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# A Research on the Causes and Strategies of College English Listening Difficulties

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**Abstract:** With the increasing of China's international influence, China's comprehensive discourse power in the world has been strengthened. In the past, people's understanding of learning English mainly focus on the exam, and exam pays more attention to doing exercises, leading to a certain extent ignore the training of listening skills, which results in most students who go to college learning "dumb English". In order to explore the causes of students' listening difficulties, this paper intends to use the questionnaire for research. Through the research, it is not difficult to find that most students can hardly improve their listening comprehension due to the lack of vocabulary accumulation, the lack of basic knowledge of grammar and syntax, the interference of psychological pressure, and emotional factors. In view of the above problems, the author comes up with the following solutions through research, including guiding students to combine extensive listening and intensive listening to expand their vocabulary, integrating the basic knowledge of grammar and syntax. It is expected to promote the improvement of listening skills of college students and the continued development of Chinese English education.

**Keywords:** Causes of Listening Difficulties; College English Listening; Solutions.

## 1. Introduction

Entering the new era of socialist construction, all aspects of our country are good. Universities are the cradle for cultivating high-level talents, and the communication between China and the world cannot be separated from English. Recently, the new college English teaching syllabus requires that through college English teaching, students should be trained to have strong reading ability, listening ability, preliminary writing and speaking ability, so that students can use English as a tool to acquire professional knowledge and lay a solid foundation for further improvement of English. It can be seen that college English listening course is a very important course, and enough attention should be paid to it in listening teaching. But the reality is that in college classes, teachers' pay more attention to teaching vocabulary and texts, and ask students to do test papers and exercises after class. Listening teaching is almost treated as a decoration. Students practice listening just to pass the final or various level exams, putting the cart before the horse. In order to fit the requirements of the syllabus, but also to play the role of English communication tools, improving college students' listening skills is a top priority. Therefore, the author believes that it is necessary to analyze and explore the causes of college English listening difficulties, and then put forward practical and feasible suggestions for implementation, so as to continuously improve the overall level and quality of college English teaching.

## 2. Results Analysis of Questionnaire on the Causes of College English Listening Difficulties

The author took undergraduates and postgraduates of a university as the research objects, conducted a sample survey on them, distributed questionnaires through WeChat and QQ software, and finally took back 166 valid questionnaires. Among the 166 students, 142 were female students, accounting for 85.54%, and 24 were male students, accounting for 14.46%. Most of them were English majors from the senior year to the first year of graduate school, so it can be seen that they had a good English foundation. The questionnaire has a moderate number of questions, a total of 20 questions, mainly single choice. Students are asked to select out the reasons that make them difficult to listen according to their own learning status. Among the options, the most frequently selective options are phonetic rules, vocabulary and grammar, foreign background knowledge, psychological pressure and listening habits. According to the results of the questionnaire, 78.91% of the students believe that the lack of phonetic rules and the inability to accurately identify the problems of linking and ellipsis are fatal reasons to the improvement of listening skills. 91.57% of the students think that the speed of speech is an important factor affecting their listening comprehension; 81.93% of the students believe that the accumulation of words and phrases was an important factor affecting their listening comprehension; 87.35% of the students believe that due to the lack of relevant background knowledge in Britain and America, their listening comprehension was not in place or there was deviation; 65.06% of the students suppose that during listening training, they would be affected by psychological or emotional factors, such as anxiety and nervousness, which would directly affect their listening performance. Through the results of the questionnaire, the author clearly understands that the factors affecting the listening effect are not single, but the result of the interaction of multiple influencing factors.

## 3. Main Causes of Listening Difficulties

After understanding the results that affect students' listening difficulties, it is particularly important to find the causes. Only by finding out the cause can we better apply them, so as to ensure the improvement of the listening level of students. After careful consideration, the author believes that the factors affecting students' listening can be mainly

divided into two categories, one is subjective factors, one is objective factors. Later, the author will discuss these two aspects in detail:

1. Subjective factors

(1) Insufficient accumulation of vocabulary and fixed collocations in the early stage

When reading, the teacher told the students that vocabulary is also divided into categories, one is called positive vocabulary, the other is called negative vocabulary. The former means that these words are not only required to be recognized, but also required to be written out; The latter requires us to be able to identify them, even if we cannot spell them. In the listening test, most of our questions are objective multiple-choice questions, which do not require us to spell words, so it is particularly important to accumulate more negative vocabulary after class. Yang Shune (2013) once said: "Vocabulary is the basis of all training, usually one or two new words in listening materials may affect the understanding of the whole sentence or even the whole article, if students do not pay attention to the accumulation of vocabulary in learning, even if they can identify the sound, but also do not know its meaning, will certainly affect their listening comprehension level." Therefore, the lack of vocabulary has a great impact on the improvement of listening comprehension, which should be paid attention to by both teachers and students.

