Critical Literary Studies
Vol. V, No. 1, Series 9
Autumn and Winter 2022-2023

Exploring the Effects of Dynamic Assessment on Improving Iranian Quran Learners' Recitation Performance

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DOI: https://www.doi.org/10.34785/J014.2023.010
Article Type: Original Article Page Numbers: 159-176
Received: 14 December 2021 Accepted: 25 August 2022

Abstract

Although Dynamic Assessment (DA), rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) notion, has been extensively researched in teaching English as a foreign language, it has remained largely unexplored in teaching Arabic as a foreign language. To bridge this long-lasting gap, this study purports to investigate the effects of DA on improving Iranian Quran learners' recitation performance. For this purpose, two intact grade 7 classes were selected at a public high school in Borujerd city, Iran, and were assigned randomly as DA group (n = 21) and non-DA group (n = 23). Later, they went through a pre-test, intervention (offered based on the principles and procedures of DA for the DA group and held in 15 sessions), immediate post-test, and delayed post-test. The collected data were analyzed through a one-way ANCOVA. Findings documented that the DA group outperformed the non-DA group on the immediate post-test. Additionally, the results evidenced that the DA group outweighed the control group on the delayed post-test. The study ends with proposing some implications in consistent with the tenets of Sociocultural theory.

Keywords

Sociocultural theory; Zone of proximal development; Dynamic assessment; Recitation performance; Quran learners

1. Introduction

With more than 375 million native speakers, Arabic is currently the 5th most commonly spoken language in the world. It is spoken as the official language in more than twenty countries located in the Middle East and other parts of the world (Ernst 2013). Additionally, it is used as an official language in the Arab League, the United Nations,

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the African Union, and the Organization of Islamic Conference. More importantly, Arabic is the language of the Holy Quran, hadith, and the other Islamic teachings (Bagheri et al. 2020). This has been confirmed in the Holy Quran:

> "*Indeed, we have sent it down as an Arabic Quran that you might understand*." (Quran, 12:2)

This verse indicates that Arabic was chosen by God and everyone need understand it, because God had sent the life guidelines through it. Due to some reasons, Arabic course is one of the compulsory courses in the education system of Iran. They include strengthening students' faith and inclination to the Quran and Atrat, improving students ability to read Quran, promoting students' understanding the meaning of the verses of Quran, fostering students' ability to ponder upon and commitment to tact based on the verses of Quran, preserving Quran, raising students' interest and passion in Quran, making students familiar with the sciences of Quran, and enabling students to use Quran in their daily life (Parvin et al., 2021).

Although the majority of Quran teachers may acknowledge that there are different ways to teach its different parts, they may have failed to reach a strong consensus on the optimal approach to teach it (Parvin et al. 2021). For this, instruction is the first thing that may come into the mind to improve Arabic learning. In the literature the instruction of Arabic can be divided into three phases: explicit instruction, implicit instruction, and currently a combination of both explicit and implicit instructions (Bagheri et al. 2020). In all of these instructional methods, the focus has been on teaching to reach the desired results and the significant role of assessment has been largely left unnoticed. However, a quality instruction is not obtainable without incorporating assessment (Lantolf et al., 2021). In other words, teaching and assessment should be considered as two sides of a coin complementing each other (Backman and Palmer 2012). This view was strengthened and supported by the advent of dynamic assessment (DA) (Luria 1961; Vygotsky 1978).

As Vygotsky (1978) notes, the relationship between teaching and assessment is monistic rather than dualistic. That is, in DA, there exists a dialogic dance during which a learner's ability is optimally improved by a teacher's congruent mediations to his/her changing needs (Lantolf et al. 20121; Poehner 2008). During this dialogic dance, a student's ZPD is fused with the given mediations, resulting in a promoted performance and probable future development. In this way, the teacher has better opportunities to reach a complete picture of the learner's current and proximal developmental stages (Anton 2009; Lantolf and Zhang 2017).

