

## The Impacts of the Video-Based Internet Materials on International Students' Listening Comprehension

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**Abstract:** *The purposes of this study are firstly to examine whether video-based Internet materials have a significant effect on international students' English listening comprehension, and secondly to investigate their attitudes toward the video-based Internet materials. This study recruited 40 international students studying at a public university in Taiwan where Mandarin is a mother and official language. The students came from Asian and south American countries. The participants were divided into an experimental and a control group. The experimental group completed listening tasks using video-based Internet materials, including spoken narrations and video, while the control group completed listening tasks with spoken narrations only. The data were collected through an immediate listening comprehension test and the Internet use questionnaire. The independent sample t-test result indicated that the participants in the experimental group achieved a significantly higher score on the immediate listening test than those in the control group. The questionnaire results revealed that all participants believed that the Internet was a useful listening tool, 92.5% of the participants agreed that the Internet-based activities were valuable for English listening, and also 92.5% expressed that they felt comfortable when using the Internet.*

**Keywords:** *English listening, international students, Internet use attitude, the video-based Internet.*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

With the establishment of the World Wide Web (WWW) in the early 1990s, the use of computer technology has become widespread. Together with the development of the Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) and the Hyper Text Transfer Protocol (HTTP), the Internet has begun to be widely used in almost every aspect of our life and all fields including foreign language education at all levels (Spren 2002). There are many valid online interactive resources on the Internet and most information on the Internet is presented in English. Through the Internet, the learners who learn English as a foreign or second language (EFL/ESL) can easily communicate with English native speakers at any time and in any place from school, home or work. In this way, the Internet is regarded as an optimal place for EFL/ESL learners to learn English (Hsu, Hwang, Chang, and Chang 2013; Sarica and Cavus 2008; Watkins and Wilkins 2011).

Listening has long been considered as one of the essential skills in language learning, because it provides input for the learners. In second language acquisition theory, language input is the most essential condition of language acquisition. Without understanding input at the right level, no learning can even begin to take place (Field 2008). In communication, listening plays an important role (Sabet and Mahsefat 2012). In language education, listening is regarded as a critical means of acquiring a second language; it is suggested that listening be taught in classrooms (Vandergrift and Goh 2012). Understanding how to improve learners' listening comprehension is indispensable in the EFL/ESL context. In the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century, many researchers have devoted their efforts to using the Internet to promote English learning in EFL/ESL contexts. However, from the reviewed literature, few studies have examined whether the use of the Internet and video along with sound presented on the Internet can foster international students' listening comprehension.

In this study, international students learned English as a foreign language in their hometown and speak different mother languages. They studied in a Chinese-speaking context where they used

English as a communicational tool in daily life and in class. They needed to improve their English listening skill for effective communication. They majored in technical sciences. They had quite limited time and money to take English courses practicing English. They needed free Internet resources to learn English. Through this study, international students had access to the Internet and cultivate the concept of using English to learn English. By leading international students to practice English listening skills and using video-based Internet materials, this study aims to advance the knowledge of the effects of the video-based Internet in the field of EFL/ESL education and to understand whether such materials are a useful resource for international students to learn listening, and their attitudes toward using the Internet to learn English.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 The Effects of Video Materials on Second Language Learning**

Video-based materials feature aural and visual support and are assumed to be a useful aid to learn a second language (Lin 2011). The results of previous studies reveal that video-based material can foster vocabulary learning, text comprehension, and listening and reading skills (Bransford 2000; Jones 2003; Jones and Plass 2002; Lin 2010; Rubin 1995; Sydorenko 2010). Rubin (1994) suggested that visual support enhances listening comprehension and, with empirical research, Rubin (1995) indicated that visual information can assist less proficient learners to develop their listening competence. The results of Lin's (2010) study further provide evidence that a video-based CALL program significantly fostered less proficient participants' incidental vocabulary acquisition and comprehension ability; moreover, proficient participants also received benefits from this video-based program. A video-based learning environment is useful to students as it allows them to make reflections on their on-line learning and practice process (Wagener 2006). Watkins and Wilkins (2011) used the video website YouTube.com to teach English conversation, listening, and pronunciation skills, and they also found that the online video repository effectively motivated Japanese students' learning autonomy. This study was to investigate whether the video-based Internet can foster EFL/ESL learners' listening skills.

