

Analysis and Suggestions on the Listening Section of the New Curriculum Standard II

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Abstract: The design of the college entrance examination emphasizes the focus on moral education and talent selection and cultivation. The examination is still designed to evaluate students' core competencies, examining them from aspects such as language proficiency, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability, while helping candidates fully demonstrate the development level of their core competencies. This paper provides an in-depth analysis of the listening section of the 2024 New Curriculum Standard II College Entrance Examination English paper, with a detailed examination of the difficulty level, topics, and changes in test questions within the listening section. It aims to provide valuable references and suggestions for teachers in listening instruction, which is of great significance for promoting the quality and efficiency of high school English teaching. Additionally, the paper also points out the directions and challenges for future research on listening comprehension, providing a reference for in-depth research in related fields.

Keywords: The 2024 New Curriculum Standard II; Listening Test; Suggestions.

1. Introduction

Listening skills constitute an important part of students' English language skills. The English listening test primarily examines candidates' listening comprehension abilities, encompassing listening skills, linguistic knowledge, emotional attitudes, learning strategies, and cultural awareness. The "Analysis of the 2024 New Curriculum Standard II" clarifies the concepts guiding the test design: firstly, to focus on moral education and strengthen the educational function of the college entrance examination; secondly, to facilitate talent selection and cultivation by intensifying the assessment of thinking quality; and thirdly, to exert a positive guiding role in promoting the improvement of quality and efficiency in high school English teaching. (National Education Examinations Authority 2024) Thus, it is evident that the college entrance examination's test design still revolves around evaluating students' core competencies, examining them from aspects such as language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability, and aiding candidates in fully demonstrating their level of core competency development.

2. Interpretation of Listening Test Difficulty

The scoring and question types for the listening section of the 2024 New National Curriculum II remain unchanged, with a total score of 30 points, accounting for 20% of the overall paper. The question types are categorized into Section one, which includes 5 short conversations, and Section 2, which consists of 4 long conversations and 1 monologue.

Upon analysis, the listening materials for the 2024 the New National Curriculum II focus on two major themes: human and nature, as well as human and society. The total word count of the listening section is 870, with a duration of 5 minutes and 45 seconds, and a speaking speed of 151 words per minute. The speaking speed has increased compared to the previous year. A detailed analysis is shown in the table 1

below:

Table 1. Listening Test Analysis

Theme	Theme Group	Contexts	Words	Duration	Speaking Speed (words per minute)
Human and Self	Life and Learning	Text 1 Travel and Daily Activities	23	7s	197 wpm
		Text 5 Time Management	29	10	174 wpm
		Text 6 Outdoor Activities	96	38	152 wpm
		Text 10 Professional Achievements and Personal Experiences	244	101	145 wpm
Human and Society	Interpersonal Communication	Text 2 Visiting the Park	34	13s	157 wpm
		Text 3 Weekend Plans	25	11s	136 wpm
		Text 4 Invitation and Polite Refusal	39	13s	180 wpm
		Text 7 Restaurant Reservation	92	39s	149 wpm
		Text 8 Course Project Grouping	115	51s	135 wpm
	Art	Text 9 Concert Invitation	167	62s	163 wpm

Table 2. wh-words of questions

Years	what	who	when	where	why	how
2024	14	0	2	0	3	1
2023	12	1	1	2	3	1
2022	10	2	1	2	4	1
2021	12	1	1	2	3	1
2020	8	3	1	2	2	3

Based on an overall Flesch Reading Ease of 91.2, the level generally aligns with the academic proficiency expected at the end of high school for students. In terms of question types, there is a variation in difficulty among texts 1 to 8; specifically, except for text 4 with a Flesch Reading Ease of 89.1, the other passages exhibit similar levels of difficulty, with Flesch Reading Ease ranging between 90 and 100. Monologues tend to be more challenging, with a Flesch Reading Ease of 66.6, posing certain listening obstacles for students. The listening section in the 2024 New National Curriculum II listening part is slightly more difficult compared to the 2023 New National Curriculum II listening part. Additionally, the setting of wh-

words (question words) is more flexible than in previous years. The specific details are illustrated in the table 2.

