

## A Study of Video Effects on English Listening Comprehension

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### Abstract

Video resources are more and more frequently used in foreign language teaching, especially in the teaching of listening. However, it is still rarely used in listening test. The effect of video on listening comprehension hasn't been fully studied. The current study intends to examine the effects of two different presentation modes (audio and video) on L2 listening comprehension based on a test to sophomores from English major of four classes with various listening materials and different forms of answer questions. It is found that if the multimedia materials are well designed, the audio+video mode is more favorable to listening comprehension.

**Key words:** Multimedia; Video; Listening comprehension; Presentation modes

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### INTRODUCTION

With the development of computer science and Internet technology, video resources are more and more commonly used in EFL classrooms, especially in listening classrooms. The benefits of using videos in listening classrooms seem obvious: it arouses students' interest in learning and makes teaching more effective; and by watching videos, the learners could catch some non-verbal components

of spoken text, such as gestures, facial expression, thus get a more authentic input than only listening to the audio. However, it is still rarely used in listening test. The effect of video on listening comprehension hasn't been fully studied. The current study intends to examine the effects of two different presentation modes (audio and video) on L2 listening comprehension based on a test to sophomore English major students of four classes with various listening materials and different forms of answer questions. The objective of this study is to explore whether video resources is suitable material for listening comprehension test and provide suggestions for practical listening teaching.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.1 The Application of Multimedia in English Learning

With the development of information technology, the use of multimedia in second and foreign language learning has been steadily growing. With the help of the computer, we can make a greater progress in listening with enough materials. Most popularly, we are often accustomed to watching US TV series that could improve our listening capacity over a long period. Multimedia is changing the way in which we go to learn the language, providing different presentation modes, such as the audio, the video, and the video subtitle and so on.

As Al-Seghayer (2001) said, the adoption of computer technology in L2 education is regarded as the most exciting developments stemming from the participation of advanced technology in education. As we know, multimedia can present lively scenes and specific images to learners while listening at the same time, which is different from the traditional teaching mode of only listening to the tape.

## 1.2 The Effects of Different Presentation Modes on Listening Comprehension

The increasing focus on multimedia application in language listening learning has positive influence on students' attitude. The foreign researches show that students have positive attitude toward the use of computers for language learning. Computers can present several different modes when listening, and here presentation mode refers to the method in which information is represented and shared, such as through audio, video or text. Then which is the most appropriate presentation mode to the most learners, the audio and video listening?

In the early time of 1975, Rubin makes the research and suggests "the students could make a greater improvement with the video listening than the audio listening." He means that video can not only arouse the study enthusiasm, keep a longer attention, but also widen their horizon, deepen the impression, inspire their imagination. Actually, listening comprehension is the weakest aspect in L2 learning. Then the most important is to develop the students' learning interests and make a great progress in listening. The famous foreign teaching specialists in America, W. M. Rivers and W. S. Temperly (Pan & Wu, 2011, p.24), put forward, "the three-quarter information people get come from 'listening and speaking', and the others come from 'reading and writing'. Students can remember 15% of all information by listening, 25% by watching, up to 84% by the combination of listening and watching." It is clear that using the video materials in listening teaching could combine sound and picture, audition and vision, language and scenes, which is beneficial to students of various studying styles. They both draw evidence from previous researches and claim that aural input in listening comprehension could be enhanced through dynamic visual information.

How about the current situation of video teaching in China? Liu (1997) made a research on freshmen to investigate the effect of videotape on listening comprehension in 1997. The scores of the experimental group are much higher than the control group out of watching video, particularly in the comprehensive questions about the theme, details and inference. What's more, Zhou and Yang (2004) investigated the experience on various levels of language learners, and found out that "video teaching makes a positive effect on all students. Specifically, students of a lower proficiency benefit more from it."

However, when nearly all the materials emphasize on the effective impact of video in language learning, some scholars oppose to the conclusion. In the 20th century, Balatova (1994), through a study of videos on learning French students, learned that "video of a close connection between sound and picture or body language could help students' better understanding in the content of what they

hear." However, the materials with rigid pictures, or much longer dialogues increase the difficulties to understand the listening comprehension that is helpless. So Canning-Wilson (2000) argues that "we should not blindly encourage using video materials in the classroom, because its influence on listening comprehension has not yet to be confirmed."

All in all, it is difficult to judge the advantages or disadvantages of video in listening comprehension exactly. What we can do is to do a research on the learners and to use the specific data to prove the theories. Then I made a study of video effects on English listening comprehension.