Although there are a mass of empirical findings supporting the efficacy of DA in learning and development of English as a foreign or second language (L2) (e.g., Ableeva and Lantolf 2011; Anton 2003, 2009; Birjandi et al. 2013; Kozulin and Grab 2002; Lantolf and Poehner 2011; Poehner and Lantolf 2005), its effects have not been extensively explored to promote Quran learning. To the best knowledge of the researchers, until now only two studies (Fahmy 2013; Parvin et al. 2021) have investigated the effects of DA on the improvement of Arabic learning in the past literature. It is essential to investigate the efficacy of DA, as a new approach for teaching L2, on the improvement of different aspects of Arabic learning. Therefore, the present study aims to disclose the effects of DA on improving Iranian Arabic learners' recitation performance.

2. Dynamic Assessment

As noted above, DA was introduced in contrast to traditional assessment or so-called static assessment. In static assessment, learning is separated completely from assessment (Lantolf and Poehner 2005). According to Brown and Abeywickrama (2010), in static assessment, testers aim to measure the present abilities at a certain point in time. Static assessment is administered in either summative or formative form. It is called summative assessment when the evaluation of students' abilities is done at the end of the course (Bachman 2002). However, it is called formative assessment when students' abilities are measured during the course (Brown and Abeywickrama 2010). The proponents of DA questioned the efficacy of static assessment since it just addresses the existing mature abilities, and it was not able to identify and measure the abilities that were still in progress (Poehner, 2005). To alleviate this drawback, Luria referred to Vygotsky's notion of ZPD and introduced DA.

Vygotsky (1978) considers ZPD as the area between a learner's assisted and independent performance. In a sense, ZPD is the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Xi and Lantolf 2021). Another key concept in DA is mediation. Mediation is a clue, question, recommendation, or explanation during the exchanges between a teacher and a learner so as to improve the learner's performance (Lantolf and Poehner 2005).

According to Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994), an effective mediation should meet three requirements. First, mediations should be offered through an implicit-explicit scale. Second, more explicit mediations should be offered when the more implicit ones are not effective enough. Third, mediations should be offered in the form of a conversation using interactions between a teacher and a learner. By offering congruent, contingent mediations, teaching and assessment are integrated into a unified pedagogical activity (Ableeva and Lantolf 2011). In this way, a teacher or a tester becomes a mediator between a student's current ability and the intended performance. That is, in DA, a teacher plays a dual role of being an instructor and a tester at the same time.

In the past literature, two general approaches to DA have been introduced, namely interventionist and interactionist (Lantolf 2009; Lantolf and Thorne 2006; Poehner 2008; Stenberg and Grigorenko 2002). In interventionist DA, a predetermined and fixed range of prompts or mediations is offered to a learner during his/her learning performance. These prompts are arranged on a scale from the most implicit to the most explicit ones. This implicit-explicit scale is interpreted as degrees of control over the learning task at hand. It means that if a given learner replies to the most implicit prompts, s/he has already attained a greater degree of what s/he is performing. The way around is also right, i.e., there is a trade-off between explicitness and degrees of control. The more explicit the prompts are, the less control a learner has over a task. However, in interactionist DA, there is no pre-determined set of prompts to provide a learner with. Instead, it is the degree of a learner's responsivity that determines what kind of prompt should be offered. It should not be wrongly interpreted that these two approaches share no common grounds.

As Lantolf (2009) notes, in both approaches assessment and mediations are mingled into a single activity and the goal is to explore the learning potential. However, it is fulfilling this diagnosis and development dimensions of the two approaches that diverge them. According to Lantolf (2009), the interventionist DA is more psychometric in nature owing to the determination of prompts in advance and the potentiality of numbering these prompts. Hence, it gives the approach a quantitative character. On the other hand, as Lantolf and Poehner (2014) assert, the interactionist DA comes closer to Vygotsky's wish for qualitative analysis of psychological process. It should be noted that the interventionist DA was used in the present study.

