

Research on the Correlation between the Learning Strategies on English Listening and the Corresponding Performance among College Students

Xuemei Zhang*

Jilin Engineering Normal University, Changchun 130052, Jilin Provinces, China

Abstract: Listening is very important for the learning of a language. We must ensure that there are language standardization and foundation of practice while learning any languages. By improving listening, the language communication ability can be improved. Learning other languages requires listening as the foundation of learning. In college English teaching, listening also takes very important position. However, due to the current situation of Chinese education and the characteristics of students' learning, Chinese students generally have a lower level of listening skills, and usually, most of them score very low in the listening part in level 4 or level 6 of the College English Tests. The root cause of this phenomenon is that listening test in some underdeveloped areas of China is not included as part of the test results of the middle and high school entrance examinations, and very often, listening was neglected in English lessons. As a result, many students end up with poor listening performance result. However, in college, the teaching of listening still follows the traditional education model of the past, and there are many lessons allocated to this aspect of English learning. In addition, there is almost no strategic guidance in the learning process, making students unable to begin on listening practice. Although both teachers and students tried to improve their listening skills, the results were unsatisfactory. Therefore, it is imperative to solve the problem of poor English listening level of students. Experts such as Huang Zidong and Wang Yu believe that strengthening strategic training is currently a very important method to improve students' English listening skills.

Keywords: College students; English listening;

Learning strategies; Listening performance; Relevance

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***Corresponding author:** Xuemei Zhang, scott23@163.com

1 Definition of learning strategy

The term "learning strategy" was coined by Oxford, a foreign linguist in 1990. As early as 1996, Chinese scholar Wen Qiufang had a systematic discussion on learning strategies, which she mentioned in the book "Strategies on Learning English". However, the term 'learning strategies' has been defined by both local and foreign scholars, but the interpretation emphasis is different. Thus, there are currently no unified views regarding the definition of this term (Table 1).

Table 1. Definition of learning strategies

Scholar (Time)	Definition
Chamot (1987)	Learning strategies are the skills, methods or deliberate actions used or taken by students, with the purpose of improving the learning effect and recalling the form and content of language.
Oxford (1990)	Language learning strategies are defined as the behaviors or actions taken by learners to make language learning more successful, autonomous, and enjoyable.
Cheng Xiaotang, Zheng Min (2002)	Language learning strategies are various strategies adopted by learners in order to achieve better results in language learning.
Wen Qiufang (2004)	Strategies are a series of measures taken by the learners while learning a foreign language

Many scholars have different views on learning strategies, but their definitions or interpretations of 'learning strategies' still possess certain common characteristics. For example, the learners can adopt a variety of learning strategies to improve their English level, and the learning strategy is not only an implicit internal mental activity, but also an explicit external behavior. Thus, learners should consider which strategy to use for learning based on their actual situation.

2 Definition of listening strategies

Listening strategy is considered by many scholars as an important part of learning strategies. In 1990, Oxford argued that learners should understand listening, and listening strategy is a great way for learning. In 1990, Ellis defined listening strategy as a combination of external and internal behaviors of learners while improving their English comprehension. In 1997, Vandergrift's perception of listening strategies is that it is a learner's behavior or psychology in retrieving and memorizing information, covering a wide range of processes in which some are for better learning and some for improving memory skills or for learning.

With regard to the definition of listening strategies, Chinese scholars have also conducted relevant research and discussion. In 1992, Pan Yugao interpreted listening learning strategies as an understanding of the vague meaning of new information, or an active process of retention or learning. Wang Yu and Wu Yanjun also proposed their understanding of listening strategies in 2002 and 2009 respectively in which they believe that listening strategies are an vital part of learning strategies and are some of the techniques and steps used by listeners. In 2004, He Mengyi and Ji Peiyong defined listening strategy as a number of mental activities and actions that are performed to understand and master the listening materials. In 2015, Yang Fan believed that listening strategies are some methods and skills the learners use before, during and after listening to improve their listening level^[1].

Therefore, listening strategy is a process, and learners will take a lot of relevant methods in order to improve the listening level and promote listening comprehension in this process. These processes involve various relevant tactics and methods which include the implicit internal psychological activities as well as the explicit external behaviors.

3 Correlation between the Learning Strategies on English Listening and the Listening Performance

3.1 Study Design

3.1.1 Principal problem statements of research

(1) Does the listening strategy training model improve students' English listening comprehension?

(2) Does the listening strategy training model increase the frequency of using the strategy among the students?

(3) Does the listening strategy training model have a different effect on students from high-performing and low-performing groups?

(4) What is the student's overall feedback and comments of the efficacy of listening strategy training?

