

How to Help Senior High School Students Reduce Listening Anxiety

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Abstract

As one of the important skills in English learning, listening is an input skill. High school students often cause listening anxiety in the learning process, which affects their learning effect. The purpose of this study is to explore the causes of English listening anxiety in senior high school students and the corresponding mitigation strategies. By means of questionnaire and semi-structured interview, 86 students from A high school in a county were investigated and analyzed. The study found that the main causes of high school students' listening anxiety include fast speaking speed, large amount of new words in listening materials, interference of background noise, lack of listening training in class and so on. In order to alleviate these anxieties, this paper proposes corresponding strategies, aiming at providing practical teaching methods for English teachers to effectively reduce the listening anxiety of high school students and improve their English listening level.

Keywords

High school English, English listening anxiety, listening teaching.

1. Introduction

Listening belongs to the comprehension skills and is a crucial component of language ability, serving as the primary mode of language input (Luo Zhihui, 2023). English listening anxiety refers to the nervousness and fear experienced by English learners during the process of listening comprehension. In English listening training, listeners are required to perform a series of decoding processes such as identifying, understanding, processing, memorizing, and storing sounds within a short period of time, thereby converting them into information with specific meaning (Chen Xiuling, 2004). Currently, there has been a qualitative shift in second language listening instruction, transitioning from traditional audio-based teaching to a multimodal approach combining video, listening, and speaking (Cai Chen, 2021). Additionally, due to the immediacy of listening, learners often feel anxious during the process. Anxiety is one of the important emotional factors that affect language learning. Stephen D. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis states that the emotional factors influencing learners' language acquisition primarily include motivation, self-confidence, anxiety, and attitude. As one of the emotional factors, anxiety has a certain degree of influence on the input and output of language learning. Furthermore, listening comprehension is a complex cognitive process that is difficult for teachers to observe directly. Therefore, teachers should design effective classroom activities to identify the difficulties students encounter during listening and help them overcome these challenges (Sun Yi, 2022).

The "General High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition, Revised in 2020)" (hereinafter referred to as the "Curriculum Standards") specifies requirements for high school students' English listening proficiency. The "Curriculum Standards" establish three proficiency

levels for high school English academic performance, with detailed descriptions for each level. Reaching Level 1 listening proficiency requires students to extract the main idea of texts related to daily life during listening, discern changes in stress, intonation, and rhythm in texts, and identify the practical significance conveyed by the text as well as the speaker's explicit intentions and emotional attitudes. Students should also be able to briefly describe their own or others' experiences orally, express opinions, and provide reasons. Levels 2 and 3 respectively require students to grasp the main idea of familiar topic texts and complex spoken texts. However, in current listening classroom instruction, some teachers do not recognize students' listening anxiety issues. Coupled with the pressure of the college entrance examination, students are often more focused on obtaining high scores. Therefore, some students cannot understand what the teacher says in English in class, nor can they communicate with teachers, classmates, or even foreigners in English. Over time, many students experience English listening anxiety. Therefore, conducting objective and precise diagnostics of English listening comprehension barriers can effectively assist teachers and students in comprehensively grasping the overall situation and individual differences in learners' listening comprehension, enabling teachers to form a clearer understanding of students' listening proficiency (Feng Guifang, Chen Jin, 2022).

In summary, research on high school students' English listening anxiety can help us understand the current situation and causes of English listening anxiety and attempt to find effective methods to address it in practical teaching, thereby promoting students' learning and development.

