

Test-takers' Attitudes toward Taking Pictorial and Visual Modalities of Listening Comprehension Test in an EFL Context

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Abstract—Listening comprehension test has always been a challenging point for language teachers and test developers. In order to scaffold students in taking the test and at the same time sustaining the authenticity of the assessment, pictures and video devices are proposed by scholars to be added to the test. Beside many advantages, these modified listening tests have a distracting nature too. In this study a sample of 80 EFL students were selected to inquire their attitude toward taking three different modalities of listening test. The results of 5-point scale questionnaire show that test-takers reacted negatively toward audio-only listening test. The attitude of test-takers toward taking the pictorial listening test was totally positive. However, students responded negatively toward taking the visual modality of listening test. Most of the test-takers were unanimous about the distracting nature of visual listening test.

Index Terms—visual listening test, pictorial listening test, listening assessment, video listening test, still-image listening test

I. INTRODUCTION

For many years, test administrators meticulously tried to monitor test-takers' behavior in taking different modalities of listening comprehension test. Listening test which has always been a challenging point for test administrators created a dilemma over how to use additional materials with the test. On one hand, many researchers (e.g., Kellerman, 1990; Baltova, 1994; Kellerman, 1992; Progosh, 1996; Shin, 1998; Sueyoshi and Hardison, 2005; Wagner 2010b) believed that providing students with visual and pictorial devices can improve the comprehension of the text and consequently improving the authenticity of the test.

On the other hand, it is believed that accompanying other resources like pictures or video materials or even multimedia resources means testing something beyond the listening skill. But accompanying listening test with pictorial and visual devices can make the listening test more integrative as listening in real-life situations involves the listener to watch the physical movements and facial gestures of the speaker(s) and even reacting to them (Sueyoshi and Hardison, 2005).

However, incorporating these devices with listening comprehension test needs more consideration as it is suspected to be the reason for test-takers' distraction (MacWilliam, 1986; Bejar et al., 2000; Alderson, Clapham, and Wall, 1995; Brett, 1997; Coniam, 2001; Ockey, 2007; Buck, 2001).

Therefore, apart from taking these sorts of tests and comparing the results, test-takers' attitudes toward taking these tests should also be taken into deliberate consideration. Some previous studies (e.g., Progosh, 1996; Wagner, 2002; Wagner, 2010b) showed test-takers' strong positive opinion for having video materials in taking the test.

In this study, the use of pictures in taking the listening test is referred to pictorial mode of listening test and the implementation of video materials is referred to visual modality of the listening test. Pictorial listening test involves providing a still-image with the test which represents some particular features of the context e.g. setting, and the character(s). This sort of test has been used by ® ETS in TOEFL CBT and TOEFL iBT tests since 2003. It is argued that pictorial test is less distractive and sidetracking for students as they can concentrate on the listening track after visualizing different aspects of the test situation immediately.

The visual mode of listening test, on the other hand, involves showing a video track of the test.

Although this mode of test seems to be more valid and facilitating, students are faced with some difficulties in taking the visual listening test. It is estimated if students want to get the most of the visual listening test, they may overlook reviewing the questions simultaneously. On the other hand, students may prefer following the track of questions instead

of watching the video on the screen in order not to get lost during the test. Although some textbooks (e.g., American English File) accentuated the use of video listening test in the form of multimedia test with direct feedback, there is no reputable test administrator which utilized the use of video materials yet.

In the current study students were assigned to take three different modalities of the listening comprehension test: listening to an audio-only test, listening with a still image and listening to a visual context. After taking the test, students showed their perceptions and attitude toward taking different test types.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *The Usefulness of Visual and Pictorial Materials in Listening Test*

Visual and pictorial listening tests have been administered regularly by test administrators and the results were contradictory (Wagner, 2010a, 2010b; Baltova, 1994; Sueyoshi and Hardison, 2005; Shin, 1998; Gruba, 1997; Coniam, 2001; Kellerman, 1990, 1992; Burgoon, 1994; Progoosh, 1996). In some studies (e.g., Baltova, 1994; Parry and Meredith, 1984), those test-takers who received the video listening test, scored higher and consequently performed better in the test.

