Osaka JALT Journal

Vol. 10 (2023)

http://www.osakajalt.org/journal

Student Learning Attitudes in Voice-Over and Role-Play Film Projects

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Abstract

Films can be used as a creative resource in English language teaching. This paper investigates learning attitudes among students who completed voice-over and role-play film projects while enrolled in a non-credit English course. Students who participated in the film projects completed a survey, which reflected positive learning attitudes regarding the use of voice-over and role-play film projects.

Introduction

In 2019, the global film industry was estimated to have brought in over 100 billion dollars in revenue (Rubin, 2020). Although Hollywood's English language films make up the majority of the world's leading film titles, their audiences have become international. Over two thirds of Hollywood studio revenue comes from international markets (Brook, 2014). The global and diverse audiences for films have thus led to opportunities for films to be enjoyed in ways that go beyond simple and passive entertainment. Films, for example, have been pointed out as useful and creative classroom resources in English learning classrooms (Sheffrin, 2020). In addition, films and the use of videos are also crucial in that they can be motivating tools for students that help spark and create unique and authentic language learning exercises and activities (Bahrani & Tam, 2011; Bahrani & Tam, 2012; Li, 2009; Stempleski & Tomalin, 1990).

The purpose of this paper is to investigate learning attitudes regarding the use of film projects in an English learning classroom. Students participated in either a voice-over film project, in which they recorded their voices in sync with a movie clip, or a movie role-play project, in which students recorded themselves performing a scene from a movie clip.

Background

Voice-over and role-play tasks using films can be useful activities in English language classrooms. While the act of doing a voice-over, also referred to as "dubbing" for the purpose of this paper, in which the audio track of a film clip is re-recorded with student voices, involves many steps, it has important pedagogical purposes. According to Burston (2005), voice-overs not only "foster more native-like speech delivery" but the act of syncing voices with a screen while paying attention to "the display of gestures and facial expressions, make it much easier for students to put themselves into the persona of the characters whose voices they are dubbing" (p. 81). Talavan and Costal (2017) also point out that the process of dubbing a film clip has numerous language learning benefits because students use both receptive and productive language skills. A study done at Kanda University of International Studies using voice-overs also found that students reported high levels of satisfaction with voice-over activities as it helped with learning intonation, pronunciation, and accents in addition to the benefits of learning and practicing along with the "natural speed of native speakers" (MacKenzie, 2009-2011, p. 151).

While voice-overs serve many learning purposes, so does the use of role-play tasks from films, also referred to as "film dialogues" for the purpose of this paper, in which students record themselves performing a scene from a movie clip. Film role-plays are a method of introducing drama in the English language classroom that help facilitate a learner-centered approach. According to Davies (1990), film role-plays aid students to "become more confident in their use of English by experiencing the language in operation" as well as the opportunity to experience "an effective variation on the method of Total Physical Response" (p. 97). Belliveau and Kim (2013) also outline benefits of drama in language learning as an important tool to introduce different forms of language, emotions, and active cooperation among students. Film role-plays in particular were also shown to be beneficial in a study among Chilean 7th grade students. In the study, students displayed high levels of positive attitudes and greater enthusiasm towards speaking English after watching film clips and performing scripted role-plays (Castro and Diaz, 2019).

The steps of listening and repetition involved in the use of voice-overs and role-plays in the classroom may also be compared to the practice of shadowing. Shadowing in the English language classroom refers to the practice of listening and repeating language. Shadowing is a particularly effective technique in speech and comprehension because of its link with "the study of human higher mental processes" and close role with producing "speech input into speech output" (Marslen-Wilson, 1985). While shadowing can be broken into several techniques, the use of videos or films with shadowing can also be useful. Acton (1984) describes how shadowing (referred to as "tracking" in his article) real-life conversations or "a model on videotape or television" can successfully help English learners not only listen, repeat, and "mirror" pronunciation but also improve other important language features such as intonation, stress, and rhythm while also picking up non-verbal communication such as "posture, body movements, gestures, and facial expression." According to Acton (1984), shadowing real-life interactions or videos can play an important role in helping to improve pronunciation and overall intelligibility in English language learners.