2. Organization of the Text

2.1. Key Concepts Defined

2.1.1. Foreign Language Anxiety

With the in-depth study of anxiety, people gradually realize that anxiety will have an impact on foreign language learning. In the 1980s, Horwitz first proposed the concept of foreign language anxiety, pointing out that foreign language anxiety is generated by language learners in the process of learning a foreign language (Horwitz, 1986). Horwitz's research shows that many students will have anxiety in some aspects of foreign language learning. Typical symptoms such as shivering, forgetfulness, helplessness, fear, and negative evaluation are occasionally present. Oxford believes that language anxiety is not only a state, but also a sense of fear when learners communicate and talk in the target language. In the process of learning a foreign language, learners are difficult to use the target language correctly, fluently and clearly as in their native language (Oxford, 1990). According to Ellis, foreign language anxiety is a unique emotion that language learners produce when they try to communicate with their second language (Ellis, 1994). Gardner, MacIntyre and others agree that foreign language anxiety is different from general learning anxiety in that it appears in a specific second language learning context (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). Domestic scholars Wang Ruiming and Yang Jing believe that foreign language anxiety is the anxiety and panic caused by language learners when they use a second language they are not familiar with. Subsequently, more and more domestic and foreign scholars began to make different definitions of foreign language anxiety (Wang Ruiming & Yang Jing, 2016).

To sum up, the research topic "anxiety" investigated in this study mainly refers to inhibitory anxiety, which is a kind of negative learning anxiety and an emotional factor that impedes learning.

2.1.2. Listening Anxiety

With the in-depth research on foreign language learning anxiety, many experts and scholars have gradually shifted their research focus from the macro perspective to the micro perspective. Listening anxiety is an important part of foreign language learning anxiety. According to Horwitz and Cope, compared with other processes of foreign language learning, language learners are most prone to anxiety during listening (Horwitz, 1986). Through the literature analysis, it is found that foreign language learning anxiety mainly refers to English learning anxiety, and different scholars have given different definitions of English listening anxiety. Listening anxiety, Wheless notes, is the tension caused by the fear of lacking the ability to properly process a problem or adjust one's attitude when receiving information from others. In addition, he suggested that this strain is closely related to low confidence and negative evaluation, and that the degree of confidence is directly related to the degree of hearing anxiety (Wheless, 1975).

Domestic scholars have also put forward different views on the definition of listening anxiety. Zhu Yanhua believes that English listening anxiety refers to the emotional state of English learners in the process of listening comprehension. Learners are worried that they may not understand the information and then get negative comments from others (Zhu Yanhua, 2010). According to Zhao Yanchun, English listening anxiety is a state of tension and fear that English learners will experience when they understand what the speaker is saying (Zhao Yanchun, 2020).

In short, listening anxiety in this study refers to a feeling of nervousness or anxiety in a foreign language classroom or a foreign language listening test due to English learners' fear that they will not be able to understand the English listening task or process the content obtained.

2.2. Related Studies Home and Abroad

There are some foreign studies on the relationship between foreign language learning and anxiety. In terms of the sources of anxiety, Horwitz wrote in *Anxiety in Foreign Language Classroom*, this paper explores three sources of foreign language learning anxiety: communication fear, exam anxiety and negative evaluation (Horwitz, 1986). Vogely looked at the characteristics of the input information, factors related to the listening process, the external factors and the characteristics of both teaching and learning parties are discussed in this paper (Vogely, 1998). On the influence of foreign language listening anxiety, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis holds that affective factors play a role in filtering inputs. Emotional factors vary from person to person (Krashen, 1982). The emotional aspects of learning can hinder or accelerate language acquisition. True learning occurs only under optimal emotional conditions. The best emotional conditions include the absence of high or low levels of anxiety. Emotional anxiety can filter some of the information in listening materials.

Compared with foreign countries, domestic research on listening anxiety started late, and was paid attention to in the early 21st century. Zhou Dandan investigated the influence of English major students' listening anxiety and affective strategies on their listening performance by means of self-made questionnaire (Zhou Dandan, 2003). Shi Yu and Fan Weiwei and Zhao Linlin, Zhang Yao, and Fang Wei used the "Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale" to explore the listening anxiety of Chinese non-English majors (Shi Yu & Fan Weiwei, 2013, Zhao Linlin & Zhang Yao & Fang Wei, 2018). The above studies were conducted on students of a certain major or a certain grade. Chen Yanjun and Li Dejun taking college students majoring in science and engineering as the participants, this paper discusses the causes of English listening anxiety, and summarizes them into five major causes, such as nervousness, lack of skills, and unfamiliar background knowledge (Chen Yanjun & Li Dejun, 2010). Therefore, this study takes senior high school students as the participants, aiming at providing practical teaching methods for English

teachers to effectively reduce the listening anxiety of high school students and improve their English listening level.