### **2.2 Video-Viewing Cognition Assumption**

The pure rationale for applying video-based Internet materials to learning is that "people can learn more deeply from words and pictures than from words alone" (Mayer 2005, p. 1). Mayer (2005) assumes that "humans possess separate information processing channels for visually represented material and auditorily represented material" (p.33). Thus, it is assumed that human beings process incoming information through two channels: an auditory (verbal) channel and a visual (pictorial) channel. The dual-channel assumption asserts that the verbal channel processes information constituted from words while the visual channel processes information constituted from pictures. These channels process incoming information separately.

When viewing audio-visual materials, the viewer may activate the two subsystems, which separately process verbal information (i.e., narrations) and visual information (i.e., scenery, people), and undergo simultaneous processing. Lin (2011) surveyed EFL learners' strategies to comprehend video-based materials, and explained that learners use verbal strategies to comprehend verbal information while simultaneously utilizing nonverbal strategies to interpret verbal information. Among nonverbal strategies, audio stimuli (pitch, intonation, background sounds) and visual stimuli (the speaker's facial expressions, body gestures, and referents) are major clues. The dual dimension of these strategies offers further support for Mayer's dual-channel assumption that learners are capable of processing verbal and nonverbal information through verbal and visual channels. In this study, international students (non-native English speaking learners) used video-based Internet materials to learn English. The video-based Internet offers an array of online audio and visual information. Lin (2010) stated that [t]he modality of video viewing involves the viewer in reading and listening to verbal and non-verbal messages. In a video clip, the verbal messages include written or spoken words, while the nonverbal messages include the background sounds, the referents, the speakers' paralinguistic features (such as tone of voice, breathy voice, lip-rounding, or giggling while speaking) and kinesthetics (body language). All these may offer clues for comprehension. Considering the dual cognition assumption, learners may benefit from video-based Internet resources.

### **2.3 Video-based Internet for Listening Comprehension**

Since the 1980s, listening comprehension has been regarded as critical to facilitating language learning (Richards 1983). O'Malley, Chamot, and Kupper (1989) explained that "listening comprehension is viewed theoretically as an active process in which individuals focus on selected aspects of aural input, construct meaning from passages, and relate what they hear to existing knowledge" (p. 418). These researchers defined listening comprehension in terms of learners' perceptions of auditory information only and ignored the role of visual stimuli in listening comprehension. Rubin (1994) indicated that visual support can improve listening comprehension, and suggested that video be used to enhance listening comprehension. The present study adopted Rubin's (1994) conception and examined the effect of the video-based Internet on improving EFL learners' listening comprehension.

Pictures, animations, graphics, and videos play an important role in fostering listeners' comprehension. Many researchers have indicated that the combination of visual, aural, and textual forms facilitates understanding of aural texts in a target language (Jones 2003; Jones & Plass 2002). With the advanced technology, video clips embedded in multimedia presentations (i.e., television programs, movies, YouTube, and mtvU) have been used to improve learning in college courses (Berk 2009). In general, there is a widespread belief among researchers and learners that video helps listeners improve their listening comprehension.

