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The Effect of Captioned Videos on Iranian Advanced EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension

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Abstract

As a relatively modern technology, captioned videos have contributed to foreign language learning, in general, and listening comprehension, in particular. This study investigated the effect of captioned videos on Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension. The research design used in the current study has been quasi-experimental with a pretest-posttest control-group design. Thirty homogenised students were randomly assigned to control and experimental groups. The required assumptions of normality were run to run the appropriate statistical analysis, followed by the ANCOVA to compare the control and experimental groups. The experimental group watched movies with captions, while the control group used no captions. The results indicated that captioned videos did not affect the listening comprehension of the experimental group. The results of this study can have clear implications for learners, teachers, and other stakeholders of ELT. As there seem to be more contradictory results, the findings of this study should be treated with caution, and more work is required.

Keywords:

Captioned videos, listening comprehension, EFL learners

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Introduction

Captioned videos have contributed to general foreign language learning and listening comprehension (Danan, 2004). Listening is a critical skill in language learning because it is the first sensory mode through which second or foreign-language learners typically process the target language. Thus, listening is the gateway to language acquisition and the foundation upon which the other primary language skills (reading, writing, and speaking) are built (Plass & Jones, 2005).

Captions are on-screen text descriptions that display a video product's dialogue, identify speakers, and describe other relevant sounds. Captions are synchronised with the video image so that viewers have equivalent access to the content initially presented in sound, regardless of whether they receive it via audio or text (Katchen et al., 2001). There are two main kinds of captions: Open Captions and Closed Captions. The former is always in view and cannot be turned off, whereas the viewer can turn the latter on and off. Closed-captioned media allow the captions to appear on the screen through a decoder. Open captioned media does not require a decoder, as the captioning is permanently part of the picture and cannot be turned off. In our study, the type of caption used was "closed." In addition, the subtitles were bimodal, i.e., the foreign language captions were used for the foreign language audio. The assumption was that using this subtitle could affect the students' listening comprehension ability. However, the effects of other types of subtitles have been studied in the literature.

Although teaching listening came to fashion in the 1960s and gained momentum with Krashen's (1981) idea of comprehensible input in the 1980s, it has experienced a process of back and forth (Field, 2004). With the advent of technology in the 1980s, however, the integration of visual materials in language classrooms became widespread, and listening instruction experienced a new era of popularity. In addition, with the inception of communicative approaches and the utilization of more authentic texts (Gilmore, 2007), the need to find a good way to exploit audio-visual materials to their full potential has been urgently felt. In recent years, therefore, with well-equipped language laboratories and classrooms, visual materials have become a significant part of language classrooms (Katchen, 2001). Satellite programs, feature films, talk shows, etc., have become a daily part of people's lives, and the demand for improving listening comprehension has increased. All these changes have resulted in the incorporation of more off-air authentic visual recordings in classrooms, which have encouraged language teaching experts to make the best use of available technology.

Saha (2008) expresses that although listening and hearing are related, listening involves an active process, which requires an analysis of sounds, in contrast to hearing, that only passively perceives sounds. In the same way, Harmer (2001) stated that listening is a receptive skill where people obtain the main idea according to what they hear. Besides, Helgesen (cited by Gonzales Moncada, 2003) supports that listening helps learners be flexible listeners and know how to listen to get the general idea or the specific information needed to understand videos. Similarly, Richard & Rubin (cited by Van Duzer, 1997) argue that although listening is a passive skill, it is an active process of selecting and interpreting information from auditory and visual clues. In this study, however, the listening skill is integrated with the visual mode, and the students can use both auditory and visual modes, which is an example of multimodality.

Liou, Katchen, and Wang (2003) also explain that videos, particularly films, offer some advantages for enhancing listening skills. Although films are scripted, they are made for a wide variety of audiences and thus provide authentic language for the listener (King, 2002). As for the EFL classes, the teaching materials are usually presented in a slow and simplified language, but at some point, students must be able to deal with language as it is naturally spoken. Since they do not live in an ESL context, students may, to some extent, be able to receive the input they cannot get from outside the classroom through watching movies and other audio-video materials (Danan, 2004).

