Addressing the assessment dilemma of additional language learners through dynamic assessment

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Many learners with an additional language (AL) as their language of learning and teaching (LoLT) have not acquired the level of proficiency required for them to demonstrate their knowledge and achieve the desired outcome on assessment tasks given in that language. Using instruments designed for fully fluent learners and covertly including proficiency in the AL when assessing them academically or clinically, is inequitable and certainly yields invalid results. The notion of language of learning, teaching and assessment (LoLTA) should replace LoLT to represent the dilemma more accurately. This paper reports on empirical research in Nigeria using curriculum-based dynamic assessment (CDA) as an alternative method of assessment of AL learners in mainstream education. The study aimed to determine the influence of the CDA procedure on the performance and affect of AL learners. Eight learners in Grade 8 selected from two schools participated in a process of debriefing and mediation during three continuous assessment cycles and the end-of-term examination in Business Studies and Integrated Science. The assessments were mediational in nature as they contained linguistic adaptations of the questions and incorporated a glossary of assessment terms. The results suggest a generally positive influence of CDA, although to varying degrees, on participants' performance and affect. The school context also has a crucial influence on these two aspects.

Keywords: curriculum-based dynamic assessment, additional language, dynamic assessment in continuous assessment, mediational assessment, equity in assessment, equity in education

Introduction

All learning areas in the school curriculum hinge on a high level of language proficiency (Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 2004:73; Cummins & Swain, 1986:143; Levin & Shohamy, 2008:2) in learning as well as in assessment. Strongly linked to cognitive development, language development is regularly described as actually determining cognitive progression (Doughty & Long, 2003:5; Gravelle, 2000:18; Heugh, 1999:301), which further emphasises the impact of language on achievement. The challenges of learning new knowledge and skills at school in an additional language (AL) – in a language that learners are often still in the process of learning – are certainly severe (Guglielmi, 2008:323; Hugo, 2006:48).

Cummins' distinction (Cummins, 2000:111-115; Cummins & Swain, 1986:152-153) between the social use of language (basic interpersonal communicative skills – BICS) and language use at an academic level (cognitive academic language proficiency – CALP), should be recognised as a criterion which underpins all academic teaching, learning and assessment. To perform to their potential, AL learners must be at the same proficiency level as learners using their first language (L1), since success in curricular learning and assessment depends on building a "complex network of linguistic understanding" (Hutchinson, Whiteley & Smith, 2000:45).

Cummins (1996:111-112) argues that AL learners' academic skills depend not only on their exposure to the AL, but also on all their acquired knowledge and concepts that assist them in making sense of the AL. We will expand on this argument in order to recognise the severe demands faced by AL learners particularly during academic assessment. Learners who do not have the requisite language skills to access the assessment *per se* both functionally and conceptually, are incapacitated even before endeavouring to demonstrate their knowledge. It is essential for AL learners to be able to decode fluently, process and reconstruct the very instructions and questions which they are expected to respond to. Recognising that the academic assessment process is integral to learning and teaching, we are extending the notion of LoLT to the language of learning, teaching and assessment (LoLTA).

Research has found marked disadvantages with regard to learning and assessment in an AL (Baker, 2001:122-132), "entrenching unequal opportunities" (Barry, 2002:106) and contributing to under-achievement, poor pass rates and high dropout rates (Prinsloo, 2005:37). Assessing learners, whose only contact with the AL is at school, with the same tests and criteria as L1 learners is certainly inequitable. However, giving undue advantage to AL learners would again compromise the reliability and validity of academic assessment results.

It is imperative to broaden the scope of academic assessment methods as a means of addressing the language factor in education and assessment. For AL learners, scaffolding is often required for access to instruction and content, and meaning often has to be mediated. Static assessment, however, does not provide similar avenues in follow-up (Lidz, 2002:74; Losardo & Notari-Syverson, 2001:126-128). At best, static assessment yields information about what has been learned, whereas assessment should actively address learners' needs and barriers in order to provide information about how to support them in the next step of their learning (Bouwer, 2005:47; Vandeyar & Killen, 2003:124). If any barrier to demonstrating one's learning exists, the assessment should identify and address this, suggesting ways of overcoming or reducing the barrier to fully actualise the learner's potential. Dynamic assessment (DA) is one way to consider.

