

## Do Films Improve EFL Students' Listening Comprehension Ability?<sup>1</sup>

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### INTRODUCTION

Recently commercial films (hence films) and ELT videos have been widely used in EFL classes.<sup>2</sup> Language teachers and materials developers have insisted that films and/or ELT videos are effective for listening comprehension practice of EFL students (e.g. Allan, 1985; Tomalin & Stempleski, 1989; Viney, 1989). There exist, however, only a few empirical studies concerning the effectiveness of films and/or ELT videos vis-à-vis conventional audio tapes (e.g. Takai, 1984; Yoshida, 1976).

Edasawa, Takeuchi & Nishizaki (1989) conducted two preliminary studies concerning the effectiveness of "film" and "audio tape". In the studies, we found that, though "film" highly motivates students, it does not help them make much progress in listening comprehension in a way "audio tape" does.

Some criticisms, however, were made about these studies. The following are examples of the criticisms made.

- (1) Did the test used for measuring students' progress fit their proficiency levels?
- (2) Was the film used in the study tuned to the proficiency level of our subjects?<sup>3</sup>
- (3) Was the effect of the film confounded with those of other materials?

Some suggestions for improvement were also given to our study:

- (1) By using two-factor ANOVA with repeated measures on one factor (Winer, 1971), we will get more reliable figures in the statistical analysis of a study using a similar design.
- (2) The effect of ELT videos should be studied, along with those of films and audio

tapes.

With these criticisms and suggestions in mind, we have conducted a new study concerning the effectiveness of films, ELT videos, and audio tapes.

## STUDIES

### PURPOSES

Our study has a two-fold purpose: (1) to compare empirically the effects of a commercial film, an ELT video, and of an audio tape on EFL students' progress in listening comprehension (STUDY 1), and (2) to compare EFL students' subjective reaction to the three materials (STUDY 2).

### STUDY 1

#### SUBJECTS

The subjects of STUDY 1 were 259 Japanese first-year students who took the required "LL Enshu" (listening) course at Doshisha Women's Junior College (hence, DWJC). They majored in English and had studied the language at least six years before admission to the college. They were divided into six classes and three groups were made out of these six classes. Group A was made up of classes # 1 and # 3. Group B consisted of classes # 2 and # 5, and Group C of classes # 4 and # 6. (See Table 1.)

Table 1 Classes, Groups, and Subjects

	Teacher X	Teacher Y	Teacher Z
Group A(Film)	Class 1	Class 3	
n=88	n=43	n=45	
Group B(ELT Video)	Class 2		Class 5
n=86	n=42		n=44
Group C(Audio Tape)		Class 4	Class 6
n=85		n=44	n=41

We failed to obtain homogeneity among the three groups at the beginning of this study. Our statistical analysis, however, showed that no interaction existed between the groups and the trials (difference between pre- and post- tests explained later) and, thus, heterogeneity among the groups could be disregarded for the purpose of investigating the effects of the treatments. The statistics concerned are to be seen in RESULTS. (See Table 5 and Figure 1.)

## METHOD

The six classes were taught by three Japanese teachers of English (2 female, 1 male) in AV room # 1 at DWJC.<sup>4</sup> Each class met twice a week for 40 minutes. The students in Group A, in each lesson, saw a part of *Charade*, an American "woman-in-danger" type film, on TV screens for about ten minutes, and its sound track was recorded simultaneously on the students' tapes. The students were required to listen carefully to this tape at home and fill in the blanks on the text provided (i.e., partial dictation). In the next lesson, the same part of the film was shown several times on TV screens and the correct answers to the dictation were given. In addition, explanations were offered on reduced forms, colloquialisms, and cultural background in the section of the film.

After examining several films which are often used in classes, we concluded *Charade* to be a typical film used for EFL students' listening comprehension practice.<sup>5</sup> We also considered the film to be easier for our students to understand than *Love Story* used in our previous study in terms of delivery speed, reduced forms, sentence structure, colloquialisms, and background knowledge.

