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The Impact of Computerized Group Dynamic Assessment on Iranian EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension Across Gender

Research Article
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Abstract
Framed in Vygotskian sociocultural theory, this study intends to examine whether computerized group dynamic assessment (GDA) through software has affected Iranian male and female learners' listening comprehension ability. Data were collected through administration of listening comprehension pre- and post-tests among 140 participants divided into male and female learners in the experimental and control groups. There were 35 male and 35 female learners in each group of the study. Participants in the experimental groups were exposed to GDA in order to interactively work on the selected tasks of listening comprehension, and the teacher provided the necessary support as well. Quantitative analysis of the pre- and post-tests of listening comprehension among male and female groups was conducted through two-way analysis of variance and covariance. Results revealed that both male and female learners in the experimental groups significantly outperformed the learners in the control groups. However, there were not any significant differences between the gender groups' listening comprehension ability in the experimental groups. Findings contributed to the effective employment of GDA through software in order to improve the learners' listening comprehension ability, denoting that teachers are recommended to be aware of technological devices in paving an interactive way for learners to develop their language skills and sub-skills.

keywords*:* computer assisted language learning (CALL), group dynamic assessment, EFL, listening comprehension ability, zone of proximal development (ZPD)

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Introduction

Over the last decades, much attention has been devoted to the learning, teaching, and testing of second language listening skill. This growing attention is due to the identification of the significance of listening in language learning. In spite of the significance of listening comprehension, English language classes, particularly in the public sectors, such as high schools of Iran, still focus on other skills more than listening ability. In addition, private language Institutes in Iran do not pay a well-deserved attention to teaching listening (Sehati & Khodabandehlou, 2017). In the Iranian EFL context, students "are not accustomed to hearing the language as it is produced by native speakers for native speakers" (Sehati & Khodabandehlou, 2017, p. 118). Accordingly, they have difficulties comprehending the language they hear when they are in contact with English speakers. In this regard, DA, which originated from Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT), can be applied as both an evaluative and an instructional tool, offering new perspectives for assessment and teaching of listening comprehension. As Lantolf and Poehner (2004) state, Dynamic assessment integrates assessment and instruction into a seamless, unified activity aimed at promoting learner development through appropriate forms of mediation that are sensitive to the individual's (or in some cases a group's) current abilities. In essence, DA is a procedure for simultaneously assessing and promoting development that takes account of the individual's (or group's) zone of proximal development. (p. 50)

This view contrasts sharply with traditional testing practices that distinguished assessment and instruction and focus on assessment in a standardized and conventional manner (Haywood & Lidz, 2007). Some experts like Douglas (2010) consider DA as a form of alternative assessment; however, they are different as the main principle of DA is constructing the unknown from the known through more knowledgeable person mediation. Thus, some reported DA studies (e.g., Poehner & Lantolf, 2010; Rahimi et al., 2015) have considered private mediation sessions during which a student and a teacher have dialogical cooperation in order to overcome a problematic linguistic issue that cannot be solved by the student alone. This has resulted in the misinterpretation that DA is not appropriate for whole classes. As Anton (2009) states, "DA procedures are ideally administered individually, which makes this type of assessment time-consuming" (p. 579). As a result, many school teachers viewed DA as an unworkable concept (Guk & Kellog, 2007). To deal with such a problem, Poehner (2009) introduced G-DA, in which the mediator considers an individual ZPD as part of the whole group ZPD to progress all of them through interaction. Therefore, classroom activities focus on group ZPD, not an individual. The group ZPD is pointed out implicitly by Vygotsky himself as the "optimum time for teaching both the group and individual ZPD" (1998, p. 204). G-DA aims to address the group's ZPD and involve students in activities that can only be performed by pooling the learners' resources together in dialogical interaction.

With the emergence of educational technology and the subsequent progresses in corpus linguistics, particularly the corpora designed for language assessment and testing objectives (Park, 2014), a major turn can be witnessed in the assessment field. As to the significance of benefiting from incorporating technology in foreign language learning, teaching, and testing, teacher can benefit from technological devices in the learning environment. The influence of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) on listening skills development has been well investigated on the basis of the examination of teaching different second languages, such as Russian

language (Lebedeva et al., 2016) or English language (Abdolrezapour, 2019; Elfi, 2019; Khoshsima & Mozakka, 2017; Nachoua, 2012; Vahdat & Eidipour, 2016), among many others, confirming the constructive effects of digital technology on the learners' listening skills. However, the present study aimed to use digital technology in both teaching and assessment procedure, and examine its possible effects on the male and female EFL students' listening comprehension. To achieve this goal, three research questions have been proposed:

RQ1: Does computerized group dynamic assessment via CoolSpeech software have any statistically significant effect on the listening comprehension ability of male EFL learners at upper-intermediate level?

RQ2: Does computerized group dynamic assessment via CoolSpeech software have any statistically significant effect on the listening comprehension ability of female EFL learners at upper-intermediate level?

RQ3: Is there any significant difference in the listening comprehension ability of male and female EFL learners at upper-intermediate level affected by computerized group dynamic assessment via CoolSpeech software?

