

# The Application of Action Research in College English Listening Teaching

Chuan Liu

*Department of Foreign Languages, College of Modern Economics & Management JUFU, Nanchang, Jiangxi, China*

**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to explore the application and effect of action research in college English listening teaching. By conducting an action study from finding problems, reconfirming problems, designing action plans, final actions to reflection, with a hybrid approach to research design, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, the study employed questionnaire survey and interview to understand students' satisfaction with listening teaching and the existing problems, namely, the inappropriateness of listening task design, the limits of vocabulary, the lack of listening skills and strategies. Subsequently, a series of solutions are proposed and applied into actions. Teachers adjusted their teaching strategies according to the initial feedback and implemented a series of innovative teaching activities, such as group discussion, role playing, simulate real situations, interactive listening games, and the use of multimedia materials. During the implementation process, researchers regularly collect feedback from students and analyze the data together with teachers to further optimize teaching methods. The results show that action research not only improves students' listening skills and learning motivation, but also enhances their critical thinking and autonomous learning ability. In addition, the teaching practice of teachers has been significantly improved.

**Keywords:** Action Research; Listening Teaching; Listening Teaching Problems; Teaching Improvement

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, with the reform of the College English Test, the listening score accounts for 35% of the test surface, which shows the importance of listening in five English skills.

However, many students often feel confused and frustrated in the face of English listening problems, and the traditional teaching methods are often difficult to meet the needs of students. Therefore, action research, as a method to improve teaching quality and meet students' needs, is worthy of application and exploration in college English listening teaching.

Through action research, teachers and researchers can deeply understand students' needs, difficulties and learning styles, so as to adjust teaching content, methods and strategies in a targeted way to improve students' listening level and learning motivation. In addition, action research also promotes the interaction and cooperation between teachers and students, creates a good teaching atmosphere, and improves the teaching effect and student satisfaction [1]. Therefore, the introduction of action research into college English listening teaching can provide teachers with more targeted and effective teaching programs, stimulate students' learning interest and potential, and achieve a win-win situation between teaching and learning [2].

## 2. Action Research

Action research is a research method that solves practical problems through systematic observation, practice, reflection and improvement. It usually involves taking action in a particular environment and then observing its impact, constantly adjusting and improving to achieve the goal of promoting practice and solving problems. This method emphasizes the combination of practice and theory to promote social change and the construction of practical knowledge [3].

McNiff & Whitehead believe that action research is a research method based on practical problems, with collaborative participation and reflection as the core, with the aim of improving the quality, effectiveness and sustainability of practical activities. It

includes practical engagement: Action research requires researchers to work closely with practitioners to participate in the problem solving process. Cyclic process: It consists of a cycle of planning, action, observation and reflection to continuously improve practice. Problem-oriented: Action research starts from practical problems and seeks solutions through research and experimentation. Knowledge generation: It aims to generate new knowledge, improve practical effects, and promote social change and innovation [4].

In a word, action research helps to improve practical activities. Through action research, practitioners can systematically analyze and improve problems, and improve the quality and effect of practical activities. Promote knowledge sharing and exchange among practitioners to promote the development and progress of the industry; It also provides new ideas and methods for solving social problems and promotes social change and progress [5].

To sum up, action research, as a practical and reflective research method, provides an important way for problem solving and knowledge generation, and helps to promote the improvement and innovation of practical activities. Through action research, we can better understand and respond to practical challenges and drive social development and progress.

The author believes that action research refers to practical research, which is a spiral process of self-reflection. From initial idea → fact-finding → action plan → implementation → monitoring → revision → amended plan plan → and so on through the cycle[6].

Action research solves the problem of disconnection between teaching and research well, making teachers no longer mere knowledge imparted, but also teaching researchers. In this way, teachers can easily find problems in their own teaching and use them as research objects to find appropriate solutions and improve their teaching practices. Therefore, summarized from the above action research process, the research steps are mainly divided into: (1) Identify problems and propose hypotheses: identify problems or challenges in practice, and determine the research objectives and scope. (2) Re-identify the problem through observation (3) Design an action plan: Develop an action plan and study design, and determine the method of data

collection and analysis. (4) Plan implementation: Execute the action plan according to the plan, collect data and record it. (5) Reflection: Observe the effect of action, regularly reflect and adjust the research process. (6) Output results: Summarize research results, put forward conclusions and suggestions, and share experience and new knowledge.

Action research has been widely used in the fields of education, social work, organization management and medical health, providing practitioners with important research tools and methods, and has become the research direction of many scholars [7-11], but the total number is relatively small. Therefore, teachers urgently need to use this method to find ways to improve their English skills in foreign language teaching.