(2) grammar, syntax foundation is not solid

When listening to the material, most of the students can't clearly hear every word, every phrase in the listening material, and the listening is not required to do everything, but to learn how to quickly get the general idea of the material. In the process of listening, if the students have a solid grammar foundation, they can quickly hear the main components of the sentence, and understand what the listening material is roughly about. Sun Huabin (2015) mentioned in his research and analysis of college English listening impairment and countermeasures, "English is different from Chinese in terms of word order and word formation, and such differences in grammatical structure will interfere with students' auditory cognition. For students, if they cannot analyze the sentence structure, it is difficult to correctly understand the meaning of the sentence, especially for long difficult sentences with complex structure and numerous modification components. If they lack semantic knowledge, they will not be able to master the semantic relationship between clauses or structures, resulting in comprehension difficulties." It can be seen that students with relatively weak grammar and syntax have obvious reasons for poor listening comprehension.

(3) Interference of psychological pressure and emotional factors

The author through observation and research, on the one hand, found that whether it is college students or junior high school students, when listening to the listening, some students will be difficult to concentrate, or because of missing one or two words, or cannot keep up with the rhythm of listening, and feel anxious, leading to a nervous situation, finally listening results are in a mess. From the students' behavior reaction, the author thinks that this is because the students' psychological pressure is too large, which has an inhibitory effect on them, and then leads to the listening effect is not ideal. On the other hand, emotional factors are at work. People are emotional animals, for positive mood, when doing things will produce a positive effect, and for negative mood, will bring negative effects. Wang Rui (2020) once said in College English listening Impairment and how to overcome it: "Each student has a different ability to accept the same knowledge. Some students are conceited, while others feel inferior. Conceited students will study in an impetuous state of mind, which will affect their attention; students with low self-esteem are not confident in their listening level, which can easily lead to excessive tension and affect the performance of their level." And another kind of students are confident, his emotions are positive, so when listening to the listening materials, they are relatively pleasant and relaxed, so the listening results are naturally compared to the first two types of learning a lot. Above repeated so much, not to tell the reader that psychological pressure and emotional factors are also the key factors of the success of students listening.

2. Objective factors

(1) Lack of phonetic knowledge, listening materials too fast, too difficult

If you want to do the right listening, first of all you need to be able to identify the right words. Different parts of speech, different stress positions, and there are homonyms and homonyms in English, all of which require students to understand the pronunciation of words well after class. Moreover, when listening, the teacher does not fully understand the students, do not know the current language level of the students, the listening material is too difficult to play, so that the students seem to be listening to a book, and the speed of the player is inconsistent with the teacher's usual speed, which will make the students have a feeling of difficulty to adapt to. In the daily broadcast listening, people often say that the speed of speech actually contains two aspects of meaning: one is the language speed of the teacher's lecture, the second is the speed of speech in the player. In the real teaching class, in order to let the students hear the instructions clearly, the teacher will slow down his speaking speed, and strive to make the students who can understand the teacher's instructions and respond. While listening to the recording, the tape is recorded in advance, close to the level of normal communication in the United States and Britain, speaking too fast, students naturally difficult to follow, so the listening effect is not so ideal.

(2) Lack of relevant cultural background knowledge in Britain and the United States

Language is the carrier of culture. Language learning is not only for communication, but more importantly, through language exchange, we can further understand the local customs and religious beliefs of various countries in the world, embrace the world, and have the ability and vision of cross-cultural communication. The lack of relevant background knowledge will lead to our comprehension deviation when we do listen. Wang Qian (2012) mentioned in her research on the attribution and strategies of College English hearing Impairment based on constructivism theory: "The English language is extremely rich in expressions, has a large vocabulary reserve, and varies in specific collocations, including various phrases, slang and so on. In essence, English is a concentrated reflection of the society, life, culture and other aspects of English-speaking countries. It is very difficult to interpret its meaning from the fixed context or meaning in isolation. It is necessary to have sufficient understanding and recognition of the cultural and social background knowledge covered by it, otherwise it is just a "water without source and a tree without roots". Therefore, why do some words know what they mean individually, but when put together, they don't make sense? For example: as

cool as cucumber, does it sound as cool as cucumber? But as cool as Cucumber actually means to be calm and collected; a storm in a teacup is literally a storm in a teacup, but someone is making a big deal out of it. If students do not understand the slang or background knowledge in the United States, they may make mistakes in listening, which will result in poor listening results.

(3) Students lack relevant listening problem-solving skills and strategies

In the teaching process, teachers focus on reading teaching, ignore listening teaching, naturally will forget to teach students listening problem-solving skills. For example, the teacher did not emphasize to the students that listening to the article does not need to focus on a new word, but to grasp the main idea of the article, so the students will not grasp the key points and so on when listening to the blind choice. In most English classes, there is less time for listening. The teacher speaks English words, grammar and reading, leaving little time for listening. The students do not get enough practice, and the teacher does not overemphasize the listening answers, so the teaching of listening skills is ignored again and again. There is no correct method to guide, how can listening do not detours? Finally, students can only complain about the results of listening but there is no way.

# 4. Solutions to Improve College Listening

In view of the above factors affecting the improvement of listening, the author believes that the following aspects can be carried out to realize the gradual improvement of college students' listening, and constantly strengthen the effect of college English teaching.

