

Scaffolding Voices: Dynamic Assessment for Process-Oriented L2 Writing

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ABSTRACT

Second language (L2) writing instruction faces global challenges: overreliance on static summative assessment (prioritizing products over processes), insufficient personalized feedback in large classrooms (e.g., 40–50 students in China), and students' struggles with pre-writing planning and revision (Liu & Qi, 2024; Ning, 2021). Process-oriented approaches lack aligned assessment tools, while Dynamic Assessment (DA)—rooted in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)—integrates instruction and assessment via contingent mediation (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004).

This systematic review synthesizes DA research in L2 writing to: (1) trace writing instruction shifts (product- to process-oriented) and alignment with DA; (2) clarify DA's theoretical (SCT, Feuerstein's MLE) and methodological (interventionist, interactionist, Group DA/G-DA) foundations; (3) identify key findings and gaps.

Key findings show DA enhances L2 writing by supporting pre-writing/revision, improving product quality (fewer errors, better coherence), and reducing writing anxiety. Critical gaps persist: (1) limited G-DA in large classes; (2) focus on micro-skills (grammar) over macro-skills (text structure); (3) short-term interventions (2–8 weeks) lacking longitudinal tracking; (4) insufficient attention to proficiency-based DA perceptions.

This review aids practitioners (G-DA implementation) and researchers (guiding macro-skill/longitudinal studies), reinforcing DA's value as a process-aligned tool for L2 writing.

Keywords: Dynamic Assessment; L2 Writing; Sociocultural Theory; Group Dynamic Assessment; Literature Review

INTRODUCTION

Writing is universally recognized as a cornerstone of second language (L2) proficiency, serving as a bridge between linguistic knowledge and communicative competence (Weigle, 2002). In academic and professional contexts, L2 writing proficiency directly impacts students' ability to articulate ideas, engage with scholarly discourse, and pursue career opportunities—particularly in globalized environments where English functions as a lingua franca (Wang, 2016). For non-English major students in China, this significance is amplified by the College English Test Band-4 (CET-4), a high-stakes examination whose writing component heavily influences academic progression and post-graduation employment prospects (Jin et al., 2022). Yet despite its importance, L2 writing instruction, especially in large-classroom contexts, remains mired in persistent challenges that hinder both teaching efficacy and student development.

A primary obstacle lies in the structural constraints of Chinese college English classrooms. Nationwide surveys reveal that college English teachers typically oversee 40–50 students per class, with some responsible for correcting essays of 200–300 students weekly (Liu & Qi, 2024; National College Foreign Language Teaching Advisory Board, 2018–2022). This disproportionate teacher-student ratio leaves little room for personalized feedback: most instructors can only provide brief scores or generic comments on final drafts, rather than guiding students through iterative revision or pre-writing planning (Wei, 2010). Consequently, students often struggle with core writing processes: they report “having nothing to say” during brainstorming, struggle to organize ideas coherently, and lack the confidence to self-correct grammatical or rhetorical errors (Zhang, 2023). These struggles are exacerbated by the lingering dominance of product-oriented writing instruction—a paradigm that prioritizes imitation of model texts and evaluation of final products over the cognitive and metacognitive processes that underpin effective writing (Chen & Li, 1999).

Over the past four decades, L2 writing pedagogy has shifted toward process-oriented approaches, which frame writing as a dynamic, cyclical activity involving pre-writing (e.g., topic exploration), drafting, peer feedback, and revision (Akbarzadeh et al., 2014; Khanlarzadeh & Nemati, 2016). This shift aligns with research showing that writing is not a static act of “translating ideas” but a process of continuous discovery, where learners refine their thinking through interaction and revision (Silva, 1990; Weigle, 2002). However, the implementation of process-oriented instruction in Chinese college classrooms has been uneven. Without assessment tools that integrate instructional support with developmental evaluation, teachers struggle to track students’ progress across writing stages or provide targeted mediation (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). Traditional static assessment—summative, product-focused, and divorced from instruction—exacerbates this issue: it measures only what students can do independently, ignoring their potential for growth with support, and fails to motivate revision by reducing feedback to a single score (Peng, 2022; Yang, 2024).

Dynamic Assessment (DA) has emerged as a transformative framework to address these gaps. Rooted in Vygotsky’s (1978) Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)—the gap between a learner’s independent performance and their potential with guidance—DA integrates instruction and assessment into a unified activity through “contingent mediation” (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004). Unlike static assessment, DA prioritizes developmental potential: it uses hints, prompts, or explanations tailored to learners’ needs to scaffold progress, then adjusts support as learners gain competence (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). This focus on interaction and growth makes DA uniquely suited to process-oriented L2 writing instruction, as it can support pre-writing brainstorming, guide draft revision, and foster self-regulation over time (Shrestha & Coffin, 2012).

Despite growing interest in DA, existing research on its application to L2 writing remains fragmented. Early studies focused on individualized DA in small settings (e.g., Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994), demonstrating its efficacy in improving grammatical accuracy but neglecting its scalability to large classes. More recent work has explored Group Dynamic Assessment (G-DA)—a variant designed for classroom contexts—but these studies are limited in scope, often focusing on short-term interventions (2–8 weeks) or micro-skills (e.g., vocabulary, tense marking) rather than macro-skills like text structure or logical coherence (Poehner, 2009; Shrestha, 2017). Additionally, few studies investigate how students of different proficiency levels perceive DA: medium-proficiency learners, for instance, may face unique barriers to participating in group mediation that have yet to be addressed (Kusumaningrum & Karma, 2018). A systematic synthesis of these studies is therefore urgently needed to consolidate findings, identify gaps, and guide both research and practice.

This literature review addresses this need by systematically analyzing existing research on DA in L2 writing instruction. Its primary objectives are threefold: (1) trace the paradigmatic shift from product- to process-oriented L2 writing instruction and explain how DA aligns with process-focused goals; (2) clarify DA’s theoretical foundations (SCT and Feuerstein’s Mediated Learning Experience) and methodological variations (interventionist, interactionist, G-DA); (3) synthesize key findings of DA’s application in L2 writing and highlight critical research gaps. By achieving these objectives, the review aims to provide practical guidance for college English teachers seeking to implement DA in large classrooms and identify actionable directions for future research.

Dynamic Assessment In L2 Writing: Theoretical Foundations And Empirical Insights

This review unfolds in four logically connected sections to systematically unpack the role of Dynamic Assessment (DA) in L2 writing instruction.

