

Research on the Application of Stratified Teaching Method in the Listening Teaching of Grade 9 -- A Case Study of Licai School in Longhu District in Shantou

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Abstract: The traditional teaching mode has led to a widening gap in English listening ability of students in grade 9. Stratified teaching method, which pays full attention to the differences of students, can effectively improve the status quo. This study selects 105 students from Grade 9 in Licai School, Longhu District, Shantou, as the research objects, and conducts a quantitative and qualitative analysis before and after the implementation of stratified teaching method.

Keywords: English listening; Stratified teaching method; Teaching strategies

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1. Research Background

At the present stage, teachers mainly adopt the PWP method, i.e. Pre-listening, While-listening and Post-listening, when conducting listening teaching, which is in line with the *English Curriculum Criteria (2011 Edition)*. However, some teachers may ignore the differences among students' ability when implementing this mode of teaching by using listening materials and questions of the same difficulty level, without fully considering the actual needs of students of different levels in the listening classroom. In the current teaching mode, teachers often design classroom activities for the whole class, expecting all students to participate; however, in reality, it's difficult to get all students fully involved. This "one-size-fits-all" mindset ignores the needs of students, which is inconsistent with *English Curriculum Criteria (2022 Edition)*^[1], and also deviates from the requirements of the core literacy of the English subject, which is not conducive to the overall improvement of students' language proficiency, cultural awareness, critical thinking and learning habits.

The stratified teaching method is a strategy that provides differentiated instruction for students' different learning needs and ability levels. As students' listening levels vary, the use of the method allows for the design and provision of listening materials and activities that meet the needs of students at all levels, which helps to effectively improve students' listening performance. An in-depth study of the implementation of this method makes it easier to assess and improve students' listening level, and provides teachers with targeted teaching strategies and practical references for other teachers to deepen the application of this method in the field of English listening teaching. Therefore, the study of the application of stratified teaching method in English listening teaching of Grade 9 has significant theoretical and practical significance for educators to jointly promote the innovation and development of teaching methods. Therefore the study aims to answer:

- 1) Can stratified teaching method improve students' English listening abilities?
- 2) What are the effects of stratified teaching method on students' listening abilities?

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2. Stratified Teaching Method

Both internationally and domestically, the stratified teaching method has been the focus of scholarly attention.

Susan Hallam^[2] pointed that stratified teaching is a teaching method that makes school education adapt to students' difference and fully reflect students' subjectivity by constructing diversified courses and teaching. Nunley^[3] pointed out that the stratified teaching method emphasizes the unique variations in students' learning styles, dimensions of intelligence, readiness and thinking systems, requiring tailored instructional strategies to accommodate their individual needs. In terms of studies from China, Ye Lin^[4] mentioned that stratified teaching is a personalized approach to meet the needs of students, emphasizing an understanding of students' individual differences in terms of goals, stratified criteria, content, etc. Liu Shuping^[5] points out that teachers should design teaching steps according to students' ability and tendency principle, adopt different teaching methods according to their learning situation, take into account each student's actual ability, and promote the development of each student on the original basis, so as to achieve the overall teaching goal. In recent years, with the deepening of education reform, English teaching in junior middle school has shifted their focus to the cultivation of core qualities. Chinese researchers, such as Peng Xiusong^[6], Wang Na^[7] and Zhou Qianqian^[8], have extensively discussed the application of stratified teaching method in English listening in junior middle schools, in order to explore more effective teaching methods.

Overall, their findings suggest that stratified teaching methods can provide more personalized and differentiated help. In actual teaching classes, it is necessary to take teaching environment and characteristics of students into account, so as to flexibly use these research results, and adjust and optimize according to the actual situation to achieve better teaching results.