3. Significance of Recitation in the Quran Course

In the education system of Iran, the Quran course seeks to gradually teach students basic skills to use the Holy Qur'an. These basic skills include: the ability to read the Holy Quran, the ability to understand the meanings of phrases and verses, and the familiarity with simple and basic methods of contemplation in the Holy Quran (Bagheri et al. 2020). The essential element of familiarity with the Holy Quran is the daily recitation of verses from the words of God. These essential skills along with the familiarity with the Holy Quran are considered as the main objectives of the Quran course. Therefore, in the Quran course, some objectives should be followed: hearing the absorbing recitation of the Holy Qur'an, interest in reading the Quran beautifully and melodiously, familiarity with the meaning and content of Quran messages and their relationships with our lives, familiarity with some Quran stories, performing interesting and diverse activities to strengthen the interest in the Holy Quran, and non-stop reading (Bagheri et al. 2020).

The learning contents of the Quran course consist of three basic components: recitation, concepts, and knowledge of the Quran (Bagheri et al. 2020). Since the current study aims to deal with the recitation, we provide a snapshot of the significance of recitation in the Quran course. In simple terms, recitation is defined as reading Quran words and phrases from the textbook or the Holy Quran. The recitation of the Holy Quran usually begins with reading section by section continues until the recitation is smooth and at a normal speed. Sometimes reading slowly and part by part is called recitation and reading with normal speed is called fluent reading. According to the objectives of the Quran instruction in the elementary school, the objective of recitation is to acquire the required skills to read fluently the verses of the textbook (Bagheri et al. 2020).

In junior high school, the purpose of recitation is to acquire the skills of reciting the Holy Quran by educational calligraphy. It should be noted that correct and eloquent recitation has other characteristics, such as the correct pronunciation of special Arabic letters, following the rules of Tajweed, the ability to stop at appropriate times and at the beginning and the end of the verses, and absorbing sound and tone. In addition, in the instruction of the Holy Quran, there are other purposes, such as encouraging students to listen to educational reading tapes in and outside the classroom, and increasing their interest and motivation to continue reading the Holy Quran (Bagheri et al. 2020).

Obviously, as Bagheri et al. (2020) note, getting acquainted with any book begins with reading it. Since the Holy Quran is the word of God, its reading and recitation have always been emphasized and recommended. It has been stressed that even if the recitation of the Holy Quran is without understanding the meanings, it has educational and moral effects and brings about the remembrance of God. Therefore, teaching recitation is of paramount importance at all stages of the Holy Quran instruction. In grade 7, emphasis is placed on gaining the ability to make sense of simple phrases and verses of the Holy Quran and understand them and teaching reading is also a serious and valuable position (Bagheri et al. 2020). These two basic skills (recitation and concepts), which are two sides of the same coin in the general education of the Qur'an, should be considered in a balanced way and extremes in each should be avoided.

Related Studies in the Literature

Here, a number of previous studies are reviewed critically to lay the groundwork for the present study. In a study, Kozulin and Grab (2002) explored the effects of DA on the learning of reading comprehension strategies among young adult learners. Pre-test, intervention, and post-test procedures were followed. The findings documented that the participants benefited from the intervention and were able to apply the acquired strategies to the new text. They also found that the students with identical pre-test scores acted very differently at the post-test. In addition, Ahmadi (2013) investigated whether tutor mediation was helpful in the instruction and assessment of Iranian EFL learners' reading strategies. The results indicated that the participants receiving mediation through DA procedures outperformed significantly than the non-DA group.

In research by Naeini and Duvall (2012), the effects of DA on the improvement of university students' reading comprehension ability was investigated. Their participants went through a pre-test, mediation, and post-test design. Their results disclosed that the participants' reading comprehension ability significantly improved on the post-test. Additionally, in research by Birjandi et al. (2013), the effects of DA on Iranian EFL intermediate learners' reading comprehension and metacogntive awareness of reading strategy was investigated. The participants went through a pre-test, intervention, and post-test procedures. Their findings indicated that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group on the post-test. However, their findings documented that there was not any significant improvement in the participants' metacognitive awareness reading strategy use.

