

Improving English Listening Proficiency: The Application of ARCS Learning-motivational Model

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Abstract

Language learning motivation is one of vital factors which strongly correlates to the success in second language acquisition. Listening proficiency, as one of the basic language abilities, is paid much attention in English instruction, but presently the college English listening teaching is a weak link in English language teaching in China, which means listening practice occupies so much time but the gains are so limited. Therefore, promoting the performance of listening proficiency is still a hot topic in English language teaching. The ARCS model, which includes four categories, is both motivational and also teaching model. So, this model can be utilized in college English listening teaching and learning to discuss how to stimulate the listening motivation and to improve listening proficiency as well as teaching performance.

Keywords: listening proficiency, ARCS model, learning motivation, English listening teaching

1. Introduction

Nowadays in China, the focus on foreign language education and research is shifted from how to teach to how to learn. Learners have become the centre of English language teaching and the study of language learning motivation is a very important part in the field of learner individual differences. To some extent, learning motivation has impact on the language learning and is a key factor which may dominate the success or failure in second language acquisition (Chang & Lehman, 2002). Simultaneously, listening proficiency is paid so much attention by English teachers and learners in China, but unfortunately, many Chinese learners are annoyed because of their low level of listening comprehension. In teaching practice, the time listening spends on is relatively long but the outcomes learners gain are few. Therefore, how to improve English listening proficiency and teaching performance is driven by wide awareness.

A number of studies of human learning have been indicated that motivation is a critical key to language learning (Crookers & Schmit, 1991). Based on this notion, Keller designed and developed the ARCS (attention, relevance, confidence and satisfaction) model of motivation to motivate and help learners to learn well. But it is rare to utilize this mode in listening in English as Foreign Language Environment. So in this study, the ARCS model and English listening will be unified to discuss how to stimulate learners' learning motivation and how to improve their listening proficiency in learner-centred education.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Learning Motivation

The word "motivation" is derived from a Latin verb "movere", and it usually explains the reasons for human's desires, needs and actions. Motivation can also be defined as one's direction to behavior or what causes a person to want to repeat a behavior and vice versa (Elliot & Covington, 2001). Basically, motivation is composed of two fundamental elements: internal drive and inducement. Learning motivation is a kind of driving force that can motivate students' learning and actually it is a need for learning that reflects the objective requirements of the school and society for students' learning in the minds of the learners.

However, in the context of globalization, what Gardner and Lambert proposed the classical classification of “instrumental” and “integrative” motivation in 1970s cannot meet the needs of learning today, because more and more attentions are paid to dynamic process of motivation.

Learning motivation has drawn considerable attention in foreign language learning, because it is hard for unmotivated learners to finish such a challenging goal in language learning (Mardid, 2002). In the area of educational psychology, some scholars (Brown, 2007; Dörnyei, 2005) have stressed the importance of learning motivation and tried to analyze it from different perspectives. There are three roles of motivation in learning: *a)* generating learning desire. Motivation is the force which causes learning action and it allows learners to enter status in learning and to focus on their learning materials. *b)* identifying goal orientation. Learning motivation makes students to choose to learn and goal orientation signifies the coherent pattern of motivation which causes individuals to improve their capacities through learning new skills as well as through adapting new environment and finally to show a response (Zhang, 2013). *c)* sustaining learning behaviour. Motivation can sustain students’ desire to accomplish learning tasks and generate new desire to start further learning. These views are dynamic and cyclic; in other words, the last state will affect the first in an ongoing virtuous circle.

Although researchers and scholars have proposed a number of models to analyze and explain learning motivation, they mainly investigate cognitive characteristics of learners and view it as a personal or unchangeable feature rather than an overall picture of motivation. The ARCS model Keller (1987, 2010) developed helps to bridge these gaps via establishing a more complete picture of motivation, which includes motivational strategies, classroom implementation, and the responsibilities of teachers. So the following section will discuss the ARCS model in great detail.