The Internet has long been used as a tool for English learners to improve their listening ability (Peterson 2010). Learners can access the Internet to download audio files or listen to listening practice exercises and online programs using a variety of multimedia players such as RealPlayer, iTunes or QuickTime Player (Stanley 2006). Hansen, Resnick, and Galea (2002) used an Internet *Better Listening* program that employed graphics and video clips, together with narration, scripts, quizzes, and cartoons to teach listening. All students in their study reported that the program was helpful and increased their listening abilities. Smidt and Hegelheimer (2004) investigated how an authentic Web-video enhances vocabulary acquisition and listening comprehension. They also found that the students who attended lectures assisted with Web-video reported more correct answers in listening tests than those who attended lectures without video, and concluded that the use of videos helped the learners acquire more vocabulary. Likewise, Verdugo and Belmonte (2007) studied the use of Internet-based technology to improve listening with 220 junior high school students in Spain. The results showed that the experimental group trained with the Internet-based syllabus outperformed the control group in the aspects of linguistic structures and vocabulary. Lin, Winaitham, and Saitakham (2008) investigated the use of particular websites for practicing the listening skills of EFL undergraduate students in Thailand. They found that nearly all students agreed that using these websites for practicing listening could help them improve not only their listening skills but also other skills such as pronunciation, speaking, reading, and vocabulary acquisition. With the rapid growth of online distance education, podcasting is designed to place recorded material on a website; in this way the learner can download and listen to the material at a later time. Podcasting has become a popular medium for not only accessing and assimilating information but also for delivering educational content. Researchers have found that podcasting raises learners' motivation and interest (Bolliger, Supanakorn, and Boggs 2010; Chan, Chi, Chin, and Lin 2011; Scutter, Stupans, Sawyer, and King 2010).

### **2.4 EFL/ESL Students' Attitudes towards Internet Use**

Many studies have focused on investigating ESL/EFL learners' attitudes towards using the Internet as a tool for learning a foreign/second language. Generally, the researchers reported that most learners had positive attitudes towards the use of the Internet. For example, Hong, Ridzuan and Kuek (2003) surveyed 88 second-year undergraduate students in Malaysia. Their study showed that most of the students had positive attitudes toward using the Internet for learning. The statistical results further showed that there was no significant difference between males and females in their attitudes; however, significant differences were found in the students' attitudes in terms of their academic background. Aydin (2007) surveyed 115 students who learned English as a foreign language regarding their attitudes toward the Internet. The themes of the questionnaire included their perceptions of the Internet, usefulness of language learning, personal interaction, social activities on the Internet, and cultural exchange. Aydin (2007) reported that 97.4% of the

students agreed that the Internet is a universal digital library, and 96.5% agreed that the Internet is the fastest way to reach knowledge. As for language learning, 77% agreed that the Internet has the potential to be an effective training tool. Conducting a small-scale study, Son (2008) found that all 12 ESL students enjoyed the Web activities and would like to access web activities outside class time. However, there is a gap in research on the use of the Internet to enhance language learning. The participants included in the aforementioned studies were not international students. The present study investigated the perceptions of students from different countries to verify the effects of the use of Internet video-based materials on their English listening skills.

### **2.5 Research Purposes and Questions**

In light of the cognitive theory of multimedia learning and the dual-channel assumption, this study investigates the impacts of video-based Internet materials on international students' English listening comprehension. The study also examines students' perceptions of the video-based Internet materials when they use the Internet to improve their English listening skills. To achieve research purposes, the study addressed the following research questions:

- 1) Do the video-based Internet materials improve the international students' listening comprehension?
- 2) What are the international students' attitudes towards using the video-based Internet materials to improve their English listening?

## **3. METHODS**

### **3.1 Research Design**

Responding to Research Question 1, a quasi-experiment was designed and 40 international students in one university were invited to join this study. They were randomly divided into the control and experimental groups, each consisting of 20 students. The control group performed listening tasks with narrations only, whereas the experimental group was provided with listening material including both narrations and video. After receiving the treatment, the two groups took the immediate listening test. Responding to Research Question 2, a questionnaire adapted from earlier listening research was employed to analyze the students' attitudes towards the Internet. In addition, interviews were conducted and several excerpts taken from these interviews offer interpretations of the statistical results.