In incorporating the current shift in focus from assessment of the learner to assessment for learning, DA is based on the notion of assessment as a direct teaching intervention (Feuerstein, Rand, Jensen, Kaniel & Tzuriel, 1987:35-37; Haywood & Tzuriel, 2002:40-41; Lidz, 1997:281). The method usually follows the pre-test – intervention – post-test format. The key terms of DA are *modifiability* of *cognitive functioning* (through) *activity* and *interaction* (Jensen & Feuerstein, 1987:380); thus, essentially acknowledging that, contrary to the popular notion, assessment should be instrumental in *enhancing* assessees' *performance* rather than being judgemental (Lidz, 2003:112-113; Lidz & Macrine, 2001:76; Tzuriel & Shamir, 2002:22). The principle of DA was conceptualised by Vygotsky and operationalised by Feuerstein (Losardo & Notari-Syverson, 2001:123). One of its theoretical assumptions is Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, i.e. the area of learning potential between the learner's independent level of functioning and the level of achievement attained with adult assistance (Lidz, 1991). Another assumption is that of mediated learning experience, which proposes that an adult mediates between a learner and a given task to enhance its meaning. Finally, there is the assumption of self-regulation, which implies that individuals have the capacity to adjust themselves and adapt to a task as the need arises (Deutsch & Reynolds, 2000:312; Pena, Iglesias & Lidz, 2001:139).

The interactive approach of DA accords the learner an active role in knowledge construction. The assessor mediates content with the intention of inducing an enhancement of the learner's cognitive functioning. Mediation includes questions to stimulate thinking and provides leads or suggestions to apply as well as examples to follow (Camilleri & Law, 2007:317; Elliot, 2003:16-17; Kozulin & Garb, 2002:113).

The method of DA has provided suitable alternatives to the assessment problems of a wide range of learners (Swanson & Lussier, 2001:342) and, in this study, we suspected that learners with an AL as the LoLTA could also benefit. Our study built on the curriculum-based dynamic assessment (CDA) developed by Lidz (2002:73) out of the need to "bridge assessment with intervention and for the results of the assessment to inform instruction". Seeking to examine in what ways CDA could contribute to the assessment of AL learners, we focused on the influence of CDA on the assessment and performance of AL

learners, the effect of static and dynamic forms of assessment on their attitude towards assessment and their own performance, and how DA should be conducted to prevent it from becoming an undue advantage for AL learners.

The research was conducted in Nigeria, a country with about 400 languages (Bamgbose, 1995:24). Despite the emphasis of the Nigerian National Policy on Education on the importance of indigenous languages in education, English is the LoLTA for the majority of learners, and subtractive bilingualism is inadvertently promoted. Contrary to policy demands, many schools do not teach through the medium of the L1 in the first three years of schooling. Learners must often cope with second or third language learning concurrently with assimilating the subject content. This situation could hardly lead to academic proficiency in the LoLTA, making it relevant to examine DA as an alternative form of assessment and a solution to AL learners' assessment dilemma.

Method

A qualitative multiple case study was conducted, with permission from the Department of Education and informed consent from the participating learners and their teachers and parents. The participants were AL learners in Grade 8 (UBE 8), referred to as Basic 8. The sampling was purposive and entailed selecting eight learners from two government-owned schools in Lagos: four participants per school, a boy and a girl each from two Basic 8 classes. The selections were made by the teachers, based on their knowledge of the participants' language status and academic abilities. All the learners had Yoruba as their home language and were average or low achievers suspected of under-achieving. To allow for a possible socio-economic factor, one school was from the lower-income bracket (LIB School) while the other was from the middle-income bracket (MIB School). The study ran for the first school term through three continuous assessment (CA) cycles and the end-of-term examination. Figure 1 summarises the data collection process.

PHASE	EVENT/ACTION
I: CA1	"Welcome Tests", taken by whole class; general observation, orientation; contact, debriefing and mediation of participants; adaptation of assessments for CA2
II: CA2	Mediational assessment; observation, debriefing and mediation of participants; collation of participants' responses and observation notes; adaptation of assessments for CA3
III: CA3	Mediational assessment; observation, debriefing, mediation of participants; collation of participants' responses and observation notes; adaptation of examination papers
IV: Exam	Mediational end-of-term examination

Figure 1 Phases of data collection

The instrumentation consisted of CA1 assessment tasks in Business Studies (BS) and Integrated Science (IS) as initially developed by the teachers, and mediational assessment tasks for the further rounds of assessment. These two subjects were selected because both offer new knowledge that learners in Grade 8 might not have encountered yet in the general flow of their experience. However, at the Grade 8 level these subjects differ in linguistic complexity, with BS containing fewer subject-specific terms than IS and being transmitted largely by means of BICS.

