

The effects of film-based instruction on Japanese students' listening skills

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While a number of educators and scholars argue for the advantages of using films in teaching second or foreign languages, there is not enough empirical research to support this teaching approach. It might cause skepticism or lack of confidence about the pedagogical effectiveness of this approach. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of film-based instruction on Japanese high school students' listening skills. This paper discusses research findings which imply the positive effects on improving learner's listening skills and pedagogical implication to encourage more and more language teachers to adopt film-based instruction in their classes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Many scholars argue for the advantages of using films. They contend that using films can improve learners' motivation [7], [12]; provide authentic language [1], [15]; provide meaningful context [1]; maintain learners' attention [2], [16]; lower affective filters [8]; retain language [5]; improve listening skills [8], [10]; improve speaking and writing [16]; and provide numerous idiomatic expressions [9]. However, as empirical research on the effectiveness of this approach was not substantial, it has been unclear for many in-service teachers as to how effective using film really was for English learners.

Therefore, I decided to conduct empirical research to investigate the effectiveness of this teaching approach. In advance of this research, a small-scale pilot project on the same topic was conducted, [6] in which I surveyed students who had received film-based instruction for one year, and interviewed teachers who had used films in their classes in order to investigate psychological effects of using film. The results of that pilot study supported the effectiveness of using films; however, the data obtained did not include data of language proficiency tests. Furthermore, the study did not have a control group with which to compare. Therefore, for this current study, I investigated the language learning effects of using films, by conducting pre- and post-course listening comprehension tests. These tests were given to the students who had film-based instruction and students who did not have this

form of instruction. Based on the effectiveness of using films argued by educators, I focused on the effectiveness on the students' listening skills in this study because I hypothesized that this fact would likely improve through this teaching approach.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the pedagogical effects of using films on students' listening skills. Based on the findings for this research question, I will discuss the effectiveness of using films and provide pedagogical implications, which may be beneficial for English teachers who may consider using films in their classrooms.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Participants

All of the student participants for this study were Japanese high school students who study English at a senior high school in Osaka, Japan. There are 950 (463 female and 487 male) students at this urban public high school. The socio-economic status of the students at this high school is middle class, and their parents are capable of financing their university education. The students who study at this competitive high school have demonstrated academic excellence at the junior high school level. To enter this high school, students need to pass the high school entrance examination with high scores. Therefore, compared to average Japanese high school students, the

academic performance of the students who attend this high school is more advanced than other public high schools in this city. Upon completion of high school, the vast majority of the students at this school have the intension and aspiration of continuing their education at the university level.

Among the total student population at this school, 76 of the 310 in their last year of high school participated in this study. The ages of these participants are seventeen and eighteen years old. All of them have studied English for three years at the junior high school level and two years at the high school level. In total, they have had five years of official English education in Japan. Although they have yet to take the TOEFL or TOEIC tests, all of these students have taken a standardized English proficiency test - The STEP Test - administered by the Society of Test of English Proficiency and authorized by Japanese Ministry of Education. The STEP Test is one of the most widely recognized English proficiency tests in Japan, and is comparable to the TOEFL test. According to their teacher, the majority of these students have passed the pre-second grade and some have passed the second grade of the STEP Test. Although the contents and testing methods of the STEP Test are different from the TOEFL, according to Nakano (2001), the pre-second grade and second-grade seem to be equivalent to 417 and 503 scale of the TOEFL. The following is the evaluation standard of the grades.

Pre-second Grade

Possesses the basic ability to cope with simple matters concerning daily life in English. Able to communicate in limited circumstances if visiting or living overseas. Able to exchange general information about oneself in simple English. The successful examinee is: 1) Able to converse about common daily topics (make simple conversation on the telephone, leave messages, etc.). 2) Able to read materials about common everyday topics (simple news articles, letters, pamphlets, etc.). 3) Able to write about common, everyday topics.