(1) Combination of intensive listening and extensive listening to expand the listener's vocabulary

In order to improve students' listening skills, it is a good choice to combine intensive listening with extensive listening. Good English listening refers to the need to understand all the English listening materials, and pronunciation, words, sentence patterns. When doing English listening exercises, we should keep upright, concentrate on it and not be careless. Strive to understand each word and each sentence thoroughly, which is not only conducive to improving our listening level, improving the sensitivity of the words, but also greatly promote the learning of vocabulary and grammar. And English listening refers to listening to English listening materials do not need to understand all, just listen to the key words, without understanding. This does not need to invest too much time and energy, just review the knowledge points and maintain the sense of language, usually understand the overall situation of the event, can feel the English environment, cultivate English logical thinking, in the process of listening, students can not only get used to the English listening environment, but also help accumulate a variety of subjects of English words, further expand their vocabulary, to improve their listening level.

(2) Strengthen the knowledge base of grammar and syntax, and enhance the mastery of sentence structure

Although students have systematically learned relevant grammar knowledge in middle school, some of them do not have a solid foundation of grammar, and some of them have serious English deviation phenomenon. The unclear grasp of basic grammar knowledge and syntactic rules is not conducive to the improvement of listening level. Therefore, in listening teaching, teachers should consciously guide students to consolidate and review the grammar knowledge they have learned before. For some key and difficult points in grammar, such as modal verbs, attributive clauses, subjunctive mood, etc., special time can be arranged for targeted practice. After learning grammar and syntax well, students will be able to quickly realize the main stem of sentences when listening, so as to better grasp the main idea of the listening material, and promote the correct rate of answering questions significantly.

(3) When doing listening, focus on the positive psychological suggestion

Listening training is an activity that requires students to maintain a high level of attention. If you are not careful, you may miss key information and lead to listening failure. Therefore, when you do listen, the first sentence of the listening material should play up one hundred percent of the spirit to listen carefully. Generally speaking, as long as the beginning of the rhythm of listening is not chaotic, after listening will not feel so nervous and anxious. When listening, teachers should give students positive psychological suggestions to help them build up confidence. When the students are full of confidence, their learning ability can also be effectively enhanced, and then help them eliminate anxiety and unease in the process of learning, enhance the interest in learning, and finally achieve the purpose of improving the effect of listening learning.

(4) Correct pronunciation and intonation following reading training

Standard English pronunciation is the basis of listening to good. If you want to be able to understand listening articles, you need to be accurate pronunciation. Therefore, students should master the pronunciation rules of words, such as stress, linking, ellipsis, blasting, and so on. At the same time, they need to distinguish the differences between American and British pronunciation. Correct pronunciation is in daily listening practice, which can further improve listening ability and remove phonetic obstacles. Teachers can use the minimal pairs of oral training in daily listening exercises, so that students can feel the difference between single similar phonetic symbols, such as /i:/ and /I /. By listening to the pronunciation of sheep and ship, students can more clearly feel how important it is to standard pronunciation for listening comprehension. And English pronunciation, intonation and reading training can further improve students' listening sense and ear sensitivity, which plays an important role in the overall improvement of listening skills.

(5) In teaching, gradually infiltrate the cultural background knowledge of British and American countries

Before the author repeated the importance of having knowledge of British and American cultures. Language is a bridge and bond between cultures. In-depth knowledge of foreign cultures and backgrounds will help readers to deepen their understanding of the language. Chen Meng (2016) mentioned in the Minute Analysis of Listening Impairment in College English Discourse: "When listening to English articles about current hot topics, learners obviously understand more parts than unfamiliar articles, which indicates that if listeners are familiar with relevant background knowledge, their ability to speculate will be improved, which greatly enhances the listening effect." Therefore, teachers imperceptibly transfer the cultural background knowledge of foreign language countries in class, bringing unexpected effects on students' listening training

after class.

(6) To impart practical listening skills and strategies

In the process of classroom listening teaching, teachers should give active guidance to students. On the one hand, they should cultivate students' listening skills. As we all know, the listening process is a process of decoding and re-construction of meaning, which is the result of the interaction of skills, such as guessing, anticipating, speculating and imagining. Therefore, in the teaching process, teachers should teach students the skills of prediction and reasoning, short-time shorthand, analysis and generalization. On the other hand, to teach a variety of listening methods, such as the combination of listening and listening, listening and speaking skills, not only should pay attention to the input, but also pay attention to the output, because the input drives the output. It will constantly improve the students' listening skills and level.

# 5. Conclusion

This paper takes students of a university as the research object, adopts the way of questionnaire, comprehensively investigates the causes of students' difficulties in listening, and puts forward corresponding measures and suggestions. After that, readers can see that the factors affecting students' listening level do not exist in isolation, but interact with each other. They together cause the students' low listening level. Therefore, in order to gradually improve the students' listening level, the author believes that it is still necessary for teachers and students to make unremitting efforts for a long time. Only when both sides cooperate with each other and teach each other, can they receive good results.

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