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## 2. METHDODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

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### 2.1 The Subjects of the Study

This study is conducted with 86 English major sophomores of four English classes from Zhejiang Gongshang University, China. For convenience, the four classes are named A, B, a, and b respectively. They are taught by the same teacher. Class A is parallel with Class B in English proficiency, and so is Class a with Class b. So the learning ability of participants in Class A and B is assumed to be closely equivalent, as is the same situation in Class a and b. Besides, the English proficiency of students in Class a and b is lower than that of students in Class A and B. The participants in the four different classes are arranged to make a dual-contrast.

### 2.2 The Materials Used in the Study

The listening materials used in the experiment are six English excerpts of different topics selected from websites and exercise books. The rationale for choosing these six excerpts is their appropriateness in length, speed, content and so on. The first excerpt discusses if people win a million dollars, what they are going to do. It also points out in the real life winning a million dollars could be a fraud. The second talks about the structures, features and functions of the robot named Pino. The third excerpt is a news report on rainstorms in China, while the fourth introduces Thanksgiving Day in America. The fifth excerpt is a conversation between three persons discussing Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament. The last one reports the U.S first lady, Michelle Obama leading the delegation to the London Olympics. The questions for the first four excerpts are multiple-choice questions, while for the last two excerpts questions are designed to be true or false questions and sentence completion. All the six excerpts have both video and audio versions.

### 2.3 The Procedures of the Study

To study the effects of video presentation mode on listening comprehension, the audio + video version of Excerpts 1, 2, 5 and the audio-alone version of Excerpts 3, 4, 6 were presented to Class A and Class a. In contrast, the

participants of Class B and Class b could watch the video of Excerpts 3, 4, 6 while listening to the audios of Excerpts 1, 2, 5. All classes listened to or watched all the excerpts

only once. Table 1 gives a clear picture of the arrangement, in which A+V means audio + video presentation mode, while A means audio presentation mode.

**Table 1**  
**Distribution of the Excerpts**

	Excerpt 1	Excerpt 2	Excerpt 3	Excerpt 4	Excerpt 5	Excerpt 6
Class A	A+V	A+V	A	A	A+V	A
Class B	A	A	A+V	A+V	A	A+V
Class a	A+V	A+V	A	A	A+V	A
Class b	A	A	A+V	A+V	A	A+V

The experiment could be roughly divided into three phases: pre-listening/watching, listening /watching, and post-listening/watching. During the pre-listening/watching phase, the teacher told participants the presentation mode for each excerpt. Then the students were given five minutes to glance over all the questions on the paper. After finishing listening or watching one excerpt, one minute was given to answer the questions and prepare for the next excerpt. The post-listening phase includes the analysis on the grades and interview. To help explain the statistical results and to better understand the effects of presentation modes on listening comprehension, four or five participants from each of the four classes are randomly selected and asked. The questions of the interview are as follow:

- a. Which presentation mode do you prefer, audio or video?
- b. Which presentation mode do you think is more favourable for listening comprehension? Give your rationale.
- c. If you choose video presentation mode in Question b, then in what situations (pertaining to the contents of materials and the question type of the exercises) are the videos more helpful to listening comprehension?
- d. In the future English classes, which presentation mode do you think the teachers should adopt, audio or video?
- e. Do you have other suggestions on improving listening comprehension?

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Results of Listening Scores

##### 3.1.1 The Video Effects on Different Levels of Students

Some previous researches prove that video presentation mode is better than audio on English listening comprehension. However, the present study shows this statement isn't correct in any condition. It is found that the effect of videos on listening comprehension varies according to the different levels of language proficiencies. Students' mean wrong scores of Excerpts 1, 2, 5 and Excerpts 3, 4, 6 of four classes are shown in Table 2. Besides, it should be mentioned that Excerpts

1, 2, 5 have eighteen questions and Excerpts 3, 4, 6 have fourteen questions.

**Table 2**  
**Mean Wrong Scores of the Excerpts**

	Class A	Class B	Class a	Class b
Excerpts 1,2,5	4.18	4.35	4.74	4.53
Excerpts 3,4,6	1.46	1.04	2.53	2.69

From the mean score, we can infer that Excerpts 1, 2, 5 are more difficult than Excerpts 3,4, 6. In addition, the fact that English listening level of Class A, B is higher than Class a, b can be proved by the data. Then the difference occurs. The students in video mode made a better performance than those in audio mode between class A and class B ( $M=4.18 < 4.35$ ,  $M=1.04 < 1.46$ ). However, the case is opposite between class a and b ( $M=4.74 > 4.53$ ,  $M=2.69 > 2.53$ ). Table 2 shows the high level students could benefit more from video mode, but the low level students do worse in video environment. During the interview, some low level students said, when they were listening to the excerpts, the video on the computer would divert their attention. They also pointed out that there was little experience for them to do listening with videos in the previous listening classes, so it was hard to listen and watch at the same time. On the contrary, the high level students could catch the main idea, even the details of the passage through the video. All in all, when watching is coordinating with listening, the listening level can get a great leap under video mode. What is needed to enhance for learners now is to be accustomed to listening with the video. Then the low level students can deal hearing well with watching just like the high level students. On the other hand, it is necessary for teachers to exercise listening with more video materials in class in the future.