3. Methodology

(1) Research subjects

The study participants in this study are Grade nine students between the ages of 15 and 17 from Licai School in Longhu District, Shantou. These students are learning PEP English as the primary curriculum. 55 students from Class 1 are selected as the Experimental Class (EC) and Class 2 as the Control Class (CC) for the study. Prior to the study, both classes underwent a pre-listening test to ensure equal academic levels. Following the test, the author categorized students into three levels: Level A, Level B, and Level C, according to their interest, motivation, awareness and ability of English learning,

(2) Research tools

The instruments in this research included questionnaire and tests. The questionnaire consists of 15 questions, covering the following aspects: students' basic information, self-assessment of their English listening ability, evaluation of the stratified teaching method, and the impact of the stratified teaching method. The tests, including pre-test and post-test, aimed to check whether the application of stratified teaching approach has a real good effect. The author collected 85 test papers and all of that are valid. To testify students' English listening ability, comparison would be carried out between the post-test and the pre-test with the application of the stratified teaching method.

(3) Research procedures

The 19-week-long experiment is conducted from September to December, 2023 by the same teacher in both classes. The pre-experiment consisted of the following contents: the preparation, the stratification of students and homework. To make a good start and understand the basic situation of the students' English listening, the teacher first conducted a test. Based on the test results, the students are divided into three levels: A, B, and C. 20 students are

at Level A, with an average correct rate of 65%, 45 students at Level B, with an average of 45%, and 40 students at Level C, with an average of 30%.

Students in Level A possess excellent learning abilities and solid English knowledge, thus they have an extremely high level of listening proficiency. In contrast, students in Level B have moderate learning capabilities, with relatively solid English knowledge, but they may only comprehend basic sentences and dialogues. Students in Level C demonstrate weaker English proficiency and have a weaker foundation in English, hence they may struggle to understand English listening comprehensively. Homework plays an indispensable role in English teaching. Given the varying levels of students' English listening proficiency, it is imperative for teachers to arrange differentiated listening assignments to ensure that tasks are appropriately challenging and aligned with students' abilities. For instance, section B of Unit 2 in the PEP ninth-grade textbook includes a listening exercise related to Halloween. Students at Level A can listen to the recording and subsequently answer questions to assess their listening and comprehension abilities. However, Level B students, typically with intermediate English listening skills, may struggle to understand the recording clearly or respond appropriately to direct questions. To address this issue, they can enhance their attention to language details and strengthen their listening skills by completing sentences with missing words. For Level C students, who generally have weaker listening ability, building a solid foundation is essential. By listening to the recording and selecting the correct vocabulary from multiple options to complete sentences, they can reinforce basic vocabulary understanding and improve sentence construction skills.

After implementing stratified teaching method, the teacher conducts a re-test on the students from both classes and finds that they made significant improvements (see table 1). Additionally, a questionnaire survey is conducted to explore the impact of stratified teaching on students' listening abilities. The survey results indicate that stratified teaching had a significant impact on English listening instruction, improving students' language abilities, cultural awareness, critical thinking skills, and helping them find suitable learning methods.

Table 1 Correct Rate of Students' Listening Ability in Pre- and Post-experiment Tests

| Level | Pre-experiment | Post-experiment |
|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| A | 65% | 76.8% |
| B | 45% | 50% |
| C | 30% | 40% |

4. Results and Analysis

(1) Development of students' language abilities

Stratified teaching can implement personalized guidance according to students' language level, learning ability and listening level. By grouping students according to their learning needs and abilities and formulating corresponding English listening teaching strategies, teachers can help students improve their language skills in English listening more effectively. For those students with weak language skills, teachers will provide extra help and guidance; For students with better mastery, more challenging assignments are assigned to promote the development of their language ability. Studies have shown that students' language skills have improved significantly after adopting the stratified teaching method (see table 2 & 3). Under the effect of stratified teaching mode, the language learning performance of students has been improved, especially those who started with a weak language foundation. These results further validate the practical value of stratified teaching method in improving students' language ability.