Second Grade

Able to understand and use English well enough for everyday needs and situations. Able to communicate if visiting or living overseas. The

successful examinee is: 1) Able to converse about basic matters of daily life (make simple explanations, conduct simple business by telephone, etc.). 2) Able to read materials related to basic daily life (general newspaper and magazine articles, pamphlets, instructions, etc.). 3) Able to write about basic matters of daily life.

(The Society for Testing English Proficiency, 2001, <http://www.eiken.or.jp/english/evaluate/index.html>)

The student subjects consisted of two groups: an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group included 23 female and 15 male students, while the control group consisted of 14 female and 24 male students (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Student Subjects

	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
E	15	39%	23	61%	38	100%
C	24	63%	14	37%	38	100%

The experimental group consisted of thirty-eight students who selected the elective English class in which films are used as the primary teaching and learning material. This class was offered every Monday afternoon. In addition to this elective film-based English class, the students in the experimental group took other English classes. The number of English classes they took at this school, besides the film-based class, varied depending on the student. Among the students in the experimental group, 15 out of the 38 students received 10 additional hours of English instructions a week, 20 students received 7 additional hours and 3 students received 6 additional hours.

In contrast, students in the control group studied English only in traditional English classes, in which a government-approved high school English textbook was used as the primary teaching and learning material; films were not used. The number of English classes they took varied, just as in the experimental group. Among the students in this group, 20 out of the 38 students received 9 hours of English instructions a week, and 18 students received 6 hours.

The classes in which both the experimental and control groups were enrolled were not offered or designed

only for the purpose of this study. Before I approached the teacher in this study to participate in my research, the teacher already decided to use films for one of her classes. Therefore, I requested her cooperation and participation in this study.

2.2 Materials

The listening comprehension tests were designed for the students. The first listening comprehension test was conducted in the first class session of the semester (April 13, 2005), and the second listening comprehension test was conducted in the last class session of the semester (July 13, 2005).

2.2.1 Listening comprehension tests

The listening comprehension tests consisted of the pre-listening comprehension test and the post-listening comprehension test for both groups. The purpose of the pre- and post-listening comprehension tests was to examine the progress of the students' listening skills from the beginning to the end of the semester. Both tests were designed to be at the same level of difficulty. Each test consisted of two sections, and all the questions and instructions were given in English. In designing these tests, Jack Richards' [13] list of micro listening skills were taken.

In regard to the recordings for audio materials for the listening comprehension tests, two native English speakers cooperated in this study: the male speaker is from California, while the female speaker is from Washington D.C. The speakers were asked to speak naturally to ensure that the quality of the conversations were as close possible to authentic spoken language.

2.2.2.1 Listening test section one

The first section was designed to test the following skills: getting the topic of the conversation, inferring a situation, inferring a speaker's implication, understanding the assumption of the conversation, understanding the function of the conversation (e.g., suggestion and request), and getting detailed information.

In the first section, the students were allowed to listen to each short conversation and the following question about the conversation twice. There were 18 questions in the first section, and three questions were included to examine each skill (3 questions x 6 skills = 18

questions). This section consisted of multiple-choice questions in which the subjects were asked to choose the appropriate answer to each question about the short conversation. The subjects were given ten seconds to choose the correct response among three possible choices. All the questions of this section were designed with reference to the listening section of the TOEFL test. As this section is a multiple-choice test, one point was given if a student's answer matched the correct answer. The mean scores of the total score and the scores of the six individual skills were analyzed by comparing them with those of the control group.

2.2.2.2 Listening test section two

The second section of the listening comprehension test was a dictation test to examine the students' abilities to recognize the phonological features of spoken language. I selected three sound features for this section of the test. In this section, the task was to listen to the conversations and fill in the blanks of the scripts of the conversations. The phrases that they were required to fill in were from two to four words. The conversations were spoken by two people (a man and woman) and took approximately one minute each. The subjects were allowed to listen to each conversation three times, and the speech rate of each conversation was the same. This section consisted of six questions to examine each of the target listening skill. In total, the students were asked to answer eighteen questions (6 questions x 3 skills). As the purpose of this section was to evaluate the students' sound recognition skills of spoken language, one point was given if the phrase that the students provided matched the scripts. The total score with respect to each phonological feature (contraction, linking, and reduction) was calculated.

