

# An Experimental Study of Promoting College Students' English Listening Ability with American TV Series

Chen Liu\*

School of Foreign Languages, Taishan College, Taian 271021, China

\*Corresponding author: Chen Liu, [hellodolphin2007@sina.com](mailto:hellodolphin2007@sina.com)

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**Abstract:** In English teaching, the improvement of listening ability is essential to the comprehensive development of students' language competence. In recent years, listening comprehension has been an important part of English teaching in colleges. Among the four basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, listening is the basis of English learning, but it is also regarded as the most difficult one by the students. However, there are many problems in traditional English listening teaching in colleges. Many college students spend a lot of time on their daily study, but they have failed to gain satisfactory effect. English listening teaching with American TV series does not only provide learners with rich audio-visual materials but also shows a variety of authentic contexts for effective learning, so that students can improve their English listening comprehension ability and exercise their English communication ability. Therefore, the study attempts to make an experimental study to promote college students' English listening ability by adopting American TV series.

**Keywords:** Krashen's Acquisition Theory; Context Theory; English listening teaching; American TV series; College students

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research background

Listening is quite an important part of English language capability. Listening comprehension is a rather complicated process, which may cover elements of language, cognition, culture and social knowledge, etc. According to C. Kenneth (1976)<sup>[1]</sup>, listening comprehension is composed of five parts, discrimination, perception of message, auditory memory, decoding message, and applying or storing message with the language learned. As for the sequence of those five parts, the posterior always relies on the previous part. There are two factors that will affect listening comprehension. One is the listening material factor, the other is the learner factor. The influential elements of listening materials mainly include speech rate, vocabulary, syntax and the listener's familiarity with the materials involved.

## **1.2. Research purpose**

From the aspect of teaching practice, we found that non-learning factors, especially psychological factors, play a decisive role except for learning factors. It is common to see students' weariness, burnout, negative emotions in colleges. Without learning motivations and interests, students' learning effect is greatly reduced. College English teachers should pay attention to how to create the environment and forms loved by the students in the aspects of the English teaching process, teaching method and emotional context. In that case, the student's learning effect will be significantly improved.

## **1.3. Research significance**

In terms of English teaching, the teaching of English listening is a comparatively weak link, which has failed to play the expected role in students' English learning. However, in daily communication, listening plays a significant role. According to an American survey, when normal people are awake, they spend 70% of the time on various forms of communicative activities, and during the period for communicative activities, listening accounts for 42%. Expecting to enhance the teaching effect of listening class and trying to find a new listening teaching method, this study analyzed the problems that existed in the traditional listening class and the feasibility of adopting the American TV series in English listening teaching for college students.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Theoretical basis**

#### **2.1.1. Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory**

In the field of second language acquisition, the American linguist S.D. Krashen is one of the most accomplished and influential scholars. Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theories are the summary of second language acquisition or foreign language learning in the past two or three decades. He theorized and systematized all kinds of learning results and made them a system. Krashen began to engage himself in the study of a second language in the early 1970s, and he published two monographs in the early 1980s. They are "Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning (1981)" <sup>[2]</sup>, "Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition (1982)" <sup>[3]</sup>. On the other hand, He and T. Terrell co-published "The Natural Approach (1983)" <sup>[4]</sup>. In these three works, Krashen elaborated his foreign language teaching system through the analysis of a second language acquisition process. Krashen's second language acquisition theory contains five hypotheses as follows:

- (1) Acquisition and Learning Hypothesis
- (2) The Natural Order Hypothesis
- (3) The Monitor Hypothesis
- (4) Affective Filter Hypothesis
- (5) Input Hypothesis

#### **2.1.2. Context theory**

The concept of context was first proposed by the British anthropologist Malinowski (1923) <sup>[5]</sup>. In his opinion, language isn't the signal of thoughts, but a way of behavior. He divided contexts into the context of culture (the social-cultural background that the speaker lives in) and context of situation (a concrete scenario where the

speech act takes place). He said that any words would be meaningless without the context of situation.