Concerning the instruction of Arabic, using a mixed-methods study, Fahmy (2013) investigated the impacts of DA on adult learners of Arabic learning in the U.S.A. A sample of adult learners ($n = 12$) went through a pre-DA, DA, and post-DA. The findings indicated that the participants' Arabic learning significantly improved in terms of the structural control. Finally, Parvin et al. (2021) investigated the impacts of interactionist DA and interventionist DA on the identification of beginner Arabic learners' competence errors and the development of speaking skills. Their findings evidenced that the interactionist DA and interventionist DA significantly improved the participants' abilities in the identification of errors and the development of speaking skills.

As can be implied from the above-alluded studies, the effects of DA on the development of Quran learners' recitation performance is under-researched in the Iranian context. In other words, as the above studies revealed, the most studies surveyed the effects of DA on the learning of Latin languages. It is essential to explore if DA can be considered as a new approach to fostering recitation ability among Quran learners. To bridge this gap, the present study aims to explore the effects of DA on the development of Iranian Arabic learners' recitation ability. To meet these purposes, the following research questions were put forward:

1. Does dynamic assessment lead to any significant improvement in Iranian Quran learners' recitation performance?

2. Does dynamic assessment lead to any significant improvement in Iranian Quran learners' long-term recitation performance?

4. Method of the Study

4.1. Research Design

A quasi-experimental design was used to reach the present study's objectives. As Riazi (2016) note, a quasi-experimental design is used to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between an independent and dependent variable. It does not rely on random sampling. In this design, two intact grade 7 classes in a junior high school were selected randomly and assigned as a control group and an experimental group. Then, a pre-test, intervention, post-test, and delayed post-test procedure was implemented. In sum, the primary aim was to disclose the effects of DA on the development of Quran learners' recitation performance.

4.2. Setting and Participants

The present study was run at 'Fatemato Zahra' public junior high school in Borujerd City, Iran. Two intact 7 grade classes were randomly selected and assigned as the control group ($n = 23$) and the experimental group ($n = 21$). The participants were female and their ages ranged from 13 to 15 years old. The participants have been learning Arabic as a foreign language only in their regular school. The Quran course along with Arabic course are compulsory in junior high school schedule. Students receive four hours of instruction per week. In the Quran course, the focus is majorly on recitation, understanding the meaning of verses, and grammar of Arabic. Students hardly ever use Arabic for communication purposes and never work on listening and reading comprehension. The practice of writing skills is restricted to answering questions and drills in their textbook mainly done at sentence level. Another prevailing feature of the Quran course is that teachers usually run classes in Farsi and adopt a grammar-translation method.

Before running the study, the first researcher referred to Fatemato Zahra' public junior high school. After having a warm greeting with the school officials and the Quran teachers, the first researcher explained the present study's objectives in detail. Given his

explanation, the school officials and the Quran teachers permitted the study to be run in their school setting. Then, the first researcher selected randomly two intact grade 7 classes. He took the phone numbers of the students' parents, contacted them, and detailed the present study's objectives. Next, the first researcher sent written consent in Persian via WhatsApp to the students' parents to see if they permit their students to participate in this study. The parents signed the written consent (control group (n = 23) and experimental group (n = 21) and sent it back to the researchers. One of the Quran teachers who had 15 years of teaching experience was recruited as the instructor in the current study. The researchers ascertained the school officials, Quran teachers, students, and parents that the participation in the study is voluntary, the students' performance would remain confidential, and they would be informed about the final findings.

4.3. Instruments

To collect the required data, two instruments were used in the present study. The first instrument included three recitation tests administered as pre-test, immediate post-test, and delayed post-test. To develop the recitation tests, the researchers recruited three well-experienced Quran teachers. They designed and developed three recitation tests, including 20 verses. To design the recitation tests, they went through the students' textbook and selected different verses. They ascertained that the recitation tests measure adequately students' recitation ability. Then, the Quran teacher administered the recitation tests as pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test where they invited the students one-by-one in a comfortable place and asked them to recite the verses. To measure the students' recitation performance carefully, their voices were recorded. Then, two well-experienced Quran teachers were recruited to score the students' recitation performance.