Visual and multimedia listening tests were not always represented test-takers' higher performance. In a study by Gruba (1997) which was carried out on 91 ESL students in the United States of America, no statistically significant difference was observed between audio-only and video listening test.

The use of video listening test was also compared with multimedia listening test. Multimedia listening test which is the visual test by showing the video prompt on the computer and it is different in a sense that it has to be carried out on computer. Additionally, students receive direct corrective feedback closely after taking each test. Brett (1997) examined test-takers' performance by conducting three different test types of audio-only, Multimedia and visual listening tests. Among the three test types, students totally scored higher in the multimedia listening test. Among 6 test items, Multimedia listening test scored higher in 4 test items and video listening test received higher score in 2 test items.

Along the visual materials, pictorial resources were tested previously in order to compare the students' performance between listening test with audio-only materials and listening test with a still-image. The practice of still image listening test is still endorsed and authorized by © ETS in TOEFLiBT and TOEFL CBT. In a study by Bejar, Douglas, Jamieson, Nissan, and Turner (2000), the implementation of still-image was tested in comparison to audio-only listening test. They outlined the still-image (pictorial listening test in this study) as a convenient way to anticipate the upcoming events while taking the test. When test-takers can envisage a general outline of the settings and the character(s) in the listening test, they would unquestionably have a better impression of what the test is about and which pieces of information are more substantial than others.

B. *Test-takers' Reactions over Using Different Modalities of the Listening Test*

The amount of test-takers' engagement with the video listening test has been investigated meticulously in different studies. Ockey (2007) found that students shown the minimum amount of engagement while taking the video listening test. On the other hand, Wagner (2007) investigated the test-takers' viewing rate and found that students showed 69% eye contact with the visual materials while taking the listening test. In another study, Wagner (2010b) argued that in his study, test-takers' declined watching the video prompts in order not to lose the track of the listening questions. He concluded that the total amount of test-takers' viewing rate was less than half of the test time.

A number of studies investigated the students' perceptions, attitudes and reactions over using different types of listening test. In some studies (e.g., Progoosh, 1996; Wagner, 2002; Sueyoshi and Hardison, 2005) students gave optimistic and constructive responses over using video listening test. Likewise, in another study, Wagner (2010a) concluded that students' strong reaction in favor of using video materials in listening test might be the reason for reducing test anxiety and apprehension. It was concluded that students became more attentive and observant while taking the video listening test.

Feak and Salehzadeh (2001) believed because of the provocative judgments over using or not using visual and pictorial materials in the listening test, more research is needed in order to deliver these prompts to students in different conditions. Although implementing video materials might lead to improve the face validity of the listening test, there are some potential reasons for not using the test by professional testing administrators: firstly, it is difficult to administer and challenging in execution. Secondly, it is believed that testing listening by integrating some visual materials might be equal to test something beyond the listening ability.

Visual and pictorial listening tests received robust criticism too. Some researchers (e.g., Bejar et al., 2000; Alderson, Clapham, and Wall, 1995; MacWilliam, 1986) believed that the distracting and sidetracking nature of the visual resources makes the test encumbering rather than facilitating. Brett (1997) argued that students became busy reading the test books and neglected watching the visual materials. Coniam (2001) and Ockey (2007) believed that sidetracking and distraction are other factors that affect test-takers in this kind of test. According to Buck (2001), the ability to comprehend the language similar to those of the target language domain is different from the ability to understand "subtle visual information" (p. 172).

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The current study intended to investigate the following research questions:

1. What is the test-takers' attitude over taking audio-only listening test?
2. What is the test-takers' attitude over taking pictorial listening test?
3. What is the test-takers' attitude over taking visual listening test?

IV. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. Participants and Setting

This was a part of a larger study in which 85 Iranian intermediate students were selected. Students aged 16 to 20 speak Persian as their mother tongue. In order to make the participants homogenized, the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency was administered and students ranked in intermediate level according to ACTFL proficiency guidelines.