The use of shadowing, which has taken on significant roles in Japanese classrooms as a "strong and effective exercise" (Horiyama, 2012), has also been explored in Japanese classrooms, specifically with films. According to Saito, Nagasawa, & Ishikawa (2010), shadowing techniques with film, for example, can help students focus and improve their speech with regards to intonation, rhythm, and stress. This was examined in a study by Saito, Nagasawa, & Ishikawa (2010), in which students reported positive attitudes after viewing a film, practicing shadowing, and participating in a role-play of a movie scene.

Research Questions

The researcher, who was interested in students' views (learner attitudes) of their respective film projects, looked at the following research questions below:

1. What are the learning attitudes of students after participating in the voice-over film project?

2. What are the learning attitudes of students after participating in the role-play film project?

3. What are the learning attitude similarities and differences (if any) among students after participating in their respective film projects (voice-over or role-play)?

Method

The participants in this study (n=51, males=13, females=37) were all first year Management Department students of a Japanese university enrolled in weekly 90-minute, small group, non-credit English classes with different English learning experiences. While 19% of respondents said they had started studying English before 7 years old, the majority (56%) said they had started studying English between the ages of 12 and 15 years old when English study is a compulsory academic subject in Japan.

For the purpose of this study, all student participants who were enrolled in the non-credit English classes were split into two separate groups, an A group (n=27), in which students participated in the voice-over film project, and a B group (n=24), in

which students participated in the role-play film project. In both A and B student groups, students were additionally split into small groups of two to five students with the option of choosing between two different film clips (*Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* or *Toy Story*) for the purpose of their respective film projects. The two different film clips, which were both between two to three minutes in length, were chosen by the researcher because of their many dramatic sequences and rich language opportunities – factors that were deemed to be ideal for the purpose of use in voice-over and role-play film activities. Both student A and B groups were given four weeks to select a film clip, practice in small groups, and then either record a voice-over of their chosen film clip (group A) or record themselves performing a role-play of their chosen film clip (group B). In both A and B groups, students were given the accompanying movie scripts for their chosen film clips and given practice time to focus on intonation and pronunciation in preparation for their final voice-over and role-play video recordings. Students used their smartphones to record their performances and were also given guidance on how to use the video recording features on their smartphones. After students completed and shared their recordings, they completed learners' attitudes surveys (see Appendix A, Survey A and B) that were adapted from surveys used by Sauvignon and Wang (2003) and Yoshida et al. (2012) and chosen by the researcher due to the researcher's familiarity with the surveys in the context of small groups of university students participating in weekly non-credit English courses (Sheffrin & Vakhnenko, 2020). Although the surveys used in Sauvignon and Wang (2003) and Yoshida et al. (2012) were used to examine beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes towards communicative language teaching practices, the researcher in this study adapted the surveys to investigate student learning attitudes in the context of participation in voice-over and role-play film projects. Questions used in the adapted surveys were identical for both voice-over and role-play project groups except for questions in which students were asked about their specific film project tasks ("voice-overs" and "dubbing" for group A and "movie dialogues" and "role-plays" for group B). The surveys were given in a bilingual Japanese and English format with responses using a Likert scale from 1-5 (1 - strongly disagree, 5 - strongly agree). Students were also encouraged to write comments (in either Japanese or English) for their responses in the surveys. In order to analyze and compare the results, the researcher looked at questions that received the top five highest and top five lowest mean scores for both project groups. The researcher chose to look at questions with the five highest and lowest mean scores as a method of screening for an overview of responses that had the highest degrees of approval and disapproval among students.

Results for Research Question 1 - What are the learning attitudes of students after participating in the voice-over film project?

Questions that asked students about their attitudes towards learning English as an entertaining activity (Question 19), movies as a useful tool for learning about culture (Question 20), beliefs about the difficulty of doing a voice-over task (Question 29), and the desire to speak or sound like native English speakers (Question 10 and Question 5) were all among the top five survey questions that had the highest mean scores (Question 19, mean=4.7, Question 10, mean=4.7, Question 20, mean=4.5, Question 29, mean=4.4, and Question 5, mean=4.4) and all had high percentages (over 87%) of students who answered that they strongly agreed or agreed with each question.