2.2.2.3 Test level

In order to ensure that the test level was appropriate for the student subjects, the teacher examined the first draft of the listening tests. After reviewing the draft, she reported that the level of the questions were far beyond her students' current language abilities. Therefore, I revised the tests to ensure that they were appropriate for the student subjects. For the first section, the number of the options was reduced from four to three, and the vocabulary was changed into language which was familiar to the subjects. For the second section, the number of the

words in each phrase which the students needed to fill in was reduced. After the teacher scrutinized the revised second draft, she permitted me to use these tests. Additionally, to make sure whether the first and second tests had the same difficulty level, two fellow graduate students in the M.A. TESOL program at San Francisco State University took the tests to examine the level of the tests.

2.3 Procedures

2.3.1 Treatment

The teacher provided English instruction for both the experimental and control groups for fourteen weeks (from April to July 2005). As stated above, in addition to the required regular English classes, the students in the experimental group took the film-based English class as an elective class. They received forty-five minutes of film-based instruction once a week. For this class, the teacher used a Hollywood movie, "Stuart Little" as the main teaching material for one semester. She showed the entire movie over fourteen sessions. The activities she used were comprehension check questions, dictations, and discussions about the topic of the movie.

On the other hand, the students in the control group received English instruction only in their regular English classes, in which the teacher used a government-approved high school English textbook as the main teaching material. For these traditional English classes, films were not used to instruct these students.

2.3.2 The tests

In the first session of the semester, students in both groups completed the pre-listening comprehension test. The same listening test was used for both groups. At the end of the fourteen week session, students in the both groups completed the second listening comprehension test. Each test took approximately twenty minutes to complete.

2.3.3 Data Analysis

Microsoft Excel was used to compute the quantitative data. A t-test was used to investigate if the difference of the mean scores was statistically significant. The alpha level was specified as .05, as well as the common language studies [3], [4]. In addition, although positive effects of film-based instruction were expected, and as the

possibility of negative effects of the instruction cannot be completely denied, a nondirectional decision (two-tailed) was adopted for this study.

3. RESULTS

3.1 The students' listening skills at the beginning of the semester

First, Table 2 shows the results of the total scores of the pre-test of the experimental group and the control group. A t-test ($df=72$) was conducted to examine the mean scores of each group. Consequently, with an alpha level of .051, it is possible to assert that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups.

Table 2.
T-test for the Mean Scores of the Pre-test

	N	S	M	SD	t	p
E	37	583	15.76	5.068	1.985	0.051
C	37	509	13.76	3.443		

E = the experimental group, C = the control group, N = the number of the student, M = mean score, S = sum, SD = standard deviation, t = t-value, p = p-value

3.2 Macro skills

This section shows the results of the macro listening skills which consists of six skills - 1) getting detailed information, 2) getting the topic of the conversation, 3) inferring a speaker's implication, 4) understanding the assumption of the conversation, 5) inferring a speaker's next action, and 6) understanding the function of the conversation. Hereafter, these skills will be referred to as Skill 1, Skill 2, Skill 3, Skill 4, Skill 5 and Skill 6.

Tables 3 and 4 provide the mean scores and standard deviations of each macro skills and overall scores of the pre- and post-tests. Reviewing each score, for most skills and overall score, reveals that the experimental group seems to have scored higher than the control group on the post-test. Table 5 includes the difference of the mean scores of the macro skills between pre- and post-tests. It shows that the experimental group's score seems to have increased in Skill 2 and 3, and overall skills, and decreased in their score of Skill 1, 5, and 6. Meanwhile, the control group seems to have increased in Skills 2 and 4, and decrease in Skills 1, 3, and 5, and overall score. However, when examining the scores by t-test ($df=36$), as Table 6 shows, the experimental group's mean score of the difference between pre- and post-tests is not statistically significant, except for Skill 1 and 2. For the control group,

Table 3.
Pre-test Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Macro Skills

