

A Study of Listening Skills Learning for Business English Majors Upgraded from Junior College under a Full English Mode of Teaching

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Abstract: Due to their professional background and language level, many Business English Undergraduate upgraded from junior college have difficulties in English teaching, especially in the input listening courses. In order to better improve the efficiency of English listening learning for these students, the thesis conducts a survey, using questionnaires and interviews to investigate the main difficulties encountered by them in the listening skills learning, and tries to dig out the main reasons that hinder their listening learning. The study found that English listening learning for business English undergraduate requires not only students' own efforts, but also correct advice and suggestions from teachers and schools, and that the improvement of students' listening skills is the result of the joint efforts of all three parties.

Keywords: full-English teaching; Business English Majors upgrading from junior college; listening skill

1. Introduction

English listening ability is a basic and indispensable professional ability for English majors. Based on the requirements of China's education model and examination ability, the written answer ability accounts for a large proportion in English learning, and listening is often neglected. Studies have shown that in daily communication, people spend 40 % -50 % of the time on listening, 25 % -30 % of the time on speaking, much higher than 11 % -16 % of the time on reading, and only about 9 % on writing" (Rives, 1984: 17)^[1]. College English Teaching Guide (2020 Edition) points out that one of the important tasks of college English curriculum is to enhance the understanding of different cultures, strengthen the interpretation of Chinese and foreign cultures, and cultivate intercultural communication competence. To implement this task, English learners' cultural knowledge and language skills are undoubtedly the key points. In the teaching of English language, Chinese college students are generally full of fear and lack self-confidence in listening comprehension. In all levels of examinations, listening comprehension scores are often unsatisfactory. In order to solve various problems in English listening teaching, scholars at home and abroad have studied English listening teaching from different perspectives.

Foreign scholars have studied listening in many ways. Kreshen (1981) believed that listening teaching is an important factor in promoting students' understanding of language and a key factor in students' language learning^[2]. Rost (2002) pointed out that output activities such as speaking and writing should be based on listening and reading input activities, and listening input plays a key role in the process of language learning^[3]. It is very important to have a good foundation when students are learning something new. Clark, H.H. & Clark, E.U.(1997) believed that listening comprehension is a basic part of people's daily communication and the main source of information^[4]. Nevertheless, the process of listening comprehension is no longer simply regarded as a passive acceptance process. Anderson (1985) divided the the listening comprehension process into three interdependent stages : perception, parsing and utilization^[5]. Richards (1984) believed that language expression usually has the intention of the speaker^[6]. Therefore, listening is not a simple "listening", but a combination of listening, understanding and application. In the process of listening, people do not passively receive audio materials like recorders, but unconsciously actively predict, screen, interpret and summarize the information of the auditory system.

The study of English listening skills by domestic language scholars is relatively recent, with a more

systematic approach to the study of listening skills strategies only beginning in the 1980s. Generally, these strategy studies are more Chinese characteristics and appropriate to Chinese learners. From the perspective of language itself, if a learner does not have the ability to listen, this will directly affect the actual communication (Zhou, 2000: 3)^[7]. Moreover, almost 80% of students find listening comprehension the most difficult part of the English learning process and there are eight types of listening comprehension disorders of college English learners (Jiang, 2006)^[8]. However, the proportion of listening has increased significantly in the CET-4 and CET-6 test, which makes more challenges in English learning for Business English Majors Upgraded from Junior College Under a Full English Mode of Teaching

This article is to analyze the current situations and the main difficulties that business English students upgraded from junior college have encountered in the acquisition of English listening skills. Through investigation and interview, starting from the students' actual situation, this article proposes feasible strategies for learning English listening skills, focusing on the comprehensive analysis of improving English listening skills from three aspects: schools, teachers and students.

2. Research Methodology

The research of this paper takes the business English majors upgraded from junior college (Grade 2019) in Guangzhou College of Commerce as the main participants, mainly investigates the difficulties and obstacles encountered by them in learning listening skills, and focuses on analyzing the strategies for improving listening skills, so as to help the students better learn English listening skills and improve their English professional ability.

