

Listening Comprehension and the Use of Audio-visual Aids at Home A Case Study at a High School

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Abstract

This paper aims to shed some light on the relevancy between English listening skills and the home use of audio-visual aids by high school students, referring to the kinds of aids and their functions used to improve the students' listening skills.

A student questionnaire was the primary research instrument employed, and the acquired data was carefully scrutinized and considered with the results of a series of listening tests given to define the study population.

The results of the research revealed that the students' listening skills were generally related to their home use of audio-visual aids of their own choice. The results also suggest that students' listening skills would greatly improve with their positive use of aids off campus under the teachers' appropriate guidance.

1 . Introduction

In Japan, many kinds of audio-visual aids are being manufactured, and the quality of such instruments is improving in almost a regular six-month cycle. This is owing to the ongoing advancement of high technology and the insatiable quest of suppliers and consumers for higher-quality products.

Few language teachers would deny that the use of audio-visual aids would be a great help for improving listening skills. Actually, various kinds of audio-visual aids are currently being used at schools to serve their educational purpose.

However, the present situations reveal that the time spent using audio-visual aids at school is rather limited, and a drastic change to use more aids does not seem to be expected in the near future.

Nowadays we know for certain that almost all high school students either privately own various electronic gadgets, which could be used as audio-visual aids, or can use them freely at home. Therefore, using those instruments at home would extremely benefit students by improving their listening skills. With such devices, they can choose a convenient time to study, which is something they cannot do during normal school hours.

This paper researches the relevancy between listening comprehension and the use of audio-visual aids at home, the variety and functions of audio-visual aids available for home use, and how much the aids are used for learning English.

2 . Methodology

2.1 Study Population Defined

The study focused on 226 students in general courses at Takamatsu First High School in Kagawa Prefecture. Two classes from each grade level were selected, one special English class and one training class of students with above average aptitude for English. In this paper, special English classes and training classes in the first, second, and third years for a total of six classes were selected for the study. They are abbreviated as 1-S, 1-T, 2-S, 2-T, 3-S, and 3-T. The numbers indicate the grade level, while S stands for special English class and T stands for training class. The breakdown of the study population is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Study population by class

class	1-S	1-T	2-S	2-T	3-S	3-T	total number
number of the students	38	36	41	44	25	42	226

The special English classes and the training classes were both composed of students who were selected by the school in terms of general scholastic ability. The students with the experience of studying abroad for one year or more, and those who were absent from the listening tests (see Table 3), and those who failed to return the questionnaire were excluded.

Table 2 illustrates the difference in English aptitude (reading and writing) between the special and training classes as measured by test scores for the three grades.

Table 2. English reading and writing skills classified by class

class	1-S	1-T	2-S	2-T	3-S	3-T
score of the tests	67.2	56.1	62.1	52.4	54.9	44.4

NOTE: In the school year, three common tests were given to the first-year classes, and four to the second and third-year classes. The figures represent the average score of those tests and are rounded off to the first decimal place. A perfect score is one hundred.

Similarly, Table 3 displays the differences in listening skills between the special and training classes.

Table 3. English listening skills classified by class

class	1-S	1-T	2-S	2-T	3-S	3-T
score of the tests	8.5	8.1	10.7	9.3	11.3	9.6

NOTE: Three types of listening tests were utilized toward the end of the academic year. All the students took the same tests. The figures represent the total points of the results of the three tests. A perfect score is fifteen. The data for this table is taken from Ikeuchi (1998).

The comparison of the special English class and the training class on each grade clearly reveals that the former class (with advanced aptitude in reading and writing) also attained higher scores in listening skills than the latter class. Hence, the distinction between classes, originally designed based on reading and writing skills, exists in listening skills as well. Accordingly, the special English classes can be defined as being more advanced in listening skills than the training classes through the grades.

2.2 Research Materials

A student questionnaire regarding the availability of audio-visual aids at home and the actual use of those aids referring to their kinds and functions was utilized. The purpose was to evaluate the relevancy between English listening skills and the use of those aids at home and to analyze the actual situations when audio-visual aids were beneficial as tools for listening.

3 . Results and Discussion

Table 4 shows in percentage how many students of each class can use the selected eleven kinds of audio-visual aids, whether they are owned by the students themselves or by the other members of their families. Those audio-visual aids are ranked according to their average percentages of availability for 226 students. The television was most available and the laser disk (LD) player least available. Although the television is divided into three categories according to its broadcasting systems such as very high frequency (VHF)/ultra high frequency (UHF), broadcast satellite (BS), and communication satellite (CS) - cable television (CATV) is excluded - the percentages for VHF/UHF turned out to represent the general figures for the television without exception.