B. Audio-only, Pictorial, and Visual Listening Tests

After taking the pre-test, students took three different kinds of listening test. In the first test, students took a listening test in the form of audio-only test in which no additional material was included. The audio-only test consisted of multiple choice test representing the conversation in the form of a dialogue between two speakers. After the audio-only test, test-takers took the second kind of listening test which was the pictorial listening test in which at the beginning of each section, a still image was provided. The purpose of the still image was to provide necessary information about the situation of the test. In the third listening test, students watch a video track before taking the listening test. All three tests were extracted from American English File proficiency test. The speakers in the listening test were all native speakers of English. Various topics were selected like shopping, conversation in the Hotel's reception desk, conversation at the check-in desk at the airport, and conversation in the restaurant.

C. Questionnaire

After taking the test, a 5-point scale questionnaire similar to the 5-point Likert Scale questionnaire was given to the test-takers. The current questionnaire (see appendix A) was organized by getting assistance from the questionnaire of development and validation by Lotfi (2010). The questions were modified in order to meet the criteria of this study. Questions were designed in order to acquire test-takers' reactions, perceptions and attitudes on taking three different types of listening test. The questionnaire was intended to analyze a range of different issues related to three different tests. Different issues like the ability to predict the content and also predicting the upcoming events was probed in the questionnaire. Students were asked about comparing the visual with pictorial listening test as far as prediction ability is concerned. Test-takers' opinions were collected regarding the better understanding and the usefulness of visual materials by watching the physical movements and facial gestures. Whether implementing the video test could promote understanding the difficult words with unfamiliar stress patterns and intonations was also scrutinized in the questionnaire.

The negative aspects of the video listening test were also examined to see whether students could maintain the main idea while taking the test. The sidetracking aspect of the video listening test was also a key feature in the questionnaire. Additionally, students were questioned over the matter of managing the time to see whether they had enough time in watching the video track and following the track of the questions.

D. Procedures

After taking the pre-test, Students with (z) scores of 1 standard deviation below and above the mean were selected. The number of participants was reduced to 80. After homogenizing the participants, three different test types were taken. The tests included multiple-choice test in three formats: audio-only, pictorial and visual listening test. The tests were all extracted and randomized from American English File proficiency test including a range of different topics representing those of a target language domain. After taking the test and experiencing different modalities of listening test, students were asked about their attitude regarding different issues which had been presented in all three tests. The responses were collected and the mean and standard deviation of all answers were analyzed in detail. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was also obtained by using Cronbach's alpha.

V. DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 represents the scores of each of thirty-one items of the questionnaire on a 5-point scale similar to the 5-point Likert Scale with three as the center point. According to Table 1, means above three reveal positive attitudes of test-takers and means below three indicate negative attitudes of test-takers. The mean of the overall questionnaire was 3.85 and the standard deviation was 0.17. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was $\alpha = 0.80$. Moreover, all of the items had item-total correlations of greater than 0.3. Therefore, the questionnaire items were reliably measuring the same construct.

The first research question sought to investigate the test-takers' attitude over taking audio-only listening test. First, consider the questions about audio-only test which are the questions 1, 9, 12, 13, 14, 20, 22, 25, and 26 (*It was difficult for me to predict the content of the test in listening to audio-only modality test, In Audio-only modality of listening test,*

it was difficult to relate what I heard with an earlier part of the listening test, In listening to audio-only modality test, I found it difficult to guess the meaning of unknown words by linking them to known words, In audio-only listening modality test, making a mental summary of information was difficult, In audio only modality of listening test, there was enough time to take notes while listening, I found it difficult to understand the listening tests in which there were too many unfamiliar words, I found it difficult to understand when speakers spoke too fast in audio-only test, I found the long audio-only listening text difficult to interpret, By thinking about the meaning of unfamiliar words in audio-only listening modality test, I got lost in the middle of the test). These questions had negative meanings investigating the hardness of audio-only test. The mean of these questions were higher than the central point (mean = 4.24, 4.40, 4.16, 4.53, 3.70, 4.39, 4.29, 4.38, 4.00) indicating that the attitude of students toward the audio-only test was totally negative (overall mean = 4.23). Figure 1 shows the results more conspicuously.