The British system-functional linguist Halliday MAK *et al.* (1964)<sup>[6]</sup> did deeper research on types of context elements. He put forward the concept of “register,” and divided register into three aspects: field, mode and tenor. “Field” refers to what’s happening. That is to say, the scope of the speech act includes politics, science and daily life. “Mode” refers to the medium of speech act, which contains oral form, written form or oral and written form. “Tenor” covers communicators’ status, identity and interrelation.

Based on Halliday’s theory, Hu Zhuanglin<sup>[6]</sup> discussed the relationship between context and pragmatics in his book “Discourse Cohesion and Coherence (1994),” in which he divided context into three categories: linguistic context, context of situation and context of culture.

## 2.2. Previous studies on audio-visual English listening teaching at home

Many researchers and teachers have proposed to change the traditional listening teaching methods, and they have made many studies on the application of original films and television plays to English listening teaching. In that way, English can be spoken naturally. In 2003, Wang S *et al.* (2003) in “Teaching ELF Listening: From Theory to Practice” put forward the positive function of watching films and television plays by using modern teaching equipment in English listening teaching<sup>[7]</sup>. Ye X (2004)<sup>[8]</sup> proposed the English audiovisual and speaking teaching design at the university, she advocated English teaching with Internet and multimedia technology to improve the teaching effects of listening classes. Ding G (2009)<sup>[9]</sup> carried out her experiment, trying to improve the teaching effect of college English listening. Such a teaching pattern as the traditional listening teaching model + film-watching teaching practice was employed. Experimental results showed that this teaching pattern has helped improve teaching efficiency to some extent. It has brought great vitality to college English teaching and learning environment. Yang H *et al.* (2010)<sup>[10]</sup> did a study of the relationship between American TV series watching and English learning. An effective way was found to promote English proficiency that students keep on watching an American TV series season after season and watch them repeatedly. Feng L *et al.* (2013)<sup>[11]</sup> also made a study of improving English listening ability with American TV series. They analyzed the features of American TV series and the reasons that American TV series has become popular in China. Based on the Affective Filter Hypothesis, they bring forward the practice of improving listening ability by using American TV series. They thought that this was quite an important teaching device.

## 2.3. Previous studies on audio-visual English listening teaching abroad

Foreign scholars have carried out much research on applying films and television videos to English teaching. Massi and Merino (1996)<sup>[12]</sup> put forward that English films and television videos can provide authentic language materials and scenes, hence they are the most ideal listening materials. Arthur (1999) put forward that visual media can supply students with real mode for imitation and role play. We can raise students’ awareness of other cultures, enhance their language perception, extend teacher-student interaction, expand the limits of students’ classroom activities, and help the students to use the most advanced technology so as to promote the language learning through right and appropriate teaching. J. R. Weyers (1999)<sup>[13]</sup>, in his work *The Effect of Authentic Video on Communicative Competence*, stated that original films and television videos can play a constructive role in improving students’ English ability, especially in listening and speaking abilities. The famous linguist Hammer (2003)<sup>[14]</sup> discussed audio-visual teaching in his book “The Practice of English Language Teaching,” in which he mentioned that one of the main advantages of videos is that students do not just hear language but see it too. This greatly helps the students with their comprehension. In addition, videos

allow students to look out of their classrooms. J. Sherman (2012)<sup>[15]</sup>, a Professor of Oxford University, made detailed descriptions of the features and sample applications of each kind of film and television video in his work “Using Authentic Video in the Language Teaching.” There are movies, television series, documentaries, commercials, news and talk shows. He fully demonstrated that films and television materials had a positive effect on the improvement of students’ English comprehension ability.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research questions**

In the present study, the author assumes that this teaching method is more effective in promoting the students’ comprehensive listening ability than the traditional teaching model. This study tries to answer the following three questions:

- (1) What is the current situation of college English listening teaching?
- (2) Is it feasible to conduct English listening teaching in colleges?
- (3) What effects would English listening teaching with American TV series produce on college students’ listening ability?