It should be noted that the instructional materials included was the Quran textbook for grade 8 to make sure that the students had not studied the textbook already. The textbook comprises 12 units. Every unit includes four main parts: recitation of verses, understanding the meaning, learning Quran at home, and knowledge of Quran. In the present study, the focus was mainly on the first part. The last point that should be stressed is that the researchers examined the reliability and validity of the recitation tests by running a pilot study with 20 students at another junior high school. The reliability (0.89) was calculated through Cronbach's alpha which was considered acceptable for the present study's purposes. The validity of the recitation tests was measured through expert judgment. For this purpose, the recitation tests were given to two well-experienced Quran teachers to examine them in terms of face and content. Overall, they confirmed that the tests enjoy the required face and content validities.

The other instrument used in this study was Recitation Rubric (RR). The researchers developed RR to measure the participants' recitation ability. RR measured a student's recitation performance in terms of fluent reading, correct pronunciation of special Quran letters, following the rules of Tajweed, the ability to stop at appropriate times, and the ability to read beautifully. Each one of these traits was rated as: poor (1), satisfactory (2), Good (3), and very good (4). Therefore, the students' recitation performance was scored from 5 to 20.

4.4. Data Collection Procedures

The researchers took the following steps to run the present study. At first, prior to running the main study, the pilot study was run with 20 students at another junior public high school to measure the reliability and validity of the recitation tests. Then, the first researcher held two preparatory sessions to make the experimental group's instructor familiar with the principles and procedures of DA. He tried to direct her attention to the moments at which she could provide students with graduated, dialogic, and contingent prompts. During these sessions, the first researcher explained the key concepts and points in Persian and answered the teacher's questions. The following step was administering the pre-test. Next, the instructions were offered in 15 one-hour sessions.

In the experimental group, at the outset of each session, the teacher provided a briefing on the lesson and tried to activate the students' background knowledge by asking some simple questions. Afterward, the teacher read out slowly the verses of the lesson. Next, she read out again the verses and asked the students to repeat them after her. Then, she called out one of the students to recite the lesson's verses. When the students made an error, the teacher tried to scaffold them by offering congruent, contingent mediations. In exact words, she used Davin's framework in an interactionist way to offer prompts; that is, "by providing contingent and graduated support, called mediation, in the form of question, hints, and prompts" (Aljaaffreh and Lantolf 1994, p. 25). She used the following prompts, in order:

Table 1. Mediations/prompts provided by the teacher adopted from Davin and Donato (2013, p. 6)

Level of Explicitness	Mediation/Prompt
Prompt 1	Pause with skeptical look
Prompt 2	Repetition of entire phrase by teacher
Prompt 3	Repetition of the specific place of error
Prompt 4	Forced choice option Prompt
Prompt 5	Correct response and explanation provided

The process of offering graduated prompts, from implicit to explicit scale, continued until all the problems with different aspects of recitation were identified and rectified. In the instruction for the control group, the teacher implemented a non-DA approach in which prompts and feedback were provided for the students without considering their ZDPs. In other words, as one of the students made an error, the teacher provided immediately the correct form accompanied by a simple explanation. Having completed the instructions, the next step was administrating the immediate post-test to measure the students' recitation ability after receiving the instructions. Finally, the delayed post-test was administered after three weeks to measure the students' long-term recitation performance.

4.5. Data Analysis Procedures

The researchers used SPSS version 22 to calculate the descriptive and inferential statistics of the collected data. Along with measures of central tendency and those of variability for all the given measures described above, a test of Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was run to identify the differences between the two groups in terms of their gain scores across the three test administrations. In other words, the researchers used a one-way ANCOVA to disclose if DA leads to significant improvement in the participants' recitation performance on the post-test and the delayed post-test.

