

How to Improve Junior Middle School Students' Listening Ability in English Teaching

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Abstract:

As we know, listening is to give one's attention to sound or action. Listening involves complex affective, cognitive, and behavioral processes. Listening is the most common communicative activity in daily life. Listening is also important for obtaining comprehensible input that is necessary for language development. The purpose of English teaching focuses on cultivating students' ability to use language for communication, which contains four skills of capability, including listening, speaking, reading and writing. The listening, speaking, reading and writing are the four language skills. For any kind of language, listening is the first. English listening learning is an important and difficult task for junior middle school students. English teachers in junior middle school should pay attention to the cultivation and the improvement of students' listening ability in English teaching, so as to lay a good foundation for students' future development in the society.

Key words: listening; listening ability; the present state of English listening teaching; the objective and subjective factors; ways; English teaching; junior middle school students

1. Introduction

The listening, speaking, reading and writing are the four language skills that English learners in junior middle school should develop.^[1] And listening ranks first among these four skills. Obviously it is an important means of communication and an important channel of knowledge and information acquisition. The improvement of junior middle school students' listening ability is very helpful to the development of their abilities of speaking, reading and writing. Therefore, great importance should be attached to the improvement of junior middle school students' listening ability in English teaching.^[2] However, the training of listening has not been placed in its proper position in traditional English teaching for a long time and hence listening has long been a weak point. Many junior middle school students think that listening is one of the most difficult things in English study, and even some of them have difficulties in understanding what their English teachers teach them in English. As the improvement of students' listening ability has become the demand of junior middle school's New English Curriculum Standard, nowadays the training of listening has drawn unprecedented attention than before. How to improve junior middle school students' ability in listening and how to enhance their listening comprehension in the examination have been the common concerns of many English teachers in junior middle school.

2. The Present State of English Listening Teaching in Junior Middle Schools

Listening is the premise of receiving language information. Only after understanding the listening can we properly accept and use the information.^[4] English listening ability is formed by two parts. One is the ability of discriminating sounds and understanding meanings quickly and correctly. The other is that of comprehending the content of language. It's obvious that students' listening ability cannot be improved in a short time, so English teachers in junior middle school need to make long-term and various plans to overcome students' difficulties in English listening learning. English teachers in junior middle school often regard it as a common problem of improving their students' listening ability. In real life, interpersonal communication mainly concerns about listening and speaking communication.^[3] In the traditional teaching model, junior middle school students' training in listening and speaking fell far behind in reading and writing skills. It's an indisputable fact that many students become the "deaf" or the "dumb" after learning foreign languages for many years. And many junior middle school students have significant problems during the hearing process. Therefore, improving listening ability has not only become the dream of most junior middle school students, but also the wish of many junior middle school English teachers.

3. The Objective and Subjective Factors that Affect Junior Middle School Students' English Listening Comprehension

After talking about the present state of English listening teaching in junior middle schools, we can find out that the necessity and significance of the cultivation and the improvement of junior middle school students' English listening ability. We now begin to analyze the factors which probably affect junior middle school students' English listening comprehension. Although there are

many different factors, they can be divided into two categories. They are objective factors and subjective factors.

3.1 Objective Factors

Objective factors play an important role in affecting junior middle school students' English listening comprehension. And these factors cannot be controlled by students themselves. Generally speaking, these objective factors are mainly the speed of listening materials, the speakers' pronunciation and intonation, and the length of listening materials.

3.1.1 The Speed of Listening Materials

Whether the speed of listening materials is moderate or not can greatly influence the process of junior middle school students' English listening comprehension. On the one hand, if the speed of listening materials is too fast, junior middle school students cannot catch up with the speed, they will become nervous and they cannot think out the meaning of even a simple word after hearing that in seconds. Again, they feel overloaded with incoming information. On the other hand, if the speed of listening materials is too slow, they will think that it is so easy for them to understand the listening materials, so in this case, it cannot help them to improve their English listening ability.