2.2 The ARCS Model

John M. Keller (1979) proposed that external conditions could be constructed to promote learners’ learning motivation. He believed “Every educator knows the challenge of stimulating and sustaining learner motivation and the difficulty of finding reliable and valid methods for motivating learners. One approach to meeting this challenge is provided by the ARCS model of motivation. (Keller, 1999)” According to this concept, he designed and developed the ARCS learning-motivational model.

This model is based on Tolman and Lewin’s expectancy-value theory, which proposed that learners are willing to learn while there is value or needs in the knowledge presented and also the amount of expectation of success. Keller divided these two concepts into four categories and renamed *Attention (A)*, *Relevance (R)*, *Confidence (C)* and *Satisfaction (S)*, which is called ARCS model and is shown in Figure 1. What’s more, each category includes three subcategories, which is defined in Table 1.

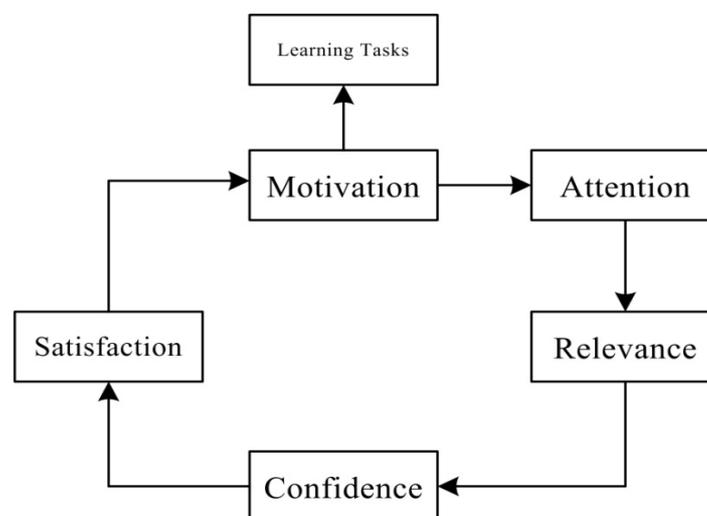


Figure 1. The ARCS Learning-motivational Model

Table 1. Keller's (2010) Motivational Strategies of ARCS

Categories	Subcategories
Attention (A)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Perceptual ● Inquiry arousal ● Variability
Relevance (R)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Goal Orientation ● Motive matching ● Familiarity
Confidence (C)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Learning requirements ● Success opportunities ● Personal control
Satisfaction (S)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Intrinsic reinforcement ● Extrinsic rewards ● Equity

Attention is the prerequisite the learning activity and refers to the interests of learners. At the beginning of the learning, students' attention and curiosity should be aroused over time, and then the learning process will head on. For example, when learning materials are presented, the variability of color and font can be used to attract learners' attention. In addition, if learners are faced with appropriate levels of learning confusion, attention also can be aroused. Therefore, the subcategories of attention include *perceptual*, *inquiry arousal* and *variability*. During the learning, learners' attention plays vital role in stimulating motivation.

After the learners' attention is obtained, they may want to know how the given learning materials relate to their interests and goals, which is named relevance. The basic approach is that learners have to know their learning activity closely relate to their past experience, knowledge or some interests, such as explaining new concept by using obtained concept, telling the future use of the new knowledge or rewarding the active participants (meeting the students' desire for praising). In other words, relevance can be gained via examples or speeches that are familiar to students, so the subcategories of relevance are *goal orientation*, *motive matching* and *familiarity*.

