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The Effect of Mobile-mediated Dynamic Assessment on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Writing Skill

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of mobile-mediated dynamic assessment on Iranian EFL learners' writing skills. The participants were 60 intermediate-level EFL learners from an English language institute in Shiraz, Iran, aged 15 to 30. They were randomly assigned to one control group and two experimental groups. The study used the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT), the DIALANG writing test, WhatsApp, Google Docs, and interviews. The OQPT assessed general English proficiency before the experiment. Quantitative data were analyzed using Kolmogorov-Smirnov, Shapiro-Wilk tests, descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-tests, ANOVA, and Tukey post hoc tests. Qualitative data from interviews were coded and analyzed for mediation typology. ANOVA results indicated significant differences among groups, showing that mobile-based dynamic assessment improved writing proficiency. Both experimental groups made notable progress, and participants reported that the approach saved time, boosted confidence, and increased enthusiasm for writing.

Keywords:
Mobile-mediation, Dynamic assessment, EFL Learners, Writing skill

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Introduction

According to Poehner (2008), DA is a framework for teaching and assessment as an integrated activity, in this framework the instructor should discover the learner abilities and give a dynamic support according to the abilities to promote them. The vital element of DA is; to provide effective mediations (Suherman, 2020). One of the reasons for mixing instruction and assessment is that, learners with low competency fail to make progress after mediation and this will under question the efficiency of using DA (Hidri, 2019). Mobile devices have attracted lots of attentions in learning and teaching a language due to some characteristics such as mobility, portability and so forth (Biantoro, 2020; Krivoruchko et al., 2015; Kukulska-Hulme et al., 2017; Loewen et al., 2019).

M-learning is also defined as "learning that occurs when learners have access to information anytime and anywhere via mobile technologies to perform authentic activities in the context of their learning" (Martin & Ertzberger, 2013). MALL is defined as the use of mobile devices in learning a language (Nuraeni et al., 2020; Sutrisna, et al., 2018). This study used DA for assessing the student writing tasks via Mobile devices. The term Mobile Dynamic Assessment (MDA) has been integrated in this study to unify the two fields of MALL and DA and seeks the MDA's effect on EFL learners' writing proficiency. However, writing is a complicated process for second or foreign language learners and they have to restore linguistic items from long-term memory and then construct a message which is linguistically representative (Li & Roshan, 2019). In other words, appropriate writing requires transforming messages productively by using meaningful sentences (Jayanti, 2019). Therefore, finding a

modern way to motivate the learners to master this skill is vital. Integrating various technological tools to ease the process of writing has taken special attention. (Ebadi & Rahimi 2018, 2019; Lee, 2020; Vakili & Ebadi, 2019). Based on the literature, there is a need for giving continuous feedback to learners, whether in a computerized or in-class version of DA, as mediation becomes a central aspect of DA. In addition, some other studies have reported a positive relationship between DA and its application through mobile devices (Andujar, 2020; Rad, 2021; Rezaee, et al., 2020). To the best knowledge of the researcher, there is just one study (Ebadi & Bashir, 2021) that concentrated on EFL writing mobile-based interactionist DA, and there is little information about the role of MDA on improving EFL learners' writing performance. The main rationale behind carrying out this study was the insufficient evidence regarding the use of DA through Mobile devices in the writing process. Thus, this research aimed at finding out any possible effect on EFL learners' writing proficiency when they use mobile devices for receiving text and voice-based mediation.

These questions were answered in this research.

Question 1: Does mobile-mediated dynamic assessment significantly affect Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing performance?

Question 2: Which kind of mobile dynamic assessment mediation is more effective in written accuracy (voice or text based)?

Question 3: What are Iranian intermediate EFL learners' attitudes toward mobile-mediated dynamic assessment writing experience?