Figure 1
An Overview of the Questions with the Highest Mean Scores in the Voice-Over Film Project Group
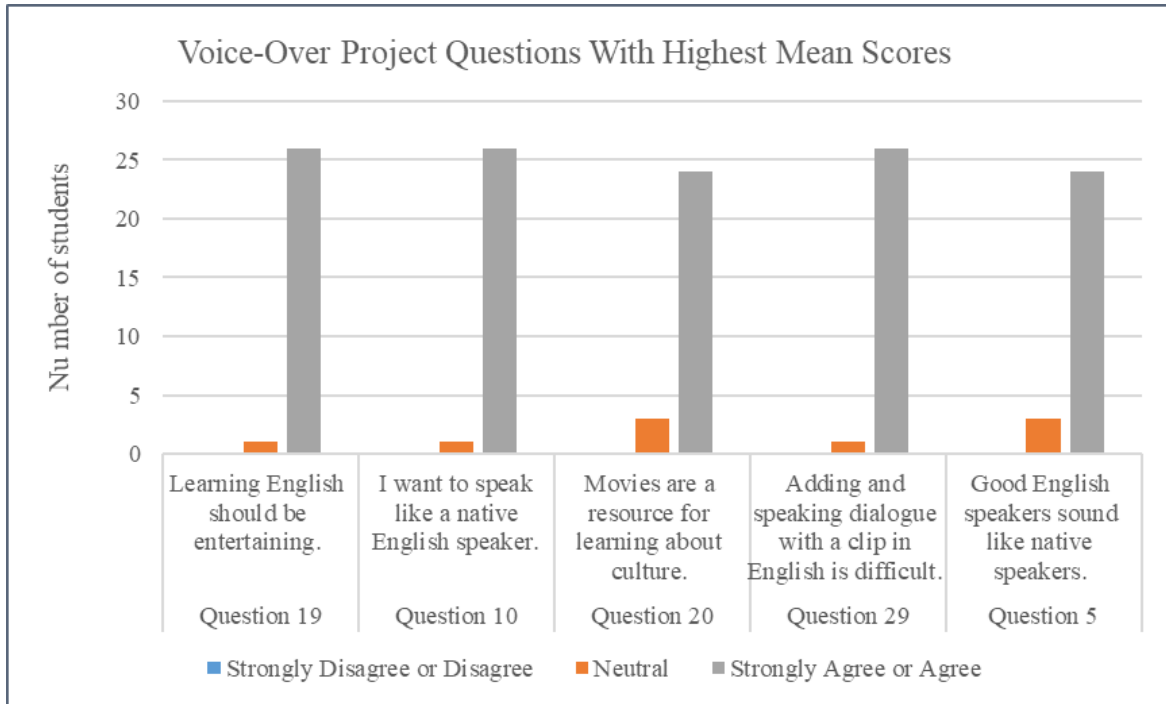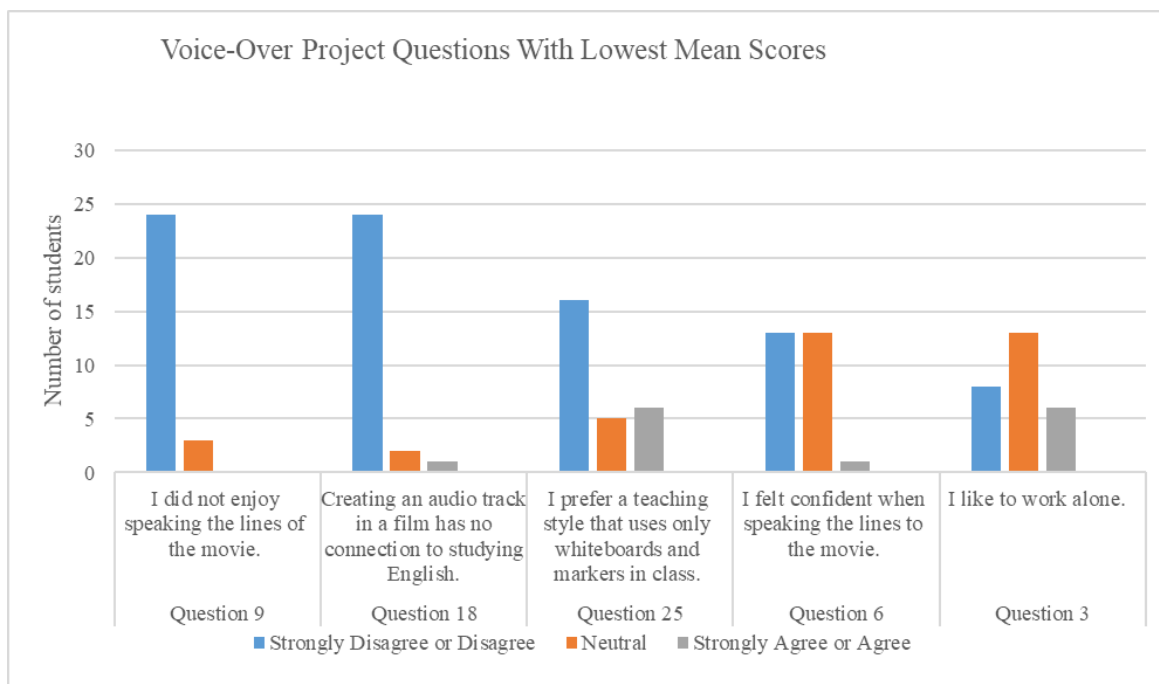