Table 2 Students' Views on the Effect of Stratified Teaching on Improving Language Skills

| Perception of Stratified Teaching Effectiveness in Improving Language Skills | Percentage |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Extremely Effective | 34.29% |
| Significant Effect | 57.14% |

| | |
|----------------------|-------|
| Somewhat ineffective | 0.95% |
| No Change | 4.76% |
| Not Helpful | 2.86% |

Table 3 Improvement in Language Skills After Personalized Guidance

| Perception of Stratified Teaching Effectiveness in Improving Language Skills | Percentage |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Increased Vocabulary | 64.76% |
| Deepened Understanding of Sentence Patterns | 68.57% |
| Improved Pronunciation | 57.14% |
| Culture Knowledge | 38.1% |
| Enhanced Overall Listening Level | 60.95% |
| No Significant Progress | 8.57% |

Secondly, in listening teaching, teachers adopt stratified teaching method to design goals and challenges in line with students’ personal learning level, which can effectively stimulate students’ enthusiasm for language learning. By setting appropriate listening learning goals and tasks, students can get a sense of achievement when they achieve their goals. This encourages students to keep a positive mindset, and is conducive to their continuous progress in English listening. On this basis, teachers can also make use of stratified teaching, by dividing students into groups in listening classes, and encouraging students to help and cooperate with each other. By tutoring struggling students, advanced students can also cultivate soft skills of leadership and communication, so as to realize the comprehensive development of students.

Overall, it may be said that stratified teaching has obvious positive effects on improving students’ language skills, which are mainly reflected in tailor-made learning paths for students, stimulated interest and motivation, targeted feedback and collaborative learning among students. Therefore, in the practice of language learning, stratified teaching is significantly beneficial to help students achieve better results in the learning process.

(2) Cultivation of students’ cultural awareness

In the implementation process of ninth grade English listening teaching, the stratified teaching method can significantly improve students’ language skills and cultural awareness, by focusing on enriching students’ appreciation of the culture carried by the English language.

Based on the *New Curriculum Standards* (2022), teachers should provide listening materials of different levels to ensure that each student can access to the content corresponding to their language level. Take Unit 10 *You’re Supposed to Shake Hands* as an example, the main purpose is to introduce etiquette in China and the West. In addition to listening exercises, teachers can tailor listening materials to students. For students with weak foundation, the teacher may only ask them to listen to the recording of the textbook, which is of appropriate difficulty. While listening, children can refer to the original text, mark the cultural knowledge they are interested in or the unfamiliar vocabulary and sentence patterns, and search the dictionary after class to solve the problem, which is conducive to expanding students’ international vision. And build an initial understanding of different cultural backgrounds and possibly expand their vocabulary. For those students with strong listening ability, textbook may not meet their needs. Therefore, teachers can provide additional materials, such as detailed introduction of etiquette in different countries, comparative analysis of international meeting etiquette, etc. In this way, students can gain a deeper and comprehensive insight into intercultural communication on the basis of their original listening skills. Through the combined use of textbooks and extracurricular materials, teachers can not only adapt to different students’ listening levels, but also better promote students’ appreciation of the cultural connotation, and effectively promote the two-way development of language and cultural awareness. As shown in table 4, students have a deeper understanding of different cultures, which helps them to improve their cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication ability. Therefore, teachers should take the initiative to adopt hierarchical teaching strategies in listening teaching practice, and pay attention to integrating cultural elements into the curriculum, so as to promote students’ cultural awareness

more effectively.

Table 4 Student Perceptions on the Its Effectiveness in Promoting Cultural Awareness

| Student Opinions | Percentage |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| Very Effective | 32.38% |
| Effective | 59.05% |
| No Change | 2.86% |
| Both Effective and Ineffective | 1.9% |
| Completely Ineffective | 3.81% |

(3) Improvement of critical thinking ability

After the implementation of the stratified teaching method, students with lower basic levels have built confidence, from understanding simple and easy conversations to moderately difficult passages. They gradually learn to guess the main idea of the text, which not only improves their listening comprehension ability, but also exercises their reasoning skills. At the same time, advanced students are encouraged to challenge more complex essay recordings, and on this basis continue to conduct in-depth analysis and self-reflection, in order to improve their listening recognition and critical thinking skills.