3. Interpretation of Listening Comprehension Changes

In recent years, the English listening comprehension tests in the New National Curriculum II have shown notable changes in multiple aspects.

3.1. Topic Range

In 2021, the topics covered common scenarios such as daily life, school life, and family activities. In 2022, topics such as health and lifestyle, travel experiences, and cultural activities were added. In 2023, the range further expanded to include workplace scenarios, social phenomena, technological developments, and other fields. In 2024, the topics encompassed daily life, visiting parks, weekend plans, course projects, attending concerts, sharing successful secrets of businessmen, as well as discourse related to sports and aesthetic education.

3.2. Vocabulary Utilization

In 2021, the vocabulary was mostly common basic words and simple daily expressions. In 2022, some slightly more complex vocabulary and phrases, including many derived words, were introduced. In 2023, the vocabulary increased further, with more words from different fields and difficulty levels to better assess students' understanding and utilization of vocabulary in different contexts. In 2024, the original listening part contained approximately 866 words, similar to the New National Curriculum I and II, but the speaking speed was about 152 words per minute, a significant increase compared to the 2023 New National Curriculum II.

3.3. Cultural Elements

In 2021, the focus was mainly on domestic daily life and cultural phenomena. In 2022, some Western cultural elements and topics with an international perspective were gradually incorporated. In 2023, the cultural elements became even more diverse, covering cultural characteristics and customs of different countries and regions. In 2024, by selecting texts related to sports and aesthetic education, students were guided to adhere to the five-in-one education approach, achieving healthy physical and mental growth and comprehensive development in morality, intelligence, physique, aesthetics, and labor.

3.4. Question Types

In 2021, the question types were relatively traditional, with a focus on factual details, and fewer reasoning and main idea questions. In 2022, the distribution of question types adjusted slightly, with an increase in reasoning and main idea questions, placing higher demands on students' comprehensive understanding and logical reasoning abilities. In 2023, the question types became more diversified, adding attitude questions in addition to regular factual detail questions, requiring students to accurately understand the speakers' positions and attitudes. In 2024, there were 11 factual detail questions, 7 reasoning questions, 1 main idea question, and 1 attitude question. Meanwhile, the setting of interrogative words was more flexible than in previous years, emphasizing students' comprehensive understanding and detailed grasp of the listening materials.

3.5. Phonetic Characteristics

In 2021, the anchors spoke at a moderate speed with clear pronunciation, mostly standard accents. In 2022, the speaking speed increased slightly, and phonetic phenomena such as liaison, weakening, and stopping began to appear, posing a certain challenge to students' speech recognition abilities. In 2023, the speaking speed increased further, and the phonetic phenomena became more complex, such as unreleased stops and assimilation, requiring students to have stronger phonetic adaptability. In 2024, both male and female anchors spoke with standard American accents at a speed of about 152 words per minute.

In summary, from 2021 to 2024, the English listening comprehension tests in the 2023 New National Curriculum II have continued to expand in terms of topic range, vocabulary utilization, and cultural elements, while also undergoing significant changes in question types and phonetic characteristics. These changes reflect the higher requirements of the college entrance examination for students' comprehensive English abilities and also indicate the developing trends in English education.

4. Deficiencies and Extensions of Listening Section

The National college entrance examination English paper, as a nationwide authoritative test paper, plays an important role in assessing students' English proficiency. However, no test paper is perfect, and the college entrance examination English paper also has some shortcomings, mainly reflected in the following aspects.