3.1.2 The Speakers' Pronunciation and Intonation

The speakers' pronunciation and intonation in English tapes is also a crucial factor which affects listeners. In some junior middle schools, a great many students cannot correctly distinguish phoneme, syllable, stress, weakening, even cannot comprehend the simplest word during the listening procedure, which increases the difficulties of English listening in a passage uttered in normal speed. Besides, the phonetic difference between British English and American English is also one of the big obstacles that affect junior middle school students' English listening. The majority of listening materials in our country are recorded in British English pronunciation, so when junior middle school students listen to English tapes which are recorded in American English pronunciation, they cannot adapt to those English tapes immediately.

3.1.3 The Length of Listening Materials

The Length of listening materials also affects junior middle school students' English listening comprehension. ^[6]If the length of listening materials is too long, it will make junior middle school students feel stressed, tired and nervous, because they cannot "remember a lot of information in a short time", and thus "might miss the specific information". If the length of listening materials is too short, junior middle school students cannot figure out what the main idea of the listening materials is in a short time, because the passage is over before students can obtain the essential information.

3.2 Subjective Factors

Subjective factors are the vital factors which affect junior middle school students' English listening comprehension. But different from objective factors, they can be controlled. If English teachers and students in junior middle school try their best to overcome these subjective factors, junior middle school students must be able to make great progress in English listening comprehension. These subjective factors are mainly listeners' phonetic knowledge and vocabulary, listeners' listening skills and listeners' background knowledge.

3.2.1 Listeners' Phonetic Knowledge and Vocabulary

There are many junior middle school students who are lacking in English phonetic knowledge and vocabulary. So as the quality of their phonetic knowledge is low, many of them cannot correctly distinguish and read the English words, especially the similar phonetic English words, such as bad-bed, sheep-ship, here-hair and so on. Besides, junior middle school students often meet with unexpected problems while they are listening to English tapes. Sometimes they cannot identify all the English words correctly. And even English words which they are quite familiar with, they fail to identify them at once only by listening. So when junior middle school students meet with an unknown English word during the process of listening, they may stop and think about the meaning of that English word. As the speed of listening materials is fast, they miss the following part, and finally they fail to understand the whole passage. Therefore, it is of great necessity and significance to encourage junior middle school students to enlarge and enrich their vocabulary as much as possible.

3.2.2 Listeners' Listening Skills

Listening skills play a quite important role in English listening comprehension. But in English listening learning, many junior middle school students are lack of listening skills, such as: making prediction, guessing information, getting the main idea, taking notes and so on. In most cases, they only listen to English tapes and get a little information about listening materials. If they cannot catch up with the speed of listening materials, and cannot understand the beginning of the listening materials, they will give up continuing to listen to the following listening materials. All of these cases make them unable to do a good job in English listening comprehension.

3.2.3 Listeners' Background Knowledge

Different countries have different cultural background. When the listening materials which junior middle school students listen to are about the cultures which are different from their own culture, they may find out that the listening materials are difficult for them to understand. So if listeners have little background knowledge of other countries, they cannot have a good understanding of the listening materials even though they are familiar with the English words which they have heard.

4. Ways to Improve Junior Middle School Students' Listening Ability in English Teaching

Since we have known many factors that affect junior middle school students' English listening comprehension, we can find out a number of ways to improve their English listening ability according to the above mentioned factors.

4.1 Create a Good English Listening Environment

When junior middle school students do the listening exercises, English teachers in junior middle school should create a quiet and relaxing environment for them, and English teachers should get rid of all the factors that distract their students' attention. During the listening procedure, English teachers in junior middle school had better keep silent. English teachers can share some listening skills with their students before or after the listening procedure.^[5] Besides, it is known to all that the biggest difference between native language learning and foreign language learning is the language environment. English teachers in junior middle school should try their best to create a suitable language environment for their students in class. English teachers in junior middle school should also teach in English in class and try to encourage their students to communicate with others in English in daily life.