According to the above-mentioned research questions, the following hypotheses can be addressed as follows:

$H_0$1: Computerized group dynamic assessment via CoolSpeech software does not have any statistically significant effect on the listening comprehension ability of male EFL learners at upper-intermediate level.

$H_0$2: Computerized group dynamic assessment via CoolSpeech software does not have any statistically significant effect on the listening comprehension ability of female EFL learners at upper-intermediate level.

$H_0$3: There is not any significant difference in the listening comprehension ability of male and female EFL learners at upper-intermediate level affected by computerized group dynamic assessment via CoolSpeech software.

Review of the Related Literature

DA was developed on the basis of the SCT of language learning. There has been growing attention to DA among educators and psychologists in the last few decades. The foundation of social constructivist theory is based on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). By zone, Vygotsky means "an area of exploration for which a learner is cognitively prepared, but requires assistance and social interaction" to develop (Borchelt, 2007, p. 2). Concerning the role of constructivism in language learning, it is assumed that learners can benefit from interactive language classroom in which they can be engaged in more creative activities focusing on the construction of knowledge. Vygotsky thinks that social learning precedes cognitive development. During this process, social interaction plays a crucial role. The more knowledgeable other refers to anyone who has a higher ability level than the learner whether a teacher or an adult (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). In fact, Vygotsky (1978) defined sociocultural theory as the influence of caregivers, peers, as well as society on the higher-order development of individuals. The advocators of SCT consider that learning is a mediated activity in which different mediational means or tools help learners enhance their thinking and knowledge (Shepard, 2001). As learning takes place interactively, the learning environment is as flexible as possible for students to do their tasks cooperatively. To this end, James (2008) stated that "knowledge is created and shared in expansive learning cycles" (p. 30), by providing adequate feedback within the students' ZPD.

The concept of scaffolding is also demanding when educator faces students' need to be supported by a more knowledgeable peer. In this regard, the teachers try to direct the learners' attention toward the target feedback and gradually help learners to do the correction themselves, which, as stated by Vygotsky, can be the sign of "transition from other-to-self-regulation" in which the learners are responsible for their learning materials (as cited in McKeough & Lupart, 2013, p. 152). The shift of responsibility from instructors to students is generally referred to as learner autonomy. As Godwin-Jones (2011) argues, technology implementation facilitates learners' autonomy through providing a great deal of materials for self-learning.

Following Vygotsky, second language inquiry considers DA as a procedure that integrates instruction and evaluation (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008). Lantolf and Poehner believe that "assessment and instruction are inseparable components of the same dialectical activity" and that "assessment and instruction become as tightly conjoined as two sides of the same coin, and there are no one-sided coins" (p. 274). DA involves Interactionist and Interventionist types that commonly comprise three phases: pretest → mediation → posttest (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004). The interventionist kind of DA consists of the examiner's intervention throughout the procedure of assessment and it is a more standardized and formal approach. In this type of assessment, the examinees are instructed item by item and if they are not able to solve the items properly, they receive planned hints. The Interactionist DA, however, includes mediation, which emerges from the interaction between the examinee and examiner. In this type of assessment, hints, prompts, or leading questions are not planned beforehand; rather, they emerge from collaborative interaction or mediated dialogue between the examinee and the examiner where the examiner responds to the examinee's requirements. In DA, the relationship between examinee and examiner is based on the notion of helping and teaching, for example, students are permitted to ask questions and obtain feedback immediately. In both types of DA, teaching can be delivered in group or individual contexts (Poehner, 2005).

Prior to accounting for DA and G-DA, the role of gender in language instruction is worth investigation. There has been a common post-modern belief that gender is built on the foundation of social communications, and the gender difference was produced by the social arrangements and what a human being acquire by repeated actions in society. It is also found in conversation analysis (CA) that social behavior is determined by including all structures and interactions meaningfully (Cameron, 2005). In different contexts with different cultures, there are different beliefs of gender groups and their influence on language learning. The sociolinguistics message is that gender can influence the linguistic performance (Baxter, 2003).

The language and gender relationships in educational context shows that in the past, the role of women in public positions was denied and even women did not have the right to access to language, but today, although some of that forbiddance is removed, but some serious power still remained. Based on different studies (Walsh, 2001) women performed well in different situations and their linguistic behavior reflects their understanding, because they believe that they should put more effort on showing their strict to norms. Also it is believed in countries with advanced economics that the main criterion for employing of workforce is now interpersonal and linguistic, not physical strength. Hence, the role of gender appears to have been taken for granted in issues related to language teaching and learning affected by

different interventions, such as DA and G-DA, which are the focus of the current study.

The support for implementing both types of this assessment (DA and G-DA) in language education, and particularly in the assessment of listening skill, has grown in previous years. For example, a research conducted by Ableeva (2008) applied the DA practice to listening testing to report the possible contributions of such assessment to the listening comprehension instruction and assessment. The study followed the pretest-mediation-retest format. For the pretest, some recording was played twice for the students and they were required to write the responses. During the intervention, the students could ask questions, and the mediator provided suggestions, explanations, hints, and other mediations. Throughout the retest phase, students were required to write a summary of the text. The researcher concluded that DA was a valuable diagnostic tool that empowered her to recognize the particular source of the difficulty that was not obvious during a conventional test. Furthermore, this evaluation could not only enable teachers to diagnose the actual level of students' listening comprehension ability but also to indicate their potential capabilities that were in the process of developing.

