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The comparative effects of consciousness raising tasks and dynamic assessment on morphological awareness: the case of pre-intermediate EFL learners

Buvsara Tashmuradova^{1*} , K. D. V. Prasad², Khaled Ahmed Abdel-Al Ibrahim^{3,4} and Leeda Sarabani⁵

*Correspondence:
toshmurodova_buvsara@tfi.uz

¹ The Department of Corporate Finance and Securities, Tashkent Institute of Finance, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

² Symbiosis Institute of Business Management (SIBM), Symbiosis International (Deemed University) (SIU), Hyderabad, Telangana, India

³ College of Education, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Al-Kharj, Saudi Arabia

⁴ Sohag University, Sohag, Egypt

⁵ Kabul University Kabul, Kabul, Afghanistan

Abstract

Finding out which teaching strategies best support students learning is a key objective of educational research. Knowing this, this study investigated the comparative effects of consciousness-raising (CR) tasks and dynamic assessment (DA) on morphological awareness in an Afghani EFL context. To achieve this, 90 EFL grade 11 learners from three intact classes were selected through a convenience sampling procedure and were assigned to DA, CR, and control groups, respectively, with the same number of participants in each condition. A nonrandomized pretest–posttest design was carried out. The results of the Oxford quick placement test revealed that the participants had pre-intermediate English proficiency. To assess learners' morphological awareness, two different tests of morphological awareness were given both prior to the treatment and right after it. The DA group received interactionist DA on the target morphemes, the CR group received CR instruction on the target form, and the control group received nothing. The results of a one-way between-groups ANOVA revealed that both DA and CR groups significantly outperformed the control group on the post-test. A further post hoc analysis using Bonferroni adjustment demonstrated that the difference between DA and CR groups was also statistically significant with a small effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.042$), substantiating the superiority of DA over CR tasks on morphological awareness. The theoretical and pedagogical implications of the study are discussed.

Keywords: Consciousness-raising task, Dynamic assessment, Morphological awareness, Zone of proximal development

Introduction

The capacity to comprehend and use the slimmer, more meaningful parts of language, such as prefixes (such as re-), base words/roots (such as teach), and suffixes (such as -ing, -er), to produce morphologically complex word formations is known as morphological awareness (e.g., reteach, teaching, teacher) (Wolter & Pike, 2015). It has been shown by researchers that morphological awareness abilities have a major impact on literacy development and are favorably correlated with proficient vocabulary, sight-word reading, decoding, reading comprehension, and spelling skills (Jarmulowicz et al., 2008;

Wolter et al., 2009). It is crucial to create early measurements of this skill that are sensitive to the varied developmental levels of performance given the growing emphasis on morphological awareness. Dynamic assessment (DA) is a promising method for assessing early primary grade school students' shifting performance levels and designing a suitable solution (Patterson et al., 2013; Ram et al., 2013).

According to Tzuriel (2001), DA—which evaluates learning processes rather than learning products—emerged from both theoretical conceptions of human cognitive plasticity and practical needs to find new diagnostic measures for people who, for whatever reason, do not demonstrate their abilities in conventional tasks. As seen by Tzuriel (2001), static evaluations were insufficient in reporting sufficient information about the variations in learners' learning processes, how they transform ideas into actions, and how to allocate them to suitable educational environments.

DA which is based on Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory (SCT) is becoming increasingly popular among academics as a means of promoting language learning by integrating and unifying instruction and assessment, two crucial aspects of the teaching and learning process that are typically separated. DA can be thought of as a continuum in which the student is initially assisted by the teacher using implicit methods before moving on to explicit ones as needed by the learner (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Vakili & Ebadi, 2022). A learner's zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is the space between what they can do on their own and what they can do with more expert support, can be determined by how they move across this continuum (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004). To put it another way, the types of prompts the teacher employs (such as implicit or explicit) and the frequency necessary over time will change as the learner progresses, revealing that the learner is shifting from a reliance on other regulation to self-regulation, that is, achieving a greater degree of independence and increased control of the language (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Lantolf, 2012). In other words, the time spent on testing is also time spent on learning, enhancing, and measuring learners' abilities and growth. Therefore, DA provides opportunities for instruction and evaluation to advance together. A DA assessor actively participates in learning and fosters emerging skills, putting more emphasis on the process of improvement than just the outcome or current level of ability (Poehner, 2011). However, what pedagogically improves the value of DA resides in the quality and purpose of support, or mediation, which is to help students come to new understandings that would, in turn, reinforce future performances, making the DA also known as a diagnostic activity (Poehner, 2013).

Attempts to facilitate learners' progression toward more native-like proficiency in the target language are not limited to DA. For example, Long (1991) has argued for a focus on form approach to teaching grammar which refers to the unplanned attention to form when learners are communicating. According to Long, the rate of learning can be accelerated for language learners by using the focus on form instruction which is a non-interfering method of teaching grammar. One way through which focus on form can be put into practice is through consciousness-raising (CR) tasks.

An inductive method of learning called CR calls for learners to exert mental effort to comprehend the desired feature. CR, as seen by Rutherford and Sharwood Smith (1985), is any intentional effort to call learners' attention to the formal elements of the target language. Similar to this, Ellis (1997) described CR tasks as a type of instructional

activity where L2 teachers drive their students to take some action with the facts at hand to achieve declarative knowledge of the target language structures.

Ellis (1997) distinguished between CR tasks and form-focused activities, contending that student production is viewed as superfluous in CR tasks as opposed to form-focused activities. In reality, he thinks that the goal of CR exercises is to increase the learner's awareness of the targeted structure while minimizing the production of the targeted feature. Therefore, it would appear that the primary objective of CR exercises is to help learners build declarative knowledge of grammar (i.e., explicit knowledge of it), as opposed to procedural knowledge (i.e., implicit knowledge), of grammar. Ellis (2002) acknowledged that CR tasks might not lead to quick acquisition, nevertheless. In other words, the learning of L2 rules may be delayed as a result of these assignments.