4.1. Deficiencies

4.1.1. Fixed Question Types and Assessment Points

The question types and assessment points of the college entrance examination English paper are relatively fixed, which helps maintain the stability and fairness of the test but may also limit the comprehensive demonstration of students' English abilities. Fixed question types and assessment points can easily lead to exam-oriented education, where students only review according to the test content and neglect the practical application of English.

4.1.2. Unbalanced Difficulty Levels of Some Question Types

In the college entrance examination English paper, the difficulty levels of different question types can sometimes be unbalanced. The monologue section in the 2024 New Curriculum Standard Paper 1 is significantly more difficult compared to other question types, which may increase students' psychological pressure when taking the test, leading to abnormal performance.

4.1.3. Lack of Innovation and Openness

Although the college entrance examination English paper has made some innovations in question types and contextual settings in recent years, it still tends to focus on traditional assessment methods, such as multiple-choice questions and fill-in-the-blank questions. Adding more innovative and open-ended question types, such as essay questions and project-based learning tasks, can further stimulate students' creativity and critical thinking skills.

4.1.4. Lack of Diversity in Cultural Background

Although the National college entrance examination English paper pays attention to diversity in material selection,

there is still room for improvement in cultural backgrounds. The articles and questions in the test paper sometimes tend to favor a particular culture or region, which may limit students' understanding and cognition of different cultures. Incorporating materials and questions related to cross-cultural communication can help students better understand and respect multiculturalism, cultivating an international perspective.

4.2. Extensions and Variations

4.2.1. Adjust Speech Speed

Adjust the speech speed to approximately 130-140 words per minute to ensure that most students can keep up with the pace and fully understand the listening content. Meanwhile, appropriate pauses can be set between different paragraphs or dialogues to give students time to think and take notes.

4.2.2. Optimize the Distribution of Question Types

Reduce the proportion of factual detail questions to about two-thirds and increase the proportion of inferential judgment questions and main idea questions to about one-third. This can assess students' ability to capture details while guiding them to focus on the overall structure and logical relationships of the article. At the same time, simplify the expression of interrogative words to make them more direct and clearer, avoiding increasing students' understanding burden.

4.2.3. Strengthen the Assessment of Students' Innovative Abilities

Add some questions in the listening test that require students to engage in innovative thinking and critical thinking. For example, students can be asked to create a dialogue based on a certain listening segment, encouraging them to present their own views and opinions.

4.2.4. Enrich Cultural Elements

Expand the topic range of listening materials to include various fields such as art, history, geography, science, technology, society, psychology, environmental protection, health, and more. Through diverse topics, expose students to more multicultural backgrounds and knowledge systems, cultivating their interdisciplinary thinking skills and global perspectives.

5. Issues in Listening Teaching

Deficiencies and extensions of listening section

The tasks involved in listening require a dazzling and intricate cognitive process, which becomes even more complex when the auditory signals are in a foreign language. (威尔逊 2012) Due to the complexity and invisibility of this cognitive listening process, instruction in listening comprehension often remains superficial.

The fundamental issue affecting listening teaching is the inadequate emphasis placed on it. Listening comprehension encompasses three stages: perception, parsing, and utilization. (孙怡 2022) Many teachers adopt the following teaching model for listening: they treat textbooks as workbooks, instruct students to turn to a specific page, read the requirements for the tasks (most of which are multiple-choice, matching, or fill-in-the-blank questions); then, they play the audio recording several times, ask students to complete the tasks after listening, check the answers; finally, they present the transcript on PPT and ask students to read it once, concluding the entire listening lesson. Listening instruction lacks a long-term mechanism, as most schools' teaching arrangements are solely oriented towards the