Per CA cycle, the CDA procedure took the form of linguistically focused debriefing and mediation regarding assessment questions. Debriefing involved discussing with participants their observed behaviour and experience of the assessment, seeking to identify the language-related challenges of the assessment tasks and engaging them in a solution-finding exercise to address the linguistic barriers encountered. Mediation addressed the processing of questions. Transcripts of debriefing and mediation contained the original mix of English and Yoruba, and translations of the Yoruba. Findings derived from the debriefing and mediation were categorised in terms of language barriers at the receptive level of decoding, comprehension and processing, and the expressive level of lexicon, logical thought and writing. Mediational assessment then entailed the

linguistic adaptation of assessment questions set by the teachers to mediate cognitive-linguistic acts of response at both levels, and scaffolding in the form of a glossary. The following is an example:

Question	Adaptation
What is the composition of blood?	What are the things that make up blood?
Describe each component.	Describe each part of blood.

The glossary contained subject-specific and functional assessment terms from the questions, e.g. *agent, differentiate, describe.* The strategies aimed essentially at enabling the AL participants to self-direct their language-related acts to process the questions and construct their responses more effectively.

The data comprised the scripts and observation of language-related test-taking behaviour such as underlining words, time taken reading each question, re-reading particular questions, practising responses or spellings, and writing with hesitancy or confidence. Data analysis was performed per case, using an explanation-building technique. The analysis focused on the scripts to identify particular challenges of question format and linguistic complexity, and utterances and behaviours possibly reflecting personal perspective (attitude) on the assessments. Collective analysis of the debriefing and mediational data per CA cycle was used per school to identify emergent themes for the adaptation of items in the subsequent assessment. An intra-comparative analysis was conducted per participant with reference to the class average in order to identify indications that suggested progress across the CA cycles and examination. Owing to the small sample no statistical analysis was executed.

Results and discussion

The results and findings are stated per school. Because of limited space we present one exemplar only and a comparative overview of the results incorporating discussion. Participant codes indicate class (A/B in the LIB School, C/D in MIB) and gender (M/F).

LIB School – Participant BF

BF was a lively, vocal girl and interesting to work with. She was fluent in Yoruba (unlike some other participants) but lacked proficiency in spoken English even at the BICS level; thus, constantly requiring code-switching during debriefing and mediation. By using gestures, she supplemented information not yet acquired in her expressive lexicon of the AL. Consequently, her assessment results could not possibly have been a reliable indication of her learning, which supports earlier findings about the impact of AL deficiency on achievement (Barry, 2002:106; Prinsloo, 2005:37).

In answer to the question, *In what ways does the amount of water you drink affect what you excrete?*, BF's response was: *in by taken al ot of water it excrete and affect The body organs or The stomack*. The response demonstrates a breakdown of grammar, syntax and meaning and, at the conceptual level, only a vague, inadequate association between *water – excrete – affect* (already provided by the question) and *body organs – stomack*. Table 1 and Figure 2 show BF's scores.

Table 1 BF: CA and Examination (%)

Participant	CA1-BS $\bar{x}$=37.5	CA2-BS $\bar{x}$=35	CA3-BS $\bar{x}$=41.5	EX-BS $\bar{x}$=47	CA1-IS $\bar{x}$=18	CA2-IS $\bar{x}$=23	CA3-IS $\bar{x}$=10	EX-IS $\bar{x}$=22.5
BF	25	25	45	50	0	14	10	30