As an English teacher employed by the Afghani Ministry of Education, I constantly see that pupils are not making the required growth in their grammatical abilities and that they consistently perform poorly not only on my objectively designed tests but also on high-stake tests. Additionally, if these students want to continue their education at the university level after they graduate from senior high school, they must pass Afghanistan's biannual University Entrance Examination (UEE). English is a crucial component of the UEE. However, these students typically perform poorly on the English portion of the UEE, with grammar playing a significant role. One factor contributing to Afghani students' poor UEE performance is the little amount of time allotted for each subject in the country's high schools' prescribed curricula (Kargar Behbahani & Khademi, 2022). Grammar is seen as an indispensable part of language as one cannot put words together to create a grammatically correct sentence without having a sufficient command of grammatical structures. In addition, morphological awareness helps language learners develop their vocabulary size. Learners familiar with a wide variety of prefixes and suffixes can boost their vocabulary size over time, hence the potential efficacy of morphological awareness.

The current research is a determined endeavor to compare the comparative effects of dynamic assessment and CR tasks on morphological awareness among adolescent Afghani senior high school learners and tries to find out which is more facilitative of morphological awareness given the importance of grammar, particularly in the Afghani high-stake UEE exam. As can be inferred, this current study mainly aims at exploring the comparative effect of CR tasks and dynamic assessment on morphological awareness. Therefore, the main objective behind carrying out this study is to compare and contrast the effects of DA-based instruction and CR instruction on EFL learners' morphological awareness. That said, this research primarily looks to find an appropriate answer to the following research question:

Research question

How does the performance of learners exposed to dynamic assessment differs from learners exposed to consciousness-raising instruction and learners in the control condition?

Although language instruction in Afghani public schools places a strong emphasis on grammar, the majority of students struggle to write with perfect grammar. The cause can be attributed to the curriculum's insufficient time allotment for English—only 2 or 3 h

per week (Fazilatfar et al., 2016). Additionally, as mentioned above, EFL learners more often than not perform poorly on tests of grammar. Thus, it is required to dwell more on this indispensable part of language to enhance it. To identify a workable way to enhance the grammatical proficiency of Afghani EFL learners, a new study is necessary. This study attempts to compare and contrast the effect of DA-based and CR instruction on morphological awareness. As to the best of the researchers, no study has ever compared the efficacy of these two instructional techniques, and it is expected that the results of this project would assist teachers, syllabus designers, curriculum developers, students, and all other stakeholders by providing a useful answer for the target participants' grammar improvement and progression in morphological awareness.

Literature review

In this section, theoretical background, as well as empirical background underpinning both DA and CR tasks, is presented.

Theoretical background

Dynamic assessment

Following Vygotsky (1987), social interaction and participation in culturally prescribed activities shape human mental functioning. It transcends a fundamentally directional reaction to outside stimuli as described by biological instinct. The most well-known component of Vygotsky's (1987) account of mind that has influenced psychology and education is ZPD, which is defined as the difference between one's level of ability at which s/he can perform without being mediated and the opposite level at which s/he can perform in the presence of assistance. ZPD was first used as an alternative to traditional IQ tests, which, in his view, concealed the processes behind performance and failed to identify still-emerging abilities. Due to Vygotsky's assertion that the ZPD serves as the foundation for development-oriented pedagogies and his argument that emergent abilities are most amenable to instructional intervention, psychologists focused on this application of the ZPD decades later, shedding light on the first practices referred to as DA (see Poehner, 2008; Tzuriel, 2021; Vygotsky, 1987, 1998).

One alternative assessment that has recently attracted a lot of attention in science education and language evaluation is the DA (Ahmadi Safa & Beheshti, 2018). For educators to conduct evaluations or measurements at that time, this assessment seeks to mediate or scaffold pupils during the assessment process (Van der Veen et al., 2016). Thus, substantial interaction in the dynamic assessment attempts to look into the issues that come up during the assessment.

The two models under which DA can be used are interventionist and interactionist. The first model is followed by interventionists, who, as their name implies, immediately use an intervention or mediation to reinforce and support further learning. In other words, the format is such that learners are first given a test, then they are exposed to the targeted teaching item, followed by another testing session. The most used DA strategy, test-teach-retest, is consequently the most effective and appropriate in separating stronger from weaker learners. An assess-instruct-reassess strategy provides information on test-taker modifiability and responsiveness as well as performance improvements because of its widespread application (Lantolf & Poehner, 2011; Mehri

Kamrood et al., 2021; Naeini & Duvall, 2012). From the least supporting to the most supportive, the prompts, which include leading questions, hints, examples, and identification of existing faults, can be arranged hierarchically. After then, DA is used to deliver programmed suggestions that are progressively more encouraging to help the test taker improve and demonstrate critical skills until the assignment is finished. Sometimes a different activity is used to examine a test taker's ability to apply what they have learned to the new circumstance. Therefore, the consideration of the necessity for prompts, the level of support provided, the learners' responsiveness to prompts, and the learners' capacity to transfer learning to different contexts are what needed to be represented by the scoring system (Laing & Kamhi, 2003; Poehner, 2011).

In opposition to interventionist DA, the foundation of interactionist DA is Vygotsky's theories on the value of cooperative dialogue. This type of assessment allows for total coordination between the learner's ZPD and mediation, which may be recognized based on how the learner and the mediator interact. The development of a single student, or even a group of learners, is the only thing that interactionist DA is concerned with. It is not concerned with the preset goal of learning or the work required in this process (Poehner, 2008). Through mediation, engagement, and collaboration, the mediator aims to assist L2 learners in performing to the level of their actual competence—something they are unable to do on their own—and in progressing to the next level.

Consciousness-raising tasks

According to Ellis (1990), a CR task is a pedagogical activity in which students are given L2 data in some form and asked to conduct an operation on or with it to gain an explicit grasp of one or more linguistic aspects of the target language. The way Ellis (2003) sees it, explicit learning is the main foundation of CR tasks. Reaching the level of comprehending rather than noticing enhances awareness.