### **3.2 Participants**

The participants involved in this study were 40 international students from ten countries, namely Chile, Honduras, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. They were both undergraduate and graduate students, pursuing academic programs in different departments in the same university. All international students accepted to study in Taiwan (as with any other country) have to meet the English requirements of the accepting institution. Students admitted to this university are required to have English certificates in their applications (i.e., IELTS 5.5, TOEFL 550). Their English ability was equivalent to intermediate or higher levels (e.g., IELTS of at least 5.5 or TOEFL 550).

Their mother languages are not English and they all learned English as a foreign language. All courses in the university are taught in English and the students used English to read, speak, and discuss with their teachers and peers. Most participants' academic backgrounds were related to the technical sciences such as Aquaculture, Food Sciences, Biology, and Marine Sciences. Their average age was 28 years old and two months.

### **3.3 Instruments**

#### *3.3.1 The background information (BI) questionnaire*

This questionnaire was designed to collect the participants' demographic information (e.g., age, gender, nationality, and the English proficiency test they took before entering the university).

#### *3.3.2 English proficiency test*

This test was administered to gather data on all participants' English ability before the treatment. The test comprised two sub-tests: listening comprehension and reading comprehension. The listening sub-test consisted of 30 multiple-choice questions, while the reading sub-test comprised 25 multiple-choice questions about grammar, vocabulary, and socio-cultural knowledge. The purpose of the test was to verify their English proficiency and was used to divide them into the control and experimental groups. The participants received one point for each correct answer, giving a maximum score of 55. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability is 0.82.

### 3.3.3 *The immediate listening comprehension test*

This test was conducted right after the two groups of participants completed a listening task. Listening tasks and listening tests were conducted online through the chosen website. The participants completed three listening tasks and three immediate listening sub-tests. The format of the immediate listening test was multiple-choice questions with three options. Each immediate sub-test included 7 items. The first five question items were directly adopted from the website and were related to the details of the clip. The sixth question was related to grasping the main idea of the clip; the last question pertaining to figuring out word meaning from context. Participants received one point for each correct answer, giving a maximum score of 21 for each of the three immediate listening tests. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability is 0.84.

### 3.3.4 *The Internet use attitude (IUA) questionnaire*

This questionnaire collected all participants' viewpoints regarding the use of the Internet for practicing English listening. The questionnaire included ten items and was adapted from Son's (2007) eleven questions on learners' Web-based experiences, and Son's (2008) seven questions on using Web-based learning activities in the ESL classroom. The questionnaire consisting of ten items was designed with a four-point Likert scale which ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). At the end of the questionnaire, the participants could write down their opinions about using the Internet to learn English. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability is 0.80.

### 3.3.5 *One-to-one interviews*

These were semi-structured interviews. We asked for volunteers for the interview. In all, eight students joined the interview. The aim of the interviews was to elicit participants' insights into their perception of using the Internet to learn English and practice listening. The interview data were recorded and later transcribed verbatim. To ensure the credibility, inter-rater reliability was established for the interview transcriptions. The two authors were inter-raters.

## 3.4 Treatment Materials

The Internet website used in this study was Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab (<http://www.esl-lab.com/>). This website provides a variety of audio-visual listening exercises. All listening tasks are grouped from easy to difficult and so are suitable for listeners of all levels. This website is equipped with video material designed for non-native English speaking listeners. The website continually uploads new video clips with new topics. Listening materials include both audio-based and video-based tasks. In addition, the website includes interactive activities, such as an online student-study guide, help pages (e.g., pre-listening, post-listening), and an online forum where learners might post or answer questions relating to the webpage.

The experimental and control groups were requested to complete three listening tasks. The tasks consisted of native speakers talking about three different topics. Task 1 was a news report on disaster relief lasting for 1 minute and 2 seconds. Task 2 was a guideline for safe investing lasting for 1 minute and 49 seconds. Task 3 discussed some gardening secrets and lasted for 2 minutes and 54 seconds. These topics were selected according to the participants' interests.