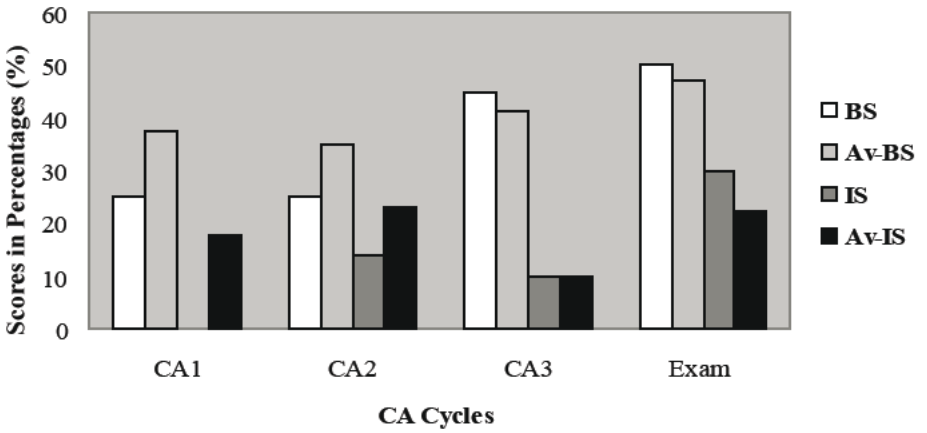

Figure 2 BF: Comparison of results

BF improved in both subjects from considerably below the Class A&B average (BS by 12.5%, IS by 18%) to slightly above the concurrently, though weakly, rising class average (by 3% and 7.5% respectively). She ultimately obtained a pass mark (50%) in BS. Although she never passed an IS assessment, she showed consistent improvement relative to the class average after the initial 0%, breaking even in a possibly flawed CA3-IS and then outstripping the class average in the examination.

BF appeared to benefit from the mediation. From the start, without prompting, she blamed her failing marks on question complexity: *I didn't know what the teacher was asking ... I don't like doing the test because I know I'm going to fail ... If I understand what I'm asked to do, I'll pass* (translated from Yoruba). Mediation chiefly entailed reading (processing) the questions and constructing responses in logical sequence. Graduated prompting (Campione & Brown, 1987:105-106) proved to be effective.

BF remarked on the value of the focused learning support so pivotal to CDA. She put in much effort, wishing to develop her cognitive skills as well as to become fluent in English – certainly a welcome development, since DA is explicitly concerned with enlisting learners' efforts to realise their full potential (Deutsch & Reynolds, 2000:312; Lidz, 1991:57; Pena *et al.*, 2001:139). In this sense, we argue that the possible Hawthorne effect (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000:26-27) contained in BF's strong improvement is a legitimate element of DA.

BF's written responses grew in length, the mediation apparently making her try harder to express her thoughts. She found the glossary useful, enquiring whether other subjects could not also incorporate one, which suggests the CDA was already finding transfer into other areas of her learning. By CA3, she could read and respond independently to the terms denoting assessment functions (e.g. *state*, *define*, *describe*).

Projecting her AL dilemma onto the field of relationships, BF harboured resentment towards her teachers, believing that they intentionally complicated the work. She displayed an external locus of control in blaming her poor achievement on teachers, textbook complexity and the noisiness of peers. She almost invariably expected to fail, showing visible signs of tension during assessments. Situations such as this ultimately contribute to learners losing motivation and ending up in a state of confusion, even truancy, and dropping out of school (Bolarin, 1996:139 & 143).

Comparative overview of results – LIB School

The overview of results per school is no attempt to generalise findings, but to broadly consider the performance of all the participants. Table 2 contains the LIB results, graphically represented per subject in Figures 3 and 4.

Table 2 LIB scores: BS and IS (%)

	AF		AM		BF		BM	
	Score	Deviation from mean	Score	Deviation from mean	Score	Deviation from mean	Score	Deviation from mean
CA1-BS $\bar{x}$=37.5	20	-17.5	15	-22.5	25	-12.5	40	+2.5
CA2-BS $\bar{x}$=35	25	-10.0	27	-8.0	25	-10.0	42	+7.0
CA3-BS $\bar{x}$=41.5	25	-16.5	55	+13.5	45	+3.5	45	+3.5
Exam-BS $\bar{x}$=47	30	-17.0	55	+8.0	50	+3.0	50	+3.0
CA1-IS $\bar{x}$=18	10	-8.0	25	+7.0	0	-18.0	30	+12.0
CA2-IS $\bar{x}$=23	14	-9.0	44	+21.0	14	-9.0	40	+17.0
CA3-IS $\bar{x}$=10	5	-5.0	10	0.0	10	0.0	5	-5.0
Exam-IS $\bar{x}$=22.5	20	-2.5	33	+10.5	30	+7.5	28	+5.5