Hidri (2014) also conducted a study in which 60 Tunisian EFL learners answered to a listening comprehension assessment with 2 parts, dynamic and static. The dynamic part of the test administration was conducted during regular hours of progress assessment in the class; whereas, the learners' final achievement tests was fulfilled through the static assessment, occurring after one year of listening practice. DA consisted of 3 assessment phases which were administered in 45 minutes. The tests comprised 14 items that aimed to create negotiation of meaning between the mediators and test-takers. The mediators provided guidance and support in the pre- and while-testing stages. However, they were trained to decrease mediation during the posttest. The pretest involved matching, guessing, and WH- items. The testing phase included guessing, true/false, multiple choices, summarizing, and wh-questions. The posttest contained making inference, summarizing, picture reordering, and multiple-choice items. The achievement static test involved 40 true/false, information transfer, multiple-choice, and gap-filling items. Eleven raters scored the tests. Both the raters and test-takers were asked about their attitudes towards the two assessments. The analyses demonstrated that item difficulty estimates, rater behavior, and test-taker ability differed across assessment types. The findings demonstrated that "although the new assessment provided better insights into learners' cognitive and meta-cognitive processes than did the traditional assessment, raters were doubtful about the value of and processes involved in DA mainly because they were unfamiliar with it" (p. 1).

In a similar vein, Mashhadi Heidar and Afghari (2015) explored the listening skills of Iranian EFL students at the upper-intermediate level through examining the effects of DA in a computer-mediated environment. These researchers investigated 60 students' socio-cognitive development through DA. The findings demonstrated that through interaction in the ZPD, DA in synchronous computer-mediated communication provided the opportunity to explore the actual level of the students' listening ability, as well as to identify and evaluate the potential level of their development.

In a different yet relevant study, Mashhadi Heidar (2016) examined the role of DA in improving the listening skills of 30 EFL students at the intermediate level via web 2.0. The control group experienced conventional techniques, whereas the

experimental group was exposed to technology-based intervention mediated instruction. Firstly, the learners performed the recall without mediation (NDA phase) and afterwards they repeated it, with mediation (DA phase). Thus, two opportunities existed to evaluate the listening improvement during the DA and NDA sessions, including mediated and independent listening performance. The findings of the study demonstrated that technology-based DA improved the participants' listening comprehension skill. It was also indicated that through online DA, the source of poor performance can be identified, which is typically hidden during non-dynamic ones.

Regarding the possible impacts of computerized DA on the listening skill development of students, Ashraf et al. (2016) explored the effect of computerized DA on the listening ability of Iranian EFL students. To this end, they administered a Quick Placement Test to 65 EFL learners in a language institute, and selected 40 upper-intermediate students as the participants of their study. The selected students were administered a listening test as the pretest and posttest. They were then divided into a control and an experimental group. The experimental group received the instruction via electronic-based DA in a virtual class, while the control group was exposed to the listening instruction via traditional DA in a physical classroom. The results demonstrated that the electronic-based DA could significantly affect the learners' listening comprehension.

Another similar study that investigated G-DA of EFL learners' listening ability was conducted by Ahmadi Safa and Beheshti (2018), who investigated the effect of interventionist and interactionist approaches to GDA on listening comprehension development of Iranian EFL students. Ninety intermediate learners were assigned to two experimental groups and one control group, which were then divided into subgroups. The interactionist approach was applied in the first experimental group, where the teacher took part in the listening comprehension activities, interacting, and assisting the group members in their activities. The interventionist approach to DA was used in the second experimental group, where the teacher participated in the activities and provided the students with feedback. The control group, however, used the conventional summative assessment. The data analyses indicated the primacy of interactionist GDA for enhancing the students' listening skills. Furthermore, although the interventionist GDA procedure had more effectiveness than the non-dynamic procedure of the control group, the difference was not significant. It was concluded that interactionist GDA was an effective practice and that the authoritative and unilateral approaches to pedagogy need to be replaced by the cooperative and interactive ones.

The effect of the G-DA approach on the listening skill of Iranian EFL learners was investigated by Roohani et al. (2018) in two time intervals. They selected 20 learners, who answered a pretest individually. After collecting the test sheets, the researchers replayed the listening tests for the students to provide their recalls in order to perform the test in a dynamical format. The listening tasks were provided in 3 sessions. During each session, the students first performed a listening task non-dynamically, then, they performed that listening task through G-DA practice. After this phase, the participants took the posttest to reveal their listening comprehension development. The researchers' data analysis indicated an enhancement in the participants' posttest scores, and they concluded that the improved listening comprehension could primarily be attributed to the mediation provided throughout G-DA.