A total of 38 students (32 English-related majors in the junior college and 6 cross-major students) filled out the questionnaire through the Questionnaire Star and talked randomly with 5 students after the class. 40 questionnaires were returned and 38 were valid. Then, the author interview 3 teachers who are active in front-line work and have been teaching for more than 3 years. All the respondents can complete the questionnaire and answer the interview questions seriously, objectively and independently.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 The main barriers in listening skills learning for Business English undergraduate upgraded from junior college

In the traditional English listening classroom, teachers will tell students "listen" first, and then carry out the next step, such as follow-up reading, translation and vocabulary exercise. But to carry out the next section, the students must "understand". However, through the inquiry and discussion with the students after class, students feel difficult to get the exact information most of the time, especially in the face of long and difficult sentences. The data from the questionnaire demonstrate the main barriers in listening skills learning for Business English undergraduate upgraded from junior college. See the following Figure 1.

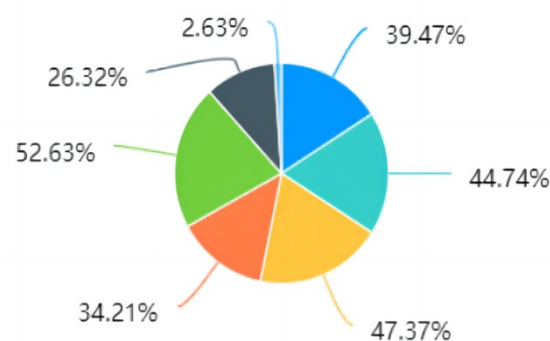


Figure 1. What do you think is the biggest difficulty in improving your English listening ability.

- At present, I have no suitable listening and speaking textbooks, and I do not know which materials or textbooks are better (39.47%);
- I always feel that foreigners speak English too vague, not clear, and a string of a string can not be separated (44.74%);
- When listening to English, I always get used to translating into Chinese first. I feel that I can't keep up with the speed of the speaker (47.37%);
- When listening to English recordings, if the speed is not too fast, I can understand. Once it is fast, I can not keep up (34.21%);
- Vocabulary accumulation is too little, I always encounter new words in sentences (52.63%);
- Schools set up too few courses on the improvement of listening ability and there is no effective way to improve English listening skills. (2.63%);

From Figure 1, the main difficulties encountered in the classroom are as follows : 39.47 % of the students think that the current teaching materials do not match their listening level, and there is no way to understand what listening materials should be used to improve their listening skills correctly, and the dialogue of listening materials in the classroom is sometimes too long and vague, and it is difficult to distinguish. 47.37 % of the students always use the inertial thinking of Chinese sentence patterns to understand English sentence patterns. When listening, they are also accustomed to translating English into Chinese first and then reading and understanding. In this way, it is not easy to keep up with the speed of listening recording, so the content behind is also difficult to grasp. However, these reasons are still only secondary, because 52.63 % of the students still think that it is difficult to understand the listening materials in the English classroom because their vocabulary is too small, and the vocabulary that has not been accumulated is always heard in the sentence.

According to Swain's (1985; 1995; 1998) [9-10] comprehensible output hypothesis, learners need not only comprehensible input but also comprehensible output. It is obvious that the accumulation of vocabulary is "input", listening, reading and understanding belong to "input", and the premise of "output" is to have "input". If there is not enough vocabulary as "input", the students cannot have the basic comprehension, let alone the "output". Swain's hypothesis has been proved in Figure1, as the biggest barrier for listening skills learning lies in the limited vocabulary, accounting for 52.63 % of the students' response.[11]

3.2 The main reasons for their learning difficulties in the study of listening skills

According to the survey, most students have had full English mode class, and they think that the English-only class is very helpful to the improvement of listening skills, but listening is the most difficult part to learn and master. The reasons for this phenomenon are shown in figure 2.