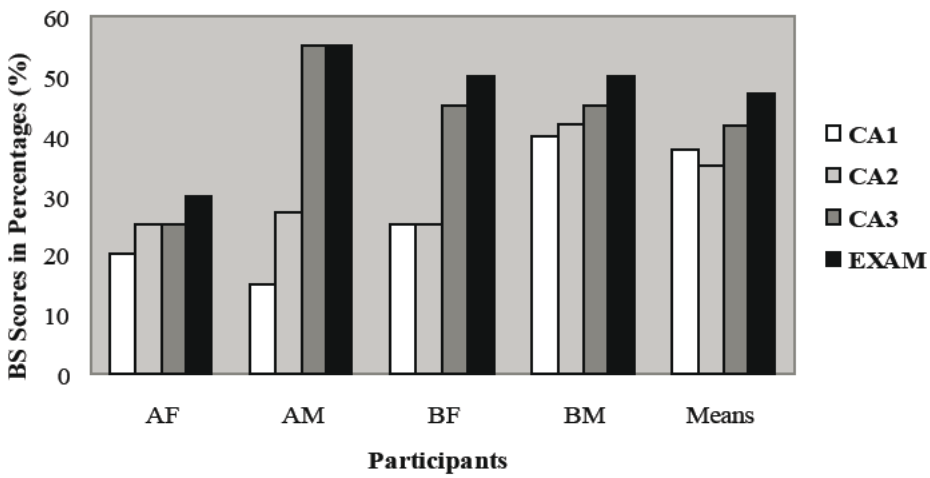

Figure 3 LIB scores: BS

Figure 3 shows not only consistent improvement in BS in terms of range of scores per cycle, but also some decrease in variance among the participants, with AM, BF and BM meeting the pass requirement (50%) in the examination. In CA3 and the examination all but AF also performed above the Class A&B average, in contrast with the earlier below-average performance of all but BM. AF was the weakest participant overall, the only one failing to pass by the end of the CDA intervention although recording personal gains. This raises the possibility of limited intellectual potential, further constrained by the AL factor. BM was initially the strongest participant, with a baseline performance of 40% and scores consistently above the Class A&B average, which raises the possibility of stronger intellectual potential, already well actualised. AM's and BF's pattern of improvement differs from that of AF and BM in overall range, each also showing a fairly dramatic increment in CA3. Mediation in BS proved more effective with AM and BF and triggered a considerable measure of learning potential, suggesting, as with the Learning Potential

Assessment Device (Feuerstein *et al.*, 1987:44-45), that mediation can effect structural change in the human intellect.

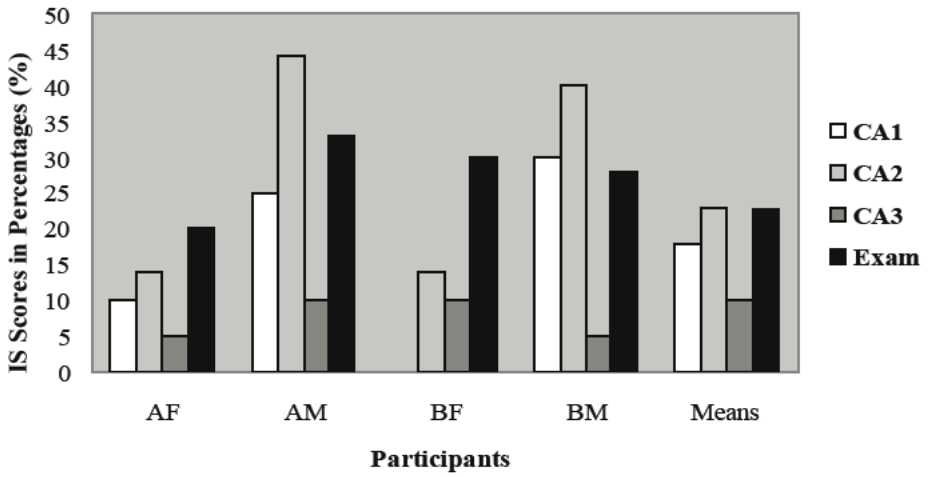

Figure 4 LIB scores: IS

Regarding IS, Figure 4 shows a different pattern of performance relative to the Class A&B average, being consistent for all participants and the class average. The examination did not culminate in the highest mark for all participants as in BS, nor in any pass marks. The results suggest subject-specific influence (with the higher CALP-level proficiency required by IS further impacting on their learning), as well as assessment-specific influence, with the added possibility that the examination scores were depressed because of the emotional effect of the poor CA3 results. This points to a more powerful counter-effect of assessment factors than that which could have resulted from a Hawthorne effect of the research. The IS profiles do not show the consistent improvement noted for BS, with AM and BM dropping back from CA2 in the examination by 11% and 12% respectively, in contrast with the virtually stable class average (23% and 22.5%). AM was the best performer and demonstrated one dramatic spurt of improvement, but BF recorded the strongest improvement overall (0%-30%). Despite the LIB School policy of English as medium of instruction, considerable code-switching took place to facilitate comprehension, especially in IS. Recalling BM's steady performance and improvement in BS, the effect of AL at CALP level on his IS performance, due to the complexity of some of the terminology in IS, can hardly be doubted.