Alshenqeeti and Grami (2019) also examined the effect of DA in listening comprehension classrooms. A total of 56 Arab EFL learners participated in their study. The participants took a general placement proficiency test to confirm their homogeneity. The pretest and posttest scores of the students were recorded and the values were coded quantitatively. One-way ANOVA was used to analyze the outcomes. The researchers supported the effect of DA in improving listening ability through the fact that DA participants' scores were better than their counterparts. The researchers also suggested language teachers to use mediation practices to enhance the learners' listening abilities.

Generally, the literature review related to the assessment of listening skills reveals that various investigations have been conducted to address different assessment approaches. However, most of the investigations on L2 listening have concentrated on improving listening comprehension, methodologies to teach listening, the appropriateness of listening materials, and similar matters. Few have focused their attention on the assessment of listening comprehension in general and computerized G-DA method to evaluate this skill in particular. Besides, as Alderson and Bachman (2003) argue, assessing listening skills is one of the least developed, least understood, and yet one of the most important areas of language assessment and testing. Actually, the review of the literature yielded that the present study is one of the few attempts that specifically compare female and male learners in computerized group dynamic approaches to assessment in the area of listening comprehension, particularly in the Iranian EFL setting. Further, sometimes in different contexts, the findings might be rather contradictory. For instance, several researchers (Ableeva, 2008; Alshenqeeti & Grami, 2019; Ashraf et al., 2016; Hidri, 2014; Roohani et al., 2018) suggested that the implementation of DA could support the students' listening comprehension achievement. Ghahremani (2013) also compared 3 types of assessment (Dynamic, formative, and summative assessment) on listening skill and listening strategy use of 140 Iranian university students and concluded that the participants in the dynamic group showed a better performance than the other two groups. It was suggested that summative assessment is important but it does not support learning and provides no continuous and planned feedback during the learning process. However, other researchers (e.g. Harlen, 2006; Lam & Lee, 2010; Lee & Coniam, 2013) agree that when using different approaches to assessment, the focus is greatly on summative assessment rather than doing the assessment in the learning process by involving the learners. Actually, summative assessment has a long history in education, and parents and the public have widely accepted them. In fact, it is regarded as an indispensable part of the language learning process in academic activities for scoring, record-keeping, and reporting (Brookhart, 2008). Moreover, due to the exam-oriented culture in the Asian academic system, alternative forms of assessments might not be able to substitute summative assessments (Kennedy et al., 2008). Obviously, as researchers make their way into this field of inquiry, challenges continue to emerge. Therefore, the current investigation tried to address the gap in research studies and aimed to scrutinize the effect of computerized G-DA on male and female EFL learners' listening comprehension ability.

Methodology

Participants

To collect the data, 140 Iranian EFL language learners, male and female, from Kish Language Institute were considered as the major participants of the investigation. They were selected through convenience sampling from among adult students of the Institute because the researcher aimed at keeping age as a fixed variable, then they were assigned randomly to the experimental and control group. Teenager participants needed different approaches of treatment. The same problem existed for middle-aged participants. That was why the age range of the participants was between 22 and 35. To make sure of homogeneity, participants were chosen from among 200 students, based on their results on an Oxford Placement Test (OPT). One hundred and forty upper-intermediate students were selected from among 200 potential participants using OPT. Then, the first experimental group included 35 male students; the second experimental group similarly involved 35 female students. In addition, the first and second control groups of the study included 35 male and 35 female participants, respectively. Table 1 shows the participants' demographic information.

Table 1
Demographic Background of the Participants

No. of Students	140 upper inter-mediate learners (35 experimental one; 35 experimental two; 35 control one; 35 control two)
Gender	70 Females & 70 Males
Native Language	Persian
Age Range	22-35 years old
Institute	Kish Language Institute
Academic Years	2019-2020

Instruments and Materials

The following instruments were applied for collecting the required data.

Oxford Placement Test (OPT). To ensure the participants' homogeneity, they were chosen based on their results in an Oxford Placement Test (OPT). As OPT is a standardized exam, the standardization process was not necessary. The OPT which was used in the current research consisted of 60 multiple-choice items. Participants had 30 minutes to answer the questions. The students who gained scores from 40 to 47 were considered as upper-intermediate level or B2.

Listening Comprehension Test. In order to examine the learners' listening comprehension ability, a 20-item researcher-made listening comprehension test was used. It was designed according to the textbook taught at Kish Language Institute. It consisted of 5 listening tasks each followed by 4 multiple comprehension choice questions. It was designed for upper-intermediate level of proficiency. In order to make sure that the listening items in the tests were of the right level, they were selected from different listening tasks of the textbook covered at the institute. The tests were made reliable by pilot study explained as follows.

In the phase of pilot study, the researcher designed these 3 listening tests and gave each of them to 15 participants, who were the representative of the participants of the study. The reliability coefficient was calculated as .71 through Cronbach's alpha. The same listening comprehension test was used as both the pre- and post-test in order to avoid the risk of different levels of difficulty in different

versions of the test.

