

Empowering College English Listening and Speaking Teaching With ChatGPT*

YANG Yan, MENG Jieqiong

Guangxi University of Chinese Medicine, Nanning, China

This paper explores the application of artificial intelligence technology, particularly the chatbot ChatGPT, in college English listening and speaking instruction, as well as its impact on educational models. The article first analyzes the current state of college English listening and speaking education, highlighting issues such as uneven distribution of educational resources, insufficient teaching conditions, and outdated teaching methods. It then defines ChatGPT and discusses its characteristics, explaining the necessity of integrating ChatGPT into college English listening and speaking classes from the perspectives of teachers, students, and pedagogy. Finally, the paper proposes innovative application methods for ChatGPT in college English listening and speaking instruction, including enhancing speaking and listening teaching, providing personalized feedback, and promoting students' autonomous learning abilities. The introduction of ChatGPT not only enriches teaching resources and enhances the authenticity and interactivity of learning but also drives educational models towards a more flexible and efficient direction.

Keywords: ChatGPT, college English listening and speaking instruction, innovative applications

Introduction

At the end of November 2022, a chatbot program called ChatGPT (Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer), launched by the American artificial intelligence research laboratory OpenAI, quickly gained popularity worldwide. Within just a few days, it surpassed one million user registrations, and in the following two months, its user base reached one hundred million. In addition to its conversational capabilities, this artificial intelligence (AI) tool can perform tasks such as literary creation, copywriting, language translation, and coding, demonstrating remarkable versatility. The emergence of ChatGPT has sent shockwaves through various industries, showcasing powerful functions that leave humanity in awe. People are now proclaiming that the era of artificial intelligence has truly arrived. As a crucial component of college English courses, the listening and speaking classes face the pressing challenge of how to proactively embrace the benefits brought by ChatGPT in light of its rapid advancement, thus better serving college English education. This is an urgent topic that requires careful consideration by college English teachers.

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YANG Yan, Master's Degree, Lecturer, College of Foreign Languages, Guangxi University of Chinese Medicine, Nanning, China.

MENG Jieqiong (corresponding author), Master's Degree, associate professor, College of Foreign Languages, Guangxi University of Chinese Medicine, Nanning, China.

Current Situation of College English Listening and Speaking Teaching

As an important course within the higher education system, “College English Listening and Speaking” aims to develop students’ listening and speaking skills in English to meet the communication demands of a globalized context. This course not only focuses on imparting language knowledge but also emphasizes the cultivation of practical skills by simulating real communication scenarios to enhance students’ communicative competence. As a required part of college English curriculum, the listening and speaking classes play a vital role in improving students’ English proficiency. However, the teaching effectiveness of “College English Listening and Speaking” is less than ideal due to issues such as uneven distribution of educational resources, inadequate teaching conditions, and outdated teaching methods.

Significant Differences in Student Backgrounds

In the Chinese higher education system, there are significant disparities in economic development levels and educational resource allocation between the central and western regions and the eastern regions. These differences directly affect students’ foundational English abilities, particularly their listening and speaking skills. Students in the central and western regions generally lag behind their eastern counterparts in both the starting point and quality of English learning. This is evident not only in the English proficiency of students at the time of enrollment but also in their mastery of listening and speaking skills. The institution where the author teaches is located in an economically underdeveloped area, with its student population primarily coming from the local region. Due to the constraints of the regional economy, the quality of English teaching during the basic education stage is relatively low. Compared to students from developed regions, those in less developed areas often begin learning English in the third grade of primary school or even later, with a focus primarily on exam preparation rather than practical language application. In contrast, students in developed regions have been receiving English education since kindergarten, emphasizing the development of listening and speaking skills, which gives them a significant advantage in language communication and interaction.

As a result of these disparities in basic education, students’ listening and speaking abilities vary widely by the time they reach university, posing challenges for teaching. Educators must consider students’ differing backgrounds and needs when designing lesson plans to ensure that the content and methods are suitable for varying proficiency levels. This necessitates the adoption of more flexible and differentiated teaching strategies to enhance the listening and speaking skills of all students.