This paper will adopt the method of action research and refer to the research design of Zheng Min and Chen to discuss the application of action research in college English listening teaching from a qualitative and quantitative perspective.

### 3. The Application of Action Research in College English Listening Teaching

#### 3.1 Research Objects and Data Collection

The subjects of this study were 91 students (50 male and 41 female) from two natural classes of non-English majors in grade 2022. They are majoring in International Trade and E-commerce at a university in Jiangxi Province. The age range was 19 to 22, with an average age of 20 with two listening classes a week. The textbook used is the new edition of College English Listening Course Volume 2 from Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, and taught by the same teacher.

This study will adopt a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative research will analyze the current problems in college English listening teaching through classroom teaching observation and semi-open interviews, while quantitative research will evaluate the effectiveness of teaching strategies through questionnaires. First, a questionnaire covering students' views on English listening teaching, their perception of hearing difficulties, and their willingness to use listening strategies was designed (Reliability 0.9) and distributed and returned

by a dedicated teacher. Second, 10 students were selected for in-depth interview to discuss the difficulties they encountered in English listening learning, the learning strategies they used and suggestions for teaching improvement. Third, observe several English listening lessons, record teachers' teaching methods, students' reactions and classroom atmosphere, so as to comprehensively understand the situation in teaching practice. Taking into account the students' English oral expression ability, the interview was conducted in Chinese, and the contents were recorded. The interview contents included "Describe your listening process", "What is the biggest difficulty in listening", "What methods can I use to help myself to better understand the content when I encounter hearing impairment", etc. Interviews were conducted before and after the action. The questions of the questionnaire were adapted from the listening learning strategy proposed by Zhang Dianyu[12], and were used before and after action research to investigate the impact of action research and conduct qualitative analysis.

### 3.2 Discovering Problems

In the classroom teaching observation, the author found that: (1) teachers explain too much, some teachers explain for a long time in the listening class, and students lack the opportunity to practice listening. (2) Students' low listening tolerance: students have poor tolerance in long-term English listening training, and soon feel tired and bored. (3) Lack of interaction and practice opportunities: students lack opportunities to interact with others and conduct actual listening training, resulting in slow improvement of listening skills. (4) The quality of listening comprehension is low, and the scores are often not high. In the listening process, most students basically adopt a bottom-up approach, that is, they listen word by word and sentence by sentence, and then ignore the relationship between words and sentences. They have a weak ability to grasp the key words in a sentence or a text, are not good at using the existing background knowledge, can not find the connection between meanings, and can not predict the content and outcome. As to vocabulary, they often stay on some words or sentences that they do not understand, and

forget them after listening.

### 3.3 Reconfirm the Problems and Propose the Hypothesis

Through interviews with students, questionnaires and observations in class, the author confirms that the following problems exist and need to be solved in college English listening teaching:

- (1) The development of students' listening skills is slow and cannot reach the expected level;
- (2) Students lack effective listening strategies, which makes it difficult for them to cope with various listening scenarios, such as a large number of new words and fast speaking speed, and they can't keep up or forget the previous content after listening;
- (3) Teachers often lack effective teaching methods to stimulate students' interest in learning English listening.

In order to solve the above problems, the author proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Students' listening skills can be improved by designing personalized listening training programs through cooperation between teachers and students.

Hypothesis 2: Teachers guide students to learn and apply a variety of listening strategies, which can help them better understand and use English listening knowledge.

Hypothesis 3: The use of modern technological means, such as multimedia teaching and online resources, can stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm in English listening.

### 3.4 Design an Action Plan

Based on the above assumptions, the author takes the following measures:

3.4.1 The design of listening tasks includes both individual listening exercises and group listening cooperation activities

Encourage students to participate in classroom interaction, through group discussion, role play, listening games and other ways to improve students' listening practice ability. Encourage students to interact with teachers and classmates to improve listening comprehension and application skills. Explore more listening assessment methods, such as oral communication assessment, listening practice test, etc., to comprehensively and accurately assess their listening level.

### 3.4.2 Explanation and practice of listening skills and strategies to overcome bad listening habits

For example, teachers should consciously cultivate students' listening skills, especially their macro comprehension of sentences and texts. In a survey of 91 students, it was found that 76% of students think that listening materials speak too fast, so they often forgetting the previous content after listening. This is because most of them are used to taking a bottom-up approach when dealing with materials, separating sentences from each other and dealing with individual words one by one, so that a complete dialogue or discourse becomes scattered fragments without any connection, which is more difficult for the brain to process. As a result, nothing was captured. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to introduce some effective listening skills to students in the teaching process, such as keyword recognition and context speculation [13].