Note. Original results are included in Appendix A.

       Questions that asked students about their attitudes towards working alone (Question 3), preferences for traditional teaching activities (Question 25), voice-over task non-enjoyment (Question 9), beliefs that creating a voice-over track had no connection to studying English (Question 18), and confidence while doing a voice-over task (Question 6) were all among the top five survey questions that had the lowest mean scores (Question 3, mean=2.8, Question 6, mean=2.4 Question 25, mean=2.4, Question 9, mean=1.6, Question 18, mean=1.7) and all had low percentages (under 22%) of students who answered that they strongly agreed or agreed with each question as shown in figure 2 below.

Figure 2
An Overview of the Questions with the Lowest Mean Scores in the Voice-Over Film Project Group

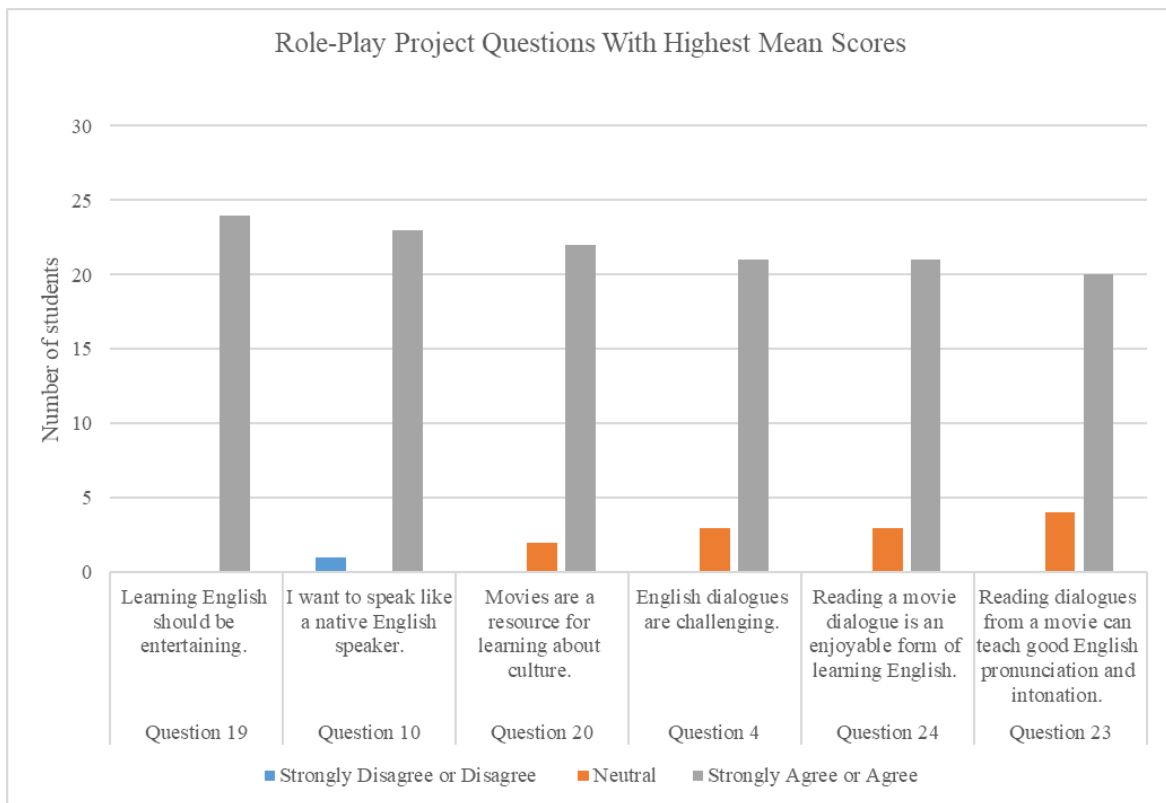
Note. Original results are included in Appendix A.