TABLE1.
QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS ABOUT TEST-TAKERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS AUDIO-ONLY, PICTORIAL AND VIDEO TESTS

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	'Strongly Disagree' ratings	'Disagree' ratings	'Undecided' ratings	'Agree' ratings	'Strongly Agree' ratings
1	4.24	0.57	0	0	6	49	25
2	1.20	0.40	16	64	0	0	0
3	4.89	0.31	0	0	0	17	63
4	4.33	0.47	0	0	0	54	26
5	3.78	0.76	0	0	34	30	16
6	4.24	0.71	0	0	13	35	32
7	3.83	0.68	0	0	27	40	13
8	4.89	0.31	0	0	0	29	71
9	4.40	0.62	0	0	6	36	38
10	4.41	1.07	4	4	0	19	53
11	3.81	0.95	54	26	0	0	0
12	4.16	0.73	0	0	16	35	29
13	4.53	0.50	0	0	0	38	42
14	3.70	0.66	0	0	33	38	9
15	4.55	0.50	0	0	0	36	44
16	3.96	1.24	4	13	0	28	35
17	2.38	0.91	11	41	15	13	0
18	4.55	0.50	0	0	0	36	14
19	4.61	0.49	0	0	0	31	49
20	4.39	0.49	0	0	0	49	31
21	4.38	0.76	0	0	14	22	44
22	4.29	0.76	0	0	15	27	38
23	2.36	0.95	12	42	11	15	0
24	3.09	0.75	0	19	35	26	0
25	4.38	0.62	0	0	6	38	36
26	4.00	0.65	0	0	18	45	17
27	3.33	0.77	0	15	24	41	0
28	4.05	0.98	0	12	0	40	28
29	1.64	0.71	40	29	11	0	0
30	3.90	0.64	0	0	21	46	13
31	3.36	1.33	11	9	19	22	19
Total of Responses			152	274	324	935	785

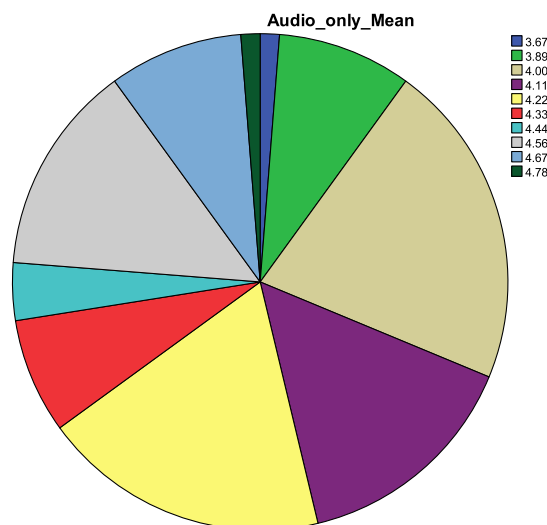


Figure 1. The Mean Differences of the Audio-only Mode Questions

The second research question sought to investigate the test-takers' attitude over taking pictorial listening test. Consider the questions about the pictorial test which are the questions 2, 3, 8, 11 and 21. Look at questions 2 and 11 (*Before listening, it was difficult for me to predict from the still-image modality test what I would hear, Listening to still-image test seemed to be more challenging*). The means of these questions were below the central point (mean = 1.20, 1.33) revealing that the attitude of students towards pictorial test was negative. In contrast, consider questions 3, 8, and 21 (*Still-image helped me to visualize the situation in which the conversation occurred, In still-image modality of listening test, there was enough time to imagine the topic and analyze the question, Video and still- image modality tests made the overall comprehension easier*).