According to Willis and Willis (1996), a complete definition of language is not conceivable since it is so expansive and constantly evolving. To help students to think critically about language samples and form their own opinions about how the language functions, teachers should assign CR exercises to their classes. They asserted that the CR task involves a variety of techniques, including identification (pointing out the target form), judgment (determining whether the data are accurate or not), completion (filling in the blanks), modification or reconstruction (rearranging or rewording part of a text), sorting or classification (assigning the forms in the data to various categories), matching (joining two sets of data according to some certain principle), rule provision or hypothesis building (make verbal or written assumptions about the data), and rule provision. According to Willis and Willis, the CR task is not just the primary task but may also be employed as a support activity. It forces the students to focus specifically on a concept they are unable to use or are using badly.

According to the guidelines, teachers attempt to isolate one particular linguistic element for students to pay close attention to in CR activities. Students are provided facts that illustrate the target feature and instructed to exert mental effort to comprehend the target feature (Ellis, 1991). CR is a pupil-centered instruction. The teacher facilitates learning by explaining specific qualities; nonetheless, students need time to internalize,

generalize, and formulate the principles using their intellectual faculties (Amirian & Abbasi, 2014).

For many years, there has been debate concerning the effectiveness of CR. A number of research have been conducted to demonstrate how CR affects various linguistic domains. The usefulness of CR in language teaching and learning has been demonstrated by several researchers (Fotos & Ellis, 1991; Kargar Behbahani & Khademi, 2022; Laufer, 2006; Macaro & Masterman, 2006; Rasha, 2011).

Empirical background

Dynamic assessment

One interesting study that sought to explore the efficacy of DA of morphological awareness in the EFL context is that of Hamavandi et al. (2017). The study's main objective was to look at the impact of DA on text understanding. The study's second objective was to determine which method of evaluating the knowledge of morphology could accurately predict and take into consideration the reading ability of EFL learners. Fifty intermediate EFL students who were split into experimental and control groups took part in the study to achieve these objectives. While the participants in the control group were instructed in the morphology using the institute's recommended approach, the experimental subjects were evaluated utilizing a DA procedure. As posttests, the Nelson-Denny reading test and the test of morphological structure were used. The findings showed that DA of morphology improved the reading comprehension of EFL students. In addition, DA was able to predict EFL students' reading comprehension better than the static morphology assessment test. The results offer early evidence in favor of a DA of morphological awareness in an EFL environment.

In another intriguing attempt to look at the positive sides of DA, Kazemi et al. (2020) investigated the beneficial role of DA in fostering reading comprehension and motivation. This quantitative investigation examined if implementing an interventionist DA model with a repetitive pretest-teach-retest process could help students' text comprehension and increase their motivation to read in the Iranian context of English as a foreign language. Two intact courses, each with 35 students, were divided into the comparison and treatment conditions to solve the aforementioned problem. Pre-test and post-test equivalent-group designs were used for the implementation of this quasi-experimental investigation. When it came to measures of reading comprehension ability, the experimental group dramatically outperformed the control group, according to descriptive and inferential analyses of the data gathered over four months. This finding indicates that the application of DA seems to give pupils an understanding of the support scaffold for reading texts. The experimental group's degree of reading motivation changed as well. Overall, DA fosters a positive learning atmosphere and offers the students educational and psychological advantages. These L2 researchers concluded that the findings help practitioners better comprehend and implement DA in the classroom successfully to promote learning and motivation.

In another study, Azizi and Farid Khafga (2023) attempted to examine the efficacy of group DA (G-DA) on Iranian high-school students' motivation, learning anxiety, and willingness to communicate. For these aims, 124 grade 11 students from Shahed High School in Borujerd City, Iran, were chosen at random, homogenized using the Oxford

Quick Placement test, and then randomly assigned as either the control group ($n=23$) or the experimental group ($n=23$). Following that, interventions (for 16 1-h sessions delivered twice weekly as an after-school program) and a post-test were put into place. The outcomes of the independent samples t tests showed that following the interventions, the experimental group's motivation significantly increased when compared to the control group. The results also showed that the G-DA-based teaching considerably helped the experimental group relieve their language anxiety. The findings also showed that there was a statistically significant difference in the gains in willingness to communicate between the experimental group and the control group.

The effect of G-DA on EFL learners' oral production, motivation, and classroom anxiety has been investigated by Sohrabi and Ahmadi Safa (2020). To do this, the Student Motivational State Questionnaire developed by Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) and the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) were used. Additionally, participants' oral proficiency levels were evaluated both before and after the treatment using IELTS Speaking Sample Tests. 100 EFL students at the pre-intermediate and intermediate levels of English competence were first chosen from a convenience sample of several language schools. The participants were then given a sample TOEFL Junior Standard Test, and 77 EFL learners with an A2 or B1 level were selected based on test rubrics and randomly assigned to experimental G-DA groups A and B and non-DA control groups C and D. All study groups took part in 14 speaking practice sessions, with groups A and B using G-DA-based mediations following Poehner's (2005) typology of mediations and groups C and D using non-DA forms of practice. The outcomes highlighted G-generally DA's beneficial effects on oral proficiency growth and reduction of classroom anxiety in EFL learners. G-DA did not, however, outperform non-DA in terms of improving participant motivation. The results appeared to suggest that applying G-DA to the EFL learners' language problems results in a more likely creation of a socially constructive environment in EFL classes, which in turn leads to a more effective identification of the group's ZPD.

In a newly published paper, Anam et al. (2023) investigated the effect of DA on the English grammar mastery of Indonesian EFL learners. To this goal, 85 university-level EFL students from Indonesia who were enrolled in the English Education study program's Functional Grammar course took part in the study. The participants were split into two groups: the experimental group and the control group, each comprising 42 and 43 pupils, respectively. Using the use of a pretest and posttest, the data were gathered. The results showed that DA affected students' grammar mastery as evidenced by the experimental class's post-test scores significantly increasing over those from the pre-test and by the significant difference between post-test scores of the experimental and control classes in the experimental class's favor. As a result, the data made it clear that language teachers should pay attention to DA as a substitute for other assessment techniques.