MIB School – Participant DM

DM sought to impress people by performing well, even practising spelling before committing responses to paper. Yet, he was deeply sceptical about his teachers ever deigning to offer real learning support, therein reflecting a sense of disconnectedness from understanding/knowledge that might well define many AL learners' experience.

DM was a fairly fluent reader and his proficiency in English approached CALP level, although subject-specific terminology was still problematic. Though there was no apparent need to code-switch, he tended to insert Yoruba phrases in discussion. The fact that he did not dissociate himself from his L1 indicates that he used and transferred knowledge acquired from L1 to his learning in the AL, confirming that development of adequate cognitive functioning in the AL hinges on L1 development (Macdonald & Burroughs, 1991).

DM expressly blamed poor understanding of assessment questions for his low marks, and he was observed taking much time rereading questions. Mediation focused on functional assessment terms in question comprehension. He expressed appreciation for the greater clarity of the mediational formulation of questions and used the glossary to cross-check meanings. He repeatedly voiced a need for "special" AL instruction: *then everybody can understand and you'll only fail when you don't read your book, but you'll know the English and you can answer some questions.* DM's opinion that learners should not fail because they do not understand the questions suggests that he has a deep understanding of the equity issues inherent in assessing AL learners.

He was frank about sometimes forgetting facts during assessments, probable evidence of rote learning to compensate for the difficult terminology. Some responses were so tenuously linked to the questions as to be virtually irrelevant, supporting the possibility of a rote learning effect, definitely a bane of AL learning. In answer to the question, *In what way does the amount of water you drink affect what you excrete?* DM's response was: *when we drink too much amount of water, if the sun is shinning and hot, we release just a little amount of water because some of the water has pass out from the skin which is sweat.* Table 3 and Figure 5 contain DM's scores.

Table 3 DM: CA and Examination (%)

Participant	CA1-BS $\bar{x}$=39.5	CA2-BS $\bar{x}$=50	CA3-BS $\bar{x}$=45	EX-BS $\bar{x}$=55	CA1-IS $\bar{x}$=38	CA2-IS $\bar{x}$=52	CA3-IS $\bar{x}$=45	EX-IS $\bar{x}$=50
DM	40	64	60	65	40	60	65	65

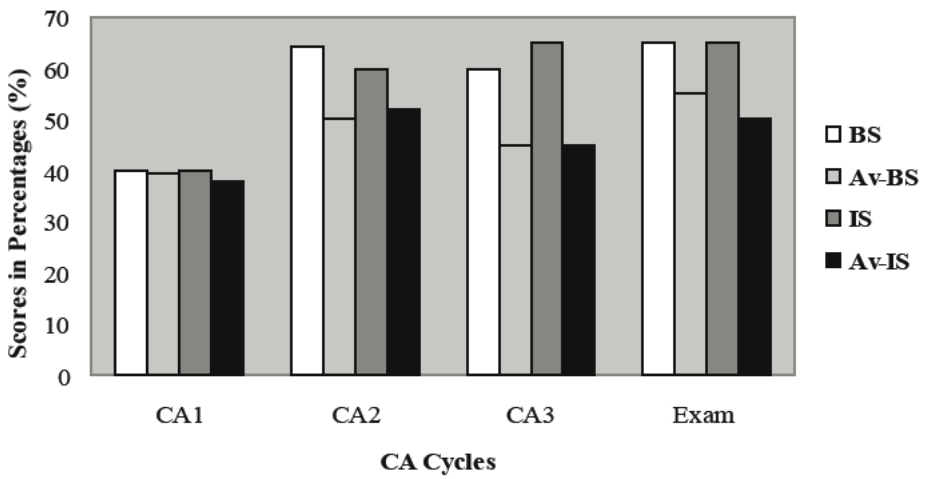

Figure 5 DM: Comparison of results

DM scored failing marks in CA1, although almost on par with the Class C&D averages (CA1-BS, 40% : 39.5%; CA1-IS, 40% : 38%). In CA2 he improved considerably (40%-64% and 40-60% respectively) and thereafter consistently scored high above average, suggesting strong potential and marked benefit from CDA. His progress suggests that the more proficient AL learners are in the LoLTA, the more likely it would be that they will effectively use the glossary and other strategies provided to bridge the language barrier.