If the relevance is perceived to be useful in accomplishing learners' given task and they know they may be successful before completing the task, learners will feel somewhat confident and only confident students can autonomous inquire unknown knowledge and fields. Confidence comes from meaningful success, but usually the success is unable to guarantee and learners enjoy the psychological experience of challenge difficulties (Molae & Dortaj, 2015). During the learning, the tasks teachers provide cannot be too difficult or too easy, which will prevent learners from gaining meaningful sense of success. If the achievements of learners' efforts are keeping the same as their expectancy and they feel confident of these outcomes, the learning motivation will be remained and sustained. Keller (2010) proposes three subcategories in confidence: *learning requirements*, *success opportunities* and *personal control*. In other words, confidence makes learners feel they can or will success.

Finally, satisfaction is the consequences of learning and refers to successful accomplishment with intrinsic motivation and extrinsic rewards, which is the reinforcement and conditioning of learning. According to Keller, satisfaction is subdivided into three subcategories: *intrinsic reinforcement*, *extrinsic rewards* and *quality*.

The ARCS learning-motivational model, which is not only offering a framework of motivation, is intended to provide the sequence of operations: to stimulate students learning motivation, the first is to arouse their attention and interests of the given tasks or assignments; next, they must know these tasks closely relate to themselves; then, learners should own confidence that they have enough ability to successfully accomplish the tasks; and finally, they can experience the sense of recognition and achievement after fulfilling the tasks and they will satisfy with themselves so that they will be motivated to begin a new task. Thus the ARCS model offers teachers for effective operation to promote learning motivation and also guides to how to incorporate such strategies into formal curricular and teaching design (Maeng & Lee, 2015).

3. The Implication for English Listening Teaching

The listening motivation can't be simply aroused only by teachers' personal attraction, sense of humor or games in classroom, so according to different teaching content, it is imperative for teachers to implement the ARCS model to design reasonable teaching strategies to elicit and sustain learners' listening motivation, and finally learners will actively and autonomously practice English listening without the external intervention.

3.1 Awareness of Value and Cultivating Interests

There are three principles to arouse attention and interests: arousal of perception, stimulation curiosity and sustenance attention. It is an undisputable fact that many Chinese learners have low levels of English listening proficiency. Because of lack of language environment, inefficiency of listening practice, the majority of students are short of listening interests. In addition, some learners are interested in listening at the beginning of college English learning, but under the heavy burden of study and examination, they may lose their interests gradually. Therefore, in China, English as foreign language, the college English teachers should help learners to be aware of the value in listening because the greater the value is given by the target task, the greater the incentive value is rendered by the individual.

When learners believe that English listening is essential and valuable, they will make efforts to practice their listening ability. Generally speaking, teachers directly tell students the achievement value of this action that is usually resolved by the significance of the action. For example, learners' English listening proficiency may have an impact on their future employability, because listening comprehension plays very important role in their CET4 (College English Test for Band 4) and the grades for this test are widely accepted by the whole Chinese society. For the long-run, however, the intrinsic value of listening action can keep the learners interests for a long time. In other words, only when the students obtain the pleasure and satisfaction from the listening practice, they will take the initiative to insist on this action. So based on the ARCS model, in listening curricular designing, college English teachers must cultivate learners' interests in listening and arouse their attention.

3.2 Building up Confidence

Positive correlations are found between learners' motivation and self-confidence identity (Xu & Gao, 2014). Many students assert that they feel inferior and humble in their listening proficiency because of insufficient vocabulary, terrible grammar and deficient sentence structure. If learners have no enough confidence in their listening, the enthusiasm that is stimulated by the value of the action will disappear gradually. Helping learners to build up confidence in listening, simple praise and support is not enough. Teachers should analyze some learning theories at first and make every student clear the objective difficulties that every language learner may encounter in listening, and then help them to master some pertinent learning strategies.

For example, during the listening practice, many students always complain that they cannot understand the conversation or cannot remember the content they listened. At that time, teachers can instruct them some basic theories of psycholinguistics: only based on listening words and distinguishing meaning to memorize, it is surface memory, which is not impressive and profound, so it is easy to forget; on the other hand, memory and understanding are interlinked and they interact with each other. In other words, memory should be based on understanding and only in this way the memory effect is perfect and unforgettable; at the same time, memory effect can influence on understanding as well, which only memory effect is perfect, can meaning be understood thoroughly.