5. Results

Before running a one-way ANCOVA, the required assumptions were checked out. First, the assumption of normality was checked out. The results of skewness and kurtosis statistics and their ratios over the standard errors on all types of tests (i.e., Control Pre-Test, Control Immediate Post-Test, …) showed that the values for skewness and kurtosis on the tests were acceptable. Therefore, the normal univariate distribution was proved. Besides, the covariates (i.e., pre-test scores of the experimental and control groups) were measured prior to the treatment to avoid scores on the covariate which was also being influenced by the treatment; thereby reducing the likelihood of obtaining a significant result. Additionally, the dependent variable (post-test scores) and covariate variables (pre-test scores) were measured on a continuous scale. Further, the assumption of independence of observations was checked, and no relationship between the observations in each group or between the groups themselves was observed.

Afterwards, the Pearson Correlation was used to check the strength of the relationship among the covariates. The correlation coefficient ($r = .36$, $p > 0.05$) indicated that the covariates were not correlated. Thus, this assumption was also not violated. To check the assumption of linearity, the relationship between the dependent variable and the covariate was checked on the scatterplots, and no curvilinear relationship was observed. Finally, the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was checked via the Sig. value for the interaction between the covariate and the dependent variable (Sig. = .745), that is greater than 0.05. So, this assumption was also met.

5.1. Results for the First Research Question

The first research question investigated if DA leads to any significant improvement in Iranian Quran learners' recitation performance. The actual difference in the mean scores between the experimental group compared to the control group is quite large. As Table 2 indicates the post-test mean scores for the experimental group ($M = 16.23$, $SD = 2.02$) was different from that of the control group ($M = 8.86$, $SD = 1.51$).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of Iranian Quran learners' recitation performance

Groups	M	SD	N
Control	8.8696	1.51671	23
Experimental	16.2381	2.02249	21
Total	12.3864	4.11586	44

Table 3 shows a sig value of .053 which is much larger than the cut-off of .05. So, the assumption of equality of variance is assumed:

le 3. Levene's test of equality of error variances[a] of Iranian Quran learners' recita

F	df1	df2	Sig.
10.283	1	42	.053

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

Table 4 shows a significant difference in the experimental group compared to the control group:

Table 4. Tests of between-subjects of Iranian Quran learners' recitation performance

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	665.057[a]	2	332.528	215.126	.000	.913
Intercept	64.102	1	64.102	41.470	.000	.503
PreTest	69.043	1	69.043	44.667	.000	.521
Groups	632.522	1	632.522	409.203	.000	.909
Error	63.375	41	1.546			
Total	7479.000	44				
Corrected Total	728.432	43				

a. R Squared = .913 (Adjusted R Squared = .909)

The sig value for the groups is .000, which is less than .05; therefore, the experimental group outperformed the control group on immediate post-test. The statistically significant results from running a one-way ANCOVA (i.e. $p \leq 0.05$) implies that the instruction based on DA principles and procedures was quite efficient.

5.2. Results for the Second Research Question

The second research question explored if DA lead to any significant improvement in Iranian Quran learners' long-term recitation. The actual difference in the mean scores between the experimental in comparison with the control group is quite large. As Table 5 indicates the post-test mean scores for the experimental group (M = 16, SD = 2.16) was different from that of the control group (M = 8.82, SD = 1.43):

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of Iranian Quran learners' long-term recitation performance

Groups	M	SD	N
Control	8.8261	1.43502	23
Experimental	16.0000	2.16795	21
Total	12.2500	4.04696	44

Table 6 shows a sig value of .052 which is much larger than the cut-off of .05. So, the assumption of equality of variance is assumed:

Table 6. Levene's test of equality of error variances[a] of Iranian Quran learners' long-term recitation performance

F	df1	df2	Sig.
10.562	1	42	.052

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

Table 7 shows that there is a significant difference in the experimental group in comparison with the control group:

Table 7. Tests of between-subjects the effects of Iranian Quran learners' long-term recitation

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	626.794[a]	2	313.397	165.892	.000	.890
Intercept	68.253	1	68.253	36.129	.000	.468
PreTest	61.848	1	61.848	32.738	.000	.444
Groups	598.394	1	598.394	316.750	.000	.885
Error	77.456	41	1.889			
Total	7307.000	44				
Corrected Total	704.250	43				

a. R Squared = .890 (Adjusted R Squared = .885)

The sig value is .000, which is less than 0.05; therefore, the experimental group outperformed the control group on the delayed post-test. Therefore, it can be said that this significant difference can be attributed to the DA instructions offered to the experimental group.