"college entrance examination," and the importance schools attach to listening depends on whether listening scores are included in the exam and their percentage. Meanwhile, the limitations of listening materials are apparent. The listening materials used in daily English teaching are mainly traditional supplementary teaching materials targeted at college entrance examination listening, with outdated topics that fail to keep up with the times. The listening materials selected by teachers tend to emphasize written language rather than spoken language, and difficult listening materials can diminish students' interest in learning. Secondly, teachers' instructional proficiency needs to be enhanced. Many teachers employ a singular teaching method with unclear instructional objectives, and the level of listening instruction in many schools does not reflect the profound meaning of high school English teaching reform. Most listening classes still follow the process of "teacher plays the recording - students check answers," with monotonous content and simplistic formats. Lastly, the main factors affecting students' listening proficiency include: firstly, weak phonetic knowledge, such as liaison and stopping, and a significant difference between their own pronunciation and standard pronunciation; secondly, inadequate grammar and vocabulary, making it difficult to identify key words; thirdly, a lack of listening skills; and fourthly, the transient nature of listening tests, as well as the anxiety caused by the aforementioned reasons.

6. Teaching Suggestions

In response to the existing problems in listening teaching, scholars have proposed numerous countermeasures.

6.1. Strengthen Phonetics Skills Training

The English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools (2020) states that English phonetics encompass stress, intonation and more. Phenomena such as word linking in the listening section of the college entrance examination are frequent and constitute one of the reasons for candidates' comprehension barriers. Therefore, phonetics instruction is crucial in listening preparation. Teachers should intensify students' basic pronunciation training, encourage listening and imitation, impart reading aloud techniques, guide students to master them, and analyze the correspondence between sounds and graphemes to expand vocabulary and enhance automatic listening skills.

6.2. Enhance Micro-skills Teaching in Listening

The New National Curriculum I emphasize deep-level understanding, necessitating teachers to cultivate students' problem-solving skills. The Beijing Normal University Edition (2019 Edition) textbook places listening instruction at the forefront and incorporates micro-skills training into newly added special sections. For instance, Unit 3 of Compulsory Course 1 imparts various listening skills, covering exam points stipulated by the new curriculum standards. During preparation, teachers should select and modify materials based on students' learning situations, establish skill priorities, teaching methods, and demonstrate them. They should also identify key listening skills in line with teaching objectives, impart specific methods, and provide demonstrations, such as pre-listening prediction, note-taking using abbreviations or diagrams. Lastly, guide students to pay attention to modal particles, transitional words to judge the speaker's attitude or

viewpoint.

6.3. Strengthen Topic-based Training

Intensive training on sub-topics helps students become familiar with vocabulary related to those topics. (覃朝姣 2022) Although the listening discourse topics in the 2023 New National Curriculum I and II differ, they both revolve around curriculum standards topics. Students need to extensively accumulate vocabulary from 32 core topics to cope with diversified listening materials. The introduction of complex vocabulary in recent college entrance examination listening sections accounts for a minority and should not pose comprehension barriers. Teachers should urge students to master curriculum vocabulary and encourage extensive vocabulary accumulation, particularly contextual vocabulary for life situations and campus scenarios.

6.4. Grasp the Dialogue Context and Overall Content of the Discourse

The listening part of the New National Curriculum I is relatively challenging due to the setting at the discourse level and the large proportion of indirect answer questions. In listening exams, students should not overly dwell on individual words but should utilize existing knowledge to analyze and infer the speaker's intention. Teachers should strengthen discourse awareness, guide students to predict and analyze material structure and themes, identify marker words, organize discussions and sharing, summarize main ideas and detailed information, and enhance overall discourse comprehension ability.

7. Conclusion

This article presents a detailed analysis of the listening difficulty, listening topics, and test question changes in the 2024 National New Curriculum Standard Paper II, with the

aim of providing corresponding teaching suggestions for teachers in the field of listening comprehension instruction. Although teachers currently possess rich teaching experience, there are still numerous issues that need to be addressed. Teachers need to change their mindset and implement an ability-oriented educational perspective, rather than merely paying lip service to it. Scholars also face a long and arduous journey in the field of listening research, requiring us to continuously conduct in-depth and diversified research that integrates theory with practice, optimize instructional design, and constantly enhance teaching standards and quality.

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