The findings of this study can propose several important implications for developing technology-based learning and teaching. Mobile-mediated learning can be a

substitution for traditional learning; hence, teaching and learning can be achieved anytime and anywhere. The results of this study can provide teachers with informative insights to help learners succeed in their learning process since DA provides learners with exactly what they need to improve their works and in this way challenges learners and enhances their automaticity (Aghaebrahimian, et al., 2014). In comparison with DA, traditional assessment is isolated, and it is counted as one of its disadvantages in learning. In addition, it can help learners experience a more supportive and socially constructed learning process provided that teachers get impressed and motivated by its objectives and findings.

Methods and Materials

This study followed an experimental mixed-methods design, making use of both quantitative and qualitative data sources. QUAN ➔QUAL is the type of mixed method in this study. Initially, quantitative data were gathered, then follow-up interviews were conducted to investigate the participants' experience of the sessions. The quantitative data were collected through experimental procedures which includes pre-tests, posttests, and the mediational processes recorded during the treatment sessions. For the qualitative data, the data were collected via semi-structured interviews with the experimental groups after finishing the post-test.

In short, this research is experimental in the sense that the independent variable (i.e., mobile mediated DA) is manipulated to study its consequential impact on the dependent variable (i.e., EFL learners' writing performance). Moreover, regarding the types of collected data, this study employs a mixed-methods design since both quantitative and qualitative data are gathered. In addition, the present research is

exploratory in the quantitative phase and explanatory in the qualitative phase where it seeks EFL learners' attitudes toward mobile-mediated writing experience. Furthermore, descriptive in nature since it depicts the context benefiting from data triangulation and rich descriptions.

The instrument and the materials used in this study are the oxford quick placement test (OQPT), the DIALANG writing test, WhatsApp, Google Docs, and the interview.

To measure the participants' general English proficiency level before the experiment, the participants took the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) which is a standardized English proficiency test. The test was conducted in a classroom environment and its length was 20 minutes. Out of 70 EFL learners at the intermediate level, 60 learners whose scores ranged from 40 to 47 were selected as the participants of this study.

DIALANG is a free online diagnostic system for assessing a person's proficiency. DIALANG offers separate test for reading, writing, listening, grammatical structures and vocabulary. Moreover, it provides test instructions, controls, help pages, explanations, self-assessment statements, test results, feedback and advice in 14 languages (Wikipedia, 2022). In this study, the writing section of DIALANG was considered as pre- and post-tests to examine the writing performance of the participants. In DIALANG, indirect writing items assess users' skills in recognizing elements of approiacy, accuracy and coherence in writing. The content validity of the test was determined by three experts in the field of English language teaching. The reliability of the test was examined using the test-retest method by reporting the correlation between pretest and posttest scores as $r = .762$. The participants took this test before and after the treatment.

WhatsApp is a free application owned by Facebook and it offers simple, secure, reliable messaging, calling and voice recording available on phones all over the world. This app was used as a platform for sharing the content with the two experimental groups.

Google Docs is an online word processor that lets you create, format and edit your documents, and gives permission to other people to see your work. In this study, it was utilized along with WhatsApp for completing the writing task by the students and applying MDA mediations.

Six participants of the experimental groups were randomly interviewed after the post-test. A semi-structured interview was administrated for the qualitative data. Semi-structured interview combines predefined questions with the open-ended exploration of an unstructured interview. The content validity of the interview was determined by three experts in the field of English language teaching. To code the participants' answers, two raters were used. First, the researcher analyzed the answers and later, another rater coded the answers.

The consent forms were distributed among the participants to declare their consent for taking part in the research. They were told that the results of the tests would remain confidential. In addition, the authorities of the language institute declared their permission to conduct this research in three classes at the intermediate level where the participants were randomly assigned to one group.

All the students took the OQPT to determine their proficiency level. Then, all the participants took the online DIALANG writing test as the pretest to determine their

current writing proficiency level in session two. In session three, the participants were taught how to use Google Docs. In the following sessions (sessions 4 to 8), the experimental groups were asked to complete their writing files (150–200 words) in Google Docs and sent them to the instructor's personal account via WhatsApp. The topics for writing tasks were chosen from Cambridge English Write and Improve. Write and improve, developed by the University of Cambridge, is a free application that helps every learner to improve their English writing.