Table 4. Percentages indicating the availability of audio-visual aids at home

audio-visual aid		class		1-S	1-T	2-S	2-T	3-S	3-T	average (for 226)
1	television	VHF/UHF		97	92	98	98	92	90	95
		BS		45	39	39	39	24	29	36
		CS		0	3	0	5	0	0	1
2	videocassette recorder (VCR)			95	94	95	95	96	90	94
3	CD-radio-cassette recorder			87	92	76	98	64	74	83
4	Walkman			68	75	80	86	80	60	75
5	stereo			55	56	56	59	76	55	58
6	radio-cassette recorder			50	67	56	66	60	36	55
7	radio			42	58	49	48	24	21	41
8	record player			24	36	32	30	44	19	30
9	tape recorder			34	28	37	30	32	5	27
10	computer			21	42	17	23	28	19	24
11	LD player			3	3	2	2	4	0	2

NOTE: Each "average" percentage point is not the average of the figures for the six classes, but of all the 226 students who participated in this research.

CATV, the mini disk (MD) player and the digital video disk (DVD) player are not included in the list in consideration of the diffusion of these devices among Japanese homes at present.

Table 5 shows the number of audio-visual aids available at home per student, classified by classes, out of the eleven audio-visual aids taken up in Table 4. The figures do not seem to hint at the existence of any characteristics peculiar to the special English and training classes which are by definition different in listening skills. Therefore, the number of the electronic audio-visual aids available to the students at home is irrelevant to the students' listening skills in English.

It is surprising that an average student can use as many as 5.9 audio-visual aids, whether they are his/her own or belong to a family member. This large number tells us that students can improve their listening skills freely at home using the convenient tools, without being restricted by school hours.

Table 5. Available number of audio-visual aids per student

class	1-S	1-T	2-S	2-T	3-S	3-T	average (for 226)
number of audio-visual aids per student	5.8	6.4	6.0	6.4	6.0	4.7	5.9

NOTE: The figures are rounded off to the first decimal place.

However, only the availability of audio-visual aids does not help improve listening skills. Now we need to know how many students of each class have used some of these tools at home for studying English in general. This is shown in percentage in Table 6. In this research, more than 30 minutes' use of an audio-visual aid by each class member was counted.

Table 6. Percentages of the students who have used audio-visual aids at home to study English

class	1-S	1-T	2-S	2-T	3-S	3-T	average (for 226)
percentage of students	45	33	85	52	56	31	50

Unfortunately, all the students' reliable data regarding the length of time spent using the aids could not be collected to bear the proper introduction here, because of some inaccurate reports in the questionnaire, for example omitted data. Each class was composed of approximately the same variety of students in terms of the length of time using the aids. Nevertheless, the comparison of the data between the different types of classes in each of the same grades would give us general idea about the relativity between the class type and the time spent using audio-visual aids.

On the whole, among all the 226 students researched, about half of them - 114 students - had the experience of using some audio-visual aids at home to study English, whether it was the use for a long or a short while.

Large percentage points for the 2-S and the 2-T classes would partly be attributed to the introduction of Oral Communication B, mainly designed for listening, into the school curriculum for the first time. As for the 2-S and the 3-S classes, a two-week homestay program in the U.S. during the summer vacation in the second year might have contributed to the increase in the percentage points.

We have to note that the use of audio-visual aids does not contribute to the improvement of listening skills only. Some students might have intended to focus on the other activities such as speaking, reading, and writing over listening. But inasmuch as the study was done using audio-visual aids, *listening* would be an integral and crucial part of the study, no matter what activities were on the learners' minds.

It is revealed clearly in Table 6 that the special English class exceeds the training class in each grade in the use of audio-visual aids. Considering that the special English classes are defined to be more advanced than the training classes in listening skills, more members of the classes with advanced listening skills could be said to have been more enthusiastic about the use of audio-visual aids than those of the other classes, regardless of grade.

Table 7 shows the kinds of audio-visual aids having been used by the students in order to study English at home. The same eleven audio-visual aids as seen in Table 4 are ranked according to the average percentages for the 114 students who have used the aids. The order of usage for individual devices is slightly varied among the classes, but those differences could not make one reasonably assume that they are caused by the class types or the different levels of

classes in listening skills. The television, the CD-radio-cassette recorder, the videocassette recorder (VCR), and the stereo ranked from one to four in that order.

Table 7. Percentages of the students who have used audio-visual aids for studying English

audio-visual aid		class		1-S	1-T	2-S	2-T	3-S	3-T	average (for 114)
1	television	VHF/UHF		41	42	60	57	57	38	52
		BS		18	25	29	9	7	23	20
		CS		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	CD-radio-cassette recorder			47	25	43	70	29	23	43
3	VCR			12	25	40	13	14	8	22
4	stereo			29	17	20	13	21	31	21
5	Walkman			0	8	20	9	21	0	11
6	radio-cassette recorder			6	8	3	4	14	8	6
7	computer			6	0	6	4	0	0	4
	radio			6	25	3	0	0	0	
9	record player			6	0	6	0	0	0	3
10	tape recorder			6	0	0	0	7	0	2
11	LD player			0	0	0	0	0	0	0

NOTE: Each "average" percentage point is not the average of the figures for the six classes, but of the 114 students who has experienced using the audio-visual aids for studying English.