In summary, through the implementation of stratified teaching method, English listening teaching in grade 9 stimulates students' thinking ability through personalized learning paths, and promotes the development of higher-order thinking skills such as critical thinking and analytical ability (see table 5). Therefore, stratified teaching method should be regarded as an important strategy in English listening teaching.

Table 5 Students' Evaluation of Its Effect on Improving Thinking Ability

| Student Approval Level | Percentage |
|------------------------|------------|
| Highly Effective | 32.28% |
| Somewhat Effective | 60.00% |
| No Change | 2.86% |
| Slightly Ineffective | 0.95% |
| Completely Ineffective | 3.81% |

(4) Improvement of learning strategies

First, stratified teaching allows students to receive instruction at their own level by providing materials and activities at different levels. For example, in listening teaching, audio materials with slower speaking speed, less vocabulary and simpler sentence patterns are used for struggling students. For advanced students, teachers use material with more specialized vocabulary and more complex sentence patterns to ensure that these students are properly challenged and stay motivated. In such a segregated learning environment, students understand what learning methods work best for them.

Second, stratified teaching promotes personalized learning. Teachers will adjust teaching strategies according to the progress and response of individual students and give more targeted guidance. At the same time, in such an inclusive learning environment, students are free to try a variety of different learning techniques, such as efficient note-taking methods, multiple ways to practice listening, and key information extraction, thus finding the most suitable learning strategy.

Finally, according to the questionnaire, stratified teaching method has a significant promoting effect on stimulating students to find suitable learning methods: 27.62% of the students strongly believe that stratified teaching method greatly encourages them to find suitable learning methods; 54.29% of the students believed that stratified teaching effectively promoted the process in most cases; 14.29% of students felt that this teaching method helped them find the right learning method in some specific situations. Therefore, stratified teaching

method is an important teaching strategy in the ninth grade English listening class. It not only promotes the improvement of students' listening comprehension ability, but more importantly helps students discover and adopt the most beneficial learning methods for themselves, laying a solid foundation for future success.

5. Conclusion

This study examines the effect of stratified teaching method in the English listening teaching of Grade 9. The results show that this method can significantly promote the improvement of students' English listening ability. This paper also elaborates two kinds of stratified teaching practices: a) Stratification of students: Before implementing the stratified teaching method, students are classified into different levels through an examination; b) Stratification of homework: Personalized listening tasks are assigned based on different levels of students.

First, under the guidance of stratified teaching method, students have achieved significant improvements in vocabulary, sentence pattern mastery, pronunciation, and overall listening skills. Second, students' cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication ability have been improved. Third, students' critical thinking ability and reasoning skills are also enhanced. Fourthly, the study also reveals that students can find their own learning methods to improve their English listening skills at their own level.

Certainly, there are problems and challenges that hinder the study. First, it takes more time to prepare teaching materials of different difficulty levels; Second, teachers may find it hard to classify the difficulty levels of listening materials due to a lack of standard, especially when there is a wide gap in listening ability among students. Third, students' perceived frustration and lack of motivation also pose a challenge to teachers.

The author suggests that: a) teachers take advantage of readily available multi-level teaching resources, share resources with colleagues, or use digital technology tools to create multi-level teaching materials, thereby reducing the preparation time required by individuals; b) teachers assess students' abilities and flexibly adjust listening materials accordingly before stratification through formative assessment and continuous observation. c) teachers provide personalized learning paths with listening materials tailored to students' specific needs and preferences. Technical tools can be used to track student progress, and the difficulty and rate can be individually adjusted to better match each student's learning process.

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