The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 24. First, normality of data was tested using Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality. Afterwards, the results of descriptive statistics were computed. Then, to compare the pre-test and post-test scores of each group (i.e., T-group and V-group), three separate paired-sample *t*-tests were calculated. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was utilized to find any significant differences among the three groups using the results of their pre- and posttests. The ANOVA was followed by Tukey post hoc tests to detect the differences between the groups in the posttest. For the qualitative data analysis, the answers to the interview questions were coded and analyzed using a typology of mediation moves proposed by Ebadi and Bashir (2021). The purpose was to find the most recurring themes in data analysis.

Results

In this section, the results of normality tests, descriptive statistics, and inferential statistics are reported. First, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) and Shapiro-Wilk tests were used to check the normality of the pretest and posttest.

Table 1. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) and Shapiro-Wilk tests

GROUP		KOLMOGOROV-SMIRNOV		SHAPIRO-WILK	
		df	Sig.	df	Sig.
CONTROL GROUP	pretest	20	.200	20	.311
	posttest	20	.200	20	.239
T-GROUP	pretest	20	.136	20	.085
	posttest	20	.200	20	.261
V-GROUP	pretest	20	.113	20	.076
	posttest	20	.192	20	.127

As presented in Table 1, the p values under the Sig. column should be compared with the .05 level of significance, and a p value greater than .05 indicates no violation of the assumption of normality. Therefore, parametric statistics including paired samples t-tests and ANOVA were used to answer the first and second research questions.

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Descriptive statistics of writing pretests and posttests are presented. This includes the mean score, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores of the participants on the pretests and posttests

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of writing pretests and posttests

Groups	Test	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Control Group	Pretest	19	29	23.68	2.854
	Posttest	20	31	24.51	2.347
T-group	Pretest	18	28	22.79	2.563
	Posttest	22	39	29.34	3.670
V-group	Pretest	18	29	23.06	2.435
	Posttest	22	38	28.52	3.738

As Table 2 demonstrates, the means of three groups are very close to each other in the pretest (23.68; 22.79; 23.06). However, on the posttest, T-group and V-group had higher mean scores (M = 29.34, M = 28.52) than the control group (M = 24.51). This implies that DA in experimental groups could have a positive effect on participants' performance

First, one-way ANOVA was run on the pretest scores. Prior to running ANOVA, Levene's test for homogeneity of variances was tested for the pretest

Table 3. Levene's test for homogeneity of variances

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.835	2	57	.524

Levene's test for homogeneity of variances tests whether the variance of scores is the same for each of the three groups. If the significance value (Sig.) for Levene's test is greater than .05, the assumption of homogeneity of variance is not violated (Pallant, 2020). In this case, the Sig. value is .524. As this is greater than .05, the homogeneity of variance assumption is not violated.

Table 4. ANOVA Test of Participants' Scores before the Treatment

	Sum of Squares	df	F	Sig.
Between Groups	9.433	2	0.683	0.521
Within Groups	480.846	57		
Total	490.279	59		

Then, a one-way between-groups ANOVA was conducted to compare the significant differences between the participants' scores before the treatment. there was no statistically significant difference at the 0.05 significance level in pretest scores: F (2, 57) = 0.683, p = .521

Table 5. Paired-samples T-tests

Groups		Mean	SD	SEM	*t*	df	Sig
Pair 1 (Control Group)	Pretest Posttest	-.83	.837	.172	-1.455	19	.541
Pair 2 (T-Group)	Pretest Posttest	-6.55	1.451	.351	-35.869	19	.000
Pair 3 (V-Group)	Pretest Posttest	-5.46	1.293	.324	-31.412	19	.000

Note. SEM: Standard Error of Mean

After conducting one-way ANOVAs on pretest scores, paired-samples *t*-tests were done to detect whether there were statistically significant differences in the mean scores before and after the treatment within control group, T-group, and V-group. As shown in Table there were significant differences between the mean scores of the

pretest and the posttest in experimental groups (T-group: t = -35.869, p = .000; V-group: t = -31.412, p = .000). In other words, experimental groups significantly outperformed the control group in the posttest. The control group, however, showed no significant difference (t = -1.455, p = .541). To answer research questions one and two, which examined significant differences between three groups, One-way ANOVA was carried out.