##### 3.1.2 The Video Effects on Listening Excerpts With Different Contents

To some excerpts, videos could show some relevant information like the topics, the scenes or the figures. Then this kind of video could be a vital complement to audio. Under this situation, the students choose more right answers in advantage of video. For example, in Excerpt 4, some students with audio-alone mode might not have become familiar with the history of Thanksgiving Day in

America if listening to audio only. However, the scenes changed frequently in video to display how the holiday originates, how to celebrate it and so on, and all of those give the students under video mode a clear idea of this topic. Then it is easy to choose the right answers on the paper with the help of this video. Table 3 can prove the situation.

**Table 3**  
**Mean Wrong Scores of Excerpt 4**

	Class A	Class B	Class a	Class b
Excerpt 4	0.5	0.13	0.63	0.55

On the other hand, when videos play basic scenes known by listeners already or the questions of some excerpts are about the details or the original text, listening to the words carefully becomes more critical than watching videos, which means, these videos may be useless even interferential to listening. For example, the topic of Excerpt 3 is rainstorm, which is close to our daily life and the relevant pictures about rainstorm appear in our mind immediately. What's more, most questions of this excerpt are about some specific details like the raining times or the involved cities. Table 4 shows the mean Wrong Scores of Excerpt 3, which proves the above statement.

**Table 4**  
**Mean Wrong Scores of Excerpt 3**

	Class A	Class B	Class a	Class b
Excerpt 3	0.1	0.13	0.35	0.8

The above analyses show that for different types of excerpts, videos could have different effects on listening comprehension. Then it is a huge challenge for teachers to choose the appropriate video materials. Students also should make a reasonable adjustment between audio and video on the basis of the passages. However, generally speaking, video would more or less make a contribution to listening comprehension.

**3.1.3 The Video Effects on Different Question Types**

Multiple-choice questions ask students to choose one correct answer from several options (usually three or four). If the question asks the main idea or the central topic of the whole excerpt, students could get a higher score by watching video than those only listening. However, if the question is about the detailed information of the excerpt, such as the time, the location, students suggest it be more efficient to get the correct answer while listening. Usually, for one excerpt, some questions are designed to be related to the main ideas, some are designed to be related to the details, and some require the listeners to infer from the given facts. Hence, it is certain that video is worth paying attention to during accomplishing the test.

In the experiment, video is apparently advantageous in true-false questions. Students can seize the error

points in the sentence through the changing screen in video. For example, several interviewees pointed that in the last excerpt, from the video, they could see Obama could't resist playing a little tennis with the kids not the basketball. In this way, video plays a key role to help choose the right answer. On the other hand, video can provide a chance for students to understand the theme of the excerpt, which is helpful to judge the true or false sentence in general. So videos play an important role in Excerpt 5 which has only true-false questions, Table 5 proves it absolutely.

**Table 5**  
**Mean Wrong Scores of Excerpt 5**

	Class A	Class B	Class a	Class b
Excerpt 5	0.95	1.45	1.63	1.84

Generally speaking, sentence completion is the most difficult task for most learners. Oftentimes, because of being nervous, some valuable information (the written words or phrases) could be missed or forgotten during the listening process. Then if participants distract their attention to the video, to complete the sentences seems even harder and needs more proficiency in the content. So to most people, video is of no value in completing the sentences. In the present experiment, the result is consistent with the above analysis, which is shown in Table 6.

**Table 6**  
**Mean Wrong Scores of Excerpt 6**

	Class A	Class B	Class a	Class b
Excerpt 6	0.86	0.78	1.55	1.34

**3.2 Results of the Interview**

The interview was carried out in order to gain a better understanding of students' perceptions on the materials played in video mode. The interview consists of several open-ended questions that ask participants how they feel about the listening materials after finishing the experiment.