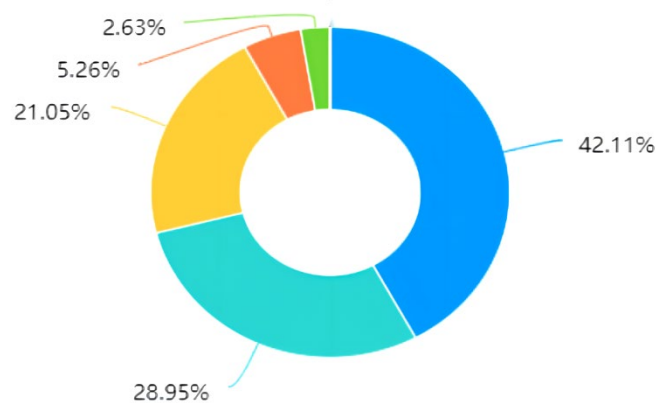


Figure 2. What are the reasons that cause the difficulties in your listening skills learning.

- Lack of vocabulary (42.11%);
- Few opportunities for oral dialogue (28.95%);
- Get used to thinking in the Chinese style (21.05%);
- Don't think listening is important (5.26%);
- Little time for classroom practice (2.63%).

According to the data in Figure 2, the biggest reason that causes their learning difficulties is vocabulary, taking up 42.11% of all the subjects. 28.95% respondents think that there are not enough

conversational activities in the class, which may lead to their difficulty in listening comprehension. The Chinese way of thinking becomes the third factor that affects their listening skills learning. For example, the Chinese sentence structure is different from English in many aspects. The Chinese usually starts a sentence with the subject at the beginning, followed up by the verb in an interrogative question while English sentence structure will be the opposite with helping verb like “do” “shall” “would” at the beginning. As a result, students in the class will not get used to the English sentence pattern and miss some information in the listening process. The fourth factor is that some students underestimate the importance of English listening and will put priority on the listening skills learning. A few students (2.63%) think there are not enough listening exercise during the class, which may reduce the effectiveness in their study of listening skills.

Besides, the interview with three teachers after their full English class helps to verify the reason. All the teachers comment that the students are not very active in the full English class, even they show some kind of interest in the topic. Students are not willing to answer the teachers’ questions in the class. With communication between teachers and students after class, the reasons for their lack of participation in the class are: First, the students cannot understand what the teacher is saying in the class. Second, they do not know how to answer in English. Third, among all the Business English undergraduates upgraded from junior college in the questionnaire, nearly half of them are interdisciplinary, knowing little about business English. So they feel difficulty in the full business English class.

Moreover, some subjects (the author of the thesis informally talked with after class) also mention that when they begin to learn English, the mode of listening training is that the teacher plays the recording, and the students follow the reading, or listen to the questions of the exam to find the correct answer. This kind of teacher’s recording and students’ listening mode runs through the whole process. Therefore, students are not interested in this static English listening training mode. In addition, the curriculum and examination requirements set by the school do not emphasize the role of listening.

3.3 Strategies for improving their learning of listening skills

3.3.1 School dimension

For students, the time in school accounts for three-quarters of the time in one year, that is to say, the time in school is very abundant, and the school plays a major role in improving students’ listening skills.

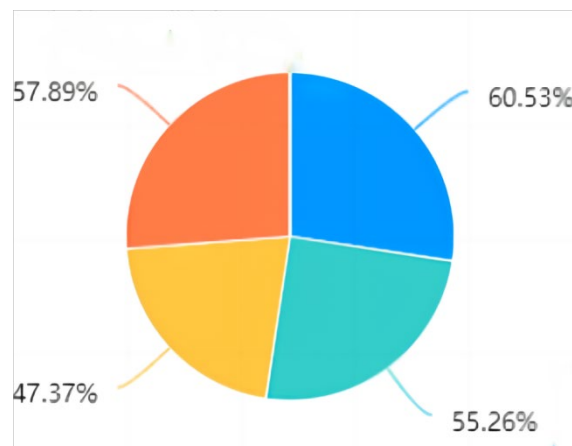


Figure 3. In what ways do you hope schools can improve students’ English listening ability.