Table 6. Test of Homogeneity of Variances for the Posttest

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.631	2	57	.504

As Table 6 illustrates, the Sig. value is .504, which is greater than .05, suggesting that the assumption of homogeneity of variance is not violated. Table 4.7 displays the results of one-way ANOVA on the posttest scores.

Table 7. The Results of ANOVA on the Posttest Scores

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	281.538	2	191.453	31.942	0.000
Within Groups	372.446	57	4.865		
Total	753.984	59			

Table 7 shows that there was a statistically significant difference between the three groups in the posttest: F (2, 57) = 31.942, p = .000. To pinpoint where the differences lie, Tukey post-hoc tests were run. The results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. The Results of Tukey Post-hoc Tests

(I) INPUT GROUP	(J) INPUT GROUP	MEAN DIFFERENCE (I-J)	STD. ERROR	SIG.
CONTROL GROUP	T-Group	-4.83*	.428	.000
	V-Group	-4.01*	.428	.000

T-GROUP	Control Group	4.83*	.428
	V-Group	0.82*	.428
V-GROUP	Control Group	4.01*	.428
	T-Group	0.82*	.428

Table 8 shows that the mean scores of both T-group (MD = 4.83, p = .000) and V-group (MD = 4.01, p = .000) are significantly different from that of the control group. However, the results showed no significant difference between T-group and V-group (MD = 0.82, p = .412), suggesting the equal outperformance of the experimental groups in the posttest.

Discussion

The result showed that both experimental groups (Text-based and Voice-based) had a remarkable progress in their writing proficiency. The results of paired-samples t-tests showed that the mediations had a significant effect on the experimental groups' learning process hence there was no significant difference between the control group' pre- and post-test scores. Furthermore, the ANOVA test showed that there were significant differences among the groups in the posttest; therefore, the significant differences were a result of the DA mediations.

In other words, both T and V groups in intermediate level had a significant progress in their writing proficiency. In contrast with Ebadi and Bashir's (2020) study, in which T-group improved more than V-group, in this study, no significant difference was found between voice-based and text-based mediations. Accordingly, the efficiency of DA on the learners' written proficiency cannot be guaranteed since there were not enough studies to be compared with the results.

In light of the qualitative data, nearly all of the participants supported DA due to its advantageous benefits, which is consistent with the findings of certain other studies (Aghaebrahimian, et al., 2014; Ebadi & Bashir, 2020; Zarinkamar et al., 2021). They felt that this approach saved them time and increased their confidence and enthusiasm for writing, which is a challenging ability. However, there were certain drawbacks to this approach, such as a bad internet connection and discomfort while speaking out loud.

Conclusion

This study was explored to seek the effect of mobile-based dynamic assessment on Iranian EFL learners' writing skill. It was conducted on 60 Iranian EFL learners at intermediate level, in which two experimental groups (V-group and T-group) respectively received the mediations through voice and text form. Based on the findings, dynamic assessment can help EFL teachers to promote EFL learners' academic writing skills. According to the quantitative results, the study confirmed that mobile-based dynamic assessment significantly affected the learners' writing scores. The mediations improved the learners' writing proficiency since the comparison between the control group and the experimental groups showed that experimental groups' scores were greater than the control groups' scores. Moreover, the ANOVA results showed no significant effect between the experimental groups. The findings of this study have several important implications for developing technology-based learning and teaching. Due to the EFL learners' positive perspective toward technology-based learning, this study can be a substitution for traditional learning hence the teaching and learning can be achieved anytime and anywhere as several researchers mentioned. In comparison with DA, traditional assessment is isolated and counted as one of its

disadvantages in learning. It has always been a challenge for learners hence it increases their stress. Thereof, it affects the validity and reliability of the test's result. This research provides a future perspective on the Improving the level of teaching and learning through useful mediators by increasing the capabilities of the learner. It also provides the possibility for the learner to increase his skills level through mobile with different platforms at any time and in any place.

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