Paradigmatic Shifts in L2 Writing Instruction and Limitations of Traditional Assessment

L2 writing instruction has undergone a fundamental paradigmatic shift over the past half-century, driven by evolving understandings of what writing is and how it is learned. This shift—from product-oriented to process-oriented approaches—has reshaped pedagogical goals, but its impact has been constrained by the persistence of traditional static assessment. To understand why Dynamic Assessment (DA) has emerged as a critical tool for L2 writing, it is first necessary to examine this paradigmatic evolution and the enduring limitations of conventional assessment practices.

From Product-Oriented to Process-Oriented Writing Instruction

The product-oriented approach dominated L2 writing pedagogy from the mid-20th century until the 1970s, reflecting the structuralist linguistic theories of the era (Chen & Li, 1999). Rooted in classical rhetoric, this approach defines writing as a static “product”—a finished text evaluated for its adherence to grammatical rules, lexical appropriateness, and textual structure (Teng, 1993). Pedagogical practices under this paradigm are teacher-centered: instructors first teach rhetorical patterns (e.g., problem-solution essays for CET-4), analyze model texts to highlight structural features (e.g., topic sentences, paragraph coherence), and assign imitative writing tasks. Assessment focuses exclusively on the final draft, with scores based on surface-level errors and conformity to the model (Chen, 2001).

In Chinese college English contexts, the product approach has been particularly persistent, partly due to the high-stakes nature of CET-4. Many instructors prioritize training students to “match the model” to secure higher scores, rather than fostering independent thinking or writing processes (Zhang, 2023). For example, a nationwide survey by Wu (2020) found that 78% of Chinese college English teachers use model texts as the core of writing lessons, and 65% evaluate students solely on final draft quality. This focus on products leads to predictable flaws: students often produce formulaic essays with limited content depth (“nothing to say”), rely on direct translation from Chinese (resulting in Chinglish), and struggle to revise beyond correcting minor grammar errors (Liu & Qi, 2024; Zhang, 2023). As Chen & Li (1999) noted, this “teacher-centered, product-focused” model treats writing as a set of mechanical skills to be imitated, not a cognitive process to be developed.

The process-oriented approach emerged in the 1970s as a reaction to these limitations, driven by cognitive psychology and sociocultural theories that frame writing as a dynamic, iterative, and meaning-making activity (Silva, 1990; Weigle, 2002). Unlike the product approach, it defines writing as a “process of discovery”—one where ideas evolve through pre-writing, drafting, peer feedback, and revision (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). Its core principles include: (1) prioritizing cognitive and metacognitive processes (e.g., brainstorming, outlining, self-editing); (2) centering student agency (e.g., letting students choose revision focus); (3) using interactive support (e.g., peer review, teacher mediation) to scaffold growth; and (4) viewing errors as opportunities for learning, not just failures (Akbarzadeh et al., 2014; Khanlarzadeh & Nemati, 2016).

For L2 learners, the process approach addresses key pain points of the product model. For instance, pre-writing activities like guided brainstorming help students generate ideas (solving the “nothing to say” problem), while peer feedback exposes them to diverse perspectives on coherence and clarity (Shrestha & Coffin, 2012). In theory, it aligns perfectly with the goals of CET-4, which requires essays with “complete structure, clear central ideas, and coherent language” (He, 2020). However, its implementation in Chinese college classrooms has been fraught with challenges. The most pressing barrier is large class sizes: with 40–50 students per class, teachers lack time to guide individual students through writing stages or provide detailed feedback on drafts (Liu & Qi, 2024; Wei, 2010). A 2021 survey by Ning found that only 12% of Chinese college English teachers regularly assign multiple drafts, and 83% report that “time constraints” prevent them from facilitating peer review effectively. Without proper assessment tools that integrate instruction and feedback, the process approach risks becoming a “theoretical ideal” rather than a practical reality.

Limitations of Traditional Static Assessment in L2 Writing

Traditional static assessment—closely tied to the product-oriented paradigm—exacerbates the implementation challenges of process-oriented instruction. Defined as summative, product-focused evaluation that separates assessment from instruction, static assessment fails to address the developmental needs of L2 writers in three critical ways.

First, static assessment provides feedback that is ineffective for promoting revision or skill growth. In most Chinese college English classes, teachers assign a score (e.g., 15/20 for CET-4 writing) with brief, generic comments (e.g., “improve coherence”) on final drafts (Peng, 2022; Yang, 2024). This feedback is “terminal”: it arrives after the writing task is completed, leaving students little incentive to act on it. Ferris (1995) found that 60% of L2 students only check their scores and ignore teacher comments, while Cohen (1991) noted that even detailed linguistic corrections rarely lead to long-term error reduction—since students lack guidance on how to apply feedback to future writing. In China, this issue is amplified by the teacher-student ratio: a teacher correcting 200 essays per week can only spend 2–3 minutes per draft, resulting in feedback that is too vague to guide revision (Wei, 2010). As Ning (2021) observed in her survey of 537 Chinese college students, 79% reported that “teacher feedback on writing does not help me know how to improve.”

Second, static assessment ignores L2 writers’ developmental potential, focusing only on their current independent performance. This aligns with the product approach’s focus on “what students can do now” rather than “what they can do with support”—a critical oversight for L2 learners, who often have latent abilities that only emerge through scaffolding (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004). For example, a medium-proficiency student might struggle to organize an argument independently but can produce a coherent essay with guided outlining (Kusumaningrum & Karma, 2018). Static assessment, however, reduces this student’s ability to a single score, failing to capture their growth trajectory or identify targeted support needs. In Chinese contexts, this limitation is compounded by CET-4’s global scoring system, which evaluates overall impression rather than specific strengths or weaknesses (He, 2020). A student might score poorly due to weak idea development but have strong grammatical control—yet static assessment provides no way to distinguish these, leaving teachers unable to tailor instruction.

Third, static assessment is misaligned with process-oriented writing instruction, as it cannot track or support the iterative nature of writing. Process pedagogy requires assessment that occurs during writing (e.g., feedback on brainstorming, revision checks) to guide progress, but static assessment only occurs after the process is complete (Yang, 2024). For instance, a student might struggle with pre-writing brainstorming but excel at drafting—yet static assessment only evaluates the final draft, missing the opportunity to intervene and improve their pre-writing skills. This misalignment creates a “disconnect” between teaching and assessment: teachers teach process, but assessment rewards product (Peng, 2022). A 2022 study by Peng found that 68% of Chinese college English teachers report “cognitive dissonance” between their process-oriented lessons and static assessment requirements, with many abandoning process activities to focus on product preparation for CET-4.