Student learning attitudes from students who participated in the voice-over film project were also reflected in the high response rate from students who were asked to fill in comments freely in their surveys upon completion of the voice-over task. Altogether, 92% of students (*n*=25) wrote in comments (Appendix B, Table 3). Many students who wrote in positive comments about doing a voice-over task stated that doing a voice-over project was an entertaining and fun way to learn English (Question 19 and Question 9) and that they enjoyed working on the task in groups (Question 3). One student, for example, wrote, "This project was a lot of fun because I was happy to be able to work with the group to create a scene." Other student comments also reflected student enjoyment of the task (Question 19 and 9) while also signaling their openness to doing creative tasks that went beyond traditional teaching methods (Question 25). Another student wrote, for example, "I was able to learn everyday phrases while having fun." Similarly, student attitudes about the connection of creating a voice-over track to English learning (Question 18) were also reflected through student comments which pointed out that their pronunciation and intonation improved through the voice-over task. According to one student, for example, "My pronunciation improved after listening to English many times in order to make the recording," while another added, "I thought it was good that by speaking the English movie lines, I was able to better understand about intonation." Similarly, less positive comments such as, "It was difficult to work to match the lines with the video," and another who wrote, "The speed at which they spoke English was fast and difficult. This project is very difficult for me," were a reflection of attitudes about the difficulty and lack of confidence while completing the voice-over task (Question 29 and Question 19). Other comments, however, echoed sentiments from students that though the voice-over task may have made them feel uncomfortable, there

was still educational value. As one student pointed out, "It was embarrassing, but I had fun. I think English voice-overs are effective for English learning."

Results for Research Question 2 - What are the learning attitudes of students after participating in the role-play film project?

Questions that asked students about their attitudes towards learning English as an entertaining activity (Question 19), the desire to speak like a native English speaker (Question 10), movies as a useful tool for learning about culture (Question 20), the difficulty of doing an English dialogue task (Question 4), and attitudes that reading movie dialogues were an enjoyable form of English that could be useful for teaching pronunciation and intonation (Question 23 and Question 24) were among the top survey questions (Questions 10 & 20 and Questions 23 & Questions 24 were tied in mean scores) that had the highest mean scores (Question 19, mean=4.8, Question 10, mean=4.6, Question 20, mean=4.6, Question 4, mean =4.5, Question 24, mean=4.4, and Question 23, mean=4.4) and all had high percentages (over 83%) of students who answered that they strongly agreed or agreed with each question.