## 3.5 Procedures

The data-collection included three phases. The first phase included one meeting, lasting for two hours. All participants completed the BI questionnaire and the English proficiency test. From the BI questionnaire, the participants took different English proficiency tests before entering this university. To gain a more objective view, the participants took another English proficiency test at the beginning of this study. Their scores were submitted to a *t*-test to examine for possible

differences between the two groups. Regarding the control group, the mean score was 39.9 ( $SD = 41.25$ ), whereas for the experimental group, it was 40.05 ( $SD = 33.41$ ). The results therefore revealed no significant differences ( $p = .09$ ), suggesting that the two groups were statistically equivalent in their reading and listening abilities before receiving the treatments.

The second phase continued with a quasi-experiment. This phase included two meetings. Each meeting lasted for two hours. In the first meeting, we invited the control group participants to a language lab equipped with computers. We accessed the website and displayed the audio-based files. The control group participants listened to the narrations. The treatment began with Task 1. When the participants finished listening to Task 1, they were given fifteen minutes to answer the Task 1 immediate listening sub-test. We did likewise for the second and third listening tasks and tests. In the second meeting, the experimental group was invited to the same language lab. The same procedure and listening tasks were provided. However, the participants watched the video-based materials while listening to the narrations. The experimental group completed viewing the three video clips and the three immediate listening tests.

The third phase continued with questionnaire data collection. This phase included one meeting, lasting for three hours. The two groups of participants entered the same language lab and used the video-based Internet to practice English listening. The website used was Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab. After two hours, both groups of participants completed the IUA questionnaire.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

In total, 40 participants in two groups completed the English proficiency test, the immediate listening test, and the BI and IUA questionnaires. The collected data were analyzed from both quantitative and qualitative standpoints to address the research questions. Descriptive statistics (means, and standard deviations) were computed first, and independent sample  $t$ -tests were further conducted to examine the differences between the two groups. Mean scores are correct scores. Mean differences in the dependent measures were tested for significance at the 0.05 level.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 The Results of the Immediate Listening Comprehension Test

Table 1 displays the mean scores and SDs of the immediate listening tests. As shown in Table 1, there was a significant difference between the two groups. The mean score of the control group is 16.95 ( $SD = 2.89$ ), while that of the experimental group is 18.25 ( $SD = 2.51$ ). The participants in the experimental group significantly outperformed those in the control group in terms of text comprehension. The statistical result is consistent with Smidt and Hegelheim's (2004) study. The finding supports the assumption that learners using Internet material consisting of both audio and visual stimuli perform better than those who only use audio stimulus. The outcomes of the present study are also congruent with earlier research (Berk 2009; Lin 2010; Rubin 1995) indicating that verbal information can be understood comprehensively by means of visual information. A possible reason is that adding visual stimuli to the listening mode stimulates the processes of cognitive matching between the audio and visual channels. This general result is consistent with Mayer's (2005) multimedia learning principle that people learn more deeply from words and pictures than from words alone. As Mayer (2005) pointed out, when listeners perceive audio-visual information, they are engaged in a cognitive process in which the information in the auditory channel is supported with that in the visual channel.

**Table 1.** *The two groups' t-test results of the immediate listening tests*

Group	$n$	Range		Mean	SD	$P$
		Lower	Higher			
Control	20	13	20	16.95	2.89	
Experiment	20	16	21	18.25	2.51	0.01*

Note. \* $p < .05$

### 4.2 International Students' Attitudes towards Internet Use in English Listening

Regarding Research Question 2, the IUA questionnaire was used to generate findings. Table 3 shows the participants' frequency of each item and the mean scores. Generally speaking, these international students had positive attitudes toward using the video-based Internet materials as a

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listening learning tool. In terms of effectiveness, all participants agreed that the Internet was a useful listening tool (Item 7), while 92.5% contended that the Internet activities were valuable for English listening learning (Item 5). During and after the completion of the listening activities, 92.5% of the participants shared the same view that they liked the repeatable video resource and felt comfortable with using the Internet (Item 6 & Item 10). Regarding the participants' interest, 90% agreed that they enjoyed the Internet listening program (Item 1).