With advances in technology, different options were made available for the users. Not only can the sound and images be adopted, but the subtitles of various languages are also called to assist comprehension and language learning. Subtitles and captions in any language are excellent tools that let people enjoy films from other cultures and countries; moreover, they might offer language learners a new path to language comprehension. Adding captioned movies to language instruction and curriculum planning has the further benefit of shifting watching typical classroom movies from a picture-viewing activity to a listening activity, supplying struggling learners with additional listening practice (Gass & Sydorenko, 2010).

However, for many years, the efficiency of captions and subtitles has been a topic of discussion, and many researchers have attempted to determine their value in enhancing Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension (Ghasemboland & Nafissi, 2012; Hayati & Mohmedi, 2011). Despite the bulk of research on the efficacy of subtitles and captions, no consensus has been achieved yet, and more studies need to be conducted to investigate this issue.

According to Nunan (1998), listening is the Cinderella skill in second language learning. For most people, knowing a foreign language means being able to speak and write in that language. Listening and reading are, therefore, secondary skills and are considered as means to an end rather than ends in themselves (Kaplan, 2002).

Reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary are often tested in any language curriculum, while there are few sections on listening (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005). However, even those students who have already achieved a relatively high English fluency level still lament their poor listening skills (Rost, 2002). In language teaching, listening is often neglected, and it is presumed to improve along with work on other skills.

Listening has been considered a passive skill (Saha, 2008), presumably because one did not have to produce language but sit quietly and absorb it. More recently, however, it has been observed that this skill requires the active involvement of the brain (Jowkar, 2012). It is virtually impossible to carry on a sensible conversation in our daily routines if one does not listen. At best, such a conversation would be one-sided and dominated by the wishes of only one of the participants (Nation & Newton, 2009).

Videos offer some advantages for enhancing listening skills. Too much teaching material in Iran is presented in artificial, slow, and explicit language, but students must deal with language as it is naturally spoken. Since they do not live in an ESL context, students may, to some extent, be able to receive the input they cannot get from outside the classroom through watching videos (Plass & Jones, 2005).

A considerable gap was observed between captioned films and listening comprehension in academic settings in Iran. To wrap, the researchers (Etemadi, 2012; Ghasemboland & Nafisi; Hayati & Mohmedi, 2010; Latifi et al., 2011; 2012) have taken up this issue to conduct studies to

determine un/subtitled films in language learning/teaching in the Iranian contexts and find out which of the following is likely to be more effective in developing listening comprehension: bimodal subtitling (English subtitles with English dialogues), standard subtitling (Persian subtitles with English dialogues) or English dialogues with no subtitle.

The mentioned researchers have studied the effect of using captions on the listening comprehension of lower-intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate university students. Even though so many Iranian students go to language institutes to learn English, the effect of using captions on listening comprehension has not been studied in this context. Furthermore, the effect of using captions on the listening comprehension of advanced EFL students has not been studied. Consequently, this study will investigate the differences, if any, between listening comprehension of Iranian advanced EFL students through watching movies with or without captions in the context of Iran Language Institute (ILI), which has more than 200,000 EFL learners around the country.

According to Morley (1991), we can expect to listen twice as much as we speak, four times more than we read, and five times more than we write. Developing all other language skills is argued to be interwoven with listening skills; it is said to be at the heart of both first and second language (Vandergrift, 2007). Language learning relies greatly on listening, which plays a fundamental role in language acquisition and allows learners to interact orally (Robin, 2007).