Figure 3
An Overview of the Questions with the Highest Mean Scores in the Role-Play Film Project Group
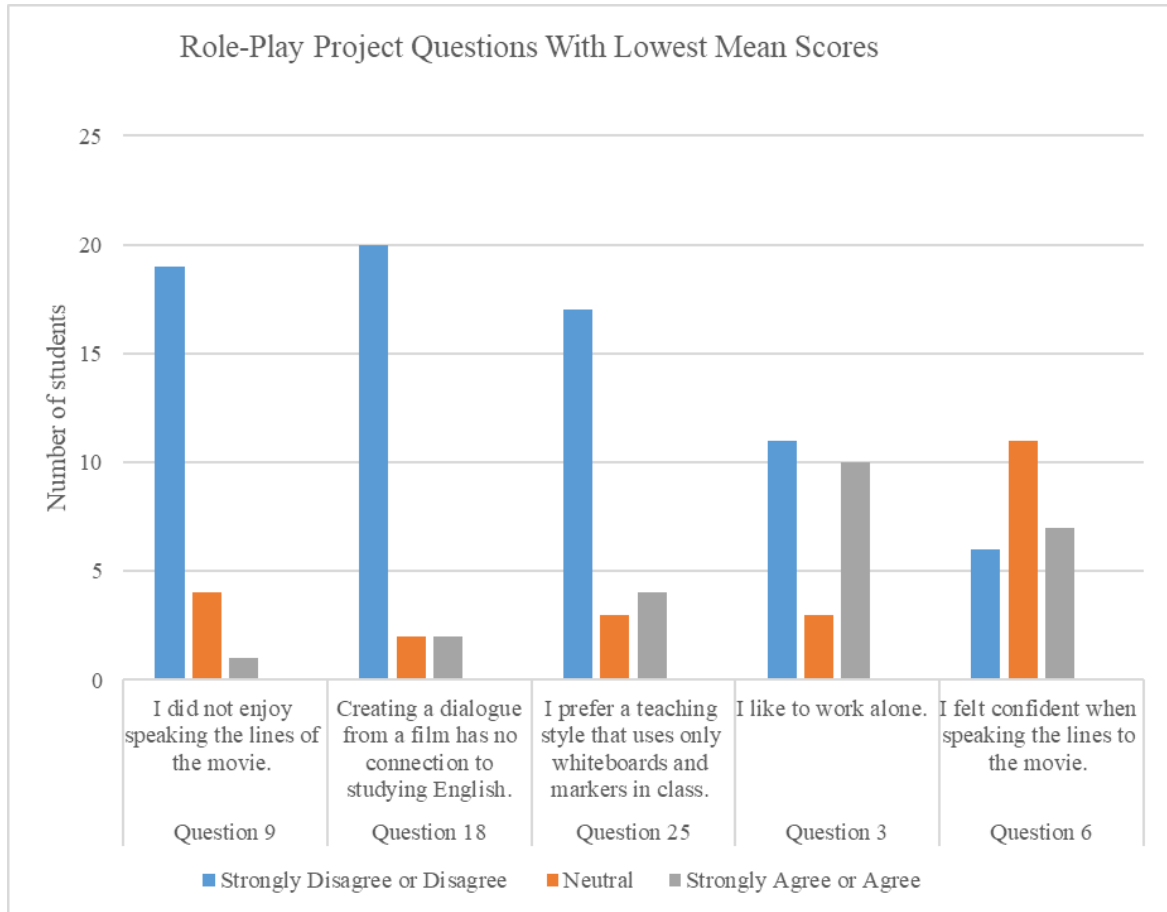

Note. Original results are included in Appendix A.

Questions that asked students about their attitudes towards their non-enjoyment of reading movie dialogues (Question 9), their perceived attitudes about a lack of connection with movie dialogues and English learning (Question 18), preferences for traditional teaching activities (Question 25), attitudes regarding working alone (Question 3), and confidence while completing a movie dialogue task (Question 6)

were all among the top five survey questions that had the lowest mean scores (Question 9, mean=1.7, Question 18, mean=1.9, Question 25, mean=2.2, Question 3, mean=2.9, and Question 6, mean=3.0) and all had low percentages (under 41%) of students who answered that they strongly agreed or agreed with each statement.

Figure 4

An Overview of the Questions with the Lowest Mean Scores in the Role-Play Film Project Group

Note. Original results are included in Appendix A.

Similar to the voice-over group project, student learning attitudes among students who participated in the role-play film project were also reflected in survey comments (Appendix B, Table 4). While lack of confidence and task difficulty (Question 4 and Question 6) among many students were reflected through comments that spoke about embarrassment ("It was very embarrassing") and nervousness ("I felt nervous speaking the lines of the movie…"), many student comments reflected positively about their enjoyment while role playing scenes from a movie (Question 9, Question 19, and Question 24) and how they felt that doing so was beneficial to their English study (Question 18 and Question 23). One student reflected, for example, "This project was a fun way to learn and speak English fluently," while another student also commented, "It was difficult to match the pronunciation with the movie, but it was fun and I was able to learn about pronunciation." Other student comments also touched on the sense of fulfillment from working collaboratively (Question 3) with beneficial classroom

activities that went beyond traditional use of whiteboards and markers (Question 25). One student commented, for example, "I was able to have fun learning English in a group, so I think it was good to participate in this project," while another wrote, "I thought this was a useful class because I was able to understand about English pronunciation, speaking speed, and emotions." Other student comments also acknowledged that though role-playing scenes from a movie was difficult, they enjoyed the task and thought it was useful for their English learning ("It was fun, but also difficult. This project was good because it was a natural way to learn English").

Results for Research Question 3 - What are the learning attitude similarities and differences (if any) among students after participating in their respective film projects (voice-over or role-play)?

Student learning attitudes among students who participated in the voice-over and role-play film projects shared similarities. In both the voice-over project and role-play project groups, Questions 3, 6, 9, 18, and 25 concerning attitudes about preferences for working alone, preferences for classrooms with traditional teaching activities, confidence and non-enjoyment while doing their respective project tasks, and finally, their tasks' respective non-connection to learning English all had the lowest mean scores as displayed in table one.