For AL learners, motivation and support are key to developing CALP (Nieman, 2006; Opara, 2004). In DM's view, these were largely absent in his school and his cheerful disposition could not mask the

stress with which he alluded to failing because of language deficiency. DM appeared to be motivated by CDA. The positive change in attitude might have further influenced his performance profile.

Comparative overview of results – MIB School

The MIB School practised a language policy approaching total immersion in the AL. Participants did not require extensive code-switching during mediation. Table 4 contains the MIB results, graphically represented per subject in Figures 6 and 7.

Table 4 MIB scores, BS and IS (%)

	CF		CM		DF		DM	
	Score	Deviation from mean	Score	Deviation from mean	Score	Deviation from mean	Score	Deviation from mean
CA1-BS $\bar{x}$=39.5	30	-9.5	30	-9.5	50	+10.5	40	+0.5
CA2-BS $\bar{x}$=50	50	0.0	40	-10.0	65	+15.0	64	+14.0
CA3-BS $\bar{x}$=45	22	-23.0	27	-18.0	69	+24.0	60	+15.0
Exam-BS $\bar{x}$=55	35	-20.0	40	-15.0	70	+15.0	65	+10.0
CA1-IS $\bar{x}$=38	20	-18.0	51	+13.0	50	+12.0	40	+2.0
CA2-IS $\bar{x}$=52	25	-27.0	70	+18.0	58	+6.0	60	+8.0
CA3-IS $\bar{x}$=45	45	0.0	55	+10.0	60	+15.0	65	+20.0
Exam-IS $\bar{x}$=50	50	0.0	63	+13.0	67	+17.0	65	+15.0

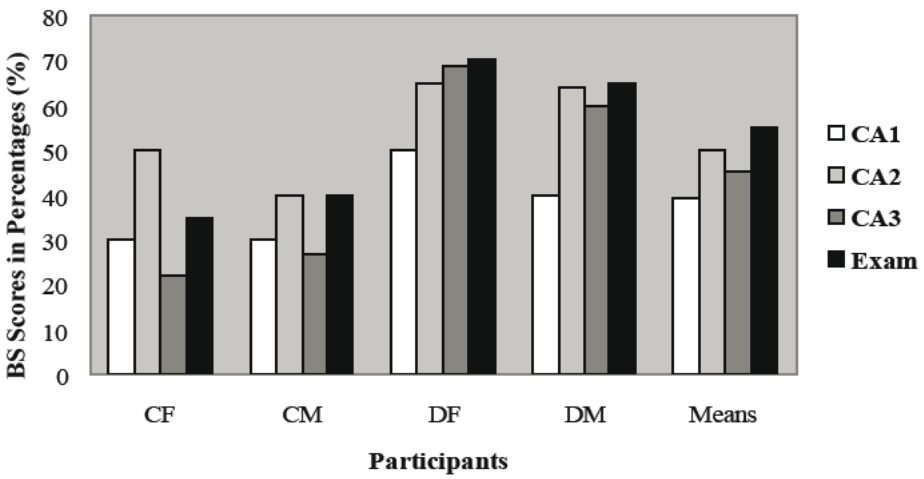

Figure 6 MIB scores: BS

Figure 6 shows the same pattern of improvement and decline in BS as the Class C&D average scores (CA2:+, CA3:–, examination:+) for all the participants except DF who improved also in CA3. However, the extent of variance differed, which might be interpreted as a function of factors such as CDA, learning potential, lesson dynamics and affect. For CF, a poor performer, the variance was especially great (+20%,

–28%, +13%). CM, also from Class C and a poor performer, had a somewhat flatter profile (+10%, –13%, +13%), a possible indication of being relatively less susceptible to either a Hawthorne effect or influence of the teacher, who was painted as lax by both Class C participants. The extent of the decline in their BS-CA3 scores relative to the trend for the two Class D participants might lend weight to their allegations. DF was the only participant who passed at baseline. She consistently scored highest and was the only one consistently showing improvement relative to her own score. DM improved dramatically by 24% from a baseline score (40%), virtually equal to the Class C&D average. His subsequent scores were all well above average and his improvement overall relative to his own scores was the greatest (40%-65%), all suggesting good learning potential and steady benefit derived from CDA.