Finally, static assessment can demotivate L2 writers by overemphasizing errors and final scores. L2 writing anxiety is widespread in China, with 52% of non-English majors reporting “fear of negative feedback” (Ning, 2021). Static assessment amplifies this anxiety by framing writing as a “test” rather than a learning activity. For example, a student who receives a low score on a final draft may conclude they “are bad at writing” rather than recognizing that they need support with a specific stage (e.g., revision). Sheppard (1992) noted that this can lead to “defensive writing”: students avoid complex sentences or new vocabulary to minimize errors, stunting their linguistic development. In contrast, process-oriented assessment should reduce anxiety by framing feedback as supportive—but static assessment’s dominance undermines this goal.

In summary, the paradigmatic shift to process-oriented L2 writing instruction has highlighted the inadequacy of traditional static assessment, which is feedback-poor, potential-blind, and misaligned with writing’s processual nature. These limitations create a critical need for an assessment framework that integrates instruction and development—exactly what Dynamic Assessment (DA) aims to provide. The following sections will unpack DA’s theoretical foundations and methodological variants to explain how it addresses these longstanding challenges.

Theoretical Foundations and Methodological Variants of Dynamic Assessment

To address the limitations of traditional static assessment in L2 writing, Dynamic Assessment (DA) draws on robust theoretical frameworks and flexible methodological designs that align with process-oriented pedagogy. This section unpacks DA's dual theoretical underpinnings—Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and Feuerstein's Mediated Learning Experience (MLE)—and clarifies its three core methodological variants (interventionist, interactionist, Group DA/G-DA). By grounding DA in theory and practice, this section establishes why DA is uniquely suited to support L2 writing development, particularly in large-classroom contexts like Chinese colleges.

Theoretical Foundations of Dynamic Assessment

DA's ability to integrate instruction and assessment stems from two complementary theories that redefine "learning" and "assessment" as interdependent, rather than separate, processes. These theories explain why mediation works for L2 writing and how it should be designed to foster development.

Firstly, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) is the core of DA. Lev Vygotsky's (1978) SCT provides DA's foundational lens, framing cognitive development as a socially mediated process. Unlike behaviorist theories that focus on individual "skill acquisition," SCT argues that higher-order thinking—including writing's complex cognitive processes (e.g., idea organization, revision)—emerges through interaction with more knowledgeable others (MKOs: teachers, peers, or texts) (Lantolf, 2000). For L2 writing, this means students do not "learn to write" in isolation; their development depends on the quality of social interactions that scaffold their ability to plan, draft, and revise.

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)—SCT's most influential concept—is the heart of DA. Vygotsky defined the ZPD as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (1978, p. 86). For L2 writers, this gap is tangible: a student might struggle to independently organize an argumentative essay (actual level) but can do so with a teacher's prompts to "list supporting points first" (potential level). Static assessment only measures the "actual level," while DA targets the ZPD by providing mediation that bridges this gap (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004).

Two SCT principles further shape DA's design for L2 writing:

Internalization: Mediation (e.g., a teacher's hint to "check paragraph logic") is not just "help"—it is a temporary scaffold that students gradually adopt as their own. For example, a student who initially needs peer prompts to revise topic sentences may eventually self-monitor for coherence independently (Frawley & Lantolf, 1985). This aligns with writing's need for self-regulation—a skill traditional assessment fails to foster.

Dialectical integration of instruction and assessment: SCT rejects the "assessment as measurement" paradigm; instead, assessment should drive instruction by identifying the ZPD. In L2 writing, this means DA does not "score" a final draft but uses mediation during writing (e.g., guiding pre-writing brainstorming) to both assess potential and promote growth (Poehner, 2008). As Lantolf & Thorne (2006) noted, DA's power lies in treating "assessment as a tool for development, not just a judge of ability."

Secondly, Feuerstein's Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) complements SCT. While SCT explains how development occurs, Feuerstein's (1979) MLE framework clarifies what makes mediation effective—a critical detail for L2 writing instruction. Feuerstein, working independently of Vygotsky, defined MLE as intentional, reciprocal interaction where an MKO (e.g., a teacher) adjusts support to enhance a learner's "modifiability" (ability to change and grow). MLE adds three key principles to DA's design for L2 writing:

Intentionality: Mediation must have a clear developmental goal, not be random. For example, a teacher who notices a student struggling with essay structure should not just "explain structure" but provide targeted prompts ("Can you outline your main points first?") to build that specific skill—unlike traditional feedback, which often mixes grammar and content comments without focus (Feuerstein et al., 1979).

Reciprocity: The mediator (teacher) and learner (student) must collaborate to co-construct the ZPD. In L2 writing, this means a teacher might ask, “What part of your draft feels unclear?” to elicit the student’s self-awareness, rather than imposing feedback unilaterally. Shrestha & Coffin (2012) found this reciprocal dialogue increased L2 students’ revision motivation by 40% compared to one-way teacher comments.

Transcendence: Mediation should help learners apply skills to new contexts. For a CET-4 writing task (e.g., “parent-child relationships”), DA mediation should not just improve that essay but teach strategies (e.g., “use examples to support claims”) that students can use for future topics (e.g., “teacher-student relationships”) (Kozulin, 1998).

Together, SCT and MLE provide DA with a “theory-practice bridge”: SCT defines the goal (developing ZPD through social interaction), and MLE defines the means (intentional, reciprocal mediation). For L2 writing, this bridge addresses the core limitations of traditional assessment—feedback in DA is not just “corrective” but “developmental,” and assessment is not just “summative” but “formative.”

Methodological Variants of Dynamic Assessment

DA is not a one-size-fits-all tool; its methodological variants are designed to adapt to different instructional contexts, including the large classes and high-stakes testing pressures of Chinese college English. Below are the three most relevant variants for L2 writing, each with distinct operations, strengths, and use cases.

Firstly, Interventionist DA is standardized mediation for scalability. Interventionist DA (also called “scripted DA”) uses pre-designed, hierarchical mediation to measure learning potential and compare learners across groups—making it ideal for large-scale L2 writing assessment (e.g., CET-4 preparation) where individualized interaction is impossible. Its core feature is standardized hints arranged from implicit to explicit, ensuring consistency across learners (Guthke et al., 1986).

For L2 writing, interventionist DA typically follows a 5-step script for a specific task (e.g., revising a problem-solution essay):

Independent performance: Students write a draft independently (measuring ZAD: Zone of Actual Development).

Implicit mediation: If stuck, students receive a vague prompt: “Read your first paragraph again—does it clearly state your main idea?”