Additional support for enhancing listening comprehension is provided using video and computer programs with multilingual soundtracks and captions. Video-based instruction can help college ESL/EFL students improve their communicative competence and listening comprehension (Winke et al., 2010). With the increasing access to TV, video equipment, and, more recently, to computers, teachers have found more opportunities to use audio-visual materials at all levels of foreign language teaching, and they have frequently used them effectively in language classes (Lewis & Anping, Meskill, 1996; 2002; Pandey, & Chudgar, 2004; Ryan, 1998; Weyer, 1999; cited in Hayati & Mohmedi, 2010).

Winke, Gass, and Sydorenko (2010) indicated that with a greater emphasis on technology in language classrooms, captioning will undoubtedly increase in importance and frequency. Captioning may be a bonus because it helps language learners connect auditory to visual input (Garza, 1991), which may aid form-meaning mapping, an essential process for foreign language acquisition (Doughty, 2004).

Vanderplank (2010) puts the case for captions, arguing that English language broadcasters and educators have yet to develop the full potential of English language television as a global resource for language learning and teaching. Danan (2004) also provides a comprehensive summary of the advantages and disadvantages of captioned and subtitled programs identified by research, such as improved productive skills, development of word recognition and vocabulary building, comprehension of details, and reduced learners' anxiety.

Captioned videos for foreign language learning are becoming more common because they are more accessible, easy to produce, and fit well into online course offerings. They are hypothesized to be an important pedagogical tool because they bring more native voices into the learning environment and help learners integrate written and aural information, which supports language acquisition.

While there have been many anecdotal reports about how motivating and helpful video is, few empirical studies have been conducted to test the effectiveness of captioning on the

comprehension of movies in Iran. Several studies have investigated the effectiveness of captioning on intermediate students (see Hayati & Mohmedi, 2011). Still, advanced students have been ignored due to their high level of language proficiency. This study, at the most fundamental level, contributes to the field of instructional design by investigating how authentic videos can be made more comprehensible to FL learners, thus making videos more effective tools for developing FL listening skills. This study aimed to investigate the effects of video captioning on Iranian advanced EFL learners' listening comprehension. Thus, the following research question and hypothesis was formulated:

- Is there any significant difference in the Iranian Advanced EFL learners' listening comprehension regarding using films with or without English captions?
- There is no significant difference in the Iranian Advanced EFL learners' listening comprehension regarding using films with or without English captions.

Literature

Captioning refers to using on-screen text with the same language audio (Taylor, 2005). Captions help learners in language learning, especially in listening comprehension, because text, as visual input, is beneficial to learners in remembering and understanding (Bird & Williams, 2002; Huang & Eskey, 2000; Markham, 2001).

Rost (2002) pointed out that captions allow learners to process language longer and enhance their listening comprehension by helping them visualize what they hear (Danan, 2004).

Guillory (1998) showed that learners receiving full captions had better listening comprehension than learners receiving partial captions, who outperformed learners receiving no caption, which indicated that captions positively impact listening comprehension. Although captions facilitate listening comprehension by the connection of visual and auditory input, learners can be dependent too much on them or negatively affected by them while listening to English (Vandergrift, 2007), meaning that learners receive information passively, which leads to the so-called surface learning and lowers learners' performance in listening comprehension (Diao et al., 2007).

Some researchers (Taylor, 2005; Winke et al., 2010) found that when captions were used, high-proficiency learners performed better than low-proficiency learners on listening comprehension. Taylor (2005) examined the use of captioned video (with Spanish captioning vs. without Spanish captioning) with beginners of Spanish and found that captions distracted low-proficiency learners from listening.

On the other hand, according to the studies done by Taylor (2005) and Winke et al. (2010), dual channel presentation (text and spoken messages) resulted in better recognition memory, implying that the more input, the better, leading to increased depth of processing because learners process different input modes differently, and these input modes reinforce one another.