The exploration of the DA efficacy on language learning is not limited to the above-cited studies. For example, Lu and Hu (2019) explored the DA of phonological awareness and its effect on the predictability of spelling performance as well as its potential for modifiability in phonological awareness. Fourth-grade English language learners ($N=50$) completed two phonological awareness tests (dynamic and static), two spelling

tests (actual words and pseudowords), and a questionnaire on their prior exposure to FL learning. After adjusting for static phonological awareness and FL learning experience, the results revealed that dynamic phonological awareness consistently predicted success in both spelling exams. The dynamic measure showed an improvement in phonological awareness performance from the first to the second half, but not in the static measure. According to the researchers, these results implied that a dynamic measure can improve spelling performance prediction and can assess the modifiability of phonological awareness in young FL learners.

Perhaps the newest study which has attempted to apply DA to an educational context is that of Rezai et al. (2023). In this intriguing study, Rezai and his associates examine the impacts of G-DA and process-based instruction (PBI) on EFL learners' metacognitive awareness and listening comprehension. For this reason, a total of 160 intermediate EFL students from the Afghanistan Language Institute (ALI) were chosen by a convenience sampling technique and homogenized using the Key English Test (KET). The EFL students were recruited and randomly assigned to the G-DA group ($n=30$), PBI group ($n=30$), and control group ($n=30$) based on their scores' proximity to the mean score. After that, the participants underwent a pre-test, 16 1-h sessions of interventions (held twice a week), and a post-test. Additionally, the conversations in the classes were closely documented. Using a micro-genetic development technique and a one-way ANOVA, the acquired data were evaluated. The results showed that in terms of improvements in metacognitive awareness and listening comprehension, the G-DA group and PBI group outperformed the control group. However, the results showed that G-DA was more successful than PBI in promoting the metacognitive awareness and listening understanding of EFL learners. Additionally, the complementing qualitative results showed that the participants' metacognitive awareness and listening comprehension were developed as a result of the appropriate feedback provided following the G-DA and PBI principles and processes.

Consciousness-raising tasks

In a newly published study, Xavier and Gessers (2022) examined the role of a CR task in a focused task sequence. To be more specific, in a series of exercises, this research examined the impact of explicit information on the acquisition of subject and object Wh-questions. Two sequences of focused activities were developed to include flooding and enriched topic and object Wh-questions in the input (Ellis, 2003). The activities were the same except for a CR task designed to encourage learners' explicit knowledge of the target structures in one of the sequences. The study involved two groups of EFL high school students. Pre- and post-tests that required the creation and identification of the structures were used to gather the data. Comparing the performances of the groups revealed that the focused-task sequence incorporating the C-RT was unpromising, probably as a result of learner internal factors that may minimize the significance of explicit information in the acquisition of a foreign language.

Another new study that has investigated the impact of task-based CR tasks on learners' grammatical growth is that of Ouazani (2022). The study's objectives were to take a task-based approach to language instruction, use CR tasks to teach grammar, and assess the potential impact of these tasks on EFL students' comprehension and usage

of the past simple, past perfect, and past continuous tenses. During the second semester of the academic year 2021–2022, thirty freshmen from the University of Ouargla's English department participated in the study. Additionally, grammar instructors were subjected to an interview to obtain information regarding their chosen teaching style and the philosophy that guides it. The researcher used a process that involved dividing the students into two identical groups (the experimental group and the control group), testing them before and after, and analyzing the results. The arithmetic means, standard deviation, and *t* test were the statistical techniques used for data analysis. According to the study's findings, task-based learning and conventional PPP grammar instruction both effectively promoted explicit understanding of the tenses under consideration. The effectiveness of the target tenses was improved by both strategies. Task-based tasks, however, had a more beneficial impact because they enabled students in the experimental group to reflect more critically on their writing and to speak with greater accuracy and self-assurance.

Kargar Behbahani and Khademi's (2022) study is yet another study that has investigated the efficacy of CR tasks on the intake and noticing of the present perfect tense. The goal of their study was to examine the combined effects of input flooding, visual input enhancement, and CR tasks on Iranian EFL learners' intake and noticing of the present perfect tense. The researchers looked at whether instruction could improve the intake and noticing of the target form using a nonrandomized control group pretest–posttest approach. Sixty-five English language students at the lower intermediate level were chosen for this purpose by convenience selection. A control group of subjects ($N=32$) and a treatment group of subjects ($N=33$) were created. The three educational strategies were shown to the experimental subjects, but not to the control subjects. The experimental group, which had received seven instructional interventions, considerably outperformed the control group, according to the findings of the independent samples *t* test. Additionally, the findings of a chi-square goodness of fit test showed that the experimental subjects focused most of their attention on the intended feature during the study's CR phase.

The investigation of CR tasks' effects on language learning is not limited to the above-reported studies. For example, Fatahzade et al. (2022) sought to explore the impact of CR via input flooding vs. vocabulary input enhancement on EFL learners' reading fluency. To be more specific, they attempted to evaluate whether input flooding and input enhancement of vocabulary affect the reading fluency of Iranian EFL learners. Additionally, they also assessed whether there were any notable differences in how to input flooding and input vocabulary enhancement affected Iranian EFL students' reading. To do this, three language schools in Iran randomly chose 120 out of 150 Iranian EFL intermediate students, dividing them into three groups of 40 students each. Treatment consisted of input flooding for the first experimental group. To achieve this, the vocabulary items in the course reading materials were employed more frequently. In other words, students were inundated with vocabulary through many examples and repeated use of the words in the reading materials. The input enhancement group's members received input enhancement through underlining, boldfacing, italicizing, capitalizing, and other techniques like color coding, utilizing several fonts, and using a variety of terminology. To do this, the vocabulary words in this experimental group were highlighted, boldfaced,

italicized, and capitalized in the texts. The researcher retyped the chosen materials and made the necessary alterations to them to do this. The traditional approach to teaching reading was used in the comparison group. ANCOVA was used to examine the results. The results showed that input flooding and input vocabulary enhancement both had significant positive effects on the reading fluency of Iranian EFL learners. In terms of their effects on the reading fluency of Iranian EFL learners, input flooding of vocabulary was more effective than input enhancement of vocabulary.