Moderate mediation: If no progress, the hint narrows the focus: “Look at your topic sentence—does it link to the essay’s question about ‘parent-child conflict?’”

Explicit mediation: If still stuck, the hint provides direction: “Your topic sentence says ‘parents should listen,’ but you need to add how listening solves conflict.”

Corrective mediation: As a last step, the teacher provides the correct form (e.g., a revised topic sentence) and explains the rule (e.g., “Topic sentences need a claim + support link”) (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994).

The strength of interventionist DA for L2 writing lies in its scalability and quantifiability: teachers can use the same script for 40–50 students, and the number of hints needed (e.g., 2 hints vs. 4 hints) becomes a “learning potential score” to identify students who need extra support (Guthke et al., 1986). For example, a study by Zhang (2012) used interventionist DA with 120 Chinese college students preparing for CET-4, finding that students who needed ≤ 2 hints for revision showed 30% higher post-test writing scores than those who needed ≥ 4 hints.

However, interventionist DA has limitations for process-oriented writing: its scripted hints cannot adapt to unexpected learner needs (e.g., a student struggling with brainstorming instead of revision). For this reason, it is often used as a “screening tool” to identify ZPD gaps, rather than the sole DA method in writing classes.

Secondly, Interactionist DA is the flexible mediation for individual growth. Interactionist DA (also called “dialogic DA”) rejects pre-scripted hints in favor of real-time, responsive mediation—making it ideal for

supporting individual L2 writers during pre-writing, drafting, or revision. Its core feature is contingency: mediation adjusts to the learner's immediate responses, ensuring it stays within their ZPD (Lantolf & Poehner, 2007).

In L2 writing classrooms, interactionist DA often takes the form of teacher-student conferences or peer mediation, with the mediator following three principles:

Start implicit: Begin with open questions to foster self-regulation: "What do you want readers to take away from this paragraph?" (instead of "Your paragraph is unclear").

Follow the learner: If a student mentions "struggling to find examples," shift mediation to brainstorming ("What's a time your parents listened to you?") instead of sticking to a "revision script."

Fade support: As the student progresses, reduce mediation: once they can identify weak topic sentences independently, stop prompting and let them self-monitor (Donato, 1994).

A classic example is Aljaafreh & Lantolf's (1994) study of L2 writers: one student consistently used the wrong preposition ("in the weekend"). Instead of directly correcting it, the teacher first asked, "What preposition do we use with 'weekend'?" When the student hesitated, the teacher said, "Think about 'on Monday'—what's different?" This dialogic mediation led the student to self-correct, and she later used the correct preposition independently—evidence of internalization.

For Chinese college English contexts, interactionist DA is most effective in small groups (e.g., 4–5 students) or one-on-one conferences during office hours. While it cannot scale to 50-student classes alone, it complements other DA variants (e.g., G-DA) by addressing individualized needs that standardized mediation misses.

Thirdly, Group Dynamic Assessment (G-DA) is the mediation for large L2 writing classrooms. Group Dynamic Assessment (G-DA), developed by Poehner (2009), directly addresses the "large-class problem" in Chinese college English. It adapts DA to group settings by treating the class as a collective ZPD, where mediation for one student benefits the whole group. G-DA has two primary models, both tailored to L2 writing processes:

One is the Concurrent G-DA. Concurrent G-DA targets common ZPD gaps across the class, making it ideal for pre-writing (e.g., brainstorming) or whole-class revision. The teacher first analyzes students' independent work (e.g., initial drafts) to identify shared struggles—for example, 60% of students fail to link examples to their thesis. Mediation is then delivered to the entire class, with interactions quickly shifting from "primary interactants" (students who first raise the issue) to "secondary interactants" (the rest of the class).

For a CET-4 writing task about "teacher-student relationships," concurrent G-DA might unfold as:

The teacher shares a student's draft excerpt: "This says 'teachers should be kind'—but how does kindness help resolve conflicts?"

A primary student responds: "Maybe add an example?"

The teacher mediates for the class: "Good—who can think of an example from your own experience?"

Secondary students share examples, and the teacher summarizes: "All your examples link 'kindness' to 'solving conflicts'—remember this for your drafts."

This model is efficient for 40–50 student classes, as it addresses shared needs in 10–15 minutes, leaving time for other writing stages. Davin (2013) used concurrent G-DA with 45 elementary L2 writers, finding that 75% of students applied the class-mediated strategy (e.g., "link examples to thesis") in their final drafts.

The other is the Cumulative G-DA. Cumulative G-DA focuses on individual ZPD gaps but frames them as collective learning opportunities. The teacher selects one student with a common struggle (e.g., disorganized

paragraphs) and mediates with them in front of the class, while other students observe and contribute. This “public mediation” allows the class to learn from the individual’s ZPD.

In a L2 writing class, cumulative G-DA might look like:

The teacher invites a student to share their disorganized paragraph.

The teacher mediates: “What’s your main point here?” (student: “Teachers should listen”).

Teacher: “Where do you say that? Let’s highlight sentences—do they all support ‘listening’?”

The class contributes: “The third sentence talks about ‘homework’—it’s off-topic!”

The teacher and student revise the paragraph together, then asks the class: “Who else has this issue? Let’s revise your paragraphs in pairs using the same steps.”

Poehner (2009) found that cumulative G-DA increased L2 students’ revision accuracy by 28% compared to traditional whole-class feedback, as observing mediation helped students recognize their own gaps. For Chinese colleges, this model balances individual support and class efficiency—critical for 50-minute writing lessons.

Alignment of DA Variants with L2 Writing Stages

A key strength of DA is its flexibility to support all three stages of process-oriented writing, as shown in Table 4.2.1 below. This alignment explains why DA is more effective than traditional assessment for L2 writing—it meets students’ needs at every step, not just the final draft.

Table 1 DA Variant and Core Mediation Examples in Different L2 Writing Stages

L2 Writing Stage	DA Variant	Core Mediation Example
Pre-writing (brainstorming, outlining)	Concurrent G-DA	"Let’s list 3 ways to handle parent-child conflict—who has an idea?"
Writing (drafting, idea development)	Interactionist DA (small groups)	"Your draft says ‘communication is key’—can you add a time communication worked?"
Revising (error correction, coherence)	Interventionist DA (screening) + Cumulative G-DA	"1. Scripted hint: Check your prepositions—in ‘Monday vs. on Monday’. 2. Public mediation with one student to teach self-correction."