CoolSpeech Software (latest version 5.0.) CoolSpeech Software was developed by ByteCool Software Inc. (2001). This text-to-speech program is supported by the most current Windows systems. This software can be applied to convert any sorts of text files (.txt, .rtf, and .htm/Html) into voice files (.Wav), and read the texts (from a variety of sources) aloud. The following features can be specified for this software:

- Being free of charge and user-friendly;
- Online listening to the news provided from any URLs;
- Reading texts of any common formats aloud;
- Fostering independent learning;
- Listening to every expression the user has just typed anywhere in Windows; and
- Audio-file scheduling, which can be listened further as a practice

Design

The current investigation was a quasi-experimental research in which the participants' homogeneity was initially ensured through administering OPT, and afterwards, they were assigned into two experimental and two control groups to meet the research purpose. The study employed a pretest, treatment, and posttest design.

Data Collection Procedure

After OPT administration and ensuring the participants' homogeneity in terms of proficiency level, then, they were assigned into 2 experimental and 2 control groups as male upper-intermediate learners, and female upper-intermediate learners. As the researcher wanted to have the groups of equal numbers, 35 male and 35 female learners were selected and assigned into two experimental groups. Moreover, 35 male and 35 female participants were assigned into 2 control groups, and the rest were excluded.

Prior to the treatment sessions, the homogeneity of participants' listening comprehension was checked by administering the pretest. Pretest results revealed no significant differences among the study groups, ensuring listening comprehension homogeneity among the participants of the study.

Both experimental groups underwent the same treatment of using computerized G-DA through CoolSpeech software for 30-minute 30 sessions. The target listening comprehension tasks were selected based on the learners' level of proficiency, encouraging them to work in pairs and groups. CoolSpeech software was used in order to develop their listening comprehension ability with the same tasks, and the learners benefited from group discussions on each task. Monitoring the learners' interactions was conducted by the teacher who provided necessary feedback as well. However, an attempt was made to promote self and peer correction rather than teacher feedback. In other words, the teacher acted as the facilitator who paved the way for learners to improve their listening comprehension in an interactive learning environment.

In the experimental groups, the following mediational tactics (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008) were used. Prior to the instruction, the teacher provided specific explanations regarding CoolSpeech software and how the learners are to work with this software during the treatment sessions. It is worth mentioning that this software

was used as a supplementary tool in line with G-DA to pave the way for EFL learners to develop their listening comprehension. Through this software, learners were able to work independently on each listening task and the teacher could save the time more efficiently and allocate more effective time for each student to carry out the provide tasks more actively. CoolSpeech was employed in order to facilitate G-DA in the sense that: First, the teacher confirmed the correct responses that the students were not certain about. Second, whenever it was needed the instructor allowed the students to hear the passage again through CoolSpeech software; participants were armed with a computer on which CoolSpeech software was installed. Third, whenever students could not comprehend the text after replaying it, the instructor tried to divide sentences into smaller and more intelligible chunks, in order to make them more comprehensible to the students. Fourth, the instructor restated the students' wrong statements with a questioning tone, acting as a model to show learners how to do the corrections and be the assessor. Fifth, learners were requested to provide peer feedback and be more engaged in doing the listening tasks more communicatively and provide correction for their classmates. Sixth, the instructor offered learners contextual clues, including topical knowledge, world knowledge, and situational awareness. Seventh, the instructor mediated students through using metalinguistic clues, either grammatical or lexical clues. Eighths, the instructor allowed the students to apply a dictionary, whenever they could not guess a word from its context. Finally, whenever the other mediational tactics could not help the students to guess the correct response, the instructor explained it.

In contrast to the experimental groups, CoolSpeech software and G-DA were not employed in the control group, receiving the conventional method of teaching listening comprehension in which the teacher provided the listening comprehension exercises followed by a warm-up. In fact, no computerized G-DA was used for the control group. Then, the recording was played and the learners were encouraged to discuss the comprehension questions posed by the teacher. Any ambiguities in understanding the task were resolved by the teacher. The learners listened to the task for the second time in order to have more concentration and resolve any misunderstanding. The learners' grades were much focused in the control group.

After 3 months of treatment on the experimental groups, which took 30 sessions, 30 minutes each session, the participants in all groups took part in a listening posttest, and the results were compared and contrasted to check the hypotheses of the study.

Variables of the Study

As to the purpose of the study aiming to probe the effect of computerized G-DA through CoolSpeech software on Iranian EFL learners' male and female learners' listening comprehension ability, computerized G-DA, CoolSpeech software, and gender are considered as the independent variables of the study. However, listening comprehension ability involves the dependent variable of the study, which is affected by the above-mentioned independent variables.

Data Analysis

The current research employed quantitative methodology to answer the research questions of the study. Descriptive and inferential measures were used accordingly. The former is concerned with the learners' development of mean scores

from the pretest to the posttest between male and female groups. The latter includes one-way ANCOVA to investigate the possibility of significant difference between gender groups. Finally, the researchers employed two-way ANOVA to examine listening comprehension of the experimental group among male and female learners.