Hsieh (2020), in a study titled "Effects of video captioning on EFL vocabulary learning and listening comprehension," investigated how video caption type affected vocabulary learning and listening comprehension of low-intermediate Chinese-speaking learners of English. Each video was presented twice with one of the five caption types: (1) no caption (NC), (2) full caption with no audio (FCNA), (3) full caption (FC), (4) full caption with highlighted target-word

(FCHTW), and (5) full caption with highlighted target-word and L1 gloss (FCL1). The results showed that the caption type did affect vocabulary learning, and highlighted words and glosses in the captioning line might direct learner attention to vocabulary rather than video content.

Teng (2022), in his work “Incidental L2 vocabulary learning from viewing captioned videos: Effects of learner-related factors,” found that the examined learner-related variables significantly influenced incidental vocabulary learning gains while viewing captioned videos. However, L2 proficiency level did not significantly predict word meaning recall and recognition.

As for our country’s context, Ghasemolani and Nafissi (2012) conducted the most recent study. They examined the effect of the presence or absence of English captions with an English-language soundtrack on the university-level Iranian EFL students’ listening comprehension of video passage material. Sixty homogenised English literature students in the second year of university participated in their study. Their study participants were randomly assigned to two groups to receive different treatments. The experimental group watched the film with English captions, and the control group watched the film without captions. Their study revealed that using captions significantly affected students’ listening comprehension, and those who received the English captions outperformed the other group.

Although empirical research has demonstrated the beneficial effect of captions and, to a lesser extent, standard subtitles, more data still need to be systematically collected on their long-term role and ways to successfully implement strategies adapted to the linguistic difficulty of the material and the learning environment. It is hoped that current interest in multimedia will lead to the development of language curricula and self-learning programs integrating captions while encouraging in-depth pedagogical research on their most effective use.

Methodology

Research design

The research design used in the current study has been quasi-experimental with the pretest-posttest control group design.

Participants

To conduct the study, 30 female participants in this research were selected based on a convenience sampling method from among 45 advanced EFL students at Iran Language Institute (ILI) in the summer term in Gonbad-Kavoos, Golestan. They were considered advanced students based on the Iran Language Institute (ILI) placement test results taken in advance of every course. Thirty advanced learners, in terms of listening ability between 17 and 25 years old, were selected as the participants for the main phase of the study based on the results of a Cambridge IELTS 8, 2011 listening sub-test. They had passed all the required courses at the institute. Familiar to all participants were at least eight semesters of exposure to EFL instruction during which they had learned English and had managed to get the advanced band score according to the institute placement test. Regarding nationality and language background, no difference existed among the participants; all were Iranians, and their mother tongue was Persian. Furthermore, none of the participants had lived in any English-speaking country.

Materials

The textbooks used in the institute's classes were developed by Iranian scholars and are used only by the Iran Language Institute (ILI). Also, captioned documentary videos have been used for treatment purposes. Three ABC News Documentary movies were selected for this study. The first one was "The Way People Perceive You", about short men and their problems in finding appropriate sizes in clothing, driving, seeing the movie screen in the cinema, and even finding a woman to date. The second movie, called "The Work Obsession," indicated the differences between hard work and workaholism, which is working for long hours or inability to turn it off like an obsession. The movie showed that workaholics define themselves in terms of their work and can never cut back, but hard workers seem more balanced and desire to have other important things in their lives, too. The third movie, which was called "Being a Better Parent", dealt with parenting problems. In this documentary, a psychologist focuses his research on what makes parenting difficult; that is, the problems faced by parents of this generation are different from those faced by parents of one or two generations ago. The movies consisted of two episodes and were selected based on the content, which was interesting, and the difficulty level, which was appropriate for the participants. Also, the duration of the films was less than thirty minutes for each session. ABC News Documentary's website determined the movie's difficulty level in advance. They are programs that are usually used for teaching purposes.

Instruments

IELT's listening sections have been used as pre- and post-tests. The tests were selected from "Cambridge IELTS 8" (Cambridge, 2011). Each test consists of four sections, each with ten questions. The first two sections are concerned with social needs. The first is a conversation between two speakers, and the second is a monologue. The final two sections are concerned with situations related to educational or training contexts. The third section is a conversation between up to four people, and the fourth section is a monologue.