3.1.2 Study participants

The study participants in the research group were made of 44 subjects who were the students in the ideologies and politics class of a teachers' college. In the control group, 42 students from the School of Management were randomly selected for comparison. Same English teacher was selected in these two groups. In addition, the selected teaching materials, syllabus, and teaching progress were also the same in both groups. In this study, the selected subjects were all college freshmen because they may choose learning strategies unconsciously during the learning process, but they have never received relevant training in learning strategies. This study was conducted to allow these students to consciously make a choice of learning strategies in their learning process to improve their listening skills. The study participants were sub-divided into low-performing group (the last 12 students), average-performing group, and high group (the first 12 students) according to their pre-test results.

3.1.3 Research tools

The methodology of this study is divided into four parts, including questionnaire surveys, pre- and post-tests, interviews and teaching of listening strategies. The listening test questions were extracted from a genuine college English listening test in June and December 2016, and this test accounted for 35 points. The questionnaire used in this study was adapted by incorporating English listening components and

designed in line with the learning strategies checklist which was conceived by Oxford. The questionnaire which has 28 questions in total includes several parts, specifically cognitive strategies, social strategies and emotional strategies. The questions were given as multiple choice questions in the form of Likert five-point scales. Students were required to select the most relevant options according to their situations^[2]. The teaching cycle of the listening strategy took 16 weeks, with one listening class per week. After the test, questionnaire survey and strategy training were completed, low-performing listeners and high-performing listeners were selected for interviews.

3.1.4 Data collection and analysis

Prior to the training, a preliminary test of the students' listening skills was conducted. The test accounted for a total of 35 points, of which 10 points were essay, 10 points were dictation, and 15 points were dialog. The questionnaire survey consists of two parts, i.e., how to use listening strategies, and analysis of the causes of poor performance in English listening and understanding of listening learning. This survey contained a total of 28 items, of which, 15 items were related to cognitive strategies, 4 items were emotional strategies, and the remaining 9 items were metacognitive strategies. After the training, according to the situation of the students, a post-test questionnaire was conducted, and the scores obtained were the same as the data before the experiment.

In the current study, statistical software from the social sciences was used to conduct sample t-tests and descriptive statistics tests on the data of the two questionnaires and the pre- and post-test results to verify any differences in the use of listening strategies before and after training. Based on Oxford's classification, the frequency of use of the strategy is reflected by the average value of each strategy. The average value of 4.5-5.0 indicates that the strategy has been used very frequently; the average value of 3.5-4.4 indicates that the strategy is often used; the average value of 2.5-3.4 indicates that the strategy is sometimes used; the average value of 1.5-2.4 indicates that the strategy is used occasionally; the average value of 1.0-1.4 indicates that the strategy has never been used.

3.1.5 Study Process

After the preliminary test and questionnaire, these assessments formed the basis for targeted listening

strategy training, with a cycle of 16 weeks. The conventional teaching mode was applied on the subjects in the control groups while the teaching mode of strategy training was applied to the research group.

The basis of this experiment originated from the "New College English Listening and Speaking Course", which is based on the learning strategy model created by Oxford. The author designed a listening strategy training mode based on the actual use of listening strategies by students in our college. The design was based on college English learning. This design was relatively practical and targeted. There were six aspects in this model, namely judging students' listening level, determining the content of strategy training, writing strategy training plans, implementing strategy training, assessing the effectiveness of strategy training, and revising and perfecting strategy training, each link was repeated until the a systematic strategy training process was formed^[3].

3.2 Training process

(1) By understanding the current situation of students' questionnaires in research and control groups and the results of listening tests before the experiment, a systematic statistical analysis was performed to analyze the difficulties of students in learning English. In the end, the listening scores of the students in both classes were very low. The average score in the research group was 7.34, and the average score in the control group was 7.48 (35 points in total). The main problems faced by students in listening include: the listening speed was too fast, they could not understand the meaning of words and sentences while listening, they were unfamiliar with the content of listening materials, they could not remember what they were listening to, and they were not familiar with the intonation of their voices, and lack of the ability to take notes while listening.

(2) Statistical analysis on the questionnaires of the strategy training conducted in the research group before the experiment

Through this statistical analysis, we can learn about the listening strategies used by the students, so as to evaluate the students' strategic needs, and then determine the 18 strategies as categorized in three parts that require training. This includes five items in metacognitive strategies, ten items in recognition strategies and three items in emotional or social strategies, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Training items of listening strategies

Metacognitive strategies	Development of plan	Develop a training plan and determine the purpose of listening based on the weaknesses in listening
	Self-management	Manage yourself and make sure the listening tasks are well completed
	Self-monitoring	Monitor the completion of your own plans and understanding of listening content
	Attention to selection	Selectively understand the keyword, phrases and language tags
	Self-evaluation	Assess the effectiveness of listening comprehension and the efficacy of using strategies
Cognitive strategies	Note taking	Document concepts and keywords with diagrams, abbreviations and numbers
	Prediction	Use the title, legend, or options to explore the main topic of the article and predict the subsequent content
	Reasoning	Use existing information to guess the meaning of the sentence and the theme or purpose of the article
	Association	Associate the common knowledge and common sense, as well as background knowledge to understand the intent of words, sentences, and articles
	Transformation	Use the knowledge and skills that have been learned to aid listening comprehension
	Use of keywords	Be excellent in identifying keywords
	Auditory reproduction	Reproducing textual sounds of words and phrases
	Restructuring	Regroup the words you know by listening into sentences and paragraphs 把
	Concluding	Summarize the information obtained
	Using reference	For example, using dictionary
Affective strategies	Mutual cooperation	Work with classmates to solve problems
	Clarification of questions and doubts	Seek explanation or clarification to clear any ambiguities and doubts
	Self-regulation	Overcome the fear while listening