To sum up, sorting through the literature reveals that both dynamic assessment and CR tasks are facilitative devices of language learning. However, one question that remains is which of these devices is more appropriate to raise EFL learners' knowledge of linguistic features. Thus, this study attempts to compare and contrast the efficacy of these two devices in morphological awareness. As no other study, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, has ever attempted to compare the effect of the two, this study seems to be an innovation. It is for this reason that the researcher hopes that the study's findings add to the literature and fills this lacuna. It is also hoped that the study's results raise some pedagogical implications for language teachers and materials developers so that learners' knowledge of morphological awareness can better be enhanced.

Method

Design

This study is a quantitative nonrandomized pretest–posttest control trial. In this investigation, two experimental subjects along with a control group, each group including the same number of subjects, were selected based on a convenience sampling procedure and tested on two occasions (pretest and posttest). Therefore, the research exploits the abovementioned design (Ary et al., 2019).

Setting and participants

This study's participants were 90 grade 11 students aged 16 and 17 studying at a senior high school in Kabul, Afghanistan. The selection procedure was based on a convenience sampling procedure because intact classes were selected. These 90 learners were divided into two experimental groups and a control group. To be more specific, the participants were divided in this manner: Group 1 as the DA group ($n = 30$), Group 2 as the CR group ($n = 30$), and Group 3 as the comparison group ($n = 30$).

Instruments

To fulfill the goals of this current research, a range of instruments that made it possible for the researcher to acquire the required data were used. The Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) was used to select study participants. The chosen participants' OQPT scores ranged from 28 to 33, showing their pre-intermediate proficiency in English. In addition, to assess learners' awareness of morphemes, a teacher-created test was designed to be used as the pretest. A similar version of the same test with the same format, but different items was also designed. The test targeted EFL learners' knowledge of prefixes and suffixes. The test items included fill-in-blanks and open-ended questions. Moreover, in another section of the test, the examinees were asked to judge if affixes added to some words are correct and make a correct word. Thus, it is clear that these

instructor-created tests were adopted by the researcher. To make sure of the tests' construct validity, the Known Group technique (Ary et al., 2019) was used. In this phase, the researcher administered the designed tests to 6 teachers of English who obviously had the construct. Using an independent samples t test, it was demonstrated that the difference between the teacher's performance and those of the learners at the outset of the study turned out to be significant at $p < 0.05$, verifying the construct validity of the tests. In addition, to make sure of the reliability of the instruments, using SPSS software, Cronbach's alpha was estimated. The obtained statistics were 0.81 and 0.77, corroborating the reliability of the instruments. In addition to the tests, the Vision 2 textbook for grade 11 learners of English developed by Afghanistan's Ministry of Education was used. In the previously mentioned coursebook, several different pages are designed in such a way that makes students familiarized with prefixes and suffixes to bolster learners' vocabulary size.

Data collection procedures

To carry out this investigation, several steps were taken. In the first step, an OQPT helped the researcher to learn the language proficiency of the learners. OQPT results showed that the learners had a pre-intermediate proficiency in English. In this next step, an instructor-made test of morphemes was designed and the reliability and validity of the test were confirmed as stated above. Then, the treatment began. To be more specific, the data collection procedure lasted five sessions overall. In the first session, the OQPT was administered. In the next session and before the treatment, a pretest using the teacher-made test was administered. In the third and fourth sessions, group 1 received a DA assessment of morphemes with group 2 receiving CR tasks, but the control group was exposed to present perfect tense. That is, the section dealing with morphemes in the book was skipped for them, and they only received the instruction once the data collection procedure had finished. In session five, a different version of the pretest with different items but with the same format was administered to the participants in all the groups.

In the DA class, first, the instructor went through with the class the main goals of the lecture. After that, he went through each prefix and gave the necessary details. Afterward, students' attention was directed to the prefixed by the teacher. In this phase, the teacher jotted down each prefix on the whiteboard and asked the participants the meaning of each prefix. The teacher provided mediation on a scale from implicit to explicit if the pupils were unable to produce the needed response or use the prefix effectively. To be more precise, the teacher used Davin and Donato's (2013) method in an interactionist way by offering learners contingent and graduated support, called mediation, in the form of questions, hints, or prompts (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). Additionally, the instructor made an effort to investigate and advance the group's ZPD while simultaneously fostering the growth of individual students (Poehner, 2009). In practice, the teacher directed the subsequent suggestion to a different pupil if the addressed learner (primary interactant) was unable to reply to the feedback (secondary interactant). His mediation was calibrated to the groups' ZPD, and the teacher gave another learner more explicit feedback if the input did not get the desired result. In other words, "when one learner's question, struggle, or comment prepares the way for another learner's input,

the teacher's engagement switches rapidly between primary and secondary interactants" (Poehner, 2009, p. 478). In this method, when a learner gave an inaccurate response, the teacher's relationship with that learner and the other pupils gradually changed so that the problem might be fixed by the prompts that were given. Finally, the teacher checked to see if the prefix had been completely addressed by asking the pupils to provide further examples that were comparable. This procedure was repeated in the next session that dealt with suffixes.

In the CR class, the data collector showed certain samples to the participants where the primary prefix was bolded and underlined. The students were then instructed to silently read the sentences and identify the intended form. The experimental individuals were then questioned on how the prefixed are used in the sentences and how they can change the meaning of a word. In this phase, the students were required to exert intellectual effort to first identify the prefixed and then to understand their meaning. In the next step, the same procedure was repeated for suffixes.

Method of data analysis

The researchers utilized SPSS to evaluate the data that they had collected. A one-sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov (K-S) test was used to ensure that the data were normal before a one-way between-groups ANOVA was used to assess how the treatment affected morphological awareness. Last but not least, post hoc analyses were performed to ascertain which tactic was more successful in enhancing morphological awareness in learners.

Results

The aforementioned research issue is attempted to be statistically addressed in this part. Because the research question has an independent variable with three levels, namely DA, CR, and control whose effect on pre-and post-test scores is investigated, it is warranted to conduct a one-way between-groups ANOVA (Rezai, 2015). However, this statistical test has some assumptions which need to be verified before one can run the test. The first assumption is to ensure whether the data are normally distributed. To this end, one needs to run a one-sample K-S test.