Consequently, guide students to make reasonable speculation through context, background knowledge, key words and sentences, that is, analyze and deduce from the macro structure of the discourse, rather than "blind" as some students say. A variety of listening teaching strategies, such as predicting questions, listening notes, listening retelling, etc. are adopted to stimulate students' listening interest and improve their listening skills.

At the same time, most of the new words are the common problems reported by interviewee. Interviews with students show that they often memorize vocabulary by rote memorization of word lists or vocabulary books. These isolated memorized words often do not enter the long-term memory, so the memory effect is not ideal. Therefore, teachers are required to systematically teach some effective vocabulary learning methods in teaching, such as using context and affixes to predict the meaning of words, and pay special attention to polysemy phenomena. And with corresponding exercises. And in the daily reading should pay attention to the accumulation of vocabulary.

Listening, however, is different from reading and writing written material that can be seen. Its instantaneous state determines that it cannot be grasped word-by-word like reading or writing. Therefore, the new words that do not play a key role can be ignored in order to

reduce the load capacity of memory and store more effective information.

### 3.4.3 Increase practice

The survey shows that more than 90% of the students think that the most important way to improve listening ability is to practice, but 83% of the students in the survey do not do any after-class exercises, and most of the remaining 27% just wear headphones lying in bed listening, which has no effect. This is related to the fact that non-English majors have many professional courses and no extra time to spend on listening practice after class, but the main reason is that most of them give up because they do not understand, and this vicious circle will inevitably wipe out their enthusiasm and ultimately affect the improvement of their listening level. Therefore, teachers should help students to carry out effective listening training and arouse students' enthusiasm; Help them choose suitable training materials, recommend some good English radio stations, such as VOA, BBC, or some original English movies and music, and increase listening practice in different topics and contexts, such as news reports, academic lectures, business negotiations, etc.; Provide a variety of listening materials, including audio recordings, videos, lectures, conversations, etc. These are not only conducive to cultivating students' interest, but also enhance their sense of language, help them adapt to the speed of speech, and correct the effect of students' pronunciation.

## 3.5 Plan Implementation

Based on the above analysis, the author designated a six-week course of action. It involves vocabulary, listening skills and extracurricular exercises. Each week, different aspects of emphasis are explained and corresponding exercises are given. At the end of the sixth week, students were interviewed again, questionnaire feedback was given, and qualitative analysis was carried out.

### 3.5.1 Listening task design

Personal Listening Practice Design:

(1) Set goals: Clarify the purpose and goal of personal listening practice, such as improving listening comprehension and expanding vocabulary.

(2) Selection of materials: Select appropriate listening materials according to the learner's level, such as news, interviews, songs, etc.

(3) Make a plan: set a daily or weekly listening practice plan, including listening time, material selection, etc.

(4) Preparation before listening: Before listening, you can preview related topics, understand the background information, and adjust the listening environment in advance.

(5) Retelling after listening: After listening to the recording, you can try to retell the recording in your own language to deepen your memory.

(6) Feedback and evaluation: Feedback can be obtained through answering questions, listening tests and other ways to adjust the listening training plan in time.

Group listening cooperation activity design:

(1) Grouping method: Grouping is in the light of the level and interest of learners to ensure that members of each group can cooperate with each other.

(2) Determine tasks: Design listening tasks for each group, which can be in the form of dictation, discussion after listening, role playing, etc.

(3) Time arrangement: Arrange the listening time of the group reasonably to ensure that each member has the opportunity to express their opinions.

(4) Cooperation and sharing: Group members are encouraged to share their listening experience and learning methods to promote mutual learning.

(5) Summary reflection: After each activity, you can conduct summary reflection, understand the difficulties and gains in the listening process, and prepare for the next activity.