		Skill 1	Skill 2	Skill 3	Skill 4	Skill 5	Skill 6	Overall
E	M	2.32	2.05	2.03	1.65	2.05	1.95	12.05
	SD	0.53	0.97	0.83	0.72	0.71	0.88	2.44
C	M	2.35	1.89	2.08	1.38	1.86	2.00	11.62
	SD	0.68	0.77	0.59	0.79	0.67	0.88	2.14

Table 4.
Post-test Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Macro Skills

		Skill 1	Skill 2	Skill 3	Skill 4	Skill 5	Skill 6	Overall
E	M	1.70	2.81	2.08	1.65	2.03	1.92	12.19
	SD	0.66	0.46	0.92	0.72	0.80	1.01	2.49
C	M	1.41	2.35	1.81	1.41	1.51	1.70	10.19
	SD	0.80	0.59	0.88	0.64	0.80	1.08	2.58

Table 5.
Difference of the Pre- and Post-Mean Scores of the Macro Skills

	Skill 1	Skill 2	Skill 3	Skill 4	Skill 5	Skill 6	Overall
E	-0.622	0.757	0.054	0.000	-0.027	-0.027	0.135
C	-0.946	0.459	-0.268	0.027	-0.351	-0.297	-1.432

Table 6
T-test for the Mean Scores of the Macro Skills between the Two Groups

		Skill 1	Skill 2	Skill 3	Skill 4	Skill 5	Skill 6	Overall
E	t	-4.390	4.323	0.285	0.000	-0.172	-0.150	0.405
	p	0.000**	0.000**	0.777	1.000	0.865	0.881	0.688
C	t	-5.763	2.679	-2.089	0.183	-2.017	-1.186	-2.927
	p	0.000**	0.011*	0.044*	0.856	0.051	0.243	0.006**

*p<0.05, **p<0.01

the difference of the mean of Skill 1, 2, and 3, and overall score are statistically significant. In sum, for this listening section, the experimental group increased in Skill 2 but not overall, and decreased in Skill 1, while the control group decreased in Skill 1 and 3, and overall score, and increased in Skill 2.

In addition to examining the mean scores within the group, the mean scores between the two groups were examined. Table 7 is the results of the t-test to investigate whether there was statistical significance between the two groups' mean scores. As the table indicates, when examining each of the six macro skills individually, there does not seem to be any significant difference between the two groups. However, when examined the difference between the total mean scores of the two groups, it was statistically significant.

Table 7.
T-test for the Mean Scores of the Macro Skills between the Two Groups

	Skill 1	Skill 2	Skill 3	Skill 4	Skill 5	Skill 6	Overall
t	1.496	1.213	0.063	0.448	1.382	0.876	2.626*
p	0.139	0.223	0.127	0.897	0.171	0.384	0.005*

*p<0.05

3.3 Micro skills

This section describes the results of the second

section of the listening test which involves three micro skills - linking, contraction, and reduction; hereinafter, referred to as Skill 7, Skill 8, and Skill 9.

Tables 8 and 9 show the mean scores of the three skills of both the experimental and control groups of the pre and the post-tests. In this listening section, as well as the macro skills section, regarding all of the skills and the overall score, the students in the experimental group received higher scores than the control group on both the pre- and post-tests.

Table 8.
Pre-test Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Macro Skills

	Skill 1		Skill 2		Skill 3		Overall	
	M	D	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
E	1.68	1.60	0.78	0.98	1.24	1.26	3.70	3.16
C	0.54	0.65	0.62	0.83	0.97	0.90	2.14	1.75

Table 9.
Post-test Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Macro Skills

	Skill 1		Skill 2		Skill 3		Overall	
	M	D	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
E	3.41	1.21	2.57	1.52	1.52	2.03	8.00	3.38
C	2.43	0.99	1.73	1.73	1.15	1.32	5.49	2.29

Table 10 shows the difference of the pre- and post-tests mean scores of each group. Both groups seem to have increased their scores in all of the three skills and overall scores. In order to investigate if the difference is statistically significant, the data was examined using t-test (df=36). Table 11 shows the results of the t-test for the difference of the mean scores of both groups. It indicates that the experimental group increased in all of the three micro skills and the overall scores, and that the control groups increased in Skill 7 and 8, and overall scores.