Insufficient Teaching Conditions

In economically underdeveloped undergraduate institutions, the limitations of teaching conditions have become a core bottleneck hindering the significant improvement of students’ English listening and speaking abilities. Specifically, these institutions face a severe shortage of teaching resources, and the far-reaching impact of this issue cannot be overlooked. Firstly, outdated and inadequate teaching equipment directly restricts the diversity of teaching methods and the optimization of teaching effectiveness, making it difficult to meet the demands of modern English listening and speaking instruction. Secondly, the limited availability of teaching materials is not only reflected in their insufficient quantity but also in outdated content that fails to keep pace with new trends and practical applications in language teaching. Furthermore, the scarcity of practical opportunities means that students lack chances to use English in real or simulated environments, severely limiting their ability to practice and improve their listening and speaking skills. Additionally, large class sizes and a high number of students exacerbate the teaching challenges. In this context, teachers find it difficult to adequately

address the learning status and individualized needs of each student, making it hard to implement targeted and refined instruction, which in turn affects the overall teaching effectiveness and individual student growth.

Given this situation, improving the teaching conditions of college English listening and speaking classes is urgent. With the rapid development of artificial intelligence technology, its application in the field of education offers innovative ideas and solutions to address this problem. By introducing AI technologies, such as intelligent tutoring systems and personalized learning platforms, it is possible to enrich teaching methods, optimize resource allocation, and achieve precision and personalization in the teaching process, effectively compensating for the shortcomings of traditional instruction.

Outdated Teaching Methods

In traditional college English listening and speaking instruction, the teaching focus often leans towards the transmission of knowledge and mechanical skill training, relying on activities such as playing listening materials, speaking practice, role-playing, dialogue simulations, and group discussions. Teachers act as the central guides, imparting listening strategies and speaking techniques while providing immediate guidance and feedback during practice, thereby establishing a basic learning framework for students. However, while this model has improved students' listening and speaking abilities to some extent, it has increasingly revealed limitations such as a lack of interaction, absence of real-world application scenarios, and insufficient stimulation of student agency.

To overcome these bottlenecks, modern college English listening and speaking classrooms urgently need to transition to more dynamic and participatory teaching models. This transformation emphasizes the cultivation of students' autonomous and collaborative learning abilities, advocating for the return of learning initiative to the students and encouraging them to explore actively and engage in meaningful communication. In this context, the introduction of advanced artificial intelligence technologies, such as ChatGPT, has become a new highlight in educational innovation. These intelligent technologies, with their powerful natural language processing capabilities, can accurately capture students' learning states and needs, provide customized learning content and strategic suggestions, and offer real-time feedback on learning outcomes. This fundamentally enhances the precision and efficiency of teaching. More importantly, they create the possibility for constructing a student-centered English listening and speaking classroom that emphasizes practical application and strengthens teacher-student interaction, thus paving new pathways for the modernization of teaching methods.

The Necessity and Methods of Introducing ChatGPT Into College English Listening and Speaking Classes

Definition and Characteristics of ChatGPT

ChatGPT, as a member of the OpenAI GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) model family, is an advanced natural language processing (NLP) model specifically optimized for dialogue generation and comprehension tasks. This model not only inherits the powerful text generation and understanding capabilities of the GPT series but also focuses on simulating the complexity and naturalness of human conversation, striving to produce dialogue content that is both meaningful and fluent. The exceptional performance of ChatGPT is attributed to its deep accumulation of natural language processing and generation technologies. Unlike traditional search engines, which operate on a singular response mechanism, ChatGPT can creatively generate diverse replies based on the context of the input. These responses maintain logical coherence while showcasing a rich variety in language expression, including flexibility in vocabulary choice and sentence structure. This capability

makes ChatGPT particularly realistic in simulating authentic conversational scenarios, providing users with highly personalized learning support and guidance.