4.2 Choose Proper Listening Materials

Albert Einstein said that: "interest is the best teacher". Interest is of great importance for English listening learning, as it can strengthen students' learning motivations. Thus, interest is a very significant factor in increasing junior middle school students' learning efficiency and improving their English listening ability. Junior middle school's New English Curriculum Standard clearly points out that: "students should have active sensibilities to themselves, to English and its culture and to English learning. Only in this way can they keep the motivations of English learning and get good achievements". Therefore, English teachers in junior middle school should choose proper and interesting listening materials for their students. Firstly, English teachers should make their students be interested in the listening materials and English listening learning. Secondly, in the process of listening training, the number of difficulties in the listening materials should be moderate. On the one hand, if the listening material is too difficult for junior middle school students to understand and get the main idea, they will feel confused and stressed. There is no doubt that the results of the listening training are terrible. On the other hand, if the listening material is very simple, junior middle school students will understand it and get the main idea easily. It cannot help them to improve their English listening ability.

4.3 Strengthen Students' Mastering of the Basic Knowledge about Pronunciation and Vocabulary

As it is known to all, junior middle school students are still lacking in basic phonetic knowledge and vocabulary. In order to improve junior middle school students' listening ability in English teaching, English teachers in junior middle school should teach their students the basic knowledge

about pronunciation, such as: stress, linking, weakening and so on. Besides, English teachers in junior middle school should pay attention to the input of the knowledge about phonetics and intonation during the normal teaching. English teachers in junior middle school had better speak English in the native and idiomatic way during the class, and tell their students to listen to English tapes, English songs, English radios, English lectures, and watch English movies after the class in order to make their students be familiar with British English pronunciation and American English pronunciation. English teachers in junior middle school should try to encourage their students to read as much as possible in order to enlarge and enrich their vocabulary. In order to improve listening ability, a variety of reading is indispensable. If junior middle school students want to enhance their listening ability, they must enlarge and enrich their vocabulary as much as possible by a variety of reading.

4.4 Try to Reduce Students' Anxiety and Make Them Be Confident in English Listening Learning

Although moderate pressure makes up the essential part of students' motivations, the evidence shows that superfluous pressure can have bad effect on learners. In order to reduce junior middle school students' anxiety, English teachers in junior middle school should try their best to create a relaxing and fertile learning environment for their students. English teachers should try to make their students be concentrated on English listening learning, which can help their students to avoid thinking about other things while they are doing the listening exercises. Apart from that, for some students who are incapable of finishing the listening exercises successfully, they have no confidence in English listening learning or they are even afraid to do the listening exercises. Self-confidence is the psychological foundation on the way to success. It is more necessary for junior middle school students to have confidence in themselves during the process of English listening learning. There is no doubt that confident and aspiring students can usually get good results, especially in listening and speaking. Some English teachers in junior middle school only give their students a little time to skim the questions and options before doing the listening exercises, and then go on to the next part of listening quickly. This certainly will make junior middle school students become nervous and eventually affect their English listening comprehension. Therefore, English teachers in junior middle school should give their students enough time to skim the questions and options before doing the listening exercises, and they should not excessive seek for the speed of listening comprehension and ignore the quality of their students' English listening learning. English teachers in junior middle school should also teach their students patiently and make sure that their students can learn a lot of knowledge during the process of English listening learning. If English teachers in junior middle school try their best to be patient with their students, their students will appreciate them and do their best on English listening learning.

5. Conclusion

By analyzing the objective and subjective factors that affect junior middle school students' English listening comprehension, we know that listening comprehension is a complicated psychological language process. And there are many factors which can affect junior middle school students' English listening comprehension. In order to improve junior middle school students' listening ability in English teaching, English teachers in junior middle school should try their best to create a good English listening environment and choose proper listening materials for students, strengthen students' mastering of the basic knowledge about pronunciation and vocabulary, reduce students' anxiety and make them be confident in English listening learning. All in all, learning English listening well is not an easy task. Improving junior middle school students' listening ability in English teaching is a long-term work: it needs common efforts from both junior middle school English teachers and junior middle school students.

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