6. Discussion

The first research question investigated if DA leads to any significant improvement in Iranian Quran learners' recitation performance. The study's findings evidenced that the DA group outperformed the non-DA group in terms of recitation performance on the post-test. The study's results indicated that by receiving congruent, contingent mediations, the DA group could detect and rectify their recitation problems. That is, when the mediations were tailored to the students' ZPDs, they could internalize their linguistic features making their recitation performance acceptable.

The second research question explored if DA lead to any significant improvement in Iranian Quran learners' long-term recitation performance. The study's findings documented that the DA group's scores on the delayed post-test were significantly different from those of the non-DA group. The study's findings disclosed that due to the instruction offered based on the principles and procedures of DA, the experimental group could remember the linguistic features of a good recitation. In the dialogic interactions that occurred in the experimental group, the students might have had better opportunities to construct the required knowledge of the intended linguistic features. In this way, their learning might have been more stable such that they could show a better recitation performance.

The study's findings lend support to those of Kozulin and Grab (2002), disclosing that DA was found useful to develop effective their participants' reading strategies. Additionally, the study's findings lend support to the findings of Ahmadi (2013). He found that DA was very helpful to improve Iranian EFL learners' reading strategies. Besides, resonated with the present study's results, Birjandi et al. (2013) uncovered that DA was found useful to improve Iranian EFL intermediate learners' reading comprehension and metacognitive awareness of reading strategy. Furthermore, the results lend credence to those of Barabadi et al. (2018), reporting that the interventionist and interactionist DAs led to significant improvement of Iranian English learners' listening comprehension. In addition, the study's findings are congruent with those of Fahmy (2013), reporting that the participants' Arabic competence significantly improved in terms of the structural control due to the instruction offered based on DA principles and procedures. Furthermore, the study's results accord with those of Parvin et al. (2021), indicating that interactionist DA and interventionist DA could significantly improve the identification of beginner Quran learners' competence errors and the development of speaking skills.

One possible explanation of the study's findings may be attributed to this view that offering the learners congruent, contingent prompts tailored to their ZPDs might have bolstered the learners to co-shape further awareness and knowledge leading to the improvement of their abilities in progress (Poehner and Infante 2017). In a sense, this explanation accords one of the basic principles of SCT claiming that "knowledge is initially co-constructed on social level where learners have the opportunity to interact with more capable others" (Lantolf and Poehner 2014, p. 17). That is, the participants' benefited from the interactions to co-construct the requited knowledge to handle the recitation tasks.

Additionally, the study's findings may be ascribed to DA diagnostic capability (Poehner et al. 2015). That is, the contingent, graduated prompts might have allowed the teacher to detect the linguistic features which have been internalized, as well as those which have not been fully matured (Xi and Lantolf 2021). In this way, the teacher might have had a better understanding to offer the prompts that suited well the lacks in the learners' existing knowledge about the intended linguistic features. In fact, this explanation receives support from Vygotsky (1978), arguing that as a learner is offered graduated prompts tailored to his/her ZPD, there opens a precious opportunity for teachers to discover the mature and immature abilities. Besides, the study's results may be explained from this view that in the non-DA group where the students were provided with direct non-dialogic prompts, their ZPDs were not taken into account. Therefore, the prompts might not have been effective enough to allow the teacher to diagnose the students' emergent abilities, and consequently, develop them (Lantolf, 2004).

The superiority of the DA group over the non-DA group may also be ascribed to this fundamental assumption of SCT, claiming that a quality instruction revolves around intensive interactions between a teacher and learners (Lantolf and Poehner 2005). Since in DA class there existed ample interactions among the teacher and students with a central focus on recitation learning, the interactions might have assisted the students to co-construct the required knowledge and get closer to the intended stage of development. In the present study, in the DA group, the teacher provided extensive interactions in line with a framework from the implicit to the explicit. However, in the non-DA group, the interactions were employed rarely. Thus, the students might not have sustainably improved their learning. This argument receives support from Tajeddin and Tayebipour (2012). They pointed out that ZDP-sensitive interactions may justify the superiority of DA over non-DA since appropriate interactions within learners' ZPD provide an efficient setting for learners to develop their learning (Lantolf et al. 2021).

