

A Study on the Listening Comprehension Barriers Faced by Chinese College Students in Learning English and Countermeasures

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Abstract

Original Research Article

English listening is a vital component of English language learning for Chinese learners, and numerous difficulties and obstacles arise in its practical application. This paper aims to investigate the barriers encountered in the process of college English listening comprehension and propose corresponding solutions. By analyzing the major obstacles in college English listening comprehension, including inadequate vocabulary, challenging pronunciation, complex listening materials, and inappropriate feedback and evaluation method, this study presents some common countermeasures. It can help English learners, teachers, and researchers gain insights into the importance and challenges of college English listening comprehension, understand the barriers involved, and acquire some solutions and practical experiences. It provides valuable reference and guidance for improving college students' English listening proficiency.

Keywords: College English, listening comprehension, college students, barrier, countermeasure

1. INTRODUCTION

College English listening is a crucial component of English language learning, and numerous difficulties and obstacles arise in its practical application. Many students often feel inadequate and even anxious when faced with English listening. This is because college English listening requires students to possess a certain vocabulary, sensitivity to different accents, an understanding of grammatical structures, and the ability to grasp context. However, due to limitations in learning conditions and methods, most students have deficiencies in these aspects. Therefore, it is particularly important to address the challenges in the process of college English listening comprehension and improve students' listening abilities.

Listening comprehension is a crucial skill in language learning, but many learners encounter various obstacles in the process, leading to a decline in their comprehension abilities. This not only affects learners' academic performance but also limits their expressive abilities in practical communication. Therefore, studying obstacles in the process of listening comprehension is of great significance for improving learners' listening abilities.

This paper aims to study the barriers encountered in the

process of college English listening comprehension and propose corresponding solutions. By analyzing the major obstacles in college English listening comprehension, including inadequate vocabulary, challenging pronunciation, complex listening materials, and inappropriate feedback and evaluation methods, this paper presents some common countermeasures.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, the importance of listening comprehension in English language teaching has gradually garnered widespread attention. To better guide college English listening instruction, numerous scholars have conducted in-depth research, exploring potential obstacles in the process of listening comprehension and corresponding strategies to overcome them. This article will comprehensively analyze the research findings of He (2020), Wang (2016), Wen (2021), and Setter and Jenkins (2005), describing and discussing obstacles in listening comprehension in the teaching field.

In her research, He (2020) pointed out that obstacles in the process of listening comprehension mainly include aspects such as pronunciation, intonation, and speaking speed. For non-native learners, the pronunciation and phonetic characteristics

of English can pose a significant challenge in understanding listening materials. Additionally, the intonation and speaking speed of different speakers can also interfere with listening comprehension. To overcome these obstacles, He proposed several strategies, such as strengthening pronunciation training and improving adaptability to different intonations and speaking speeds.

Wang's (2016) research focused on listening comprehension issues in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching. She noted that ESP listening materials often involve knowledge and terminology specific to particular fields, posing a substantial challenge for learners. Wang proposed targeted teaching strategies, such as preparing background knowledge in related fields beforehand and cultivating learners' vocabulary and reading comprehension abilities, to enhance students' understanding in ESP listening.

Wen (2021) research explored the intrinsic connection between ideological and political education and listening comprehension in college foreign language courses. She believes that college foreign language courses should emphasize cultivating students' ideological and moral qualities and social responsibility, and that listening comprehension, as an essential component of foreign language learning, holds significant importance for the implementation of ideological and political education. Wen proposed classroom teaching strategies, such as guiding students to focus on the ideological content of listening materials and conducting discussions and debates, to promote students' ideological awakening and critical thinking skills.

Setter J. and Jenkins J. (2005) focused their research on pronunciation teaching. They pointed out that pronunciation errors can hinder students' understanding of listening materials, and thus pronunciation teaching should be emphasized in English instruction. They proposed pronunciation teaching methods and techniques, such as mimicking and simulating speech in real contexts and improving students' pronunciation accuracy through listening training.

In summary, scholars have conducted in-depth research on obstacles in the process of listening comprehension and their corresponding strategies. These studies provide valuable references and insights for English teaching, offering teachers and students effective teaching methods and strategies. However, further research is needed to explore more obstacles and solutions in listening comprehension to meet the learning needs of diverse students.