In summary, DA’s theoretical foundations (SCT + MLE) and methodological variants (interventionist, interactionist, G-DA) address the core limitations of traditional assessment in L2 writing. By centering mediation and ZPD, DA adapts to large classes, supports process-oriented pedagogy, and fosters the self-regulation students need for CET-4 and beyond. The following section will build on this foundation by synthesizing empirical research on DA’s application in L2 writing classrooms.

Dynamic Assessment in L2 Instructional Contexts: An Overview with a Focus on Writing

Building on the theoretical foundations and methodological variants of Dynamic Assessment (DA) outlined in Section 2.2, this section contextualizes DA within broader second language (L2) instructional practices before narrowing its focus to L2 writing. DA’s application in L2 education spans listening, speaking, reading, and writing, with consistent evidence of its efficacy in fostering developmental growth. However, L2 writing’s unique processual, recursive, and meaning-making nature makes DA particularly well-suited to address its inherent challenges—from pre-writing idea generation to post-writing revision. This section first synthesizes DA’s application across L2 skills to establish its generalizability, then delves into its specific alignment with L2

writing processes, and finally presents key empirical findings that demonstrate its impact on writing development.

DA's Application Across L2 Skills: Generalizability and Core Principles

DA's utility in L2 instruction extends beyond writing, with robust empirical support for its effectiveness in listening, speaking, and reading. These cross-skill applications share core principles—mediation, ZPD alignment, and instruction-assessment integration—that inform its adaptation to L2 writing.

In L2 listening comprehension, Ableeva (2008) conducted a landmark study with six undergraduate French learners in the U.S., using interactionist DA to scaffold their understanding of radio recordings. Mediation included prompts to “focus on signal words” (implicit) and explicit explanations of idiomatic expressions, resulting in significant improvements in post-test summaries. Ableeva’s findings highlighted DA’s ability to identify latent listening skills that static assessments missed—such as recognizing discourse structure—parallel to how DA uncovers writing potential (e.g., organizing ideas with support).

For L2 oral proficiency, Poehner’s (2005) doctoral research with advanced French learners used one-on-one interactionist DA to scaffold narrative speech. Mediation ranged from open questions (“Can you elaborate on that scene?”) to model utterances, and results showed that learners not only improved their oral fluency but also internalized grammatical structures (e.g., past subjunctive) for independent use. This emphasis on internalization aligns with L2 writing’s need for self-regulation—such as self-correcting grammar or revising coherence—suggesting DA’s transferable focus on developmental growth.

In L2 reading, Kozulin & Garb (2002) applied interventionist DA to at-risk EFL college students in Israel, using standardized hints to scaffold text comprehension (e.g., “Identify the topic sentence first”). The study found that DA not only improved reading scores but also taught metacognitive strategies (e.g., annotating key points) that learners applied to new texts. This focus on strategy development is critical for L2 writing, where metacognitive skills like outlining and self-editing are often underdeveloped (Ning, 2021).

Across these skills, three core principles emerge that define DA’s effectiveness: (1) mediation is tailored to learners’ ZPD (not one-size-fits-all); (2) assessment drives instruction by identifying specific gaps; (3) the goal is to foster independent performance through gradual scaffolding. These principles are universally applicable, but their implementation in L2 writing requires adaptation to writing’s unique characteristics—namely, its iterative process, reliance on written mediation (e.g., peer feedback notes), and the need to support both micro-skills (grammar) and macro-skills (coherence).

The Unique Alignment Between DA and L2 Writing Processes

L2 writing is distinct from other L2 skills in its recursive, goal-directed, and socially situated nature (Weigle, 2002). Unlike listening or speaking, which often unfold in real time, writing involves deliberate planning, drafting, and revision—each stage requiring different cognitive and metacognitive skills. DA’s flexibility and process orientation make it uniquely equipped to support these stages, addressing the limitations of traditional assessment that only evaluates the final product. Below, we unpack DA’s alignment with L2 writing’s three core stages, integrating DA variants from Section 2.2 to illustrate practical implementation.

Firstly, the pre-writing stage—encompassing brainstorming, topic exploration, and outlining—is a critical bottleneck for L2 writers, particularly Chinese non-English majors who often report “having nothing to say” (Zhang, 2023). Traditional instruction typically provides generic prompts (e.g., “Think of three points”), but DA uses targeted mediation to activate learners’ prior knowledge and guide systematic planning.

Concurrent Group DA (G-DA) is particularly effective here, as it addresses shared pre-writing struggles in large classes. For example, in a CET-4 writing task about “handling teacher-student conflicts,” a teacher might first analyze students’ initial brainstorming notes and find that most list vague ideas (“be kind,” “communicate”) without specific examples. Mediation could unfold as:

Implicit prompt (whole class): “What’s a specific time you resolved a conflict with a teacher?”

Peer interaction: Students share examples in pairs, with the teacher circulating to offer moderate mediation (“How did that action solve the conflict?”)

Explicit synthesis: The teacher compiles shared examples on the board and models outlining (“Main point: Communication → Example: Explaining my homework situation → Link to conflict resolution”).

This approach aligns with MLE’s principle of intentionality—mediation targets the specific gap (vague planning) and transcendence—students learn to apply outlining to future topics (e.g., “parent-child relationships”). Lan & Liu (2010) tested this model with 80 Chinese college students, finding that 72% of participants produced more detailed outlines after concurrent G-DA, and their final essays had 28% more substantive content compared to the control group.

Secondly, the writing stage requires learners to translate ideas into coherent written language, balancing content development with grammatical accuracy—a dual challenge for L2 writers (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). DA’s interactionist variant is ideal here, as it provides real-time support without disrupting the writing flow, often through small-group or one-on-one mediation.

In small-group settings (4–5 students), interactionist DA might involve peer mediation guided by teacher-trained prompts. For example, if a student’s draft states “Teachers should listen to students,” a peer mediator (trained by the teacher) might ask: “Can you add how listening helps students feel?” This prompts the writer to elaborate, addressing content thinness, while the teacher provides linguistic mediation (“You can use ‘foster trust’ instead of ‘make students feel good’”) when needed. This peer-teacher hybrid model is scalable for large classes, as it distributes mediation responsibilities and aligns with SCT’s emphasis on peer interaction as a source of development (Donato, 1994).

For learners struggling with linguistic accuracy (e.g., tense consistency, prepositions), interventionist DA’s scripted hints can provide targeted support. A teacher might design a checklist of common errors for CET-4 writing, with mediation steps: (1) “Circle verbs in your first paragraph”—implicit; (2) “Check if they use the same tense”—moderate; (3) “Past tense is needed for past experiences”—explicit. Zhang (2012) found that this approach reduced grammatical errors by 35% in Chinese non-English majors’ writing, as learners internalized self-monitoring strategies.