The next two tables, Table 8 and Table 9, show in percentage the students who have used audio-visual aids classified by functions. Table 8 shows this percentage of the students with the experience of using aids for studying English, and Table 9 shows it for all the students including those with no experience of using the aids.

In Table 9, each special English class is shown superior to the corresponding training class in the same grade in percentage for the television, the tape recorder, the compact disk (CD) player, the computer, and the record player, but not for the radio and the VCR in the second and the first year respectively. Nobody used the LD player for studying English.

Table 8. Percentages of the students who have used audio-visual aids classified by functions - for the students who have used the aids for studying English

class audio-visual aid		1-S	1-T	2-S	2-T	3-S	3-T	average (for 114)
		1	television	59	50	74	65	
2	radio	35	33	20	43	50	62	37
3	tape recorder	29	25	29	39	50	15	32
4	CD player	24	25	31	22	7	8	22
	VCR	12	25	40	13	14	8	
6	computer	6	0	6	4	0	0	4
7	record player	6	0	6	0	0	0	3
8	LD player	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 9. Percentages of the students who have used audio-visual aids classified by functions - for all the students who have or have not used the aids for studying English

class audio-visual aid		1-S	1-T	2-S	2-T	3-S	3-T	average (for 226)
		1	television	26	17	63	34	
2	radio	16	11	17	23	28	19	19
3	tape recorder	13	8	24	20	28	5	16
4	CD player	11	8	27	11	4	2	11
	VCR	5	8	34	7	8	2	
6	computer	3	0	5	2	0	0	2
7	record player	3	0	5	0	0	0	1
8	LD player	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

In each class, the use of the television occupies larger percentage than that of any other audio-visual aid. Together with the use of the radio, it amounts to as much as 84 percent among the students who have used audio-visual aids and 42 percent among all the students researched. Needless to say, these percentage points are not simply the sum of those for the television and the radio, because some students used both gadgets.

The tape recorder follows the television and the radio. The CD player, which came into market rather recently (after 1978), ranks the fourth along with the VCR. The computer will be expected to increase its percentage much more with the development of good software available in the future.

The record player, which was a product almost as old as the radio - the former was invented in 1887 and the latter in 1895 - seems to have given up its place as a useful studying tool to the tape recorder (invented in 1930) and the CD player.

The LD player was not used by students simply because very few of them or their family members own one; but the player has the possibility of stepping up its ranking with the increase of students' availability to the machine. The MD, which uses the same digital audio disk (DAD) as the CD and the DVD, was not taken up in this research; but it would be expected to rank high in the near future.

4 . Conclusion

An average high school student was found to be able to use approximately nearly six electronic gadgets as audio-visual aids at home. The availability to such a large number of audio-visual devices provides students with great opportunity to make use of them as beneficial tools for improving their English listening skills at home or off campus, without being restricted to the school hours.

The most available audio-visual aids at home for the students studied was the television with 95 percent; followed by the VCR with 94; the CD-radio-cassette recorder with 83; the Walkman with 75; the stereo with 58; the radio-cassette recorder with 55; the radio with 41; the record player with 30; the tape recorder with 27; the computer with 24; and the LD player with 2.

Half of the students had the experience of using one or more of these audio-visual aids to study English. It was also revealed that the classes with advanced listening skills consist of a larger number of students who have used audio-visual aids to study English than the other classes regardless of their grade. This means that the listening comprehension is significantly related to the use of audio-visual aids at home, since listening is an essential skill which can be acquired from the use of audio-visual aids.

Therefore, in teaching listening, the author strongly believes that the teachers' appropriate

guidance regarding the students' use of available audio-visual aids at home will benefit the students and help them to improve their listening comprehension.

Out of the eleven audio-visual aids, the one used by the largest number of students for studying English - among the students with the experience of using them - was the television with 52 percent, followed by the CD-radio-cassette recorder with 43; the VCR with 22; the stereo with 21; the Walkman with 11; the radio-cassette recorder with 6; the computer and the radio with 4; the record player with 3; the tape recorder with 2; but the LD player with 0.

Out of the eight mechanical functions of those audio-visual aids, the one used by the largest number of students - among the students with the experience of using them - was the television with 64 percent; followed by the radio with 37; the tape recorder with 32; the CD player and the VCR with 22; the computer with 4; the record player with 3; but the LD player with 0. For all the students with or without the experience of using the audio-visual aids, each of those percentages was about half.

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