### 3.5.2 Vocabulary

Most students still memorize words by rote. For example, some students said in the interview that "they know some words from hearing, but they can't remember what they mean". This is because listening comprehension is still in the perceptual stage, and reading vocabulary is larger than listening vocabulary [14]. The result is that words enter short-term memory and are held for a short time. Cognitive psychology believes that only when information from short-term memory is transferred into long-term memory can it contribute to the persistence of information. Therefore, rote memorization alone is far from enough, the key is to establish connections and form an information network. In this way, the

brain will also activate the relevant information while extracting one end, which will help long-term memory. Therefore, we designed the methods of memorizing words according to synonyms, antonyms, affixes, context and so on. Students are not unfamiliar with the word "expecting," for example, but when it appears in the sentence "I will go to hospital for my wife is expecting," given the context, Listeners can easily guess that "expecting" means "being pregnant" rather than "hoping." These methods are really enlightening for students who are used to rote memorization. In the post-action interview, 75% of the students believed that the above methods was not only easy to catch, but also conducive to memory retention. At the same time, in the usual intensive reading class, the teacher consciously reminds the students to learn the new words they encounter to strengthen their usual accumulation. They are encouraged to ignore new words that do not play a key role in the listening process.

### 3.5.3 Listening strategies and skills

Actively participate in listening practice. Improve listening ability by listening more and practicing more. Pay attention to improving listening speed and comprehension, which can be trained by listening speed reading and other methods.

A variety of listening materials. Be eclectic and listen to various types of listening content. Learn listening skills and strategies. For example, you can master the skills of keyword capture, context inference, etc. Focus on feedback and summary.

However, most students are used to focusing on a single word and understanding it word by word. For instance, they are lack of necessary tolerance for ambiguity, accustomed to listening while translating, lack of choice attention, not good at making use of background knowledge, unable to effectively predict before listening, lack of ability to organize and summarize.

Throughout the course of the operation, we explained and trained the students in various aspects on a weekly basis. For example, in the listening material about "health" in unit 4, the teacher asked students to use their background knowledge and experience to predict the topic, and most of the students speculated around the clue of asking about the condition → describing the condition → diagnosis →

doctor's advice. It turns out that the conversation does follow the direction of the prediction, which inferring the correct conclusion, leading to improved answers and a sense of achievement.

Meanwhile, some students complained in the interview that "some sentences are too long and complicated, and they forget the previous content after listening to them." This is because of the lack of ability to organize and summarize, and the bottom-up processing method increases the cognitive load. For example in a conversation. A: The telephone is ringing. B: I'm doing my homework. It may sound unrelated, but in fact, A asked B to

answer the phone, and B politely declined A's request. That means thinking big. Through such concentrated exercises, the students' ability to summarize sentences and texts has been rapidly improved. Some students said: "Now I can start listening more easily, and I am not so nervous as before, and I can automatically associate and predict a topic when I hear, and the effect is also good." The table below is part of the questionnaire, from which we can see the changes in some listening strategies before and after the action. The content in the table is derived from Fang's adaptation of Zhang's listening learning strategy.

**Table 1. Use of listening learning strategies**

Listening learning strategy	Often or sometimes used before action (%)	Often or sometimes used after action (%)
Focus on new words	67	51
Listen word by word	83	25
Select Attention	78	88
Predict before listening	33	79
Background Knowledge	23	62
Conclusion and Inference	28	70
Sorting and Summarizing	21	65
Associate after listening	26	58

It is not difficult to see from the table that great changes have taken place in most students' listening strategies before and after the action. Students are more tolerant of new words and are no longer required to understand every word and every sentence as before and increased focus on key words. They pay more attention to prediction before listening, often use their own background knowledge to infer and better at using the method of sorting and induction. The result shows that this action has improved students' listening skills to a certain extent and promoted the improvement of their listening level.

At the same time, due to the limited listening class hours, extracurricular practice is particularly important. Most of the students complained that the recording speed was too fast, and they soon forgot the former sentence after listening to the next sentence. Some students said that "because their pronunciation is not standard and far from the pronunciation in the recording, they mistook some familiar words for new ones, thus hindering understanding." This is mainly because of too little listening practice. Therefore, outside the

classroom, we also recommend some extracurricular listening materials to consolidate and improve, from easy to difficult, for example, listen to "Step by Step", VOA and BBC Special English and watch some original English movies and listen to English songs. After six weeks of training, the students' enthusiasm has improved, they can distinguish some linking and skimming, and they can gradually adapt to the faster speaking speed. As a student said in an interview after the action: "After listening to 'Country road, take me home', I learned a lot of new words and something about West Virginia, which prompted me to know more about my hometown and became more interested in the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, which also increased my enthusiasm for English learning."

### 3.6 Application of Modern Technological Means

Multimedia teaching: Combine video, audio and other multimedia resources to provide students with vivid and interesting listening materials. Through carefully curated video-audio materials, students can better

understand and imitate English accents and intonations, thereby improving listening comprehension.

**Interactive learning platform:** Use interactive learning platforms, such as online learning websites or AI, to provide students with personalized English listening exercises. These platforms can tailor learning plans to students' levels and needs, while providing real-time feedback and interactive sessions to make learning more interesting and engaging.