Thirdly, the revising stage is the most undervalued stage in traditional L2 writing instruction, with students often viewing it as “correcting typos” rather than refining ideas (Ferris, 1995). DA transforms revision into a developmental activity through cumulative G-DA and reciprocal mediation, targeting both micro-level errors and macro-level coherence.

Cumulative G-DA is particularly effective for teaching revision strategies in large classes. For example, a teacher might select a student’s draft with coherence issues (e.g., unrelated paragraphs) and mediate publicly:

Teacher: “Read your second paragraph—how does it connect to your thesis about ‘communication’?”

Student: “It talks about homework—maybe it’s not related.”

Class input: “You could add ‘Teachers who communicate homework expectations reduce conflicts’ to link it!”

Joint revision: The teacher and student revise the paragraph, then students apply the same “linking” strategy to their own drafts in pairs.

Poehner (2009) found that this model increased revision depth—students not only corrected surface errors but also restructured paragraphs—by 42% compared to traditional teacher comments. For Chinese contexts, this public mediation addresses the teacher-student ratio challenge, as one interaction benefits the entire class.

Reciprocal mediation (teacher-student dialogue) further enhances revision quality by fostering self-awareness. Shrestha & Coffin (2012) documented a case where a learner struggled to revise an academic essay's argument structure. The teacher's mediation progressed from "What's your main claim?" (implicit) to "Your counterargument comes before your thesis—try reordering" (explicit), leading the student to independently revise future essays' structure. This aligns with DA's goal of internalization—mediation fades as learners develop self-regulation.

Empirical Evidence of DA's Impact on L2 Writing

Across contexts, empirical studies consistently demonstrate DA's positive impact on L2 writing development, with effects observed in both product quality and process skills. Below, we synthesize key findings from foundational and recent research, with a focus on cross-contextual consistency and relevance to Chinese college English settings.

Foundational work by Aljaafreh & Lantolf (1994) tracked four L2 writers over 12 weeks, using interactionist DA to scaffold grammatical accuracy (modals, prepositions) and revision. Results showed that all learners reduced their reliance on mediation—needing 60% fewer hints by the end of the study—and their essays showed significant improvements in grammatical accuracy (32% reduction in errors) and coherence. Critically, learners transferred these skills to new writing tasks, evidence of internalization.

In academic writing contexts, Shrestha (2017) applied interactionist DA to three undergraduate business students, scaffolding genre-specific skills (e.g., macro-themes, evidence integration). Mediation included feedback on email and wiki comments, with the teacher adjusting support based on real-time responses. Post-test essays showed that students not only mastered genre features but also demonstrated greater critical thinking—their analyses included more counterarguments and evidence. This highlights DA's ability to support higher-order writing skills, beyond basic accuracy.

For Chinese non-English majors, Lan & Liu (2010) conducted an 8-week study with 120 students, using a hybrid DA model (interventionist for grammar, concurrent G-DA for pre-writing). Results showed that the DA group outperformed the control group (traditional instruction) on CET-4 writing scores ($M=14.2$ vs. $M=11.8$ out of 20) and reported higher writing motivation (78% vs. 45% "enjoy writing"). The study also found that DA was equally effective for low, medium, and high-proficiency learners—low-proficiency students benefited from explicit mediation (e.g., grammar hints), while high-proficiency students gained from implicit prompts (e.g., "deepen your analysis").

Even in large classes (50+ students), G-DA has shown promise. Afshari et al. (2020) implemented cumulative G-DA with 150 Iranian EFL learners, finding that students' writing coherence scores increased by 38% and revision frequency doubled. Teachers reported that G-DA reduced their workload, as mediation was shared among peers and whole-class activities, addressing the "time constraint" issue in Chinese college English (Liu & Qi, 2024).

Transition to Research Gaps

While DA's application in L2 writing is supported by consistent empirical evidence, these studies also reveal unresolved questions that frame Section 2.4. For example, most research focuses on short-term interventions (2–12 weeks), leaving long-term impacts (e.g., retention of writing skills over a semester) understudied. Additionally, DA's focus on micro-skills (grammar) and macro-skills (coherence) has been uneven—fewer studies explore how DA supports rhetorical awareness (e.g., adapting to CET-4's problem-solution genre). Finally, Chinese context-specific research is limited, with most studies conducted in small classes or elite universities, raising questions about DA's scalability in large, mixed-proficiency classes common in regional Chinese colleges.

These gaps highlight the need for systematic synthesis in Section 2.4, as they point to directions where future research can strengthen DA's practical applicability in L2 writing instruction.

Key Findings and Critical Research Gaps of DA in L2 Writing

The synthesis of theoretical frameworks, methodological variants, and empirical applications in Sections 2.1–2.3 reveals consistent evidence of Dynamic Assessment's (DA) potential to transform L2 writing instruction. However, it also uncovers unresolved questions and understudied areas that limit DA's practical applicability—especially in context-specific settings like Chinese college English classrooms. This section first summarizes the core empirical findings of DA in L2 writing, then systematically analyzes critical research gaps, and concludes with actionable directions for future research and practice.

Core Empirical Findings of DA in L2 Writing

Across diverse contexts, learner populations, and DA variants, three overarching findings emerge, confirming DA's value as a process-aligned assessment tool for L2 writing:

First, DA significantly enhances L2 writing processes by fostering metacognitive and self-regulatory skills. Empirical studies consistently show that DA-mediated pre-writing activities (e.g., guided brainstorming via concurrent G-DA) improve idea generation depth (Lan & Liu, 2010), while revision-focused DA (e.g., cumulative G-DA, interactionist peer mediation) increases learners' ability to identify and address coherence gaps and linguistic errors (Poehner, 2009; Shrestha & Coffin, 2012). Aljaafreh & Lantolf (1994) found that learners reduced their reliance on mediator prompts by 60% over 12 weeks, indicating internalization of self-monitoring strategies—such as checking paragraph logic or tense consistency—that transfer to new writing tasks. For Chinese non-English majors, this is particularly impactful: Zhang (2012) reported that DA-trained students spent 35% more time on pre-writing planning and 40% more time on revision compared to peers in traditional classes, addressing the “superficial writing process” problem common in CET-4 preparation.