Results

Addressing First Research Question

The first purpose of the study was investigating upper-intermediate male learners' listening comprehension affected by computerized G-DA. In doing so, descriptive and inferential measures were conducted in order to compare the pretest and posttest scores of listening comprehension. Table 2 shows descriptive statistics for the listening comprehension ability of male participants in the experimental and control groups.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for the Male Learners' Listening Pre- and Post-Tests in the Experimental and Control Groups

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental post	35	70.60	3.776	1.192
Control post	35	65.71	5.458	1.726
Experimental pre	35	65.86	4.995	1.803
Control pre	35	64.90	5.109	1.119

Table 2 shows that there is a negligible difference in the pretest scores of the male experimental (M = 65.86; SD = 4.99) and control (M = 64.90; SD = 5.10) groups. However, as to the post-test results, Table 2 demonstrates the existence of a fairly large difference between the posttest mean scores of the experimental group (M = 70.60; SD = 3.77) and the control group (M = 65.71; SD = 5.45) for the male participants. In order to inferentially compare the experimental and control learners' listening comprehension ability after exposure to computerize G-DA, one-way analysis of covariance (one-way ANCOVA) was run as in Table 3.

Table 3

ANCOVA Results for Male Learners' Listening Posttest in the Experimental and Control Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power
Corrected Model	433.517a	2	216.759	44.379	.000	.839	88.758	1.000
Intercept	29.709	1	29.709	6.083	.025	.264	6.083	.643
test writing-male-pre	313.467	1	313.467	64.178	.000	.791	64.179	1.000
Code	76.860	1	76.860	15.736	.001	.481	15.736	.962
Error	83.033	67	4.882					
Total	93405.000	70						
Corrected Total	516.550	69						

a. R Squared = .839 (Adjusted R Squared = .820)

b. Computed using alpha = .05

As shown in Table 3, the significance level is less than .05 ($F_{1, 32} = 15.73$, p = .001), showing a significant difference between the experimental group and the control one among the male participants. Therefore, it can be concluded that listening instruction through computerized G-DA could result in significant improvement in the Iranian EFL male learners' listening comprehension ability, thus leading to the rejection of the first null hypothesis.

Addressing Second Research Question

The second research question of the study aimed to examine the effect of computerized G-DA on female learners' listening. Table 4 provides descriptive information regarding the female participants' listening performance in the experimental and control groups pre- and post-tests.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for the Female Learners' Listening Pre- and Post-Tests in the Experimental and Control Groups

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental post	35	69.60	6.758	1.746
Control post	35	62.17	4.166	1.076
Experimental pre	35	63.20	5.212	1.179
Control pre	35	63.10	5.111	1.201

Descriptive statistics for the pre-test scores of the experimental (M = 63.20; SD = 5.21) and control groups (M = 63.10; SD = 5.11) in Table 4 reveals a small difference of female participants' listening. However, the Table shows almost much difference between the two group, since the experimental group (M = 69.60; SD = 6.75) performed better than the control group (M = 62.17; SD = 4.16). The examination of the significance level between the two groups was done through inferential one-way ANCOVA as in Table 5.

Table 5

ANCOVA Results for the Female Learners' Listening in the Experimental and Control Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power
Corrected Model	1224.404a	2	612.202	197.335	.000	.936	394.672	1.000
Intercept	1.355	1	1.355	.438	.514	.016	.437	.098
test writing-female-pre	798.770	1	798.770	257.473	.000	.905	257.474	1.000
Code	190.731	1	190.731	61.480	.000	.695	61.480	1.000
Error	83.763	67	3.102					
Total	131329.000	70						
Corrected Total	1308.167	69						

a. R Squared = .936 (Adjusted R Squared = .931)

b. Computed using alpha = .05

Table 5 indicates that the significance level is less than .05, verifying a significant difference between the female learners' performance ($F_{1, 32} = 61.48$, p = .000). In other words, independent samples t-test revealed that listening instruction through computerized G-DA resulted in the female learners' significant

improvement in listening comprehension ability, resulting in the rejection of the second null hypothesis of the study.

Addressing Third Research Question

The third research question of the study aimed to take into account male and female learners' comparison of listening performance affected by the treatment. In doing so, Table 6 compares the descriptive statistics between the male and female participants who underwent computerized G-DA in listening instruction.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for the Male and Female Learners' Listening in the Experimental Group

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Female	35	69.60	6.758	1.746
Male	35	70.60	3.776	1.192

Table 6 demonstrates the similar performance of the male (M = 70.60; SD = 3.77) and female (M = 69.60; SD = 6.75) groups on their listening posttest. The difference between the two groups' posttest was considered inferentially through a two-way analysis of variance (two-way ANOVA) in Table 7 below to compare the two gender groups' listening comprehension ability.

Table 7

Two-way ANOVA Results for the Male and Female Learners in the Experimental Group

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	6.000	1	6.000	.180	.676
Within Groups	768.000	68	33.391		
Total	774.000	69			

Table 7 presents that the significance level is more than .05 ($F_{3, 66} = .180$, p = .676), revealing no significant differences between the male and female groups' mean scores of the listening posttest. In other words, there is not any significant difference between the effect of listening comprehension through computerized G-DA regarding male and female learners' listening comprehension ability.