3. THE PROBLEMS AND OBSTACLES FACED BY ENGLISH LEARNERS IN LEARNING LISTENING

English learners may encounter various problems and obstacles in the process of listening comprehension, which can

be broadly divided into three categories: language barriers, cultural barriers, and psychological barriers.

3.1 Language Barriers

(1) Pronunciation obstacles

Students have inaccurate pronunciation. Learners' own inaccurate pronunciation can affect their understanding of listening materials. For example, if learners pronounce word A as B, they may not recognize the correct pronunciation of word A when they hear it. Additionally, there are differences between British English and American English in pronunciation rules, which may also pose difficulties for learners.

Students are unfamiliar with connected speech, weak forms, and other phonetic phenomena. In spoken English, connected speech, weak forms, unreleased stops, assimilation of sounds, and other phonetic phenomena are common. If learners are unfamiliar with these phenomena, it will be difficult for them to accurately understand the information in listening materials.

(2) Vocabulary obstacles

Students have insufficient vocabulary. Vocabulary is the foundation of language. If learners have an insufficient vocabulary, it will be difficult for them to understand the information in listening materials.

Students' vocabulary mastery is incomplete. Even if learners have mastered a certain number of vocabulary words, if they only know one meaning of a word or are unfamiliar with its usage, it may also lead to difficulties in listening comprehension.

(3) Grammar obstacles

Students have little grammar knowledge. Grammar is the rule of language. If learners have a weak grasp of grammar knowledge, it will be difficult for them to correctly analyze the sentence structure in listening materials, thereby affecting understanding.

Students are unfamiliar with tenses, voices, and other grammatical phenomena. In English listening, the changes in tenses, voices, and other grammatical phenomena are very rich. If learners are unfamiliar with these phenomena, it will be difficult for them to accurately understand the information in listening materials.

3.2 Cultural Barriers

The lack of cultural background knowledge is also an important factor affecting English listening comprehension. Different cultural backgrounds can lead to different understandings of the same thing or concept, and sometimes even cause misunderstandings. These barriers can significantly hinder the process of understanding and comprehending spoken

English. For example, the statement “buying a new car can save money” in Western culture may confuse learners who are unfamiliar with Western values. The cultural background knowledge of English-speaking countries mainly includes:

(1) Lack of understanding of English-speaking cultures

Languages are carriers of culture. To improve listening comprehension, learners must possess a certain level of knowledge about English-speaking histories, literatures, and cultures. Familiarity with the lifestyles, customs, traditions, and social norms of English-speaking countries is crucial. However, many learners lack this knowledge, which limits their ability to fully understand and appreciate the nuances of spoken English.

(2) Differences in communication styles

English-speaking cultures tend to value direct and concise communication. However, learners from cultures that emphasize indirectness and politeness may find this style of communication challenging. Differences in communication styles can lead to misunderstandings and confusion, as learners may interpret messages differently based on their cultural backgrounds.

(3) Mother tongue interference

Learners may also face challenges due to interference from their mother tongue. This can manifest in various ways, such as difficulty in pronouncing English sounds, confusion between similar-sounding words, and misunderstandings of idiomatic expressions. Mother tongue interference can affect both the comprehension and production of spoken English.

3.3 Psychological Barriers

Psychological barriers are also an important factor affecting English listening learning. Psychological factors such as excessive nervousness, lack of concentration, and lack of confidence may affect learners’ listening effect. For example, some learners tend to lose focus during listening training, resulting in poor listening results; while others may be overly nervous, affecting their listening comprehension.

3.4 Inappropriate Feedback and Evaluation Methods

In college English listening instruction, inappropriate feedback and evaluation methods may hinder students’ learning progress and the enhancement of their listening skills (Xin, 2024).

(1) Inappropriate feedback methods

Feedback methods are not timely and specific. Teachers fail to provide timely feedback on students’ listening performance, causing students to be unable to promptly identify their mistakes and shortcomings. The feedback content is overly general, lacking detailed analysis and guidance tailored to students’ specific issues,

which prevents students from making effective improvements.

Teachers overly emphasize standard answers and judge students’ responses mechanically, neglecting the thought processes and comprehension methods employed by students during the listening process. This feedback approach may limit students’ creativity and critical thinking, hindering the cultivation of their comprehensive listening abilities.