The means of these questions were higher than the central point (mean = 4.89, 4. 89, 4.38) meaning that the attitude of students towards pictorial test was positive. Therefore, the attitude of students towards pictorial test was totally positive. Figure 2 shows the results more clearly.

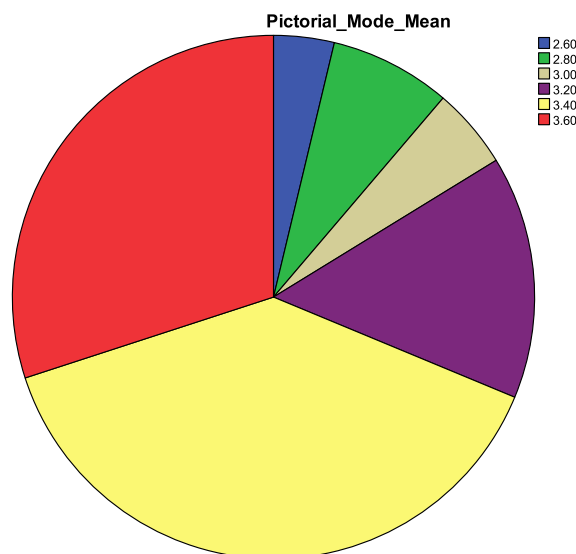


Figure 2. The Mean Differences of the Pictorial Mode Questions

The third research question sought to investigate the test-takers' attitude over taking visual listening test. Finally, consider the questions about the video test. The means of questions 4, 5, 6, 7, 21, 24, 27, 30 and 31 (*Watching video during the test helped me to understand the whole context better, By watching the video materials during the test, I could predict the upcoming incidents better, By looking at facial gestures and lip movements during the video modality test, comprehending the topic was easier, Understanding the questions which were related to content was easier in video modality listening test, Video and still- image modality tests made the overall comprehension easier, Video listening test made the understanding of unfamiliar stress and intonation patterns easier, Listening to video modality of the listening test made the consistency of the flow of speech easier, The problem of unclear sound resulting from poor quality speakers was obviated by getting help from the video track, Being able to see who the speakers were made me more interested to follow the video modality of the listening test more attentively*) were higher than the central point (mean = 4.33, 3.74, 4.24, 3.83, 4.38, 3.09, 3.33, 3.90, 3.36) meaning that the attitude of students towards video test was positive. In contrast consider the questions 10, 15, 16, 18, 19, and 28 (*When listening to video modality listening test, I missed the main idea of the passage by paying attention to the details, In video modality listening test, note taking was very difficult because of time spending on watching the movie, I preferred to ignore the video material in order to take notes on the questions, After video listening test, it was difficult to evaluate the overall accuracy of my comprehension, I was distracted many times during the video modality of the listening test, Paying attention to video modality of the listening test made me ignore paying attention to the questions*).

As it is clear, these questions investigated the hardness of the video test and how the students ignored the video or how they were distracted by watching the video. The means of these questions was higher than the central point (mean = 4.41, 4.55, 3.96, 4.55, 4.61, 3.33) revealing that the attitude of the students towards the video test was negative. At the same time, the means of questions 17, 23, 29 (*Guessing the difficult parts of the context was easier by paying attention to the video, Video listening test made the understanding of fast conversations easier, I found it easy to reduce my anxiety before doing the video listening test*) was lower than three (mean = 2.38, 2.36, 1.64) indicating that the attitude of students towards these questions was negative. Therefore, it can be reported that students' attitude towards video test was totally negative. Figure 3 represents the results more noticeably.

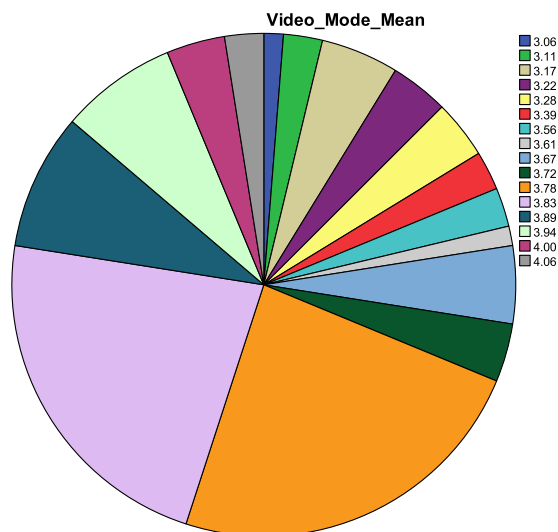


Figure 3. The Mean Differences of the Video Mode Questions

Figures 4 and 5 represent the full description of the frequency and mean of pictorial and visual listening test respectively.