A short story from *Intermediate Stories for Reproduction* (Hill, 1965) was also recorded on students' tapes for homework. In the next lesson, ten triple-choice questions based on the story (hence QUIZ) were given twice through headsets.<sup>6</sup> Answers were checked and feedbacks given immediately using the SONY analyzer system.

In addition, the students in Group A used *Workbook on Rhythm and Intonation* (Sato, 1975: hence RHYTHM). Students were asked to listen at home to a part of the audio tape accompanying the textbook.<sup>7</sup> In class, explanations were given and some exercises related to the corresponding section of the audio tape were done.

The treatment on Group B was identical with that on Group A except that *Living in Washington* (Steel, 1984), a popular ELT video, was used instead of *Charade*.<sup>8</sup> The students in this group saw a part of the ELT video in each lesson and its sound track

was recorded on the students' tapes. They were asked to listen to the tape at home and fill in the blanks on the handout provided. In the next lesson, the same part of the video was shown several times on TV screens and the correct answers and necessary explanations were provided. Note that QUIZ and RHYTHM were used in this treatment, too.

The students in Group C used neither the film nor the ELT video. They used *Listening Tasks* (Schechter, 1984: hence TASK) in addition to QUIZ and RHYTHM mentioned above.<sup>9</sup> They were asked to listen to the audio tape of *Listening Tasks* at home and grasp the outline of the taped conversation. Correct answers and explanations concerning reduced forms, colloquialisms, and background knowledge were given in class. The three treatments explained above are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 Groupa and Treatments

Group	Treatment	
	Main Material	Supplementary Materials
A	Film	QUIZZES+RHYTHM
B	ELT Video	QUIZZES+RHYTHM
C	Audio Tape	QUIZZES+RHYTHM

To measure students' progress in listening comprehension, the listening section of the CELT test (Form A) was given twice. (See Harris and Palmer, 1988 for the details of the CELT test.) The first test (pre-test) was conducted in April, 1989 and the second one (post-test) in July, 1989. The period between the two occasions was ten weeks. Considering the period and the nature of the test, we can say that the students did not remember the contents of the test in a way that would affect the results of the post-test.

The pre-test was conducted, by rotation, in AV room # 1 with the students wearing headsets. In July, larger classrooms with loudspeakers on the ceiling were used and students did not wear headsets. The difference in the surroundings, however, did not seem to influence the results.

Lastly, to investigate the effects of the treatments on the students of different proficiency levels, our subjects in each condition were divided into three levels according to their performances on the pre-test. In each group, 25 % of the subjects

fell in the low- and the top-levels respectively, while 50 % fell in the medium-level. (See Table 3.) This division of subjects is typical in experimental psychology studies.<sup>10</sup>

Table 3 Levels, Scores, and Subjects

Group	Low	Medium	Top
A(Film)	$X \geq 38(n = 20)$	$39 \leq X \leq 49(n = 42)$	$X \leq 50(n = 26)$
B(ELT)	$X \geq 40(n = 21)$	$41 \leq X \leq 55(n = 43)$	$X \leq 56(n = 22)$
C(Audio)	$X \geq 40(n = 17)$	$41 \leq X \leq 55(n = 45)$	$X \leq 56(n = 23)$

## RESULTS

We report the descriptive statistics of STUDY 1 in Table 4. To determine what these numbers mean, we conducted two-factor ANOVA with repeated measures on one factor, using the SPSS package of statistical programs. The results are shown in Table 5.

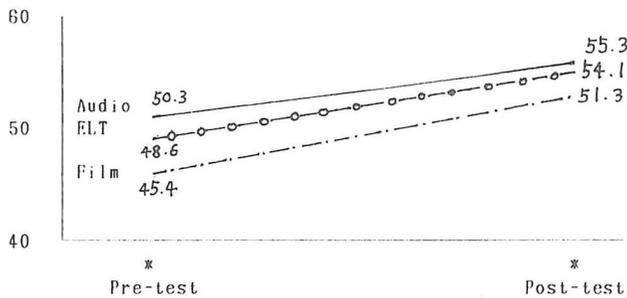
Table 4 Descriptive Statistics

Group	Subjects		Pre-test		Post-test		Gain	
	N		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
A(Film)	88		45.4	9.9	51.3	10.0	5.9	8.2
B(ELT)	86		48.6	11.6	54.1	11.6	5.6	8.2
C(Audio)	85		50.3	10.8	55.3	11.6	5.1	8.6

