

# How to Improve Students' English Level Quickly in English Teaching

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**Abstract:** Modern language teaching theories highly emphasize the influence of "listening" on learning and language use. English listening teaching is not only language teaching, but also ability training. Among the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, listening is the foundation. It is not the only primary way of acquiring linguistic information, but the basis for improving other skills. Many Chinese students consider the listening test to be the most difficult part of the entire test. The obstacles that high school students encounter in listening are various, for example, poor English listening, slow vocabulary processing, and lack of cultural background knowledge. The purpose of this paper is to put forward corresponding solutions to such problems in order to improve students' listening ability.

**Keywords:** Modern language teaching; Language use; English listening

## 1. Characteristics of high school listening comprehension

Although both listening and reading are receptive skills, teaching listening is very different from teaching reading. In reading, students associate meaning with printed words, and while listening, they associate meaning with sound. If they wanted to while they were reading, they could refer to it, but they couldn't, and in many cases, they couldn't because the sound died so quickly that they didn't have a chance to go back.

Mary Underwood (1989) pointed out that the listening process consists of three stages. In the first stage, sounds enter sensory storage, commonly referred to as "echoic" memory, and are organized into meaningful units based on the listener's pre-existing knowledge of language. In the second stage, words or groups of words are examined and compared with information already in long-term memory, and meanings are extracted from them. In the third stage, after the listener constructs the meaning from the utterance (which may or may not be what the speaker intended), he or she can pass the information on to long-term memory for later use. Typically, listeners who want to do these things log messages and store them in long-term memory in a simplified form<sup>[1]</sup>.

## 2. Problems existing in high school listening comprehension

### 2.1 Pronunciation

Listening comprehension is theoretically viewed as an active process in which individual listeners focus on selected aspects of auditory input, construct meaning from passages, and relate what they hear to existing knowledge. Students know very little about the fact that the pronunciation of language changes in the flow of speech. As a result, they often do not understand spoken English. This question is very typical for high school students. Examples of incomprehension can be found in students' classroom listening. Comprehension failures are often caused by pronunciation and reading speed. They tend to block students' understanding and often completely confuse them.

Even at the beginning of language learning, some students are unsure of the correct pronunciation of each word. If things go on, especially those words that sound alike, students will find it hard to tell the difference. Here are some commonly used words that sound similar or even the same. For example sheep -ship /ʃi:p/----/ʃip/<sup>[2]</sup>.

### 2.2 Vocabulary

Vocabulary is the most detailed part of language knowledge. The extensive vocabulary list ill helps students do well in listening comprehension and master listening material quickly. Thousands of words and phrases are necessary in order to understand what others think and express yourself.

There is no doubt that the lack of the necessary amount of vocabulary will lead to listening comprehension failures. Not being able to process the sound into meaningful words while being perceived will have the same result. One student said: "Once I heard the word 'robbery' in a passage. I thought I had come across it before, but couldn't immediately remember what it meant. The next thing I had to do was keep figuring out the word. meaning, can no longer focus on incoming information."

### 2.3 Information processing

Many students feel that they speak English too fast to keep up. They have little time to understand what they hear when the bulk of the incoming language arrives, or they don't have time to do so at all, and as a result, they have trouble keeping up with the speaker. The situation is even worse for those who try to understand sentences by translating them one by one, but not delivering them in a scene or picture, which greatly affects their reaction speed, comprehension and memory.

Chinese sentence structure and word order are very different from English. Therefore, understanding English on the basis of Chinese is slow and misleading. What's more, in order to focus on translation, students have limited time to understand listening material without any implied meaning<sup>[3]</sup>.

### 2.4 Cultural knowledge background

Language is the emergence of culture. Students who want to learn English listening well must have a certain understanding of

history and culture, and even understand local conditions and customs, lifestyles and habits. Due to this lack of knowledge, some students have difficulty listening. For example, “Thanksgiving”, “April Fools” often appear in some listening materials. If students know very little about these, they will be confused. For example, English usually greet each other by talking about the weather, but we Chinese are in a different situation. Most of the time, the Chinese want to ask people, “What’s your wife’s job? What’s her age?” And mates don’t mind. But Brits are less likely to talk about their privacy like age, salary etc<sup>[4]</sup>.

### **3. Countermeasures to solve problems in high school listening comprehension**

#### **3.1 Listening training**

These features of spoken English make students feel like they have never heard spoken English like this, especially if their previous teacher pronounced it less standard. If this problem is not addressed, they may get caught up in an acoustic blur that touches their ears during listening lessons, and their experience is bound to be very dissipating and frustrating. Hard-of-hearing people need to pay special attention to the sound system, and listening to a large number of essay passages can help them learn the sound system well. Intermediate listeners need to listen to a wide variety of speakers and accents to become familiar with a broad range of English pronunciation. Therefore, in the classroom, teachers should explain the correct expressions of certain vowels and consonants when necessary<sup>[5]</sup>.

When listening to a dialogue or paragraph, it is best for teachers to write sentences or phrases on the blackboard that may cause students to have difficulty recognizing, because some students are confused by some sentences or phrases in the continuous speech. This is especially essential in the early stages of their learning to listen.

#### **3.2 Vocabulary training**

Clearly, increasing a student’s vocabulary increases the student’s potential for better comprehension. Building students’ vocabulary will improve students’ conversation skills, students’ reading skills, and students’ listening skills. The more words students learn, the more they become listeners. In listening lessons, before students start listening, teachers should be able to predict which words and phrases in the listening text may sound familiar to students, but their meaning cannot be sorted out while being perceived, in other words, which words Probably belongs to their reading vocabulary, not listening vocabulary. The teacher’s job is to try to activate these words and promote listening.

#### **3.3 Speed training**

Many students complain that while listening, their ears disappear so quickly that they don’t have enough time to decode the information. To address this, for anyone starting to learn to listen, it may be helpful to start with repeating phrases, shortening sentences and then longer sentences. Listening requires concentration. This movement can get the listener’s attention because he or she has to focus on the speaker to repeat. When repeating longer sentences, the listener needs to sometimes use his or her language knowledge and background knowledge.

Teachers should teach students not to listen word for word, but a group of words or phrases. Processing is accelerated when a group of words is treated as a linguistic symbol. Students should be taught to pay special attention to stress words, but not to struggle to understand each word.

#### **3.4 Cultural knowledge training**

In teaching listening comprehension courses, teachers are playing the role of psychologists. In material selection and classroom practice, teachers should expand listening-related knowledge before listening, arouse students’ interest, restrain negative factors, exert positive factors, and improve teaching effect. When choosing listening materials, teachers should try to choose some interesting, new and varied materials. Interesting and authentic material may arouse learners’ curiosity and arouse their desire to “listen” to them. Enriched content and activities can maintain and improve learner motivation.

### **4. In conclusion**

We found that four main factors make high school listening comprehension difficult : unfamiliarity with different types of English accents , insufficient vocabulary , slow processing , cultural background knowledge, and the influence of psychological factors. At the same time, it also provides some corresponding skills to solve these problems. At present, because listening comprehension plays a very important role in the college entrance examination, the whole society pays more attention to listening. Therefore, teachers should make further efforts to study and explore, so that students can have a higher listening ability after entering the university.

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