(3) Formulating a strategy training plan

Based on the first volume of College English Listening and Speaking Course of student's version, the strategy training plan was compiled. The purpose of this plan is to solve the difficulties students face in the course of English listening and to determine the purpose of the final listening strategy training. The plan can be divided into two main stages. The first stage covered the first to the seventh week. This stage mainly serves to provide the explanation about the strategy theory and the relevant training. Among them, metacognitive strategies were scheduled on the first to second week, cognitive strategies on the third to sixth week, and the social or emotional (or affective) strategies on the seventh week. The second stage covered the eighth to the sixteenth week. Combined with the listening characteristics of each unit, the already-trained strategies were combined with this. According to the textbooks, they were put into application.

(4) Steps of the implementation strategy training

Each new strategy training consists of five steps. The first step is preparation. The preparation should focus on the strategy training plan which clarifies the new strategies to be trained in each lesson, according to the characteristics of the listening materials in the lesson.

Secondly, the teacher introduces the new strategies, explain the importance of their usage, and demonstrate how to apply the strategy. The third step is application. Through application, the students can apply the learned strategies not only in the listening learning in the English lesson course, but also in the extracurricular listening exercises, so that they can apply the learning strategies freely. The fourth step is evaluation. Teacher will evaluate the use of the new strategy[4]. The fifth of the final step is consolidation. A number of listening tasks designed in advance will be completed in this step, and use the previously learned strategies, as well as new strategies, to internalize the new strategies for students.

(5) Evaluate the efficacy of strategy training

After the strategy training, the listening performance of the students in the research group and the frequency of using listening strategies were objectively analyzed to evaluate the training effect by referring to the previous questionnaire surveys, interviews and test results.

(6) Revise and improve training strategies

After the training, it is necessary to conduct a post mortem regarding the training in a timely manner, in order to identify any deficiencies and find solutions

as countermeasures. Students' feedback was collected which would be used to further improve the training strategy.

3.3 Results and discussion

After analyzing the data in Table 3, it is not difficult to find that the English listening scores of the two classes before the experiment were basically the same, with very negligible difference. After the experiment, the English listening score of the students in research group increased from 7.34 points before the experiment to 10.76 points after the experiment, the standard deviation decreased from 1.24 points to 1.01, and the score of the students in control group score improved from 7.48 points before the experiment to 8.71 points after the experiment, and the standard deviation increased from 1.12 to 1.21. These research

data confirmed that one semester of listening training has improved the listening level of the two groups of students at the same time. Particularly, the students in research group with lesser internal differences have benefited from listening strategy training, narrowing internal differences, but the internal difference increased in the control group. After performing a T test on the difference between the two test scores before and after the experiment, we found that there was a significant difference in the listening scores of the students in the research group ($P= 0.000$), but the differences in the scores of the students in the control group were not significant ($P = 0.826 > 0.05$). Thus, the listening level of the students in research group has improved significantly, indicating that listening strategy training can indeed help improve students' English listening performance^[5].

Table 3. Comparison of pre-test and post-test listening performance of students in the research group and the control group

		Number of subjects	Mean	Mean difference	Standard deviation	T-test	
						T-value	P(2-tailed)
Control group	Pre-test	42	7.48	0.23	1.21	1.650	0.826
	Post-test	42	8.71		1.12		
Research group	Pre-test	44	7.34	3.24	1.24	3.214	0.000
	Post-test	44	10.76		1.01		

In summary, students have to make some efforts, go through a process of hardship in order to improve their English listening. This is because improving listening takes some time which requires the learners to accumulate the knowledge, skills and experience over time. The task of the teacher is not only to inspire students to train their own listening skills, but also to choose appropriate listening strategies for each student, and to teach students the most practical and effective listening strategies that are most suitable for the students themselves. Through scientific and reasonable training methods, students' English listening ability and English level have been improved to a favorable extent. Listening strategy training can make students use the strategy more frequently; while listening strategy training has a certain degree of impact on listeners in low-performing and high-performing groups, but the impact on the high-performing groups is lower than that in low-performing groups. Without a doubt, listening strategy training can improve the students' listening performance. The above research is a good demonstration of the value of strategy training, which

proves the feasibility of listening strategy training methods and it is very beneficial to improve students' English performance.

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