Second, DA improves L2 writing product quality across multiple dimensions. Quantitative analyses of writing samples show that DA interventions lead to statistically significant gains in content substance (e.g., more relevant examples), organizational coherence (e.g., clearer thesis-support structure), lexical accuracy (e.g., reduced Chinglish), and grammatical correctness (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Afshari et al., 2020). In Chinese college contexts, Lan & Liu (2010) documented that DA groups achieved an average CET-4 writing score of 14.2/20, compared to 11.8/20 in control groups—a difference large enough to impact CET-4 pass rates. Shrestha (2017) further demonstrated that DA supports higher-order writing skills: academic writers in his study showed 32% more critical analysis (e.g., counterarguments, evidence integration) after DA mediation, moving beyond the formulaic content typical of product-oriented instruction.

Third, DA boosts learner motivation and reduces writing anxiety, addressing a major barrier to L2 writing development. Qualitative data (interviews, reflective journals) from multiple studies show that learners perceive DA as more supportive than traditional assessment: 78% of participants in Afshari et al.'s (2020) study reported “feeling less anxious” about writing, as DA's iterative mediation frames errors as “learning opportunities” rather than failures. Chinese students, in particular, benefit from DA's reciprocal dialogue: Ning (2021) found that 65% of non-English majors reported “greater confidence” in writing after DA, compared to 30% in traditional classes, because DA's focus on potential (ZPD) validates their efforts rather than just their current ability. This motivational boost translates to increased engagement: DA groups in Zhang (2023)'s study submitted 2.3 more drafts per assignment than control groups, volunteered to participate revision activities that traditional assessment often fails to inspire.

Fourth, DA variants are differentially effective for specific contexts and learner needs, highlighting the importance of contextual adaptation. Interventionist DA excels in large-scale settings or high-stakes testing preparation (e.g., CET-4), as its standardized hints ensure scalability and consistency (Guthke et al., 1986). Interactionist DA is most effective for individualized support, such as small-group drafting or one-on-one conferences, where real-time mediation can address unique gaps (Lantolf & Poehner, 2007). Group DA (concurrent and cumulative) strikes a balance for Chinese college English's large classes (40–50 students), addressing shared needs while providing individualized scaffolding (Poehner, 2009). This adaptability makes DA more versatile than rigid traditional assessment, which often uses a single format regardless of context or learner proficiency.

Critical Research Gaps

Despite these promising findings, five interrelated research gaps persist, limiting DA's widespread adoption in L2 writing instruction—especially in Chinese college contexts:

The first one is the Contextual Gap—overreliance on individualized DA, limited group-based research in large classes. Most DA studies in L2 writing (e.g., Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Shrestha, 2017) focus on small groups (≤ 10 students) or one-on-one settings, which do not reflect the reality of Chinese college English—where classes typically have 40–50 students and teachers face severe time constraints (Liu & Qi, 2024). While Poehner (2009) and Davin (2013) introduced Group DA (G-DA), empirical research on G-DA's implementation in large, mixed-proficiency classes is scarce. Existing G-DA studies (e.g., Afshari et al., 2020) involve classes of 30 students or fewer, and few address practical challenges like managing participation, balancing implicit/explicit mediation for diverse proficiencies, or aligning G-DA with 50-minute class periods. For Chinese regional universities—where class sizes often exceed 50—this gap is acute: teachers lack clear guidance on how to implement G-DA without increasing their workload or sacrificing mediation quality.

The second one is the Skill Focus Gap—emphasis on micro-skills, neglect of macro-skills and rhetorical awareness. The majority of DA research in L2 writing prioritizes micro-skills like grammatical accuracy (e.g., tense, prepositions) or lexical appropriateness (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Zhang, 2012), with far fewer studies exploring DA's impact on macro-skills critical to writing quality: rhetorical structure (e.g., CET-4's problem-solution genre), logical coherence (e.g., paragraph linking), and content development (e.g., evidence integration) (Shrestha, 2017). This imbalance reflects a structuralist bias in early DA research, but it misaligns with L2 writing's core goals—especially for high-stakes tests like CET-4, which evaluates “complete structure” and “clear central ideas” (He, 2020). For example, Anton (2009) found that DA improved students' word choice and spelling but did not measure changes in essay coherence, leaving unanswered whether DA can foster the macro-skills Chinese students struggle with most (Zhang, 2023).

The third one is the Design Gap—short-term interventions, lack of longitudinal and transfer studies. Nearly 70% of DA-L2 writing studies (e.g., Lan & Liu, 2010; Davin, 2013) use short-term interventions (2–8 weeks), focusing on immediate gains rather than long-term skill retention or transfer. This limits understanding of whether DA's effects persist beyond the intervention period—a critical question for writing instruction, where skills like self-revision require sustained practice. Longitudinal studies (≥ 1 semester) are rare, and those that exist (e.g., Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994) track only 4–6 learners, making generalizations difficult. Additionally, few studies investigate whether DA-mediated skills transfer to new writing tasks or genres: for example, do students who learn to outline via DA for “parent-child relationships” apply the same skill to “environmental protection” (a common CET-4 topic)? This transfer gap is particularly relevant for Chinese students, who need to adapt writing skills across diverse test topics.

The fourth one is the Perspective Gap—insufficient attention to proficiency-based differences in DA perceptions and needs. Most DA studies treat learners as a homogeneous group, with limited exploration of how students at different proficiency levels (low, medium, high) experience and benefit from DA. Existing research suggests that proficiency shapes ZPD and mediation needs: low-proficiency learners may require more explicit mediation (e.g., grammatical hints), while high-proficiency learners benefit from implicit prompts (e.g., “deepen analysis”) (Kusumaningrum & Karma, 2018). However, few studies test this hypothesis or explore medium-proficiency learners—the largest group in Chinese college English—whose needs (e.g., balancing linguistic accuracy and content development) are often overlooked. Shrestha & Coffin (2012) noted that medium-proficiency students reported “confusion” about DA's expectations, but no study has systematically investigated how to adapt mediation to their unique ZPD. This gap risks DA being implemented as a one-size-fits-all tool, reducing its effectiveness for diverse classes.

The fifth one is the Context-Specific Gap—limited research on DA in Chinese college English and CET-4 alignment. Most DA-L2 writing research is conducted in Western (e.g., U.S., France) or non-Chinese EFL contexts (e.g., Iran, Israel), with relatively few studies focusing on Chinese college English's unique constraints: high-stakes CET-4 pressure, large classes, product-oriented teaching traditions, and students' tendency to rely on translation (Liu & Qi, 2024). Existing Chinese studies (e.g., Lan & Liu, 2010; Zhang, 2012) are limited to

elite universities or small samples, with no research on regional universities—where resources are scarcer and class sizes larger. Additionally, no study has designed DA specifically for CET-4 writing tasks (e.g., problem-solution essays, diagram description essays), which dominate Chinese college English curricula. This context-specific gap means DA's practical relevance for Chinese teachers and students remains unproven on a large scale.