Table 5 Two-Factor ANOVA with Repeated Measures on One Factor

Source	SS	DF	MS	F	P
Between Subjects		258			
Group	1801.95	2	900.98	4.46	<0.12
Error (B)	51671.96	256	201.84		
Within Subjects		259			
Trials	3907.36	1	3907.36	111.35	<.000
Groups by Trials	14.24	2	7.12	.20	<.817(n.s.)
Error (W)	8983.14	256	35.09		

Figure 1 Interaction between the Groups and the Trials



The F-value of "Group" in Table 5 shows that, among the three groups, there was a significant difference in both pre- and post-tests scores at the .02 probability level. This means that there was no homogeneity among the groups at the beginning and the end of the study. However, as the F-value of "Groups by Trials" in Table 5 and Figure 1 show, there existed no interaction between the groups and the trials, and, thus, the heterogeneity among the groups can be disregarded for the purpose of investigating the effects of the treatments.

The ANOVA analysis also indicates that there was no significant difference in gain among the three groups. (See the F-value of "Groups by Trials" in Table 5.) Within each group, however, a significant gain was found. (See the F-value of "Trials" in Table 5.) This means the students in all three groups significantly improved their listening comprehension ability.

Next, as we explained above, to know the effects of the treatments on the subjects of different levels, we divided them into three levels. The descriptive statistics are in Table 6.

Table 6 Descriptive Statistics of Each Level

		Group A		Group B		Group C	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Top	M	56.5	57.7	63.8	67.4	63.8	67.8
	SD	7.1	12.0	7.1	9.1	7.2	9.1
Medium	M	44.7	49.5	47.6	51.0	48.2	52.1
	SD	2.9	7.4	3.7	7.9	4.0	8.2
Low	M	32.6	46.7	34.6	46.7	37.5	47.2
	SD	5.0	8.0	5.3	9.1	2.3	9.4

To determine the effects, we used matched pair t-tests. The results are reported in Table 7. The tests show that the top-level students in Group A did not improve their ability significantly, while the medium- and the low-level students in Group A and all the students in Groups B and C did.

Table 7 Matched Pair T-Tests of Each Level

		Group A	Group B	Group C
Top	t	0.82(n.s.)	2.39 *	2.27 *
	df	19	20	16
Medium	t	4.69 * *	2.94 *	3.48 * *
	df	41	42	44
Low	t	10.39 * *	7.45 * *	3.89 * *
	df	25	21	22

\*  $P < .05$     \* \*  $P < .001$

## STUDY 2

### SUBJECTS

Subjects of this study were 261 first-year students of DWJC.<sup>11</sup> They all took the required "LL Enshu" (listening) course in which STUDY 1 was conducted.

### METHOD

The purpose of this study is to investigate the students' subjective reaction to the materials used in STUDY 1. For this purpose, we asked the subjects to fill in the questionnaire provided in the last class of first semester of 1989. Details of the questionnaire are shown in the Appendix.

## RESULTS

The results of the analysis in terms of interest are shown in Tables 8a, b, and c. Table 8a shows that 83 % (levels 4 & 5) of the subjects in Group A considered their main material (film) to be interesting, while only 49 % (levels 4 & 5) in Group B thought the ELT video to be interesting. As to the audio tape 62 % (levels 4 & 5) in Group C said it was interesting. As for the supplementary materials (i.e., RHYTHM and QUIZ), there was not much difference among the groups.