3. Measures Taken to Reduce Listening Anxiety

3.1. Pay Attention to The Selection of English Listening Materials

Firstly, choose materials that match the student's current level of English, ensuring that the content is both challenging and understandable. At the same time, the teaching materials should have a certain degree of gradual progress, which can gradually increase the difficulty with the improvement of students' English level. Secondly, listening materials should cover a wide range of topics, such as daily life, education, technology, culture, etc., in order to enhance students' comprehensive listening comprehension. In addition, the material should be as close as possible to the real language environment, so that students can access and understand native English expressions. Thirdly, with the development of language and the progress of society, listening materials should be constantly updated to meet the needs of The Times. At the same time, it is also necessary to consider the individual differences of students and provide diversified learning resources and paths.

3.2. Students Should Consciously Improve Their Learning Level and Actively Overcome Anxiety

Firstly, students should set clear and achievable English listening learning goals for themselves, which will help them maintain motivation and a sense of direction and actively seek learning opportunities, such as listening to English radio, watching English movies, attending English corners, etc., in their spare time to increase language input. Secondly, there may be setbacks and difficulties during listening learning. Students should learn to adjust their mentality and maintain a positive and optimistic attitude. Anxiety can be alleviated through deep breathing and relaxation exercises. Last but not least, students should conduct regular self-assessment to understand their learning progress and problems. At the same time, we should be good at accepting feedback and suggestions from others and constantly improve our learning methods.

3.3. Teachers Should Arrange Listening Classes Reasonably and Encourage Students More

Firstly, teachers should design the listening class reasonably according to students' learning needs and interest points. A variety of teaching means and methods can be adopted, such as prediction before listening, discussion after listening, filling in the blanks, etc., in order to improve students' participation and learning effect. Secondly, teachers should implement stratified teaching for students with different English levels. Provide listening materials and tasks suitable for students at different levels to ensure that each student can improve at their own difficulty. Lastly, teachers should pay attention to the emotional needs of students and give them enough care and encouragement. When students encounter difficulties and setbacks, teachers should give timely guidance and help to help them build up confidence and overcome difficulties. What's more, teachers should give timely feedback to students to acknowledge their progress and achievements. At the same time, it is also necessary to encourage students to continue to study hard through praise and rewards. This positive incentive system helps students maintain their enthusiasm and motivation for learning.

4. Conclusion

The study investigated the general situation of hearing anxiety in high school by means of a questionnaire. The study found that high school students often experience moderate listening anxiety, the main causes of which include students' weak listening ability foundation, large

amount of new words in listening materials, lack of listening training in class, lack of cultural background knowledge, poor psychological state and so on. In order to help students reduce listening anxiety and improve listening performance, teachers need to give active guidance. First of all, teachers should lead students to accurately assess their own English level. Wrong self-cognition will often weaken students' self-confidence, and then produce heavy psychological burden in the process of listening learning. Establishing a solid self-confidence is an indispensable cornerstone for the success of foreign language learning.

Secondly, it is very important to strengthen students' listening skills and strategies. The adoption of efficient listening practice strategies can significantly improve learning results. The key lies in guiding students to understand that the essence of listening learning lies in grasping the overall theme and general idea, rather than pursuing the exact understanding of each word and sentence. The key is to cultivate moderate ambiguity tolerance.

Subsequently, students are encouraged to continue to carry out a variety of listening training to consolidate the basic knowledge of English. This kind of diversified practice is not only helpful to relieve anxiety, but also an effective way to improve English listening comprehension. Moreover, the selection of listening materials should be both scientific and interesting. It is necessary to ensure that the difficulty of the material matches the listening level of the students, and it is also attractive to stimulate the students' interest in learning. In addition, by integrating listening teaching into audio-visual teaching, playing videos closely related to listening content can help students accumulate background knowledge, thus reducing the difficulty of listening tasks.

Although this study has preliminarily discussed the impact of listening anxiety and proposed corresponding mitigation strategies, there are still many shortcomings due to the small sample size and the relatively simple research method. Future studies are expected to use a combination of quantitative and qualitative research to further explore students' ability to self-regulate anxiety, and further enrich and improve the coping strategy system of English listening anxiety.

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