Most of the participants enjoyed the listening activities on the Internet, and felt that it is a useful and valuable tool for improving their listening skills. Regarding its effectiveness, most of the students like to use the Internet to practice listening because it offers a visual environment. Such a visual context provides them with a concrete way of interpretation (Rubin 1994). By activating audio and visual channels simultaneously, the visual context helped the listeners not only in promoting their understanding of vocabulary but also in predicting and inferring meanings easily. Two students described their experiences as follows:

Sometimes, I do not know the meanings of words. However, behavior and attitude can say something, and I can predict what they mean from the context. (Joanne)

Because when I see the way they speak, their attitudes, or their body language, I can guess the meanings of words more easily than without video. (Michelle)

**Table 3.** *The frequencies and mean scores of the IUA Questionnaire*

Item	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1	I enjoy the listening tasks on this Internet.	10	26	4	0	3.15
2	I experienced many authentic listening interactions from the Internet listening program.	8	20	11	1	2.88
3	I gained confidence in using the Internet for listening purposes.	5	25	9	1	2.85
4	I think the various presentation formats of listening activities made the class interesting.	4	28	7	1	2.88
5	I think the Internet-based activities were valuable for English listening.	10	27	3	0	3.18
6	I like the video clips on the Internet.	9	28	3	0	3.15
7	I feel that the Internet is a useful listening tool.	20	20	0	0	3.5
8	I would like to access the Internet-based listening activities out of class.	8	20	10	2	2.85
9	I would like to use the Internet-based listening activities in class.	6	18	14	2	2.7
10	I am now comfortable using the video-based Internet for practicing listening.	8	29	2	1	3.1

*Note.*  $n = 40$ . Where SA means Strongly Agree; A, Agree; D, Disagree, and SD, Strongly Disagree.

This finding is consistent with Son's (2007) study in which students reported that they found that Web activities were helpful to English learning, especially in the area of vocabulary acquisition. When they forgot some words, they could look at the clips again and listen to the material repeatedly until they were familiar with the words.

However, the mean score of Item 9 (Mean = 2.7) is the lowest. In total, 65% of participants disagreed and strongly disagreed that they would like to use the Internet-based listening activities in class. This is probably because these international students preferred interpersonal activities in class. The two participants responding with strongly disagree expressed that they liked interpersonal activities in listening class, even though their classmates are non-native English speakers. They further stated that English listening does not just involve listening to words; through interpersonal interaction, they could truly understand the implications of spoken words. In addition, 14 participants disagreed with this item. Two of them shared the same opinion that they could practice English listening using many resources. For example, Stephen described:

I use the Internet to practice English listening when I stay in the dormitory by myself. I often attend activities where many international students get together. I have many chances to have English conversations and accordingly I can practice English listening.

This finding suggests that if instructors use video-based Internet materials in class with international students, they should add interpersonal activities and not totally rely on the Internet.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The present study concerns the conception of the use of video-based Internet materials to foster international students' listening comprehension. The major implication of this study is that it provides evidence for the value of visual/ video along with audio to enhance comprehension. According to the statistical results, the video-based Internet is a good means of improving international students' listening comprehension ability. The result also supports the argument that listeners can learn more deeply from listening to and viewing audio-visual material than from listening to audio material alone. The prominent advantages of the Internet such as easily accessible resources for university international students, repeatable video clips and various presentation formats make it a motivational tool for English listening. In addition, international students have positive attitudes toward the Internet.

At present, technology advances at a rapid speed. Using videos in teaching is not new, and using video-based Internet is the trend. For convenience and effectiveness of learning English listening skill, the effects of other video-based Internet resources can be further examined in the future.

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