Table 10.
Difference of Pre- and Post-test Mean Scores of the Micro Skills

	Skill 7	Skill 8	Skill 9	Overall
E	1.7297	1.7838	0.7838	4.2973
C	1.8919	1.1081	0.3514	3.3514

Table 11.
T-test for the Mean Scores of the Micro Skills between the Two Tests

		Skill 7	Skill 8	Skill 9	Overall
E	t	6.8354	7.3586	3.625	10.485
	p	0.000**	0.000**	0.001**	0.000**
C	t	11.265	5.7443	2.0166	9.3146
	p	0.000**	0.000**	0.0512	0.000**

**p<0.01

As with the macro skills, in addition to examining the difference between the pre- and post-tests' mean scores within each group, the difference of the mean scores between the two groups was examined. Table 12 is the

results of the t-test to investigate whether there was a difference of the mean scores between the two groups. As this table shows, there was a significant difference only in Skill 8 - contraction. Regarding the other two skills (linking and reduction) and the total scores, the differences were not statistically significant.

Table 12.
T-test for the Mean Score of the Micro Skills between the Two Groups

	Skill 7	Skill 8	Skill 9	Overall
t	-0.533	2.181	1.557	1.735
p	0.298	0.032*	0.124	0.087

*p<0.05

3.4 Total score

Table 13 shows that the total scores of both groups increased, and the results of the t-tests show that the increase is statistically significant. According to the table, the gains of each group indicate that the experimental group increased 4.43 while the control group increased 1.19. As Table 14 shows, the t-test ($df=36$) to examine these mean scores of the gains reveals that the t-value is 2.99 and probability value is .004. Thus, with an alpha level of .05, the difference of the mean scores of the gains between the two groups is statistically significant. Moreover, although there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups in the pre-test (see Table 2.), the difference of the mean scores of the post-test between the two groups is statistically significant, as shown in Table 15. Consequently, it is possible to state that the experimental group total scores increased more on the post-listening test than the control group did.

Table 13.
T-test for the Total Mean Scores between the Two Tests

	S		M		SD		Difference		t	p
	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	post-pre	pre-post		
E	583	747	15.76	20.19	5.068	5.364	4.432	8.561	0.000**	
C	509	580	13.76	15.68	3.443	3.973	1.919	2.862	0.007**	

**p<0.01

Table 14.
T-test for the Gains of the Total Mean Scores between the Two Groups

	N	S	M	SD	t	p
E	37	583	15.76	5.068	2.99	0.004**
C	37	509	13.76	3.443		

**p<0.01

Table 15.
T-test for the Mean Scores of the Post-test

	N	S	M	SD	t	p
E	37	747	20.19	5.364	4.113	0.000**
C	37	580	15.68	3.973		

** p<0.01

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

4.1 The effectiveness on listening skills

As presented in the previous section, the macro skills focused on in this research were the following: topic of the conversation; inferring a situation; inferring a speaker's implication; understanding the assumption of the conversation; understanding the function of the conversation (e.g., suggestion and request); and getting detailed information. In regards to these skills, the results did not prove that the students who received the film-based instruction improved on these skills. The increase of the mean score of the experimental group did not prove to be statistically significant. However, the difference of the mean scores between the two groups was significant. Although the improvement was not large enough to be significant, I assume that since the difference between the two groups proved to be significant this implies that using films might have had some positive effects on the students' skills.

The teacher who taught these students stated that based on the scenes of the film she used comprehension questions to check their understanding, which I suppose was effective in improving their macro skills that I focused on in this study. Nevertheless, their overall macro skills did not improve enough to prove their progress to be statistically significant. For one of the macro skills, getting the topic of the conversation, the students proved to have improved significantly. However, since the control group also increased in this skill and there was not any statistically significant difference between the two groups' mean scores, it is difficult to assert that the film-based instruction improved this listening skill. Based on this fact, these macro skills that were focused on might be difficult to improve in just one semester. Therefore, longitudinal instruction might be needed in order to observe significant improvements of these skills in students.