Table 1
Voice-Over and Role-Play Film Project Question Comparison of Lowest Mean Scores

	Voice-Over Project	Role-Play Film Project
Survey Questions	3, 6, 9, 18, 25	3, 6, 9, 18, 25

However, questions that had the highest mean scores were slightly different for the two groups as displayed in Table 2.

Table 2
Voice-Over and Role-Play Film Project Question Comparison of Highest Mean Scores

	Voice-Over Project	Role-Play Film Project
Survey Questions	5, 10, 19, 20, 29	4, 10, 19, 20 23, 24

Among voice-over group students, Question 29 (Adding and speaking dialogue with a clip in English is difficult) was among the questions with the highest agreement among students (96% strongly agreed or agreed), while this was not true for the role-play film project group where there was a lower percentage of agreement (82% strongly agreed or agreed). On the other hand, a slightly higher percentage of students in the role-play film project group agreed with the statement "English dialogues are challenging" (Question 4, 86% strongly agreed or agreed) compared to voice-over group students, "English voice-overs are challenging" (Question 4, 84% strongly agreed or agreed). Students in the role-play film group, however, had higher responses regarding the use of reading movie dialogues as a useful tool for teaching good pronunciation and intonation as well as being an enjoyable method of learning English

(Question 23 and Question 24) compared to voice-over group students who were asked the same about dubbing movie clips. Both voice-over and role-play film group students gave positive responses regarding movies as a resource for learning about culture (Question 20) while sharing a desire to speak like native English speakers (Question 10).

Discussion

Voice-over and role-play film groups displayed similar learning attitudes to their respective film projects. While students were divided into separate groups in order to participate in different film projects, the similar results may be a reflection of the positive and educational use of films as a shared medium among students in both the voice-over and role-play project groups.

A significant number (44%, *n*=11) of students in the voice-over film group, however, wrote comments with sentiments that said their project was "difficult" compared to just 25% (*n*=6) of role-play film group students (Appendix B, Table 3 and Table 4). This difference between the two groups may have been an indicator that students in the voice-over group struggled with the extra requirement of matching their voices in sync with a video clip on a screen. The technology requirement with using smartphones to record film actions on a screen, for example, along with the assigned language task, may have been difficult for students without sufficient time to practice. It is also possible that working in a small group to quickly sync voices to a film clip with many different speaking roles may have created a distracting, stressful and tense environment for students in which the perceived difficulty of their assigned task could not be completely ignored. These reasons may have contributed to the significant number of students in the voice-over film project who wrote in their comments about the difficulty of their project.

In contrast, the lower number of students in the role-play film group that commented about the difficulty of their project may be a result of the fewer steps involved in participating in a role-play. While voice-over project group students needed to practice both reading from a script while recording and synching their voices to actions on a screen, students in the role-play film group only needed to practice reading and then film themselves acting out their film scene. A number of students in the role-play film group also filmed themselves role-playing their scenes using props and aids such as chairs, desks, and clothing items that may have better helped students focus on internalizing the roles of their chosen characters in their role-play tasks. This difference may have contributed to less perceived project difficulty among role-play group students compared to voice-over group students. This difference, along with the positive learner attitudes from role-play film group students concerning the use of reading movie dialogues as an enjoyable tool for learning pronunciation and intonation (Question 23 and Question 24), may possibly be interpreted to mean that students doing role-plays were better able to see a connection with their project as being related to their English learning. Students in the role-play film group may have felt less burdened by the technology requirements of their project and more easily able to focus on the enjoyment of performing a film role-play. This may have been reflected in other comments left by students in the role-play film group which mentioned enjoyment of the task of acting ("I had never used English in any acting before, so it was fun") and the greater feelings of confidence ("I was able to feel confident speaking English in front of the camera. I realized this project helped me feel less shy about speaking English").