- Develop elective course (60.53%);
- Set up an English study group (55.26%);
- Increase the proportion of listening training in the classroom (47.37%);
- Provide listening training materials, teachers’ personalized guidance (57.89%);

Based on the data in Figure3, students have made the following suggestions on how schools can help them improve their listening skills: 60.35% students suggested developing optional courses related to English listening, giving students ways and channels to understand and learn listening skills, allowing teachers to give professional guidance in the classroom, and giving students who want to improve their listening skills an additional way to learn. Additionally, 57.89% students thought it is also

important for school to provide listening training materials and personalized guidance from teachers. 55.26% felt that in addition to the formal classroom, the school could actively establish English learning groups to set tasks that are appropriate to the different levels of each group as a help to improve their abilities. Lastly, 47.37% students believed that the weight of the listening component could be adjusted by changing the previous pattern of reading, listening and writing, and putting listening-related content in the classroom so that students have more time to engage with listening training.

On the whole, schools should start from the actual situation, take the curriculum and talent training objectives as the premise, take into account that different students have different needs. School should also provide teaching guidance according to their aptitude and try to personalise and concretise English listening learning, so that the listening curriculum can be set up to meet the actual needs, which can also reflect the humanisation of the school curriculum and highlight the characteristics of a human-centred educational subject.

3.3.2 Teacher dimension

The school's listening practice in the classroom is based on the themes of the materials and is generally in line with the overall developmental needs of the students, the teacher is an important bridge for the school policy to effectively fall on the students. Teachers are able to communicate specifically with students and understand their needs, receiving more information and being more truthful. In the classroom, the most real situation can be learned according to the students' classroom performance and after-school feedback. In the traditional English classroom, the teacher seems not to be the main body of language output. Instead, the output theme is more computer and tape recorder. The teacher is only responsible for playing the recording. After listening, the teacher explains the ambiguity of the students' questions. Listening is only an auxiliary content in the classroom.

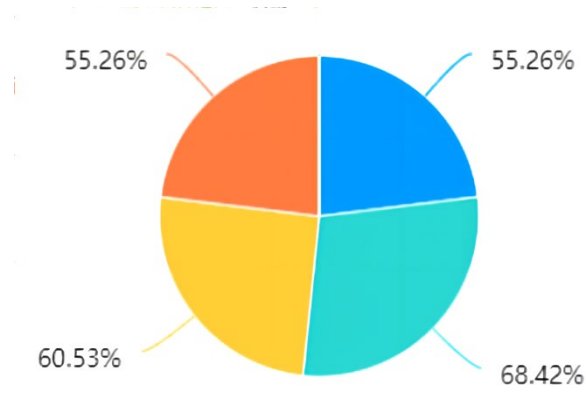


Figure 4. What would you like your teacher to do to help you improve your English listening skills.

- Set up special listening course (55.26%);
- Spend as much time as possible on listening in class (68.42%);
- Teacher use English to communicate with students in class (60.53%);
- Cultivate students' English thinking (55.26%).

In response to this phenomenon, teachers can do a lot for their students. For example, 68.42% felt that teachers should increase the time spent on the listening section of the class as much as possible, shift the focus of the whole English class to listening learning, speaking practice and other listening-related content, increase the weight of the listening section, and give students timely feedback on their learning. Moreover, the concept of "all-English" should implemented in lessons, with 60.53% believing that teachers should communicate with students in English and that English should be the main language of communication in the classroom, with Chinese being used as a support for the more difficult parts.

In addition, the cultivation of English thinking is imperceptible. In the classroom, the content of classroom learning should be flexibly designed. 55.26% thought they could start by developing students' thinking in English. For instance, popular science can be used to understand the foreign culture and differences behind listening materials, so that students can understand what the reasons for different thinking are, and how to correctly understand and use the derived content after understanding the relevant background, and transform it into a part of the student knowledge base. Similarly, 55.26% of students think that teachers could offer a class specifically for learning English listening so that those

who want to improve their English listening can have a right way to learn. So, having a special English listening learning class is also one of the most important ways to help improve students' English listening skills.

In a word, the teacher is the most intuitive and effective help to the students. The teacher can start from the actual needs of the students, understand the real needs of the students, help the students to solve the listening learning difficulties and increase more effective ways to learn English listening.

3.3.3 Student dimension

Students, as subjects of learning, should use their initiative to find the right way to improve their English listening skills. There are many ways to learn English listening, not only in school and in the classroom. There are also many interesting ways to improve English listening skills in everyday life.