In sum, the results of the study acknowledged the upper-intermediate male and female learners' significant improvement in listening comprehension through computerized G-DA. However, there was no significant difference across gender groups.

Discussion

The current inquiry was an attempt to study the potential effects of the computerized G-DA method on the listening comprehension ability of male and female EFL students. To this end, four groups (two experimental and two control groups) formed the sample of the investigation. The results demonstrated the outperformance of the experimental groups compared to the control groups regarding their listening comprehension ability. Concerning the first research question, which investigated male EFL learners' listening comprehension affected by of G-DA via CoolSpeech software, it was found that computerized G-DA could help learners to gain mastery over listening comprehension tasks. With regards to

the second research question, which explored the female learners' listening as a result of applying computerized G-DA, results indicated that female learners' listening comprehension was also affected by such assessment. Concerning the final research question, which comparatively examined learners' listening comprehension ability affected by computerized G-DA in two gender groups, the results of the two-way ANOVA revealed no significant difference regarding their listening comprehension ability. Likewise, the learners in both experimental groups performed better than those of the control group. In fact, it appears that gender as an independent variable in this study was affected by the use of computerized G-DA as the main intervention in the sense that both male and female groups could significantly improve their listening comprehension ability.

The present study was framed in Vygotskian Socio-Cultural Theory. Vygotsky's SCT provides three main themes concerning the ZPD, the more knowledgeable other and social interaction. By zone, Vygotsky means an exploration area for which a learner has cognitive preparation, but needs assistance and social interchange to develop. ZPD concept can be incorporated in the language learning classroom. This needs the use of assistance and supporting resources to help learners, bridge the learning gap between the known and unknown course content. The scaffolding strategy is evident in the technology-based language learning classroom, because this instructional model requires the facilitator to provide learners with meta-cognitive support and ensure the exactness of student learning so that the learner can become independent. In Vygotsky's idea, knowledge is co-constructed through interaction and individuals learn from each other; correspondingly, a learner in this theory must be engaged in the learning process. All these can support the findings of the present inquiry, which revealed that the learners' listening comprehension was enhanced by G-DA. The students' improved scores on the posttest could be due to the mediation provided during the G-DA procedure and the use of CoolSpeech software. It has to be mentioned that this software could help the teacher to optimize the quality of G-DA by directing the learners' attention to the listening tasks more purposefully and encourage them to work independently. Furthermore, when an activity was misunderstood for one learner, he/she was able to replay the audio for himself/herself and then be engaged in classroom communications. Although G-DA can be practical on its own, applying the treatment with CoolSpeech could motivate learners' more participation in the classroom interaction and feel that they own the learning environment and be more autonomous in carrying out the listening tasks and enjoy online listening practice as an extra activity. Last but not least, the above-mentioned software could be beneficial for reticent learners who might feel less confident in taking part in classroom talk and gradually by working with the software and doing the listening tasks individually, they were able to increase their sense of peer work and participate in G-DA intervention.

The findings of this study are in alignment with those of Ableeva (2008), who applied the DA practice to listening comprehension assessment, and concluded that DA was an effective diagnostic instrument that enabled the teacher to identify the actual level of learners' listening comprehension ability and assist them in the process of developing their proficiency. The result related to the impacts of the G-DA on the listening skills of the students in the experimental group is also consistent with the inquiry by Roohani et al. (2018), who observed the effect of the G-DA approach on EFL learners' listening comprehension and indicated an enhancement in

the participants' posttest scores. The significance of DA in improving EFL learners' listening ability was also supported by Alshenqeeti and Grami (2019) through the fact that DA participants' results were better than their counterparts. The outcomes of the present investigation are also in line with the preceding studies on the positive influence of the DA in a computer-mediated environment, such as the investigations conducted by Mashhadi Heidar and Afghari (2015), and Mashhadi Heidar (2016), who explored the learners' socio-cognitive progress through electronic-based DA, and concluded that technology-based DA improved the learners' listening comprehension ability. Similarly, Ashraf et al. (2016) explored the effect of computerized DA on the listening skill of EFL students and demonstrated that this kind of assessment could significantly affect the learners' listening comprehension. The present study revealed that the cooperative and interactive approaches to pedagogy in G-DA led to the effectiveness of this method for both experimental groups. This is something which is in agreement with Ahmadi Safa and Beheshti's (2018) study, which investigated the effect of interventionist and interactionist approaches to G-DA on listening comprehension development of EFL students, and proved the primacy of interactionist G-DA for enhancing the students' listening skills, suggesting that the authoritative and unilateral approaches to pedagogy be replaced by the cooperative and interactive ones.