#### **3.2. Research participants**

To verify the feasibility and effectiveness of applying American TV series to English listening teaching in colleges, this study designed a listening teaching experiment according to the control principle. The participants of the experiment are 100 first-grade college students from two classes in Taishan College. Each of the two classes (Class 4, Class 5) has 50 students taught by the same English teacher. Class 4 is designed as the experimental class conducted with the teaching model of English listening teaching with American TV series, while Class 5 is designed as the control class conducted with the traditional listening teaching model.

#### **3.3. Research instruments**

This English listening teaching experiment was carried out by employing such research instruments as a student questionnaire, pretest and post-test. In addition, this study adopts SPSS to make data analysis of the pretest and post-test results.

##### **3.3.1. Pretest**

The pretest aims to test the participants’ English listening levels before the experiment. This study used the listening questions of the Shandong college entrance examination (2022) as test questions. There are 20 multiple-choice questions. In part one, there are five multiple-choice questions for five short conversations respectively. In part two, there are fifteen multiple-choice questions for four long conversations and a monologue. The test lasted for 20 minutes. The pretest was held on March 20, 2024. By the results of the pretest, the participants’ present English learning situation can be known. It is a good reference for the study to choose teaching materials and design the experimental listening teaching with American TV series. The pretest can also increase the credibility of the study.

##### **3.3.2. Post-test**

The pretest intends to test the participants’ English listening achievements after the experiment. This study



used the listening questions of the Shandong college entrance examination (2022) as test questions. In part one, there are five multiple-choice questions for five short conversations respectively. In part two, there are fifteen multiple-choice questions for four long conversations and a monologue. The test lasted for 20 minutes. The post-test was held on June 22, 2024. The post-test scores are the basis to evaluate this teaching experiment, which can demonstrate if the English listening teaching with American TV series works. The post-test can also increase the credibility of the study.

### **3.4. Data collection procedures**

Before the implementation of this teaching experiment, the author conducted the pretest on March 20, 2024, to test the participants' listening levels before the experimental teaching. The pretest lasted for 20 minutes under the author's supervision. This study distributed 100 pretest papers to 100 participants in the experimental class and control class at the same time. All the test papers were collected and marked by the study. The post-test was conducted by the study on June 22, 2024, to test the participants' listening levels after the experimental teaching process. The post-test lasted for 20 minutes under the author's supervision. The study distributed 100 post-test papers to 100 participants in the experimental class and control class at the same time. All the test papers were collected and marked by the study. The results of the post-test were collected and analyzed by the study.

### **3.5. Experimental teaching design**

In the course of the experimental English listening teaching with American TV series, the study mainly adopted self-edited video clips from the American TV series "Friends" as the teaching material for the experimental class. In the meantime, the control class was conducted by using the listening materials from the textbook "New Horizon College English" published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Teaching Press.

#### **3.5.1. Teaching aims and requirements**

Listening, speaking, reading and writing are complementary parts of language learning. However, listening and speaking are the most fundamental parts of language learning. Language is the tool and means of communication. The goal of language learning is to promote communicative competence. Teaching English listening with American TV series can not only stimulate students' interests and motivations in learning but also create a real and specific language environment. The purpose of this experimental teaching is to effectively increase the students' learning enthusiasm and promote their comprehensive English communication ability.

#### **3.5.2. Teaching method**

The experimental teaching model adopted by the study is the teacher's classroom guidance + students' after-class exercises. The basis of this experimental teaching is the teacher's classroom teaching and guidance, which can stimulate the students' learning enthusiasm and guide them on how to promote their listening ability by making use of suitable American TV series after school. Students are encouraged to learn by themselves in their spare time. In classroom teaching, the traditional "teacher-centered" teaching should also be transformed into "students-centered" learning. The students play the main role in their study. The teacher teaches with self-edited video clips of the American TV series, multimedia courseware, scripts, and exercises. The students

get to know the cultural background and related knowledge of the American TV series and appreciate the fragments of the television series in a relaxed classroom environment. The teacher and students can do a variety of exercises and activities, such as dubbing and role play, to increase the student's English learning interests and enthusiasm. After school, the students will complete the assignments arranged by the teacher, such as script dictation, criticism writing, etc. By doing so, the students can indeed improve their listening comprehension ability.