Table 8a Level of Interest (on Main Materials)

	not interesting ←			→ very interesting	
Level	1	2	3	4	5
Group A(Film)	1	3	12	38	45
Group B(ELT)	8	6	38	29	20
Group C(Audio)	8	7	24	41	21

unit: %

Table 8b Level of Interest (on Supplementary Material : RHYTHM)

	not interesting ←			→ very interesting	
Level	1	2	3	4	5
Group A(Film)	18	27	37	11	7
Group B(ELT)	14	40	34	8	3
Group C(Audio)	18	26	33	17	6

unit: %

Table 8c Level of Interest (on Supplementary Material : QUIZ)

	not interesting ←			→ very interesting	
Level	1	2	3	4	5
Group A(Film)	2	7	39	28	24
Group B(ELT)	0	7	28	36	30
Group C(Audio)	7	11	29	37	16

unit: %

Table 9a shows that the film was considered to be at the highest level of difficulty (level 5) by 42 % of the subjects in Group A, while the ELT video and the audio tape were thought to be at level 5 only by 12 % and 14 % respectively. As for the supplementary materials, there was, again, no difference to speak of.

Table 9a Level of Difficulty (on Main Materials)

	very easy ←				→ very difficult
Level	1	2	3	4	5
Group A(Film)	0	1	16	41	42
Group B(ELT)	0	5	48	36	12
Group C(Audio)	1	4	26	54	14

unit: %

Table 9b Level of Difficulty (on Supplementary Material : RHYTHM)

	very easy ←				→ very difficult
Level	1	2	3	4	5
Group A(Film)	3	22	45	22	7
Group B(ELT)	3	18	55	23	0
Group C(Audio)	2	19	46	23	10

unit: %

Table 9c Level of Difficulty (on Supplementary Material : QUIZ)

	very easy ←				→ very difficult
Level	1	2	3	4	5
Group A(Film)	0	6	47	44	3
Group B(ELT)	1	8	31	46	14
Group C(Audio)	2	6	46	38	9

unit: %

Tables 10 a,b,c, report which materials our subjects believed had contributed most to the improvement of their listening comprehension ability. An important point here is, as Table 10c shows, 36 % of the subjects in Group A (film) considered QUIZ to be most useful (level 5), while only 27 % in Group B (ELT) and and 25 % in Group C (audio) thought it to be at level 5.

Table 10a Level of Usefulness (on Main Materials)

	least useful ←				→ most useful
Level	1	2	3	4	5
Group A(Film)	3	6	25	46	20
Group B(ELT)	0	3	29	44	24
Group C(Audio)	2	7	27	37	26

unit: %

Table 10b Level of Usefulness (on Supplementary Material : RHYTHM)

	least useful ←				→ most useful
Level	1	2	3	4	5
Group A(Film)	2	17	34	28	18
Group B(ELT)	1	11	40	33	14
Group C(Audio)	4	17	28	30	21

unit: %

Table 10c Level of Usefulness (on Supplementary Material : QUIZ)

	least useful ←				→ most useful
Level	1	2	3	4	5
Group A(Film)	0	2	36	26	36
Group B(ELT)	0	3	24	45	27
Group C(Audio)	4	6	27	36	25

unit: %

Lastly, we investigated how much our students thought they could complete their homework on their own. As Table 11a indicates, the subjects in Group C reported 63.1 % completion of their assignment at the end of June. Groups A and B reported 51.6 % and 59.3 % completion. These figures mean that the film was more difficult for students to understand than the other two main materials even at the end of the term.

Table 11a Degree of Completion in Homework (on Main Materials)

	End of April	End of May	End of June
Group A(Film)	34.4	44.6	51.6
Group B(ELT)	44.2	53.2	59.3
Group C(Audio)	44.9	55.1	63.1

unit: %

Table 11b Degree of Completion in Homework (on Supplementary Material : RHYTHM)

	End of April	End of May	End of June
Group A(Film)	52.8	64.0	68.2
Group B(ELT)	58.1	63.8	67.7
Group C(Audio)	56.5	63.6	69.5

unit: %

Table 11c Degree of Completion in Homework (on Supplementary Material : QUIZ)

	End of April	End of May	End of June
Group A(Film)	51.1	60.2	65.6
Group B(ELT)	52.7	60.3	66.6
Group C(Audio)	53.7	63.6	70.8

unit: %

## DISCUSSION

In STUDY 1, we found that there was no significant difference in gain among the three groups, though a significant gain was found in each group. The results appear to indicate that whichever materials we may use, there would be no difference in the effect. However, the analysis of the gains in different proficiency levels shows that this interpretation is not true. As Table 7 indicates, the top-level students of Group A (film) made no significant progress in listening comprehension practice. This shows that film did not help our students make progress in the same way the ELT video and the audio tape did.