Procedure

Thirty participants out of 45 were selected via convenience sampling at the Iran Language Institute to conduct the study. First, to ensure their homogeneity in listening comprehension, an IELTS listening subtest consisting of 40 questions was given to the students in both groups. Then, those who got 25 and above were considered to have high listening comprehension ability, as mentioned in the Cambridge IELTS 8 book. The IELTS band score for one who gets 30 will be seven, which is considered an advanced level. In other words, the students who had advanced proficiency based on the institute's placement test results were also examined and homogenized in terms of their listening ability. The Iran Language Institute (ILI) placement test was not standardized and was used to determine the students' appropriate level. Consequently, the IELTS listening test was also used to determine the listening ability of the participants in a standard way.

They were randomly divided into two equal groups, experimental and control. The former used captioned English movies as listening instructional materials, and the latter used listening based on the traditional way without captions. The classes met twice a week for 105 minutes. Each class lasted for 18 sessions, i.e., from the beginning to the end of a full term. The video

movies, which were authentic ABC News documentaries, were used for both groups. After the first episode of the documentary movie had been played, the instructor asked students a set of comprehension questions related to the movie’s content from both control and experimental groups. The questions were both global, local, and inferencing. In other words, some questions were asked about the general ideas of the movie, and some were asked for details of the content. Also, some questions were concerned with the tone and indirect ideas of the movies. Each question contained language that occurred somewhere in the episode and was derived from the video segment. However, implicit and global questions were also used.

Results

Checking the Normality of the Data

The data gathered from control and experimental groups were analyzed to investigate the research hypotheses of this study. The diagram of outliers for both the pre-test and the post-test showed that none of the participants’ scores were considered extreme outliers, so the data was appropriate for this study.

The data was checked for normality to check other assumptions. The Kolmogorov Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilks tests in Table 1 indicate that the data was expected in control and experimental groups for both pre-test and post-test, and the normality of data was obtained. In addition, the assumption of being parametric had been achieved before.

Table 1.

The results of tests of Kolmogorov Smirnov and Shapiro Wilks for checking the normality of data

Tests of Normality

	Group	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
PreTest	Experimental	.103	15	.200*	.965	15	.780
	Control	.136	15	.200*	.937	15	.349
PostTest	Experimental	.118	15	.200*	.974	15	.913
	Control	.160	15	.200*	.945	15	.455

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Data normality was also checked using a Histogram and normal curve for both pre-test and post-test, which confirmed the results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilks. As shown, the assumptions of equality are observed.

Data Analysis and Results for Post-test

Table 2 shows the mean scores of participants in the control and experimental groups in the post-test. Unexpectedly, the mean of the control group is significantly higher than that of the experimental group. The significance of this difference will be clarified in the Covariance test.

Table 2.

Descriptive statistics of the control and experimental groups' mean and standard deviation scores.

Dependent Variable: Posttest

Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Experimental	23.87	4.502	15
Control	26.93	4.148	15
Total	25.40	4.530	30

Table 3.***Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances***

Dependent Variable: Posttest

F	df1	df2	Sig.
.064	1	28	.802

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

a. Design: Intercept + Group + PreTest + Group * PreTest

Levene's test of equality of error variances (Table 3) shows that the error variances do not significantly differ between the control and experimental groups ($P > .05$), and the assumption has been met. Table 4 shows the analysis of another assumption of covariance analysis, the equality of Regression lines in control and experimental groups.

As shown in the table, the interaction between the pre-test and groups, which shows the assumption of line equality, was insignificant. Therefore, the lines have the same slope in regression, and this assumption was also met ($P = .383$ $F = .786$, $df = 1$)

Table 4.