Table 1 represents the result of the one-sample K-S test. As Table 1 reveals, the sig. (two-tailed) value in both pre-test and post-test conditions exceed 0.05 verifying the normality assumption.

Table 1 One-sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test

<i>N</i>		Group 90	Pretest score 90	Posttest score 90
Normal parameters	Mean	2.222	3.422	7.544
	Std. Deviation	2.262	1.628	4.122
Most extreme differences	Absolute	.354	.169	.098
	Positive	.354	.169	.098
	Negative	–.295	–.100	–.060
Kolmogorov–Smirnov Z		3.362	1.603	.932
Asymp. Sig. (two-tailed)		.276	.212	.351
Test distribution is normal				

Table 2 Levene's test of equality of error variances

	<i>F</i>	<i>df1</i>	<i>df2</i>	<i>Sig</i>
Pretest_Score	.838	3	86	.477
Posttest_Score	2.602	3	86	.057

Table 3 Estimates

Dependent variable	Group	Mean	Std. error	95% Confidence interval	
				Lower bound	Upper bound
Pretest_Score	DA	3.200	.295	2.614	3.786
	CR	3.345	.300	2.749	3.941
	Control	3.430	.295	3.214	4.386
	22.00	1.000	1.614	− 2.209	4.209
Posttest_Score	DA	10.933	.510	9.919	11.948
	CR	8.207	.519	7.175	9.239
	Control	3.533	.510	2.519	4.548
	22.00	7.000	2.796	1.443	12.557

Another assumption of the ANOVA test is the homogeneity assumption. To check this assumption, one needs to run Levene's test of equality of error variances.

Table 2 also reveals that the Sig. value in both pretest and posttest conditions exceeds 0.05 substantiating the homogeneity assumption, hence room for conducting the ANOVA.

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics which are used for summarizing the data (Ary et al., 2019). As this table demonstrates, the means for DA, CR, and control groups in the pretest condition are 3.200, 3.345, and 3.430 with 0.295, 0.300, and 0.295 standard error, respectively. Thus, it can be inferred from Table 3 that all the participants performed similarly before the treatment. However, in the posttest condition, the mean for the DA group rose to 10.933 with a 0.510 standard error, 8.207 with a 0.519 standard error for the CR group, and 3.533 with a 0.510 standard error for the control group. It is clear that the mean for DA and CR groups significantly increased, but the control group performed the same in the posttest.

Test of between-subjects effects shows that in the pretest condition at 3 degrees of freedom, the mean square was 3.935 ($df=3$, mean square = 3.935, $F=1.510$, $p=0.218$). Overall, Table 4 shows that the performance of the participants in the three groups was not significant. However, the table further reveals that in the posttest condition, at 3 degrees of freedom, the difference between the groups was statistically significant with a very large effect size ($df=3$, mean square = 280.077, $F=35.838$, $p=0.001$, partial eta squared = 0.556). Unfortunately, Table 4 does not show whether the difference between each of the groups is significant. Thus, one needs to look at the pairwise comparison table to gain more insight. It should be noted that for the sake of space, only the post-test score is presented below because the difference in the pre-test condition was not significant.

Table 4 Tests of between-subjects effects

Source	Dependent variable	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig	Partial eta squared
Corrected Model	Pretest_Score	11.804 ^a	3	3.935	1.510	.218	.050
	Posttest_Score	840.230 ^b	3	280.077	35.838	.000	.556
Intercept	Pretest_Score	116.883	1	116.883	44.844	.000	.343
	Posttest_Score	799.637	1	799.637	102.321	.000	.543
Group	Pretest_Score	11.804	3	3.935	1.510	.218	.050
	Posttest_Score	840.230	3	280.077	35.838	.000	.556
Error	Pretest_Score	224.152	86	2.606			
	Posttest_Score	672.092	86	7.815			
Total	Pretest_Score	1290.000	90				
	Posttest_Score	6635.000	90				
Corrected Total	Pretest_Score	235.956	89				
	Posttest_Score	1512.322	89				

Table 5 Pairwise comparisons

Dependent variable	(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. error	Sig	95% Confidence interval for difference	
						Lower bound	Upper bound
Post-test score	DA	CR	2.726	.728	.002	.760	4.693
		Control	7.400	.722	.000	5.451	9.349
		22.00	3.933	2.842	1.000	-3.741	11.608
	CR	DA	-2.726	.728	.002	-4.693	-.760
		Control	4.674	.728	.000	2.707	6.640
		22.00	1.207	2.843	1.000	-6.472	8.886
	Control	DA	-7.400	.722	.000	-9.349	-5.451
		CR	-4.674	.728	.000	-6.640	-2.707
		22.00	-3.467	2.842	1.000	-11.141	4.208
	22.00	DA	-3.933	2.842	1.000	-11.608	3.741
		CR	-1.207	2.843	1.000	-8.886	6.472
		Control	3.467	2.842	1.000	-4.208	11.141

Table 5 indicates that the mean difference between the DA group and the CR group on the posttest is 2.726, with a 0.728 standard error, and this difference is statistically significant. That is, the DA group outperformed the CR group with a small effect size (mean difference = 2.726, standard error = 0.728, $p = 0.002$, eta squared = 0.042). The difference between the CR group and the control group also turned out to be statistically significant with a large effect size (mean difference = 4.674, standard error = 0.728, $p = 0.001$, eta squared = 0.354). That is to say, both experimental groups outperformed the control group. Additionally, the DA group also outperformed the CR group on the posttest.

In summary, to see which treatment is more facilitative of morphological awareness a one-way between-groups ANOVA was used. First of all, a one-sample K-S test was carried out to check whether the data are normally distributed. The results of the K-S test confirmed the normality assumption. The results of the followed-up Levene's test

also corroborated the homogeneity assumption. Then, the results of the estimates table showed that both experimental groups significantly outperformed the control group on the post-test. Between-subject comparisons also revealed that the difference between the groups was statistically significant with a large effect size. Furthermore, pairwise comparisons using the Bonferroni adjustment test disclosed that the DA group outperformed the CR group with a small effect size. Further inspection of the data revealed that the difference between the CR group and the control group was significant with a large effect size.