Teachers fail to attend to students’ emotional needs when providing feedback, critically reprimanding students for their mistakes or ignoring their efforts, leading to feelings of frustration and anxiety among students. Feedback methods lacking emotional support may decrease students’ learning motivation and self-confidence, impacting the effectiveness of listening instruction.

(2) Inappropriate assessment methods

Teachers only utilize a single assessment method, such as multiple-choice or fill-in-the-blank questions, to test students’ listening proficiency. This assessment method may fail to comprehensively reflect students’ listening comprehension abilities and evaluate their performance in real-life contexts.

Teachers only focus on students’ listening test results, neglecting their performance and effort during the listening process. Assessment methods lacking process assessment may cause students to only pay attention to outcomes and overlook the process, preventing them from truly enhancing their listening abilities.

Teachers fail to conduct dynamic assessments based on students’ listening proficiency and progress, unable to adjust teaching methods and strategies in a timely manner. Assessment methods lacking dynamic assessment may result in teaching lacking relevance and effectiveness, failing to meet the needs of diverse students.

4. SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS AND OBSTACLES IN CULTIVATING LISTENING ABILITY

To address the above problems and obstacles, learners can take the following measures to improve their English listening ability:

4.1 Linguistic Aspects

(1) Expand vocabulary

Vocabulary is one of the core elements in language learning and plays a vital role in college English listening comprehension. If students lack sufficient vocabulary,

they will find it difficult to understand unfamiliar words, idioms, abbreviations, and colloquial expressions in the listening materials, thereby reducing their listening comprehension ability. Furthermore, inadequate vocabulary can lead to frequent pauses and hesitations in listening, affecting the fluency and accuracy of their comprehension.

To address the issue of inadequate vocabulary, an effective solution is to engage in vocabulary enhancement training. Learners can expand their vocabulary through various methods, such as memorizing words, studying vocabulary lists, and reading English articles. understand and get familiar with multiple meanings and usages of commonly used words; Additionally, students can participate in vocabulary enhancement classes or utilize online learning resources to systematically learn and master new words.

Besides, Teachers should also provide diversified listening materials. The advancement of multimedia technology has shattered the constraints of time and space, revolutionizing traditional teaching methods. Education is no longer confined within the walls of schools, and web-based teaching methods are becoming increasingly significant. The *College English Curriculum Requirements* timely emphasizes the need for college English teaching to fully leverage the opportunities brought by the development of multimedia and network technologies, adopting new teaching models to improve the original teacher-centered, monolithic classroom teaching model (Zhu Hongyan, 2006). These materials should encompass authentic language use scenarios across different cultural backgrounds and contexts. By exposing students to languages and accents from various cultures, they can better adapt to and understand the communication styles among different cultures. Teachers can select diversified listening resources, including audio clips, video segments, and lecture recordings from different countries or regions. Diversified listening materials help broaden students' horizons and enhance their understanding of different cultures (Xu, 2021).

By consistently engaging in vocabulary enhancement training, students can gradually increase their vocabulary and improve their understanding in English listening comprehension.

(2) Strengthen pronunciation training

In addition to insufficient vocabulary, the difficulty of pronunciation is also a major obstacle in college English listening. Students often encounter listening difficulties due to their inability to correctly distinguish

and understand English pronunciations and intonations. Especially for non-native learners, they may be influenced by the phonetic system of their mother tongue, making it difficult for them to accurately comprehend different phonemes and stress patterns in English (Chen, 2014).

To overcome the pronunciation difficulty, students can engage in pronunciation training to enhance their sensitivity and understanding of English phonetics. They can improve their pronunciation skills by mimicking and reading along with native speakers, and become familiar with connected speech, weak forms, and other phonetic phenomena; listen to materials with different accents to adapt to different pronunciation styles. These days, learners can also utilize online resources and applications for personalized speech training. These resources and Apps provide audio materials and related exercises to help learners correct pronunciation errors and enhance their understanding ability.

(3) Consolidate grammar knowledge

Consolidating grammar knowledge is crucial in cultivating English listening ability, as it helps listeners understand sentence structures, word order, tenses, and other linguistic elements that are essential for comprehension.

Students should perform active listening and analysis. Focus on understanding the grammatical structures in doing listening exercises. Analyze sentences, identify the subject, verb, and other key components when listening. Pay attention to word order, tenses, and phrase usage. Regularly practice grammar drills and exercises that target specific areas such as tenses, conditionals, passive voice, and relative clauses.