Given these characteristics, ChatGPT provides a solid technological foundation for its introduction into college English classroom instruction. It can serve as a powerful teaching assistant, enhancing classroom interactivity and engagement, while also offering customized learning pathways and feedback based on students' needs and progress, thereby effectively promoting the comprehensive development of students' English listening and speaking abilities.

The Necessity of Introducing ChatGPT Into College English Listening and Speaking Classes

When exploring the necessity of introducing ChatGPT into college English listening and speaking classes, it is essential to analyze the issue from three dimensions: the teacher, the student, and the teaching process itself.

Teacher dimension. As guides in the classroom, college English teachers must possess not only expertise in the English language but also keep pace with the times by actively incorporating emerging technologies into their teaching practices. The emergence of ChatGPT represents not only a technological advancement but also a revolutionary challenge to traditional teaching models. It calls for teachers to shift away from conventional one-way teaching methods and explore new interactive teaching modes that stimulate student interest and enhance teaching efficiency. Foreign language teachers should strive to understand the principles and algorithms behind language intelligence to learn how to ask more effective questions and think about how to better use technology to empower foreign language education (Hu & Qi, 2023). Education management departments should organize training related to the classroom use of ChatGPT, allowing teachers to experience and explore its applications firsthand. Through specific demonstrations and examples, teachers can be guided to master the basic operations and functions of ChatGPT through practice and interaction. In actual teaching activities, teachers should be encouraged to incorporate ChatGPT into their lessons and design innovative teaching activities that leverage its advantages. Schools can also create platforms for collaboration and experience sharing among teachers, allowing them to exchange experiences and share challenges and solutions encountered in using ChatGPT, thus providing opportunities for cooperation and support among educators to promote mutual learning.

Student dimension. College students are a generation that is eager to try new things and readily accepts emerging technologies. They have a keen sense for new tools and can quickly integrate them into their learning and daily lives, making the arrival of ChatGPT impactful for their education. Even without formal course guidance, students can self-learn how to use ChatGPT through online resources, demonstrating their enthusiasm for active learning. However, ChatGPT does have potential limitations, including misunderstandings, inaccuracies, and ambiguous responses. Therefore, it is essential to pay close attention to the accuracy and appropriateness of its generated results and to conduct additional human review and adjustments when necessary. In this context, the guidance and assistance of teachers become crucial. Proper use of ChatGPT can significantly enhance students' learning efficiency; conversely, excessive reliance on it may hinder their critical thinking and cognitive abilities. Thus, students need to carefully select appropriate content and scenarios, employing ChatGPT as a supplementary tool to unlock its full potential. While it is undeniable that the presence of ChatGPT can influence the cultivation of students' creativity and critical thinking, it remains, fundamentally, just an artificial intelligence tool, and its effectiveness depends entirely on the user's attitude (Xue, 2023).

Teaching dimension. The goal of college English listening and speaking instruction is to enhance students' language proficiency and cross-cultural communication skills. The introduction of ChatGPT provides new

avenues for achieving this objective. By simulating authentic dialogue scenarios, ChatGPT can offer students diverse opportunities for language input and output, thus promoting the improvement of their language skills. Moreover, its personalized learning support features help meet the varying needs of different students, allowing for tailored instruction. Therefore, integrating ChatGPT into college English listening and speaking classes is not only a natural trend in technological application but also an effective way to enhance teaching quality and promote the overall development of students.

In summary, the introduction of ChatGPT into college English listening and speaking classes is necessary, but it requires collaborative efforts from teachers, students, and the educational system to ensure it plays a positive role in educational practice.

Innovative Applications of ChatGPT in College English Listening and Speaking Teaching

Empowering speaking teaching through ChatGPT. In college English classrooms with a large number of students, traditional speaking practice typically involves the teacher selecting a topic, providing an outline, relevant vocabulary, and sentence structures, followed by individual practice or group discussions. Students then present their work, and the teacher offers feedback. During this process, it is challenging for the teacher to provide individualized support for each student. Some students with less motivation may take the opportunity to disengage, while those with lower speaking proficiency might lack the confidence to express themselves, feeling embarrassed about their inadequate English skills. A significant barrier to student participation stems from their lack of relevant vocabulary and sentence structures. Due to time constraints and the pace of the curriculum, the teacher is likely only able to select a few students for presentation and feedback.