Conclusion

Students in both the voice-over film project and role-play film project groups displayed similar learning attitudes regarding the use of films in their classrooms and the perceived usefulness of voice-overs and role-plays in English learning. Students in both project groups indicated preferences that were supportive of the use of English language films and projects in classrooms. The positive use of films through voice-overs and role-plays among student learning attitudes in this study was similarly demonstrated in previous studies such as MacKenzie (2009-2011) and Saito, Nagasawa, & Ishikawa (2011). One possible difference in this study between MacKenzie (2009-2011) and Saito, Nagasawa, & Ishikawa (2011), however, may be reflected in some of the specific feedback from students which pointed out the difficulty of their projects. Compared to the voice-over film project, fewer numbers of students in the role-play film project cited project difficulty in survey comments. In addition, while students in the role-play film project displayed higher levels of support regarding the usefulness and enjoyment of reading dialogues as compared to voice-over group students who were asked the same about dubbing a film clip, the small sample size of students in this study and short project length make it difficult to conclude that any single approach using films (voice-overs vs. role-plays) is more effective than the other. Further investigation with a larger number of participants and a longer length of time is necessary to make definitive conclusions regarding learner attitudes from voice-over and role-play film projects. Overall, both voice-over and role-play activities were shown to display similar learning attitudes supportive of the use of films in classrooms as measured through survey questions and student comments.

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Appendix A: *Data for Group A (Voice-Over Project) and Group B (Role-Play Film Project) Questionnaire*

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZINOWq9d1s0nYDF0sDTuAXhlT0oPM9f9/view?usp=share_link

Appendix B: *Voice-Over and Role-Play Project Comments*

Table 3

Voice-Over Project Comments (Group A)

Number	Comments
1	It was difficult.
2	The timing was difficult, and my speaking speed couldn't keep up with the images.
3	This project was a lot of fun because I was happy to be able to work with the group to create a scene.
4	The speed at which they spoke English was fast and difficult. This project is very difficult for me
5	My pronunciation improved after listening to English many times in order to make the recording.
6	I was familiar with the movie, so it was both easy and difficult.
7	It was difficult to match my voice to the mouth movements in the movie, but I had a lot of fun working with everyone.
8	I was able to learn everyday phrases while having fun.

9	I thought it was good that by speaking the English movie lines, I was able to better understand about intonation.
10	I enjoyed it
11	It was fun to work with a group and do the voice over. I enjoyed cooperation.
12	It was fun to see everyone perform.
13	This was my first time, so it was difficult, but it was good for my learning.
14	It was good to cooperate with everyone. It was fun.
15	It was difficult to work to match the lines with the video.
16	It was great having fun with this project. It was easy for our imagination because we had all seen and heard of the movie.
17	It was fun
18	I think that it was a fun project that was good for improving my English. That's good.
19	It was my first time doing a voice over so the timing was difficult.
20	Intonation was difficult.
21	It was embarrassing, but I had fun. I think English voice-overs are effective for English learning.

22	It was fun project!!
23	It was very hard, but it was good having fun with my group.
24	The voice-over timing was difficult.
25	It was difficult but it was not bad

Note. Comments written in Japanese were translated into English.

Table 4

Role-Play Film Project Comments (Group B)

Number	Comments
1	I thought that people who work as voice actors, who use their emotions in their lines, were amazing.
2	I thought that this project was a fun and good way to learn English.
3	At first I was anxious because I didn't understand the pronunciation, but while practicing, I was able to have good pronunciation.
4	The English pronunciation was difficult, but I was able to learn new words and have a good experience.
5	I thought that I could have fun learning English through a movie I was familiar with.
6	It was very difficult, but I had fun.

7	I had never used English in any acting before, so it was fun.
8	This project was a fun way to learn and speak English fluently.
9	It was very fun but I liker English talk than ths project. (sic)
10	It was my first time imitating the lines of a movie, its pronunciation, and doing acting, so it was a good experience.
11	Honestly, I felt nervous speaking the lines of the movie, but after trying it out, I felt good about my sense of accomplishment.
12	I thought this was a useful class because I was able to understand about English pronunciation, speaking speed, and emotions.
13	I was able to feel confident speaking English in front of the camera. I realized this project helped me feel less shy about speaking English.
14	It was difficult, but fun.
15	I learned English words that I normally don't use.
16	I thought it was difficult at first, but I was able to have fun.
17	It was difficult to match the pronunciation with the movie, but it was fun and I was able to learn about pronunciation.
18	It was very embarrassing.
19	It was fun, but also difficult. This project was good because it was a natural way to learn English.

20	I enjoyed project. (sic)
21	I was able to have fun learning English in a group, so I think it was good to participate in this project.
22	This projet is very interesting. (sic)
23	It was embarrassing.
24	It was very difficult, but I did fun! (sic)

Note. Comments originally written in Japanese were translated into English.