Despite the fact that gender has been regarded to play a momentous role in L2 acquisition, and educational research has confirmed the effect of gender differences on learners' academic achievements, needs, and interests, the findings of the present study demonstrated no substantial differences across gender groups in using G-DA procedure. It is worth mentioning that different academic areas have different declarations to the gender issues. As to the outcomes of the present investigation, it can be concluded that the G-DA procedure and its beneficial guidance might be used in both female and male classes in the same way. Moreover, the effective guidance of G-DA might be used in students' textbooks with no consideration of gender differences. More importantly, computerized G-DA can be successfully applied to both male and female groups as the findings of the study demonstrated that gender and development of listening comprehension were significantly correlated regardless of showing similar performance to the treatment. Therefore, gender has to be taken into consideration seriously an independent variable and in EFL instruction of language skills and both quantitative and qualitative researches are demanding to highlight the role gender plays in language teaching and learning.

Conclusion and Implication

As to the findings, it can be concluded that the G-DA method of instruction via CoolSpeech software could have a significant effect on the listening comprehension skill of both male and female learners, though no statistically significant difference between the two experimental groups (male experimental and female experimental group) was observed. The present study can have practical implications for the English language teaching and testing field.

The findings of the study can pedagogically contribute to the curriculum development and syllabus design regarding the accommodation of more interactive materials in order to foster further teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions in the classroom. It seems necessary to revise pedagogy to balance the tensions between dynamic and non-dynamic forms of assessment, and to use the advantages

of each to improve teaching and learning. One of the challenges to a learning-oriented approach to assessment is the views that simply equate evaluation with grading (Zeng et al., 2018). Dynamic approaches to the skills evaluation could help promote the features of assessment tasks as learning tasks and student involvement in the evaluation process. Exploring gender-based differences between students in applying G-DA practice can be valuable for policy makers. Moreover, the present outcomes seem to be beneficial for learners, teachers, teacher educators, and researchers.

Learners can positively be exposed to G-DA listening comprehension instruction through CoolSpeech software in order to develop their listening comprehension and enjoy more communication in the classroom, resulting in quality learning of listening comprehension. In comparison with the conventional type of assessment focusing on the overall listening ability of the learners, the dynamic model of assessment, as the present study suggests, can provide valuable insights for the learners to have awareness regarding their quality listening in the learning process. The learners' involvement in the assessment procedures not only motivates the learners' development of language skills, but they also help learners to be aware of the significance of being assessed during the learning process (Archer, 2010).

Teachers can also employ G-DA through CoolSpeech software in order to provide assessment-oriented instruction of listening comprehension for the learners in the communicative classroom. G-DA can be considered as a quality methodology to involve the learners in the listening comprehension tasks and encourage learners to have self and peer-corrections under the teacher's monitoring. The result of this study can lead both teachers and learners to apply the best assessment tools in the classroom in order to eliminate possible difficulties they may encounter during the listening class. In other words, dynamic assessment approaches can be adopted as a teaching methodology for teachers to trigger the learners' listening capacities and help them identify their weaknesses and strengths for the purpose of quality learning, and finally listening ability. Moreover, teachers need to provide assessment feedback to maximize its potential for students' actions in line with the DA framework.

The present study can also contribute to teacher educators' provision of in-service workshops for both novice and experienced teachers to benefit from assessment-oriented instruction in the classroom for the purpose of enhancing the teaching performance by involving the learners in the assessment procedure and help them to have more interaction with their peers by doing group DA.

Finally, the results of the study can be practically significant in terms of conducting further assessment-oriented studies, particularly in the Iranian context in which teaching listening comprehension through G-DA appeared to be an under-researched area of study.

Generalizing the findings of the study has to be carefully attended as the sampling and context setting do not represent the entire population of foreign language learner in Iran. The study was also limited to the context of a private language institute for participants' selection. Moreover, the participants constituted a small number of language learners. Another limitation was time, since the data collection occurred over the course of a few months. However, it is difficult to know whether this amount of time was enough to witness changes. Furthermore, a single, commonly agreed-upon definition of comprehension remains elusive (Cutting & Scarborough, 2006). Different comprehension assessments do not always generalize

across items, formats, and subjects due to differing definitions of comprehension. Thus, possibly the results of the current study might not generalize beyond the measures of listening comprehension used in this study. The final limitation of the study is related to the sampling procedure adopted in this study, since the researchers could not conduct a truly randomized sampling due to administrative reasons.

Thus, further research can be carried out to explore other variables, such as different learning environments, including high schools or academic settings like universities, as well as different levels of proficiency, and other language skills. In addition, further research can be done with the participation of a larger sample. Moreover, the teachers' perceptions about computerized G-DA in effective teaching of language skills can be explored. Investigating the teachers' perceptions can determine whether they are aware of practically applying G-DA or they should be provided with awareness-raising activities by the teacher education. It is also recommended to implement computerized G-DA in teaching other language skills and sub-skills; however, a pilot study is required to check the applicability of assessment types. Teachers and researchers can also consider an action research approach or mixed methods research that integrates philosophical, qualitative, quantitative, and action research for the study of different assessment scenarios. Last but not least, the learners' personality types (i.e., introversion/extroversion and reflectivity/impulsivity), their motivation, critical thinking, etc. can be taken into account in further research to examine how these groups of learners performed in assessment-based instruction. These factors might affect the students' performance in learning, and employing the DA method might produce thought-provoking results in terms of how to efficiently apply this approach in the classroom.

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