A possible explanation of this phenomenon is that for most of the top-level students in Group A, the film we used as a teaching material was not a good source of comprehensible input ( $i + 1$ : Krashen, 1985).<sup>12</sup> In addition, the supplementary materials used were rather easy for them and, thus, just  $i$  or  $i - X$  ( $X > 0$ ) in Krashen's term. Since comprehensible input is requisite for the improvement of listening comprehension ability, the top-level students in Group A who lacked the input did not make significant progress. As for the medium-and low-level students in the group, though the film was difficult for them to understand fully, the supplementary materials may be ideal sources of comprehensible input and help them make significant progress.

This interpretation finds some support in STUDY 2. First, as shown in Table 9a, 42 % of the subjects in Group A reported great difficulty in comprehension of their main material (film) as compared to 12 % of Group B and 14 % of Group C. This means many students in Group A thought that the film was not a good source of input.

Second, as Tables 10a and 10c report, only 20 % of the students in Group A considered the film to be the most useful, while 36 % in Group A thought QUIZ to be the most useful material. This can be interpreted as showing that the students in Group A tended to rely on QUIZ more for comprehensible input than on any other material.

Third, as Table 11a shows, at the end of June, the subjects in Group A reported 51.6% completion of their main material, while those in Group B 59 % and Group C 63 %. These figures may show that, even at the end of the term, the subjects in Group A felt that they could complete only half of the homework assigned and that the film was often beyond their ability.

The discussion above indicates the film is not a good source of input. STUDY 2 shows, however, the film does motivate students more than any other main

materials. (See Table 8a.) The results are in line with those of Edasawa et al. (1989).<sup>13</sup> Our informal observation in classes also confirmed the film is a good teaching materials for motivating students.

Another major finding of our study is that there was no difference in gains between Groups B and C. This shows that though some materials developers insist that "ELT videos" are more effective than "audio tapes," there was no significant difference between the effects of these two materials on the improvement of EFL students' listening comprehension ability.

One of the reasons for this finding can be attributed to the nature of the student's book for TASK. It gives many visual cues which can activate student's schema, or stored information. They also help students find which parts of the input they should pay attention to. So the cues may have facilitated the "predicting-testing-confirming" process of listening comprehension (Kohno, 1985) in the same way the visual component of the ELT video did, minimizing the difference between the effects of the ELT video and of the audio tape.

The other reason may lie in the fact that we used the partial dictation method in Group B. This method is now under criticism by some researchers.<sup>14</sup> For example, Richards (1987) argues that dictation is a bottom-up type activity which interferes with global understanding of the text. Tomita (1989:71), based on her preliminary study, also claims "dictation affects students badly in listening to a foreign language and prevents them from grasping the thread of the story." We can say, therefore, the teaching method may have reduced the effect of the ELT video and, consequently, there was no difference between the effects of the ELT video and of the audio tape.

On motivation, as Table 8a shows, the ELT video was rated to be the least interesting material. This may be because our subjects thought the plots used in the video to be artificial and too education-oriented.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Before concluding, some shortcomings and limitations in our study should be pointed out. First, although we did our best to control the variables concerning the teaching style in each class, we admit that there existed differences in the style of teaching. These differences, therefore, might have exerted some influence on the results of our study. In this connection, other intervening variables such as the hours students spent at home listening to English and the effect of their "Oral English" course may have affected the results of our study.

Second, the period of our study, ten weeks, is rather brief. This may have had some influence, especially, upon the statistical analysis of our study.

Third, as we have discussed, the partial dictation method, which is now under fire by some researchers, was used in Groups A and B. We can say, therefore, if other teaching methods had been used, the results could have had been different.