The first question is to explore the interviewees' attitude towards the video. To my surprise, although under video mode students can get higher scores, more than half of the interviewees think they tend to only listening when they do the tests, especially the interviewees in Class a and b. But in spare time, they often watch some movies, short play or news video reports to improve their listening skills, because video helps to increase their interest thus prolongs the time of listening. The underlying reason why students focus more on listening in the present experiment may be that they are still not accustomed to watching video in the test. Without a formal test, they might enjoy themselves by watching videos.

The second and third questions can get a specific relay in above score data analysis. The interviewees say they



would know extra information from the video when they are unfamiliar with the topic or the content is difficult to them. In other words, they say even they don't understand what are said in the excerpts, they could guess from the pictures. They feel that the motion pictures provide some extra cues for them to better understand and memorize the content. On the contrary, if the topic is related to our daily life, such as the climate, the food, the tourism, video can't play an effective role in resolving questions. In conclusion, the effects of video on the listening comprehension are complex due to various factors. For example, one interviewee does not prefer multimedia presentation. He explains that the colourful video might distract his attention. He prefers to just concentrate himself on the audio and try to understand everything in the excerpts. In the aspect of question type, the similar result was got to the result of the score analysis. Videos are more helpful in multiple choices exercises, true-false questions than sentence completion, because sentence completion requires listeners to get the exact words for the blanks, for which listening to the audio is more helpful than watching the pictures or scenes.

As to the fourth and fifth questions, nearly three quarters of the interviewees are more in favor of video presentation mode than audio. Watching video not only increases their listening interests, but also helps them get a longer memory about the content with a vivid and colourful display. After classes, they communicate with each other about the interesting activities, the famous figure, and the appealing landscape and so on. They (especially the boys) suggest teachers should employ more video forms in the future listening classes to make classroom livelier. However, the chosen materials should be appropriate and meaningful according to the listening level of the learners.

### 3.3 Summary

First, it is found that learners with a high English proficiency perform significantly well when the excerpts are presented both visually and aurally in comparison to only aurally. However, it doesn't mean video is disadvantageous for the learners with low English proficiency. One possible reason is that poor students couldn't put themselves into aural and visual context jointly. Another reason is that there are little exercise in listening classes to employ multimedia presentation mode (video) even though the computer age has come into our life already. So the low level students can't adapt to the audio + video mode because of the lack of the experience of listening with video. It is advised that video should be introduced into the English class as soon as possible.

Second, the relativity between the content and video plays a decisive role. If the picture, music, and screen shown in the video are consistent with what is mention in the audio version, students will benefit more from the video. Otherwise, the effect is the opposite. The quality

of video materials used in class for teaching should be especially paid attention to. Out of class, the websites such as BBC, VOA are good resources for college students to master listening skills, to improve English level.

Finally, the computer technology, as a new tool for listening teaching and learning, has both its advantages and disadvantages. How to make the best use of its advantages and avoid its disadvantages is a crucial problem we need to take into consideration.

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## CONCLUSION

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The traditional approach of listening teaching by listening to tapes alone is not the most efficient way, especially for college students. Multimedia technology is entering into the process of modern foreign language teaching and learning. With the help of computer, it is more convenient for students to listen and gain the useful information. Which is the most appropriate presentation mode has aroused a heated discuss from the past until now. The previous researches show that the use of both the audio + video presentation mode can increase the student's cognitive ability and reduce the limitations of the student's learning memory relative to only one mode of presentation. (Tindall-Ford, 1997; Plass, 2003).

This study focuses on which presentation mode is more favourable to listening comprehension, audio-alone or audio + video. The experimental results show that generally students could get higher scores under the audio + video mode regardless of their English levels. It confirms that the audio + video mode has certain advantages to improve students' listening comprehension.

Due to the lack of researching experience and time, there are still some limitations in this study. Above of all, all of the subjects participating in the experiment are sophomore college students with limited English listening proficiency. The different language learning styles of different students may affect the results. Therefore, the study may not truly represent the actual impact of different presentation modes on the subjects' performance. On the other hand, even though the evidences got from this study support the effectiveness of audio+ video presentation mode in listening comprehension, there is no sufficient evidence to support the assumption of "the more the better". And various factors should be taken into accounts, for example, the complexity and the contents of visual materials. It's also found in the interview that some students thought videos were distracting in some experts. So it is a great challenge for educators and learners to choose the appropriate and effective visual materials to improve students' listening comprehension. It is advised that the future research could be carried out mainly in the following three aspects: a. the effects of more presentation modes on listening comprehension, such as audio + video + English subtitle, audio + static pictures, audio + on

screen text etc; b. long-term effects of presentation modes on listening comprehension, because this study only concerns the short-term effects; c. the teaching material development and utilization of multimedia instructional materials.

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