Discussion

This study's objective was to find out a panacea for Afghani EFL learners' morphological awareness. Sorting through the literature revealed that both CR instruction and DA can facilitate language learning among learners in different settings. However, the literature does not show which tactic is more facilitative of language learning. Therefore, this study examined the comparative effects of CR tasks and DA on the morphological awareness of Afghani EFL learners. A one-way between-groups ANOVA was conducted. The results showed that the two treatment conditions (i.e., CR and DA groups) performed better than the comparison condition at $p < 0.05$ with a large effect size. Furthermore, post hoc analysis using the Bonferroni adjustment test showed that the DA group also outperformed the CR group at $p < 0.05$ with a small effect size. On the whole, the results of the study showed that both tactics can facilitate morphological awareness among language learners, but DA is a more powerful device than CR instruction in helping learners broaden their morphological awareness.

In DA instruction, as prompts are pragmatically distinct from explicit correction and a recast, improvement in morphology may be the result. By prompting, the mediator offers cues for students to use their resources to self-repair; in contrast, with recasting or explicit correction, a repair is both initiated and completed by a teacher in a single move, which may not result in EFL students' morphological awareness. It can be inferred that prompting and the resulting rise in morphological awareness among EFL students improve performance. Particularly, CR tasks typically evaluate skills that have already emerged, whereas DAs reveal a student's capacity to learn new material. The ZPD idea from Vygotsky (1978) may also be applicable in this situation. With the mediator's assistance, the student's ZPD might be increased while the DA was being conducted. The pupils might then do better on the morphological awareness test as a result.

In a similar sense, Grigorenko and Sternberg (1998) argue that DA specifically targets student learning potential in a manner different from static assessments. The efficiency of the DA of morphology offered in the present study is supported by evidence from other studies. For instance, the assessment of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds has been most frequently employed with DA employing the test-teach-retest approach, which was adopted in this study (Laing & Kamhi, 2003). Additionally, several research has shown the value of DA in assessing linguistic activities like word learning (Pena et al., 2001).

The results of this study seem to support the notion that by implementing DA in an EFL context, learners' ZPD can be broadened, thus language learners' ability to maneuver over the linguistic features to which they are exposed (Poehner, 2008;

Vygotsky, 1987, 1998). Thus, by providing scaffolds to language learners during social interaction in the classroom, a necessary factor for language acquisition takes place, hence language learning improvement. The study's findings further support this idea that CR instruction during which learners make intellectual efforts to grasp the rules (Ellis, 1990) is a facilitative instructional technique. However, the study's findings are mainly more supportive of DA than CR instruction. Thus, for the time being, this study's findings appear to claim that socially mediated instruction is more facilitative of morphological awareness than a cognitive-oriented instructional technique.

All in all, the results of this study are in line with many previous studies cited above. For example, Anam et al. (2023), Azizi and Farid Khafga (2023), Hamavandi et al. (2017), Kazemi et al. (2020), Sohrabi and Ahmadi Safa (2020), Lu and Hu (2019), and Rezai et al. (2023) have argued in one way or another for the efficacy of DA in language learning. Additionally, the results of the study also support previous findings' arguments over the facilitative role of CR tasks in learning the bolts and nuts of language. For example, Ouazani (2022), Kargar Behbahani and Khademi (2022), and Fatathzadeh et al. (2022) have all shown that CR instruction can improve language learning in an EFL context.

Among the studies cited above, Hamavandi et al. (2017) attempted to examine if DA of morphological awareness results in enhanced reading comprehension. Overall, the results of their study pointed to the efficacy of DA of morphological awareness in text comprehension. The results of this study also support Hamavandi et al.'s study in that DA turned out to be a facilitative device in morphological awareness.

Another study that has dealt with the potential effect of DA is that of Rezai et al. (2023). Rezai and his associates were mainly interested in the comparative effects of DA and PBI on metacognitive awareness and listening comprehension. The results of their study revealed that DA is a better instrument than PBI in enhancing both metacognitive awareness and listening comprehension. This finding is supported by the results of this study as we were able to show how socially informed DA is a better teaching technique than cognitively oriented CR instruction.

Experimental researchers in CR tradition (e.g., Ouazani, 2022; Kargar Behbahani & Khademi, 2022; Fatathzadeh et al., 2022) have also argued for the efficacy of CR tasks in language learning in general and grammar learning in particular. The results of this study are in line with the previously cited experimental studies in this regard. However, the study's findings are more in support of DA than CR instruction, suggesting that DA is a better pedagogical intervention than CR at least as far as morphological awareness is concerned.

Although many previous studies pointed to the efficacy of both DA and CR tasks in language learning, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no study has ever attempted to compare these two instructional procedures and understand which is more effective for language learning in general, and for morphological awareness in particular. Therefore, this study attempted to fill in this knowledge gap. In this regard, this study seems to be an innovation. Overall, the results of the study showed that both DA and CR tasks are facilitative of morphological awareness, but the study's findings pointed to the superiority of the DA group over the CR group which in turn had outperformed the control group.

Consciousness-raising training has been found to be extremely successful at assisting learners in the development of explicit knowledge (Ellis, 2015). According to Fotos (1993), learners were better able to recognize the following language forms because they had explicit knowledge from consciousness-raising exercises. The students in her study finished a number of dictations with examples of the desired structures several weeks after the completion of the activities. After that, participants were instructed to highlight any specific words or phrases that stood out to them while listening to the dictations. The structures that had been the focus of the consciousness-raising assignments were frequently underlined, according to Fotos.

The concept of primary and secondary interactants and how they would have benefited from the knowledge that was co-shaped on the social level may be used to explain the findings (Poehner, 2009). It may be claimed that the professors may have allowed the pupils to get gradual and conditional feedback that was in keeping with their ZPDs. The students were scaffolded in this manner inside this ideal setting and also encouraged to commit to their resources and go beyond their own capacities. More specifically, either the teacher addressed the class directly and gave graduated feedback, or the students were exposed to dialogic feedback in the framework of the classroom as the supporting players. The ability of DA to aid learners in learning morphemes may be linked to the dynamic nature of trading mediations as opposed to the more static nature of CR tasks, according to further discussion of the study's findings. To be more precise, the DA group's participants were given the chance to take a more active role in resolving the morphological issues, whereas the CR mode only provided a window of opportunity for one student at a time, which may have caused other participants to lose interest or tune out (Poehner, 2009).