The equality of regression lines in control and experimental groups

Dependent Variable: Posttest

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	213.089 ^a	3	71.030	4.833	.008
Intercept	1292.768	1	1292.768	87.964	.000
Group	.123	1	.123	.008	.928
PreTest	139.401	1	139.401	9.485	.005
Group * PreTest	11.553	1	11.553	.786	.383
Error	382.111	26	14.697		
Total	19950.000	30			
Corrected Total	595.200	29			

a. R Squared = .358 (Adjusted R Squared = .284)

The diagram of regression lines in the control and experimental groups confirms the results of Table 4. It shows that the slope of regression lines is the same for both experimental and control groups, and the assumption of an equal regression line was met in both groups. As a result, we can run the covariance analysis.

Testing the Hypothesis

This study sought the effect of captioned videos on the listening comprehension of advanced Iranian EFL students. The data gathered from control and experimental groups were analyzed to investigate the research hypothesis of this study. Tests of normality of the data, including checking for outliers, tests of Kolmogorov Smirnov and Shapiro Wilks, Histogram and normal curve for normality of scores, Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances, the equality of Regression lines in control and experimental groups were performed, and the data were found to be normal.

As shown in Table 5, the difference between groups is statistically significant, which was found after omitting the effect of the pre-test. Since the control group’s mean score was higher than that of the experimental group, the research hypothesis is rejected (F=13.583, df=1, P=.001, Partial Eta=.335).

Table 5.

The analysis of the covariance test to compare the control and experimental groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	201.536 ^a	2	100.768	6.911	.004	.339
Intercept	1308.403	1	1308.403	89.739	.000	.769
PreTest	131.003	1	131.003	8.985	.006	.250
Group	198.049	1	198.049	13.583	.001	.335
Error	393.664	27	14.580			
Total	19950.000	30				
Corrected Total	595.200	29				

a. R Squared = .339 (Adjusted R Squared = .290)

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study attempted to find the effect of using captioned videos on the listening comprehension of advanced Iranian EFL students. The results revealed that the students in the experimental group who watched the film with English captions did not outperform the students in the control group, and the experimental group could not answer the post-test better than the control group.

According to this research, the null hypothesis could be confirmed, and it was concluded that providing captions was not helpful and influential in improving EFL learners' listening comprehension. By providing captions, learners would have a better chance of understanding the film's content. Captions enhance students' comprehension of the films in their second language, but as Zanon (2006) mentioned, using captions can cause students to concentrate more on the texts appearing on the screen and thus disregard the audio. Accordingly, the method of this study could cause more concentration on reading skills rather than listening. This was also pointed out by Danan (2004), who argued that using captions creates a degree of dependence and makes students accustomed to written support.

The results of this study are consistent with those of other studies, which found that using captions could not always be beneficial for improving learners' listening comprehension. The present study provided evidence for the effect of captioning in improving EFL students' listening comprehension, and the results are in line with other studies that have rejected the beneficial effect of combining captions with audio-visual materials to enhance the listening comprehension of a foreign language (Garza, 1991; Zanon, 2006).

As for the context of Iran, the findings of this study did not confirm the results of Hayati and Mohmedi (2010), who found that intermediate students benefited from using bimodal input in listening comprehension. They found that English captions were more beneficial than Persian translation for intermediate students. In a more recent study, Ghasemboland and Nafissi (2012) found that using captions significantly affected students' listening comprehension, and those who received the English captions outperformed the other group without captions. Contradictory, the results of this study indicated that advanced EFL students, in the context of private language institutes, did not benefit from using captions in watching videos, and their listening comprehension did not significantly improve. In a nutshell, the results indicated that captioning would not always lead to deeper processing of input and increase the intake accordingly.

The present study was conducted to probe the effect of captioned videos on the listening comprehension of advanced EFL students. The results of this study did not confirm the beneficial effect of combining captions with audio-visual materials to enhance the listening comprehension of a foreign language. The results indicated that captioning would not always lead to deeper processing of input and increase the intake accordingly. The findings thus did not confirm the obtained results, which confirmed the findings of other research projects conducted in Iran, which pursued a similar line of research.

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