By introducing ChatGPT into the classroom, it can provide tailored support based on each student's level and ability. For instance, when students struggle with relevant vocabulary and sentence structures for discussion topics, ChatGPT can supply ample related vocabulary and sentence inputs, offering students examples to follow and content to discuss. ChatGPT can serve as a dialogue simulation tool, helping students practice oral expression and conversational skills. Students can engage in role-playing with ChatGPT, allowing them to practice speaking in various scenarios and adapt to different contexts. Through simulated real-life interactions, students can enhance their language expression abilities.

With the assistance of ChatGPT, not only can students benefit from support in vocabulary and content related to specific topics, but ChatGPT can also provide timely feedback, identifying grammatical errors, correcting pronunciation and intonation, and helping students quickly recognize and rectify mistakes. This ultimately enhances the accuracy of their spoken expression and improves learning efficiency. For those students who hesitate to speak due to fear of making mistakes, conversing with AI can alleviate their anxiety and nervousness, enriching their speaking practice experience and thereby boosting their confidence in engaging with others.

Empowering listening teaching through ChatGPT. The current state of listening classes in college English is that students in the same class, regardless of their proficiency levels, use the same textbook. Many online listening platforms allow students to independently choose any listening content from the textbook and select different playback speeds based on their listening abilities, which to some extent addresses the lack of autonomy in listening classes. However, since the learning content on these platforms is pre-set, students still have limited choices.

By incorporating ChatGPT into the classroom, teachers can use it to assess students' listening levels and then provide a variety of listening materials tailored to the assessment results. For example, in listening training, ChatGPT can offer listening materials that correspond to different themes and scenarios beyond those found in the textbook, allowing for a selection of varying difficulty levels. It can also cater to students' specific needs and focus on training challenges by selecting different types of content such as news reports, dialogues, and lectures for practice. Through interactive exercises, students can enhance their adaptability to different accents, speeds, and intonation patterns.

More importantly, ChatGPT can design listening comprehension test questions, enabling students to complete listening exercises and assessments through interaction with the AI. After listening to the content, students can answer related questions to evaluate their listening comprehension level. ChatGPT provides real-time and accurate feedback on their listening practice, identifying potential listening errors or areas of misunderstanding, which helps students promptly adjust their learning strategies and improve their listening skills. Additionally, for new or difficult vocabulary encountered in listening materials, ChatGPT can assist students in learning pronunciation and usage. Students can engage in dialogue with ChatGPT to reinforce newly learned vocabulary, thereby enhancing their vocabulary size and application skills.

Compared to traditional listening classes, ChatGPT can provide personalized listening training materials and instant feedback tailored to students' listening levels and needs, effectively helping them improve their listening abilities. In a sense, the relationship between ChatGPT and learners is mutually beneficial. Through the process of learning with ChatGPT, students continuously enhance their language skills. For advanced learners, the ability to identify and correct language issues in the AI can, in turn, help improve the machine's language capabilities (Qin, 2023).

Conclusion

Traditional English listening and speaking classes often rely on textbooks and pre-set dialogues, which, while helpful for learning basic grammar and vocabulary, lack the flexibility and depth of real communication. Through ChatGPT, students can engage with English conversations that are closer to authentic interactions, which not only helps them better understand non-verbal cues such as intonation and emotion but also encourages them to practice speaking and listening in contexts that are more reflective of real-life situations. This approach can effectively enhance their speaking and listening skills.

When used appropriately, ChatGPT can also facilitate personalized and autonomous learning for students, accelerating the shift towards a learner-centered approach (Chen, Shi, & Wang, 2023). It is evident that ChatGPT not only enriches the resources for English listening and speaking instruction and enhances the authenticity and interactivity of learning but also promotes students' self-directed learning and overall development through the customization of individualized learning paths. This signifies a movement towards a more flexible and efficient educational model that places learners at the core of the learning process.

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