With these shortcomings and the limitations in mind, we would like to summarize our findings:

- (1) Although "film" highly motivates students, it does not help them make much progress in listening comprehension. This supports the findings in Edasawa et al. (1989).
- (2) There exists no significant difference between the effects of "ELT video" and of "audio tape" on the improvement of EFL students' listening comprehension ability.
- (3) "Audio tape" motivates students better than "ELT video" does.

These findings are only the results of one limited study, so it might be dangerous to generalize them too much. We believe, however, our study warns against the casual use of films and/or ELT videos in EFL classes, and paves the way for more rigorous studies on the effectiveness of films and/or ELT videos against conventional audio tapes.

## NOTES

1) This is a revised version of a paper presented by the authors at the 15th JALT Annual International Conference on Language Teaching/Learning in Okayama, Japan, November, 1989. We would like to express our gratitude to our colleagues, Professor H. Mine for his help in statistics, and to Professor B. Susser for his comments on the draft.

2) Commercial films are defined here as "Hollywood-type" motion pictures made primarily for entertainment and ELT (English Language Teaching) videos as videos made primarily to teach English.

3) *Love Story*, an American film, was used in Edasawa et al. (1989). The film depicts school life somewhat different from that of Japanese college students. It is, moreover, full of school jargon, affected expressions, and reduced forms.

4) The AV (Audio-Visual) room is a fully-equipped language laboratory, which has a SONY 5500-Mark II console, four 27 inch TV monitors on the ceiling, and a 14 inch monitor screen

for every two students.

- 5) The films we investigated include *Back to the Future*, *the Graduate*, *E. T.*, *Oliver's Story*, *Return to Oz*, *Roman Holiday*, and *Splash*.
- 6) The QUIZZES were written by the first author of this paper and were supplemented by the second author of this paper. The stories and the QUIZZES were recorded on tape by three native speakers of English (2 female, 1 male) in the recording studio at DWJC.
- 7) *Workbook on Rhythm and Intonation* pays special attention to English rhythm, intonation, and the reduced forms of sounds. A large part of this workbook was put on the air by the Voice of America under the title, *Time and Tune of English*.
- 8) *Living in Washington* depicts the life of college students and their friends living near Seattle, Washington, USA. The language used in this ELT video is said to be well-controlled and graded by the author.
- 9) *Listening Tasks* is a popular EFL text for low-intermediate and intermediate level students who need to understand authentic American English spoken at normal speed in everyday situations. Practical topics, such as catching a plane, opening a bank account, and finding out what is going on in a town, make the material motivating for students.
- 10) Personal communication from Professor H. Mine.
- 11) 261 students took the required "LL Enshu" (listening) course in which STUDY 1 was conducted. Among them, we found two returnees whose listening comprehension ability was exceptionally good. In STUDY 1, the data of these two students were dropped.
- 12) Krashen's work has been under criticism by some researchers (e.g. Chaudron, 1985; Gregg, 1984, 1986; McLaughlin, 1978; Takala, 1984; White, 1987, among others. See also Scarcella & Perkins, 1987.). In our view, however, his work is still valid.
- 13) See also Takai (1984).
- 14) Note that there are many proponents of the method (e.g. Itakura, Ohsato & Miyahara, 1985, Oller, 1979: among others).

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2. Level of Difficulty of the Materials

	easy				difficult	
	1	2	3	4	5	N.A.
a) Film:	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
b) ELT:	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
c) RHYTHM:	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
d) TASK:	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
e) QUIZ:	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

3. Level of Usefulness of the Materials

	least useful				most useful	
	1	2	3	4	5	N.A.
a) Film:	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
b) ELT:	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
c) RHYTHM:	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
d) TASK:	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
e) QUIZ:	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

4. What % Do You Think You Could Complete Your Homework on Your Own?

N.A.		the End of April	the End of May	the End of June
.....	a) Film:	( )%	( )%	( )%
.....	b) ELT:	( )%	( )%	( )%
.....	c) RHYTHM:	( )%	( )%	( )%
.....	d) TASK:	( )%	( )%	( )%
.....	e) QUIZ:	( )%	( )%	( )%