Additionally, we can make reference to Vygotsky's (1978) view on the collaborative character of learning to explain the results of the present study. A change from a one-on-one to a group-focused model of pedagogy necessitates, according to Poehner (2009, p.472), "an awareness of the relation between the growth of individuals and development of the group," both of which take place in a collaborative setting. According to Vygotsky, this has to do with how closely connected the ZPD of the individual is to the ZPD of the group (Poehner, 2009).

This study raises several theoretical and pedagogical implications. While not without drawbacks, research has shown convincingly that CR, as one type of formal instruction, can "increase the learners' attention of the existence of linguistic characteristics which she would otherwise ignore," among other pedagogical benefits (Ellis, 1990, p. 169). Additionally, it has been asserted that CR can aid in learning by transforming the explicit knowledge that students acquire into implicit knowledge. That is to say, if sufficient exposure to instruction was supplied, explicit information can become fully automated as a component of implicit knowledge. However, there is some debate about this assertion, so it must be treated with extreme caution.

Additionally, the use of scaffolds in a dynamic assessment can be seen as an effective technique to not only raise morphological awareness but also to identify the specific morphological elements that EFL students find difficult to understand. DA might be useful in developing a personalized lesson plan for EFL students to increase their morphological awareness. The amount of scaffolding that a language learner receives grows with

each new cue; therefore, it might be possible for a mediator to determine how much support should be supplied during training. This study showed that interactionist DA can facilitate morphological awareness in learners. Additionally, DA turned out to be more effective than CR tasks. These results also suggest that DA's dynamic nature improves the task's capacity to predict results from a static morphological examination. Students' lexical knowledge may increase as a result of instruction that encourages them to focus on meaning units, which will also heighten their morphological awareness.

Another implication of this project is that in comparison to cognitively oriented instruction, a more socially based instructional technique is more facilitative of morphological awareness. This is not to say that cognitive-based instruction of morphological awareness is of no use at all. The results of the study suggested that CR instruction (a form of cognitively oriented instruction) is better than no instruction at all. Another implication of the study is that both CR and DA can be used to heighten EFL learners' morphological awareness. That is, both should be used in the classroom, but with an emphasis on DA. The following implication is that teachers should not look down on students who are unable to complete a task on their own because they lack the necessary cognitive skills. Instead, by providing individualized mediation for students who lack the necessary competency, instruction proves to be more favorable and hopeful (Ohta, 2005). The next implication is for teachers who manage large classrooms with a variety of ZPDs. Teachers can then put students with various ZPDs together to work as a team to create a common ZPD, according to the study's findings. Thus, fairness in teaching and evaluation procedures results in students receiving more fair feedback from their teachers and peers (Murillo & Hidalgo, 2017). The next implication is for teacher education programs where teacher educators can focus on the growing body of empirical data demonstrating DA efficacy. Finally, material developers can also exploit the findings of this study in their would-be-designed or would-be-modified coursebooks.

Conclusion

The present study supported the use of both DA and CR tasks, with the superiority of DA over CR instruction, as practical and successful supplements in morphological awareness. From a pedagogical perspective, the purpose of DA is not simply to support students in producing the right response, but also to assist them in developing fresh insights that will shape their future performances. As a result, DA provides a structured, development-focused framework for EFL education. Teachers, students, and researchers have all benefited from DA, which integrates instruction and evaluation. The coaxial nature of DA interaction fits existing concepts and practices in EFL/ESL classes particularly well. The results of this study seem to be more supportive of Vygotskian-based DA than CR instruction. This study's findings support the notion that socially mediated instruction outweighs cognitive-oriented language pedagogy. The results of the study further showed that although DA is more facilitative of morphological awareness than CR tasks, the use of cognitively oriented CR instruction is better than no instruction at all.

Although this study established the efficacy of both DA and CR tasks as useful tactics in facilitating morphological awareness in an EFL setting, this study is not without pitfalls. One pitfall of this study is that the study did not use a delayed post-test. Delayed

post-tests can help future researchers to understand whether the results of the study are long-lasting. Additionally, it is advisable to replicate the study among learners of different proficiency levels to understand the mediating role of language proficiency on language performance as the result of instruction based on DA and CR tasks. Future studies can also take into account the different learner's features (e.g., field (in)dependence, working memory capacity, anxiety tolerance, etc.) to see if they affect learners' gain in response to the treatment proposed in this study. Another suggestion for further research is to target different structures of the language and other language skills to see if Vygotskian-based DA will still be superior to cognitively oriented CR instruction. It is also suggested that the study be replicated in other geographical regions to see whether a similar pattern of performance will be found to ensure the generalizability of the findings.

Abbreviations

CR	Consciousness-raising
DA	Dynamic assessment
ANOVA	Analysis of variance
SCT	Sociocultural theory
ZPD	Zone of proximal development
UEE	University entrance examination
G-DA	Group-DA
TOEFL	Test of English as a foreign language
ALI	Afghanistan Language Institute
KET	Key English Test
OQPT	Oxford Quick Placement Test
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
PBI	Process-based instruction
K-S	Kolmogorov-Smirnov

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Authors' contributions

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Authors' information

Buvsara Tashmuradova is a Professor, Doctor of Science in Economics, The department of Corporate finance and securities, Tashkent Institute of Finance, Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

Dr. KDV Prasad is an assistant Professor at Symbiosis Institute of Business Management (SIBM), Symbiosis International (Deemed University) (SIU), Hyderabad, Telangana, India.

Khaled Ahmed Abdel-Al Ibrahim is an associate professor of educational psychology at college of education, Prince Sattam bin Abdul-Aziz university, Saudi Arabia, and Sohag university, Egypt.

Leeda Sarabani got her Kabul University Kabul, Afghanistan. She is an independent researcher who published many papers.

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Availability of data and materials

The authors state that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

Declarations

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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