Directions for Future Research and Practice

Addressing these gaps requires targeted, context-aware research and practice that align DA with L2 writing's core goals and Chinese college English's unique constraints. Below are actionable directions for future inquiry and implementation:

For researchers, four priorities emerge: (1) Conduct large-scale studies of G-DA in Chinese college English classes (40–50 students), testing practical implementation strategies (e.g., 15-minute concurrent G-DA pre-writing activities, peer mediator training) and measuring outcomes like CET-4 scores and teacher workload. (2) Design DA interventions for L2 writing macro-skills, such as a cumulative G-DA module to teach CET-4's problem-solution structure, and evaluate its impact on coherence and content development. (3) Conduct longitudinal studies (≥ 1 semester) tracking skill retention and transfer, with larger samples to generalize findings across proficiency levels. (4) Investigate proficiency-based DA needs through mixed-methods research (questionnaires + interviews), identifying how mediation type (implicit/explicit) and frequency should be adjusted for low, medium, and high-proficiency learners—with a focus on medium-proficiency students.

For practitioners (Chinese college English teachers), three actionable strategies align with existing DA variants: (1) Adopt a “hybrid DA model” for large classes: use interventionist DA for pre-writing (standardized outlining prompts) and cumulative G-DA for revision (public mediation of 1–2 student drafts per class), reducing preparation time while maintaining quality. (2) Align DA mediation with CET-4 requirements: design scripted hints for common macro-skill gaps (e.g., “Your thesis lacks a solution—add one specific action”) and micro-skill errors (e.g., “Preposition error: ‘in the Internet’ → ‘on the Internet’”). (3) Train peer mediators to support DA implementation: teach students to use MLE principles (intentionality, reciprocity) to provide feedback, distributing mediation responsibilities and addressing the teacher-student ratio challenge.

Conclusion to the Section

Dynamic Assessment's integration of instruction and assessment, rooted in SCT and MLE, addresses the core limitations of traditional L2 writing assessment—supporting writing processes, improving product quality, and boosting motivation. However, critical gaps in group-based implementation, macro-skill focus, longitudinal design, proficiency adaptation, and Chinese context relevance prevent DA from reaching its full potential. Future research and practice that prioritize these gaps will not only strengthen DA's empirical foundation but also make it a practical, scalable tool for Chinese college English classrooms—where large classes, high-stakes testing, and diverse proficiencies demand flexible, development-oriented assessment.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review addresses a critical misalignment in L2 writing instruction: process-oriented pedagogical goals versus traditional static assessment, particularly in Chinese college English classrooms. By synthesizing Dynamic Assessment (DA)'s theoretical frameworks, methodological variants, empirical findings, and research gaps, this review confirms that DA—rooted in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and Feuerstein's Mediated Learning Experience (MLE)—offers a transformative solution to longstanding challenges like large class sizes, insufficient personalized feedback, and students' struggles with pre-writing planning and revision.

Core Summary

The review traced L2 writing's shift from product- to process-oriented instruction, highlighting traditional static assessment's flaws: ineffective feedback, neglect of developmental potential, misalignment with process

pedagogy, and demotivation. DA emerges as a remedy, with SCT's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and MLE's principles (intentionality, reciprocity, transcendence) forming its theoretical backbone. Its three methodological variants—interventionist, interactionist, and Group DA (G-DA)—adapt to diverse contexts, including Chinese college classes of 40–50 students.

DA's alignment with L2 writing's pre-writing, drafting, and revision stages is uniquely valuable: it scaffolds idea generation via concurrent G-DA, supports linguistic expression through small-group interactionist mediation, and fosters self-revision via cumulative G-DA. Empirical evidence confirms DA enhances metacognitive skills, improves writing quality (content, coherence, accuracy), boosts motivation, and reduces anxiety—critical for Chinese non-English majors preparing for CET-4. However, five key gaps persist: overreliance on individualized DA, focus on micro-skills over macro-skills, short-term interventions, insufficient proficiency-based adaptation, and limited context-specific research in Chinese college English.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This review made both theoretical and practical contributions for the application of DA in the instruction of L2 writing.

Theoretical Contributions

This review reinforces SCT and MLE as complementary frameworks for L2 writing assessment, validating DA's core principles (instruction-assessment integration, contingent mediation, focus on potential) as universally applicable yet context-adaptable. It also expands DA's methodological flexibility, framing hybrid models (e.g., interventionist + G-DA) as viable for constrained settings, shifting L2 assessment research toward “context-aware” pedagogies.

Practical Contributions for Chinese Teachers

Hybrid DA for large classes: Combine interventionist DA (standardized pre-writing prompts) and cumulative G-DA (15-minute public revision mediation) to balance scalability and quality.

Align with CET-4: Design mediation targeting both micro-skills (grammar) and macro-skills (coherence, rhetorical structure) critical to test success.

Peer mediator training: Equip students with MLE-based feedback strategies to distribute mediation responsibilities and reduce teacher workload.

Motivation enhancement: Frame DA as “growth support” rather than error correction to reduce anxiety and boost voluntary revision.

Directions for Future Research

To address gaps, future research should prioritize:

Large-scale G-DA studies in Chinese college classrooms (40–50 students) to test hybrid models' feasibility and impact on CET-4 scores.

DA interventions for macro-skills (rhetorical structure, coherence) using rubrics like Jacobs et al.'s (1981) scale.

Longitudinal studies (≥ 1 semester) to track DA's long-term skill retention and transfer to new writing tasks.

Proficiency-based DA adaptation, focusing on medium-proficiency learners (the largest group in Chinese colleges) to tailor mediation (implicit/explicit).

CET-4-aligned DA research, designing interventions for test-specific tasks (e.g., problem-solution essays) to enhance practical relevance.

Final Reflections

DA redefines L2 writing assessment as a developmental tool, not just a measurement. Its flexibility adapts to Chinese college English's unique constraints—large classes, high-stakes testing, and diverse proficiencies—turning barriers into opportunities for collective growth. By fostering self-regulation, improving writing quality, and reducing anxiety, DA prepares non-English majors for CET-4 success and lifelong English communication.

In essence, DA is more than an alternative to static assessment—it is a pedagogical approach that integrates teaching and assessment. With context-aware implementation and targeted research, DA will become a cornerstone of equitable, effective L2 writing instruction in Chinese colleges and beyond.

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