**Virtual reality technology:** With the help of virtual reality technology, students can have immersive English listening experience. Through virtual reality scenes and role play, students can better participate in English listening practice and enhance their understanding and application of English context.

**Speech recognition technology:** It is introduced to help students accurately detect and correct pronunciation and intonation errors. Students can self-test by reading aloud, imitating, etc., and get real-time speech analysis and advice to improve their English listening and speaking skills.

**Social media interaction:** Use social media platforms to establish English listening learning communities, so that students can share learning experiences, resources and experiences with each other. Through interactive communication, students can encourage and motivate each other, thus enhancing the enthusiasm of learning and the spirit of cooperation.

**Intelligent auxiliary tools:** They are introduced, such as smart headphones, smart notebooks, etc., to provide convenient English listening learning methods. These tools can realize real-time speech translation, keyword annotation and other functions to help students understand and apply English listening content more efficiently.

In a word, through the use of modern technology, we can inject new vitality and interest into English listening teaching, stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm in learning, and improve their English listening ability and language expression ability. In the future teaching practice, we should continue to explore innovation, combine the needs of students and technological development, create a more intelligent and personalized English listening learning environment,

promote students to comprehensively improve their language ability, and achieve the comprehensive development of education goals [15].

### 3.7 Teacher Reflection

This action research has a positive impact on students' listening ability and career development. After six weeks of action, from the interviews with students before and after the action, and the comparison of students' use of listening methods (see Table 1), the author found that most students had significantly improved their vocabulary and listening skills. Students generally reported that the listening effect was sound and they felt more relaxed while listening. It is mainly manifested as the follows: (1) students' listening level is improved, their English listening skills are enhanced; (2) Students' listening confidence and active learning ability are promote; (3) Enrich students' listening resources and expand their listening acquisition approaches; (4) Improve the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the assessment, and better promote the development of students' listening. However, the implementation of the action plan may also face some challenges, such as the limitations of teachers and teaching resources investment, which need to be comprehensively considered and solved.

However, there are also many problems in the implementation process: (1) Although some students understand the methods and skills, they can not use them flexibly. As mentioned in the interview: "I know what to do, but I don't know when to use it, and often can't control it." This is because their methods are only declarative knowledge, not yet automated, which require constant practice to translate into procedural knowledge. (2) Habits are not formed in a moment, and some of the methods and skills that students acquired during the operation came back to them shortly after the operation was over. (3) The difference in language foundation often leads to the positive effect of actions on some students with a good foundation, while those with a rather weak foundation have no effect.

For teachers, in the teaching process, they should not only test the listening results of students, but also participate in monitoring the listening process and help students master the methods and skills to improve their listening

ability. This is also what many students desperately need in interviews. Therefore, based on the results of this study, the author believes that teachers should be good at finding problems in the learning process of students and conduct action research to effectively solve them. Therefore, the following tips should be referred to: (1) increase the listening practice time and reduce the teacher's explanation time; (2) Enhance the interest of listening class via introducing multimedia resources, games and interactive links to stimulate students' learning interest and enthusiasm; (3) Strengthen student interaction through organizing group discussion, role play and other activities among students to accelerate the interaction among students and improve the comprehensive application of listening skills [16].

#### 4. Conclusion

To conclude, this paper applies action research to college English listening teaching practice. Through the questionnaire survey, the problems and difficulties of students in listening are understood and the basis is provided for the adjustment of teaching. Design a personalized listening teaching plan and formulate a personalized listening teaching plan according to students' needs and level differences, including classroom teaching, homework assignment and practice. Teachers can improve listening teaching in many ways, such as using multimedia resources, setting up special listening training courses, providing real-time feedback and so on. By observing students' listening performance, collecting students' feedback and conducting listening test, the teaching effect of listening is evaluated and the teaching strategy is adjusted in time.

As a result, practice has proved that action research is effective, it promotes the improvement of students' listening skills and level to a certain extent, and solves the separation between teaching and research in the teaching process. However, this study also has many limitations. Firstly, such as the short research time, it is difficult to consolidate the results. Secondly, the sample is too small, the research methods are not rich enough and lack of diversity. Thirdly, due to time constraints, no quantitative analysis was conducted in the

form of language ability test. Fourthly, action research is not only practical, but also needs to be combined with relevant theories to guide practical activities, such as listening acquisition theory, cognitive psychology, etc., to help better understand the listening teaching process, which will also be the author's next action research issue.

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