### **3.5.3. Class period arrangement**

The study planned two periods of class per week to do this experimental teaching in the experimental class. Considering the uncertain factors in the implementation process, the study arranged 30 periods of class in 15 weeks in total and made specific class period arrangements according to the actual teaching condition.

### **3.5.4. Experimental procedures**

The study arranged the whole experimental teaching into three stages. They are the pre-class preparation stage, class training stage and after-class exercises stage. The study used the American TV series "Friends" as an example to illustrate the experimental procedure.

#### **3.5.4.1. Pre-class preparation**

##### **(1) Material preparation**

The selected American TV series must serve the teaching purpose and are closely related to the classroom teaching materials. This study takes the American TV series "Friends" as an example for illustration.

##### **(2) Material preview**

In the preview stage, the teacher should guide the students to make a preliminary preparation to gain a basic understanding of the American TV series.

For example:

Q1: Have you ever seen the American TV series "Friends"?

Q2: How much do you know about "Friends"? What do you think of it?

As for questions 1 and 2, the teacher could add the following supplementary information:

"Friends" is an American sitcom. The story is centered around six old friends' lives in New York, Manhattan. It describes ten years of hardships they have gone through together. There are 10 seasons and 236 episodes altogether. "Friends" was shown from September 22, 1994, to May 6, 2004. It was presented by NBC broadcast. "Friends" is one of the most popular American TV series, which is still a hit and is being re-run around the world. As one of the most well-received sitcoms, the highlight of "Friends" isn't just about its original reproduction of life. Although "Friends" strictly follows the basic rules of an American sitcom, the climax of every episode will return to calm in half an hour.

#### **3.5.4.2. Class training**

##### **(1) Subtitle selection**

Many scholars have done related research on the function of film subtitles in language teaching. Along the learning process of watching, reading and listening, students can get stimulation from pictures, words and subtitles. Such kind of stimulation can promote language learning, boost memory and enhance the learning effect. Therefore, the teacher should pay special attention to the use of subtitles in the process of playing the

American TV series. To prevent students from relying on Chinese subtitles when watching, the teacher should try to select English subtitles. For students of higher English level, the teacher can play the American TV series without subtitles.

(2) Video browsing and practice

Since it would take a long time to play one whole episode of the American TV series, the teacher should play the clips that are suitable for teaching in class. The best part of the American TV series could be depicted by the teacher to the students. In this way, the television videos can be presented coherently and completely in the classroom where the students could be stopped from paying too much attention to the plots of the television series. In the practical teaching, the teacher may combine the multimedia courseware with the television video clips. Explanations and questions can be conducted during the video-playing process to improve the teaching effect.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1. Results of students' pretest and post-test

#### 4.1.1. Data analysis of the independent samples t-test

The study took the class as a grouping variable and did the independent samples *t*-test for the pretest conducted in the experimental class and control class. As **Table 1** shows, the *p*-value of the independent samples *t*-test for the pretest is 0.483, which is greater than 0.05. This *p*-value indicates that there is no significant difference between the experimental and control classes in the pretest results and that the performance of the two classes was consistent before this experiment. In other words, the students' English listening levels of the two parallel classes were similar before the teaching experiment, which is quite important basis for the experimental comparison.

**Table 1.** Independent samples *t*-test for the pretest of the experimental class and control class

Class	Experimental class ( <i>n</i> = 50)	Control class ( <i>n</i> = 50)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Pretest scores	18.78 ± 2.35	18.45 ± 2.33	0.704	0.483

The study took the class as a grouping variable and did the independent samples *t*-test for the post-test conducted in the experimental and control classes. As **Table 2** shows, the *p*-value of the independent samples *t*-test for the post-test is 0.000, it is smaller than 0.01. This *p*-value indicates that there is an obvious difference between the experimental class and the control class in the post-test results. As for the post-test results, it can be seen by the mean that the experimental class students had a better performance than the control class students. That is to say, different teaching methods had caused obvious impact on the post-test results of the two classes. The experimental class students who had the experimental English listening class improved a lot in the post-test. The test results indicate that English listening teaching with American TV series has played a more effective role in improving students' academic performance than traditional English listening teaching.