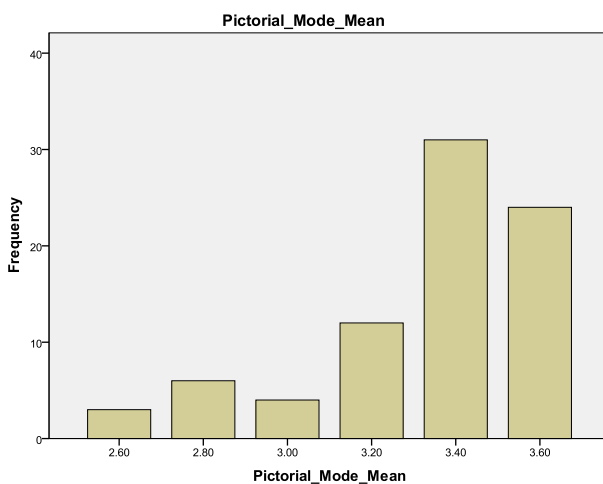


Figure 4. Description of frequency and mean of the pictorial mode

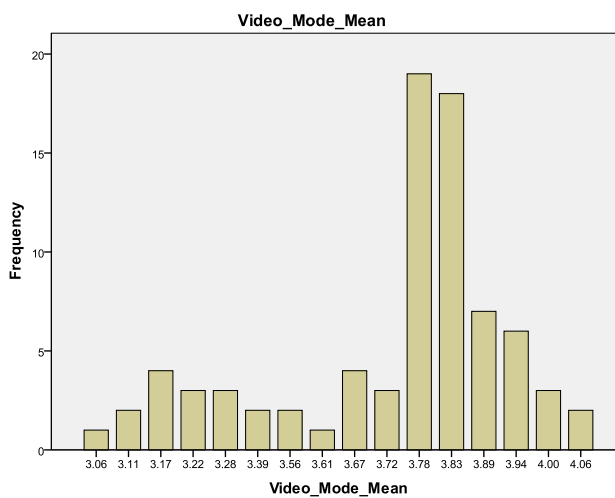


Figure 4. Description of frequency and mean of the visual mode

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

According to the results of the questionnaire, Test-takers' attitude toward taking the audio-only listening test was completely negative. These reactions are manifested in different questions.

Test-takers believed that while taking the audio-only test, predicting the content of the passage and relating different parts of the text were difficult. Furthermore, test-takers believe that audio-only listening test is not a suitable type in making comprehensive mental summary as it was difficult for them to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words. They also confirmed the fact that understanding long passages with fast pace of speech was a laborious task.

Interestingly, test-takers reacted positively toward the pictorial listening test in which a still image was included. According to the results of the survey, it is concluded that pictures in the form of still images can be a useful technique to predict and visualize the upcoming events. Moreover, in the pictorial listening test, students had enough time to imagine the topic and analyze the questions. Nearly all test-takers were unanimous that both visual and pictorial listening test were more challenging. Test-takers also believed that overall comprehension of the pictorial listening was easier.

Students showed mixed feelings regarding the visual listening test. Totally they reacted negatively toward taking the visual listening test. On one hand, students believed that visual listening test makes the overall comprehension of the passage easier and it provides a better chance of anticipating the upcoming events in the test. Body movements and facial gestures were also considered to be an advantage which made the content related questions easier to comprehend. The consistency of the flow of speech in the visual listening test was easier as long as this type of test made the recognition of unfamiliar words and phrases with difficult pronunciation, stress pattern and intonation easier. These findings are in agreement with the findings of the previous studies (e.g., Progosh, 1996; Wagner, 2002; Sueyoshi and Hardison, 2005; Wagner, 2010a). The problem of poor quality speakers has been obviated by the use of visual materials.