Purposely listening to grammatically rich materials, such as English news, podcasts, or academic lectures, is a good way. Choose materials that are slightly above the students' current listening level to challenge them. Engage in conversations with native speakers or other English learners to practice using and hearing different grammatical structures. While practicing listening, take notes on the grammatical structures. This can help the learners internalize and consolidate the knowledge. Lastly, regularly review the grammatical structures that have been learned. Use flashcards, quizzes, or other review tools to test the past knowledge.

4.2 Cultural Aspects

Overcoming cultural barriers in learning English listening requires a multi-faceted approach. Here are some practical strategies to address these barriers:

(1) Immerse in English-speaking environments

Engage with English-language media such as movies, TV shows, podcasts, and music. This helps students become familiar with different accents, slang, and idiomatic expressions. Consider spending time in English-speaking countries or communities to immerse in the language and culture. Read English books, articles, and news to increase vocabulary and understand idiomatic expressions. Keep a vocabulary journal to track new words and expressions. Use a dictionary or thesaurus to look up unfamiliar words and understand their meanings in context.

Accumulate cultural background information related to listening materials to better understand the content. Teachers can also facilitate cross-cultural communication practices by organizing students to participate in practical activities related to cross-cultural communication, such as exchanging with international students and visiting communities with different cultural backgrounds. These practical activities enable students to personally experience the communication and interaction among diverse cultures, thereby enhancing their cross-cultural adaptability and communication skills.

(2) Develop cultural awareness

Study the histories, traditions, and social norms of English-speaking countries. This will help learners understand the context behind the language and improve the comprehension. Participate in cultural events and activities related to English-speaking cultures. Research the communication styles of English-speaking cultures, such as directness and conciseness. Practice adapting the native communication style to fit in with the target norms. Be aware of cultural nuances in communication, such as nonverbal cues and body language.

(3) Enhance the pronunciation skills

Practice speaking English regularly, focusing on correct pronunciation and intonation. Use language learning tools and apps that offer pronunciation practice. Consider working with a language tutor or coach who can provide feedback and guidance on the pronunciation. Join language exchange programs or online communities to practice English with native speakers and receive feedback.

By implementing these strategies, students can overcome cultural barriers in learning English listening and improve their comprehension and communication skills.

4.3 Psychological Aspects

Fear of misunderstanding and lack of confidence can create anxiety in the learners' mind when they are practicing

foreign language listening. To overcome the psychological barriers is a key step in learning.

(1) Build a positive mindset

Cultivate a growth mindset by recognizing that improvement comes with effort and practice. Strengthen self-cultivation and overcome vanity and the eagerness for quick success. Enhance the ability to self-adjust one's mindset. Teachers have the responsibility to help students promptly restrain and regulate negative emotions by adopting methods such as "more encouragement, less discouragement; more praise, less criticism," fostering an environment of "more appreciation, less suppression" to help students build confidence in learning English. Through patient communication, listening to their inner voices, comforting and encouraging them with love, teachers can help students overcome psychological barriers, adjust their mindset, and face each day of learning with a positive attitude.

(2) Correctly understand the characteristics of English learning, and specifically, the characteristics of college English learning

In addition to preparing for final exams, CET-4, CET-6, and various other proficiency and certification exams, college students learning English must also be ready to face the selection and challenges posed by contemporary society's demand for composite talents (Wen, 2010). As economic globalization intensifies and cooperation between countries in politics, science, culture, sports, religion, social life, and other fields becomes increasingly close, contemporary college students cannot merely satisfy themselves with exam-oriented English learning.

(3) Enhance communication skills and cultivate teamwork spirit

Learning in the classroom now serves as a rehearsal for future social work and study. Seize opportunities within and outside the classroom to exercise courage and communicate with others, fully recognizing the significance of sharing and mutual assistance for each other. Encountering difficulties in the learning process is not an unsolvable problem. Helping each other is also a form of learning. Such a teamwork spirit also helps learners overcome psychological barriers of insufficient confidence.

In summary, English learners may encounter various problems and obstacles in the process of listening comprehension, but by adopting correct methods and strategies for targeted training and learning, they can gradually improve their English listening ability.