**Table 2.** Independent samples *t*-test for the post-test of the experimental class and control class

Class	Experimental class ( <i>n</i> = 50)	Control class ( <i>n</i> = 50)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Post-test scores	23.16 ± 1.87	21.21 ± 2.16	4.818	0.000

### 4.1.2. Data analysis of the paired samples t-test

**Table 3** is the result analysis of the paired samples *t*-test for the pretest and post-test of the control class. The test results show that the correlation coefficient between the pretest and post-test of the control class is 0.890. It reaches the extremely obvious level, indicating that there is a significant association between the pretest results and post-test results of the control class. The control class students' post-test scores are higher than the pretest scores. The *p*-value is 0.000, which is smaller than 0.01. The *p*-value indicates that there is a significant difference between the pretest results and post-test results of the control class. Therefore, the traditional teaching method can promote the students' listening performance.

**Table 3.** Paired samples T-test for the pretest and post-test of the control class

Class	Pretest of the control class ( <i>n</i> = 50)	Post-test of the control class ( <i>n</i> = 50)	<i>r</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Scores	18.45 ± 2.33	21.21 ± 2.16	0.890***	-18.318	0.000

**Table 4** is the result analysis of paired samples *t*-test for the pretest and post-test of the experimental class. The test results show that the correlation coefficient between the pretest and post-test of the experimental class is 0.861. It reaches the extremely obvious level, indicating that there is a significant association between the pretest results and post-test results of the experimental class. The experimental class students' post-test scores are higher than the pretest scores. The *p*-value is 0.000, it is smaller than 0.01. The *p*-value indicates that there is a significant difference between the pretest scores and post-test scores of the experimental class. Therefore, the experimental teaching method can promote the students' listening performance.

**Table 4.** Paired samples *t*-test for the pretest and post-test of the experimental class

Class	Pretest of the experimental class ( <i>n</i> = 50)	Post-test of the experimental class ( <i>n</i> = 50)	<i>r</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Scores	18.78 ± 2.35	23.16 ± 1.87	0.861***	-25.679	0.000

## 4.2. Summary

English listening teaching with American TV Series contributes to the creation of a language environment. To learn a language, the simplest way is to be in the language environment and accept the language culture. However, for Chinese people, English is neither a mother tongue nor a second language, rather it is a foreign language at most. For a long time, the lack of an authentic English language environment has been a major problem for Chinese students. To solve this difficult problem to the most, American TV Series can be introduced to English teaching. American TV Series has rich audio, words, and images, and those words, sentences, images, and people can create a real and natural language environment for students.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1. Major findings

One semester's experimental teaching proved that college English listening teaching with the American TV Series can play a vital role in improving the students' English listening ability. It may make the classroom teaching more intuitive and vivid, and make the classroom atmosphere more active. This sort of classroom teaching can greatly stimulate the students' English learning enthusiasm and produce obvious effects on the promotion of students' listening ability. At the same time, it enables the students to understand the language

knowledge better and master it from different angles and makes the students actively engage in the language practice. Such behaviors greatly contribute to the improvement of the student's language skills.

## 5.2. Limitations

Since the duration for the experiment is limited, the amount of input might be insufficient, which would make the experimental result not as fully convincing as it is expected.

## 5.3. Suggestions for further studies

English teaching in college, particularly English listening teaching, is expected to draw more serious attention from both scholars and English teachers. As national education is undergoing reform deeply and thoroughly, it is important to shift attention to college education, especially college English teaching. More attempts should be made to find good solutions to the promotion of college students' practical English abilities, including their English listening ability. Although the application of American TV series to college English listening teaching has proven to be more effective in promoting the students' listening ability, there might be some other materials that can be experimented with in English listening teaching to help the students promote their English listening ability. This study is simply a demonstration of an experiment that the application of American TV series to the English listening teaching in colleges can play quite a positive role in promoting college students' English listening ability, which may provide the scholars and other peers with some ideas for the educational reforms.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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