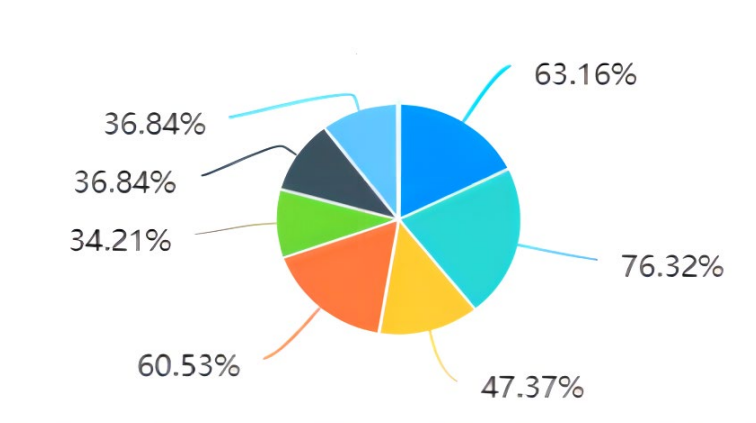


Figure 5. Which ways will you adopt to improve your listening ability.

- Increase listening practice (63.16%);
- Improve your vocabulary (76.32%);
- Communicate in English as much as possible (47.37%);
- Listen to English songs, speeches, watch British TV series, novels, movies, talk shows (60.53%);
- Attach importance to listening part of classroom English teaching (34.21%);
- Use an English practice APP (36.84%);

The following strategies can be done from students' perspective. 76.32% of students thought they need to

improve their vocabulary accumulation. It goes without saying that increasing the amount of words accumulated is the basis of everything. Only with a good foundation can they learn more easily. Classroom learning is often not that interesting, so some people need some interesting ways to learn. 60.53% of learners said they would combine learning and entertainment by listening to English songs and English speeches, plus watching English TV series, novels, movies and talk shows, to improve their English listening skills in this relaxed way. While 47.37% of people believe that they should bring English into their daily life, not only in the classroom but also in their daily communication. A further 36.84% of subjects have started to focus on the listening part of the classroom and use English listening practice apps to improve their listening skills. Other strategies also include attaching importance to listening part of classroom English listening and cultivating different way of thinking in foreign language learning.

Students should not limit themselves to teaching material, but choose their specific ways of practicing listening skill, such as listening to English speeches, talk shows, etc. In the classroom, cherish the English classroom, pay attention to the listening part of the classroom, let students as the main subject of language output. Besides, students should also increase interaction with teachers and classmates, cultivate a different way of thinking in foreign language learning, so that they can shift in time in communication. After class, students can analyze and summarize the listening content of classroom learning, understand their weak parts, accumulate new words and sentences, give themselves a classroom feedback, and practice more, so as to transform classroom knowledge into their own knowledge and prepare for the subsequent output.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Main findings

This study found that many business English undergraduates upgraded from junior college have difficulties in learning the listening part of English. The main difficulties are the incomprehension of listening in the class, the inertial Chinese way of understanding a sentence and the mismatch between teaching materials and student's actual English level. The main reasons that lie behind the difficulties are the lack of vocabulary, the lack of familiarity with the way English sentence patterns are used, and the lack of cultural background knowledge to support students in English listening learning.

Of course, possible strategies from three dimensions could be adopted to address these problem. School can design more optional courses, provide personalized listening guidance and training to specific students, set up interest study group and increase the proportion of English listening class to help students in the study of English skills. For teachers, can start from the actual needs of the students, increase the listening input in the classroom, communicate in English with students as much as possible, and create more effective ways to help students in their English learning. While students themselves should give full play to their own subjective initiative, participate as much as they can in the class, communicate with teachers in and after the class, and learn to reflect on their ways of learning.

4.2 Limitations

Unfortunately, the survey data in this paper is limited to the Business English undergraduates upgraded from junior college in Guangzhou College of Commerce. The survey has only involved a simple group of 38 subjects and 3 teachers. So, the scope of reference selection is relatively small. Further study on the same issue should enlarge the the number of the subjects, including Business English undergraduates upgraded from junior college both in and outside of Guangzhou College of Commerce, to ensure a more comprehensive data could be collected.

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