4.4 Improving Assessment Methods and Implementing Targeted Feedback

Firstly, teachers can adopt the following methods to assess students' performance in listening classes and provide targeted feedback:

(1) Observation and recording

Observe students' performance in listening activities and record their verbal expressions, non-verbal behaviors, and cultural awareness. By observing students' performance, teachers can assess their understanding and adaptability to different listening materials.

(2) Listening tests

Design listening tests that include dialogues or speeches from different linguistic backgrounds and ask related questions. By testing students' understanding and interpretation of the information in listening materials, teachers can assess their listening comprehension abilities.

(3) Written assignment assessment

Require students to write reflective essays or reports on listening materials to evaluate their understanding and application of the knowledge learned, as well as their awareness of their own listening comprehension abilities.

Secondly, provide specific feedback by pointing out the strengths and areas for improvement demonstrated by students in listening activities. Clearly identify specific issues in their language use, non-verbal expressions, or cultural awareness, and provide concrete suggestions for improvement. When providing feedback, the following methods can be adopted:

(1) Guided questions

Use questions to guide students to think and reflect. Ask questions that prompt students to consider the difficulties, challenges, and solutions they encounter in communication, thereby helping them to think deeply and improve.

(2) Encouragement and positive reinforcement

Give students encouragement and positive reinforcement, acknowledging their efforts and progress in listening learning. Provide positive feedback to stimulate students' learning motivation and self-confidence.

(3) Personalized feedback

Provide personalized feedback tailored to each student's characteristics and needs. Understand students' individual backgrounds and goals, and offer targeted suggestions and guidance based on their personal circumstances.

Through assessment and targeted feedback,

students can understand their performance in listening learning and have the opportunity to improve and enhance their abilities.

5. CONCLUSIONS

By investigating the obstacles encountered in the process of college English listening comprehension and exploring corresponding countermeasures, this article aims to assist university students in enhancing their English listening proficiency and provides practical learning suggestions and strategies. Additionally, it offers new perspectives and methodologies for research in related disciplines.

Enhancing vocabulary is an effective way to overcome difficulties in college English listening. Through vocabulary expansion training, learners can increase their vocabulary, thereby enhancing their comprehension abilities during listening. Additionally, intensifying phonetic training is also a crucial means of overcoming college English listening barriers. By targeted training on difficult phonetic points, learners can improve their sensitivity and understanding of English pronunciation, thereby increasing their accuracy and speed during listening.

Changing learning strategies is also key to improving college English listening comprehension levels. By adjusting learning strategies, such as using multimedia textbooks and utilizing online resources, learners can engage in more efficient listening training, thereby enhancing their listening comprehension abilities (Kadek, 2019). Furthermore, strengthening listening training in the classroom, combined with teachers' guidance and feedback, can help learners overcome listening difficulties.

The innovation of this study lies in analyzing the major obstacles in the process of college English listening comprehension, proposing common countermeasures, and exploring the advantages and disadvantages of different countermeasures through practical cases.

Through this paper, readers can gain insights into the importance and challenges of college English listening comprehension, understand the barriers involved, and acquire some solutions and practical experiences. This provides useful references and guidance for improving learners' college English listening proficiency. At the same time, it also offers insights into teachers' teaching methods and textbook design, providing a certain degree of reference for college English listening instruction.

While this paper proposes some countermeasures to address difficulties in college English listening, there are still issues that require further research and resolution. Firstly, regarding the insufficient vocabulary in college English listening, more effective vocabulary expansion methods can be

further explored to investigate how students can better grasp and apply new vocabulary in their learning. Secondly, for the challenge of pronunciation difficulty, more refined pronunciation training methods can be studied, such as training targeted at specific pronunciation difficulties and repetitive training to enhance students' phonetic sensitivity. Additionally, for the complexity of listening materials, more research can be conducted on different types of listening materials, providing more practical listening materials and training resources. Future research can be expanded from multiple perspectives. Firstly, the psychological cognitive processes involved in college English listening comprehension can be further investigated to explore the cognitive mechanisms and characteristics of listening comprehension. Secondly, cross-cultural comparative studies can be conducted to compare the difficulties and countermeasures in college English listening

among students from different cultural backgrounds, providing references for cross-cultural English teaching. Furthermore, research can be combined with technological means, such as using virtual reality and artificial intelligence to assist in the training and improvement of college English listening.

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