In regards to the micro skills which were studied, both the experimental and control groups increased in the mean scores, and the increase of both groups was statistically significant. However, the difference of the mean scores between the two groups was not statistically significant. Judging from these facts, the instruction which the two groups received may have been effective in improving the students' micro listening skills - linking,

contraction, and reduction. One of the factors which may have improved the experimental group's micro skills is that they had more exposure to these sound features of spoken language by watching films. Although the control group also improved on these micro skills, the increase was less substantial than that of the experimental group.

Examining the total scores of each group revealed that the increases of the total mean scores between the pre- and post- tests were statistically significant, and that the difference between the groups was also statistically significant. These facts indicate that the instructions that both groups had received were effective in improving their skill; however, the film-based instruction was more effective than the instruction which the control group received. In examining each skill separately, the differences of the macro skills' mean scores between the pre- and post-tests of the experimental group and the difference of the micro skills' mean scores between the two groups were not substantial enough to show statistical significance. However, in examining the total scores, the differences in each skill accumulated and were found to be considerable enough to prove that the difference between the two tests and the difference between the two groups were statistically different.

Consequently, upon considering the results of the listening tests, it may be possible to claim that the instruction that the experimental group received had some positive effects on improving their listening skills, although, perhaps, other measures might reflect such small improvements more clearly.

4.2 Limitations of this research

Although this study provided positive results, there are several entailed limitations which need to be addressed. First, the experimental period was short; only one semester. To significantly witness more considerable effects of this approach, at least one academic year will be required. In addition, the students in the experimental group were only taught through film-based instruction once a week for forty-five minutes, which I believe may not be sufficient; two or three class hours of instruction a week would be appropriate. To gain more substantial results, a longer term experiment will be required.

Furthermore, only seventy-six high school students at one high school participated in this research. Therefore, the number of the subjects was rather small. More

students from various backgrounds, in addition to longer experimental period, would yield more substantial results.

As the students who participated in this study took other English classes besides the film class, the possibility of the effects by the other traditional English classes should not be denied. Moreover, depending on the student, each student received various amounts of English instruction at the school. That is, the hours of English instructions each student received at school ranged from 7 to 10. On top of the instructions they received at school, some students study English outside of school. These factors may have affected their English skills and motivation.

In addition to the above, the teacher as a factor should be noted. Although both groups were taught by the same teacher, the students had other English classes instructed by other teachers. Therefore, the students' improvement of their language skills might have been attributed to the teachers, rather than the material.

The last limitation is the validity of the listening tests. Due to some copyright laws, I designed the tests. The tests contained questions which focus on 6 macro listening skills and 3 micro listening skills. In addition, the tests had only two types of questions: multiple choice and dictation. For future experiments, a wider variety of listening tests will be required (e.g., note-taking of academic lectures, writing open-ended responses to conversations, summarizing radio programs). An additional limitation regarding the listening tests is the validity of the two tests' level. Although I asked some Japanese friends who are M.A. TESOL students to answer the questions on the tests to investigate if the two tests are the same level, because of some circumstances, I could not ask the student subjects to cooperate in the pilot tests. To provide more validity for research, using some standard tests, such as TOEFL and TOEIC, may be preferable.

4.3 Conclusion

Although this is a small-scale study with several limitations, I believe that the findings suggest the viability and prospects of using this type of approach to language learning and teaching, and that the results help teachers to reduce or get rid of their skepticism or lack of confidence about the pedagogical effectiveness of using films. In addition to improving listening skills, as many

scholars argue, film-based instruction has a variety of advantages, such as improve learners' motivation [7], [12]; maintain learners' attention [2], [16]; lower affective filters [8]; increasing learners' interest in the target culture [14]. For the future study, an empirical study that investigates learners' psychological effects of using films will be necessary to convince more and more teachers to adopt this teaching approach.

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