According to the instruction, students will learn about that listening based on understanding and memory is the objective requirement in foreign language learning. Similar theoretical strategies such as how to thinking, how to memorize, how to predict, how to take notes and how to communicate are able to assist learners in sustaining confidence in listening.

3.3 Satisfaction Strategy

There are two conditions that can help learner to get satisfaction: the one is satisfaction of self-ability accomplishment, which means that learners feel their abilities are strengthened through effective learning; the other is extrinsic satisfaction. For example, after the examination, students find that their grades have been improved apparently or they are praised by their teachers. Satisfaction can't be gotten only in one or two listening practice and usually it needs to experience a period of learning. In addition, learners should appropriately evaluate their listening ability. During this progress, teachers can provide some references for learners' evaluation. For example, at the beginning of a semester, students' listening grades should be recorded. At the end of this semester, their grades will be listed again. Compared with these two grades, learners are able to really discover the change of their listening proficiency and this way can easily help them to judge whether or not they have made efforts during this period. To those who have made outstanding progress, teachers should commend and render positive feedback timely; simultaneously, to those who are insufficient incentive efforts, teachers shall support or remind them again.

4. The Listening Motivation Model

According to the analysis of ARCS model, an English listening motivation model has been devised in English as foreign language environment. The theoretical model is shown in Figure 2.

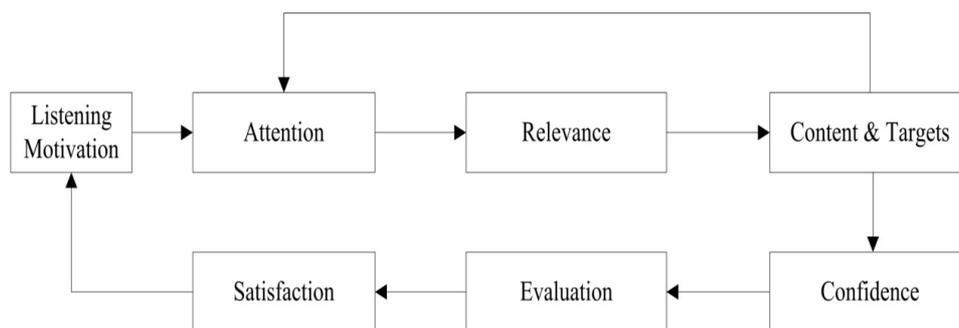


Figure 2. English Listening Motivation Model Based on ARCS

In college English listening teaching, the first step of design of listening motivation is to attract learners' attention. Teachers should help students to be interested in what they will listen and to arouse their curiosity in listening material; next, according to specific listening context, students should learn about relevant information and can establish the relevance between listening content and target. If this relevance cannot be built up, teachers have to redesign listening practice and to re-arouse learner' attention; but if students can be sure of the relevance, they will own enough confidence in their listening and strongly believe that they can easily grasp learning content and successfully accomplish learning targets. So when teachers design listening practice, learners' individual differences and academic ability must be seriously considered; then, through evaluation and self-evaluation, students are satisfied with the listening results or listening process and they will feel they have the ability to continue listening practice or accomplish the next listening goal so that a virtue circle can be formed and a new cycle of listening practice will start.

5. Conclusion

The influence of motivation in human activities like college English listening learning is so evident. Nowadays, motivation plays a vital role in English teaching, not only aptitude and intelligence. Learners' motivation of autonomous learning is mainly based on their cognition of the value of listening action, the adjustment of intrinsic motivation and the proper stimulation of extrinsic conditions. ARCS-based-learning-motivational model can stimulate and sustain learners' listening motivation and can

give them more confidence so that it can pave the way for successful English listening teaching. What's more, experience in applying for this ARCS-based listening model is needed for further validation.

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