Furthermore, along with Malmire and Mazloom (2021), it can be argued that the extensive interactions in DA class might have exposed the students to more target linguistic features, more input, and consequently more intake. All of these may have contributed to more accurate knowledge of the target linguistic features. Besides, the extensive interactions in the DA class may have acted as a bilateral process pushing the students to have more output with the intended linguistic features (Swain 2005). It is reasonable to argue that more input and output in the intended linguistic structures might have been greatly useful for the development of recitation ability.

Finally, to discuss the differential results reported for the DA group and the non-DA group, we can refer to the concepts of secondary and primary interactants (Poehner 2009). In a sense, the study's findings might be supported by Vygotsky's position about the collaborative nature of learning. According to Poehner (2009), a shift from a one-to-one model of teaching and assessment to that of a group-focused demands "an understanding of the relation between development of individuals and development of the group" (p. 472). This, in Vygotsky's mind set, is a matter of how the individuals' ZPD is related to the group's ZPD (Poehner 2009). In this respect, it may be argued that during the interactions both primary and secondary interactants might have benefited from prompts offered by the teacher.

7. Conclusion

As pointed out above, the present study investigated the effects of DA on improving Iranian Quran learners' recitation ability. The findings indicated that the DA group outperformed the non-DA group concerning gains in recitation ability on the immediate post-test and the delayed post-test. The study's results revealed that DA was efficient to improve significantly the learners' recitation performance. Based on the study's findings it may be concluded that if DA can be implemented appropriately, teaching and assessment can be unified as a single activity bringing about promising outcomes. Along with Haywood and Lidz (2007), the study's findings led to this conclusion that DA is an interactive procedure that systematically and objectively measures the degree of change that occurs in response to cues, strategy, feedback, task conditions that are introduced during testing. DA can allow us to know how and to what extent learning can be improved with the help of other capable peers' assistance.

In light of the findings of the study, some implications are presented. The first implication is that DA is not an alternative assessment. Instead, they should be considered as complement and then can practiced concurrently in assessment practices in the classroom. The second implication is that teachers should not contempt the learners who cannot do a task interpedently. Rather, by receiving appropriate mediations, they can reach a full mastery over the abilities in progress. The third implication is that teachers can group up overachiever and underachiever students together. In this way, they can offer prompts which are within their ZPDs. The fourth implication is that language teachers need to offer their prompts and mediations in a dialogic and graduated format so that they suit students' ZDPs. The fifth implication is that teacher educators need to incorporate DA in pre-service and in-service courses to make teachers aware of the principles and procedures of DA. The sixth implication is that material developers need to stimulate teachers to use congruent, contingent prompts by incorporating them in teacher guides. The last implication is for Quran learners to seek for situations in which they can involve themselves in dialogic interactions. In this way, they can improve their learning.

Considering the limitations imposed on the present study, some suggestions for further research are presented. As the present study's participants were all female, the future studies can include male Quran learners to increase the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, as the current study's participants were junior high school students, further studies are needed to investigate the effects of DA on improving Quran recitation ability among elementary and senior high school student. Additionally, as the present study utilized a quantitative design, further studies need to use qualitative design to show how DA leads to the improvement of Quran learners' recitation performance. Besides, since this study investigated the effects of DA on the improvement of Quran learners' recitation performance, interested researchers can scrutinize the effects of DA on improving the gains in Quran vocabulary, and grammar learning. Last but not least, as the current study used the DA approach, future studies can explore the effects of alternative DA approaches, such as group dynamic assessment, computerized dynamic assessment, and peer dynamic assessment.

Data Availability

The data used to support the findings of this study are available upon request to the author.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank the school principal, teachers, and students who kindly cooperated with them during the study.

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