The results of this study corroborated the fact that test-takers missed the main idea of the passage by paying attention to the details of the questions in the visual listening test. According to the questionnaire, as long as note-taking was so difficult in the visual test, test-takers preferred not to take the notes. After taking the visual test, students remained hesitant about the overall accuracy of the comprehension. The majority of students believed that they had been distracted many times during taking the visual listening test and it was the main source of their anxiety. Some of the students believed that by watching the video track, they had forgotten following the questions.

The current study validates the fact that although the inclusion of visual materials may increase the face validity by helping students in understanding the difficult words and phrases, but hinders the test-taking process as students become confused and sidetracked over what to do during the test. Therefore, the use of such devices should be practiced cautiously.

APPENDIX. THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Student,

Please state your opinions about three types of listening tests that you had before. Please put a check mark (✓) in one of the spaces for each statement which are about three different modalities of listening test: audio-only, pictorial mode and the video mode. Your sincere contribution will help us to improve the quality of instruction in your institution. Indeed your opinions remain confidential.

Thank you very much indeed for your cooperation in advance.

GUIDE TO THE TABLE: SA: STRONGLY AGREE, A: AGREE, U: UNDECIDED, D: DISAGREE, SD: STRONGLY DISAGREE

Items	SD	D	U	A	SA
1. It was difficult for me to predict the content of the test in listening to audio-only modality test.					
2. Before listening, it was difficult for me to predict from the still-image modality test what I would hear.					
3. Still-image helped me to visualize the situation in which the conversation occurred.					
4. Watching video during the test helped me to understand the whole context better.					
5. By watching the video materials during the test, I could predict the upcoming incidents better.					
6. By looking at facial gestures and lip movements during the video modality test, comprehending the topic was easier.					
7. Understanding the questions which were related to content was easier in video modality listening test.					
8. In still-image modality of listening test, there was enough time to imagine the topic and analyze the questions.					
9. In Audio-only modality of listening test, it was difficult to relate what I heard with an earlier part of the listening test.					
10. When listening to video modality listening test, I missed the main idea of the passage by paying attention to the details.					
11. Listening to still-image and video modality tests seemed to be more challenging.					
12. In listening to audio-only modality test, I found it difficult to guess the meaning of unknown words by linking them to known words.					
13. In audio-only listening modality test, making a mental summary of information was difficult.					
14. In audio only modality of listening test, there was enough time to take notes while listening.					
15. In video modality listening test, note taking was very difficult because of time spending on watching the movie.					
16. I preferred to ignore the video material in order to take notes on the questions.					
17. Guessing the difficult parts of the context was easier by paying attention to the video.					
18. After video listening test, it was difficult to evaluate the overall accuracy of my comprehension.					
19. I was distracted many times during the video modality of the listening test.					
20. I found it difficult to understand the listening tests in which there were too many unfamiliar words.					
21. Video and still- image modality tests made the overall comprehension easier.					
22. I found it difficult to understand when speakers spoke too fast in audio-only test.					
23. Video listening test made the understanding of fast conversations easier.					
24. Video listening test made the understanding of unfamiliar stress and intonation patterns easier.					
25. I found the long audio-only listening text difficult to interpret.					
26. By thinking about the meaning of unfamiliar words in audio-only listening modality test, I got lost in the middle of the test.					
27. Listening to video modality of the listening test made the consistency of the flow of speech easier.					
28. Paying attention to video modality of the listening test made me ignore paying attention to the questions.					
29. I found it easy to reduce my anxiety before doing the video listening test.					
30. The problem of unclear sound resulting from poor quality speakers was obviated by getting help from the video track.					
31. Being able to see who the speakers were made me more interested to follow the video modality of the listening test more attentively.					

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