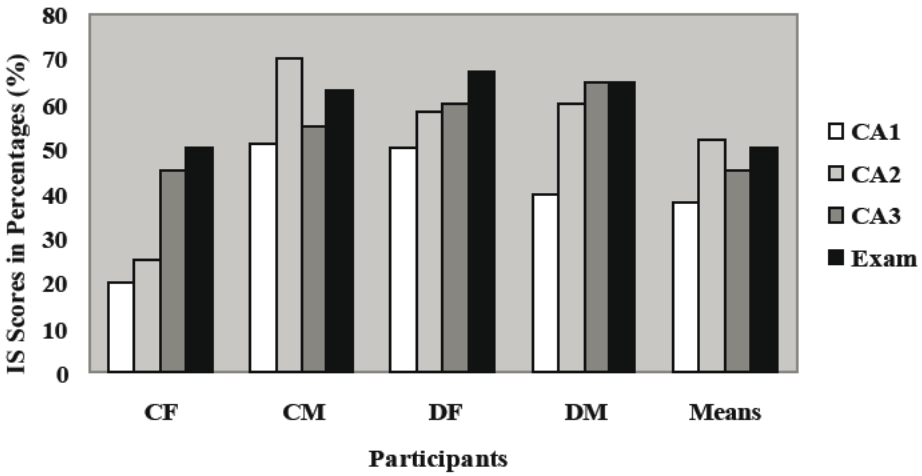

Figure 7 MIB scores: IS

Figure 7 shows that the IS scores of only CM reflected the pattern of the Class C&D average scores, and the variance was greater than in BS. Three participants showed consistent growth relative to their own scores, with DF and DM consistently scoring above average. CF not only made steady progress from a very low baseline (20%), but actually caught up with the Class C&D average in CA3 and maintained this achievement in the examination, finally passing, thereby disproving that a low baseline always has a limiting influence on academic performance as suggested by the data of CF and CM for BS. The IS scores also changed our perception of CM based on his BS performance – from being less able, to having greater learning potential – and drove us to consider his frustrations during the BS lessons more seriously. The progress of the other three participants suggests that CDA was successful with regard to IS. This finding raises questions concerning the difference in cognitive and linguistic demand between BS and IS because of the apparently more consistent and greater positive effect of CDA on performance in IS.

Conclusion

Seeking to explore the use of DA with AL learners in mainstream education, the study was undertaken from the perspective of the eight participants. Consequently, it was their subjective realities and opinions that mattered and were represented – but in the process the study also uncovered the depth of the AL challenges faced by these participants, almost to the point of relegating all else to a secondary position in order of importance. The issue of language in assessment clearly requires large-scale, multidisciplinary research.

Given the unexpectedly low levels of the participants' proficiency in the AL, the study could have benefited by a more detailed linguistic and educational contextualisation of the data. Within the very limited scope of this study, observing the English language lessons (as education in the LoLTA) would have aided understanding of the level of difficulty faced by the learners and some of the reasons why AL language education seemed to be failing them. Spending more time in discussion and observation with the subject teachers would probably have given a better understanding of their current teaching and assessment practices, especially given the difference in linguistic complexity between BS and IS.

Acknowledging the pervasive effect of AL on all aspects of learning, we argue adamantly for assessment results not to be perceived merely as the outcome of a complex, frequently hopeless, personal history of learning. The implications of the two new notions proposed in this paper in respect of AL, LoLTA and mediational assessment, are complementary. They also hinge on the issues of equitable practice. When moving away from static forms of assessment with AL learners, care must be taken to prevent the reverse of the inequalities associated with traditional assessments (Estrin, 2000:228) by maintaining a linguistic focus in mediation and refraining from the mediation of subject-related knowledge.

Bearing in mind the influence of affect and context in terms of individual background, challenges of the environment and previous learning experiences, the outcome of the study suggests that the mediational assessment had a positive impact on seven out of the eight participants. The need for clarity in the assessment questions was apparent and mediational support comprising linguistically simplified questions and a glossary of terms could serve as a temporary measure, essentially to support learning at least in the early grades of high school. More time should probably be spent on accommodating the additional reading load that forms part of the adapted questions and glossary. But much research is certainly required to fully understand the contextual and individual factors observed in order to impact on both performance and affect, and to address the various obstacles in practising such assessment equitably on a large scale.

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