# Effect of "Introducing Background Information" on Chinese College Students' English Listening Anxiety

**Wang Xiaohan[1,a,*]**

[1]*Foreign Department, Sichuan University of Media and Communications, Chengdu, China*
*a. wangxiaohan@smail.swufe.edu.cn*
*\*corresponding author*

***Abstract:*** Foreign language students commonly have a wide range of hearing anxiety in listening examinations. Background information introduction is a teaching method applied in English listening teaching, namely, the teacher introduces background information of listening content before the listening. This study investigated how pre-teaching content affects the anxiety levels of college students at an University of China taking the Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale(FLLAS) and college English CET-4 listening tests. Participants included 106 non-English major freshmen matched in listening ability. The instruments were conducting questionnaires based on the FLLAS and listening tasks given just before and after the experiment. It is concluded that the listening proficiency of foreign language learners (SL/FL) significantly affected their foreign language listening anxiety. Moreover, background information introduction, to a certain extent, may relieve FL learners' foreign listening anxiety. This paper contributes to investigate the relationships between English listening anxiety and listening proficiency of the participants, inspiring future researchers to investigate more listening strategies to deal with FL listening anxiety.

***Keywords:*** Second language acquisition theory, input Hypothesis, listening anxiety, college students

## 1. Introduction

Foreign language (FL) students are deemed to come to second language classes with preformed convictions and prospects that are not met and might adversely affect their capacity to acquire FL [1]. The resulting stress and frustration are defined as "FL anxiety in classroom" [2]. Furthermore, foreign language listening anxiety (FLLA) is considered an obstacle to foreign language listening learning in class [3]. Some researchers proved that Krashen's second language acquisition theory is applied to guide foreign language research to a certain extent, especially in foreign language listening teaching[4-6]. However, few empirical studies have focused on exerting the theory on the study of students' FLLA. Based on this, this paper is conducted to investigate Chinese college students' English listening anxiety scale (ELAS) from the perspective of the input hypothesis and affective filter hypothesis. The study aimed to carry out the teaching method of pre-teaching content based on Krashen's theory to relieve FL learners' ELAS.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Krashen's SLA Theory and its Application

In the 1980s, Stefan Krashen applied the psycholinguistic theory to classroom teaching. He proposed a complete set of second language acquisition (SLA) models, which consists of 5 language acquisition hypotheses [5]. Among them, the input hypothesis is the primary condition for language acquisition. Based on previous research, therefore, Krashen innovatively put forward the input hypothesis. "i" represents the current knowledge level of the learner, and "1" represents slightly more knowledge than the learner knows. When the learner is placed in a "comprehensible input" situation, the acquisition level will be higher than that of "i," that is, "i+1" [7]. Krashen held that it was a vital yet not adequate condition for learners to acknowledge comprehensible language input in the SLA [8]. As second language learners have different levels, learner differences should also be considered. The "natural communicative input" was the key to curriculum design, ensuring that every learner could get "i +1" input suitable for his current language ability. However, the input hypothesis was not the only theory that can affect the learning effect of learners. Krashen also devised "the affective filter hypothesis" based on learners' internal psychology, such as learning motivation, internal goals, self-confidence, and anxiety, which would affect learning [7]. If the learner's emotional anxiety factor was weak, then the amount of language input was large. On the contrary, when learners had a high sense of anxiety, the effect of language acceptance was poor [9].

Relevant Researches about analyzing the SLA Theory were categorized into two aspects: theoretical exploration and educational practice research. Psychological disorders has made language learners fail to use the understandable input they receive for language acquisition fully. Therefore, one of the best ways was to apply "understandable input" and "prepared output" in the state of low anxiety [10]. Hatch and Wagner-Gough concluded through empirical studies that foreign language learners who had acquired language input consistent with language acquisition were more likely to succeed [11]. Meanwhile, in recent years, Chinese scholars had different opinions on foreign language teaching based on the SLA Theory. Some scholars reckoned that SLA was on large-scale research in foreign language teaching. If students were input comprehensible knowledge and their anxiety levels remained low, students would have positive learning outcomes [5-6,12].

Nevertheless, some scholars conducted comparative experiments and concluded that teachers should reduce the influence of emotional factors on input in the teaching process, because students consciously refused input due to a lack of interest [11]. However, some scholars contend that Krashen's "i +1" theory was an ideal model since learners had different learning bases [4,10].

### 2.2. Foreign Language Listening Anxiety

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) has attracted much attention from scholars since the 1970s. Some scholars emphasized the origin of FLA and the interrelationship between language competence and FLA [13-14]. Horwitz. al regarded FLA as "a remarkable arrangement of self-insights, convictions, sentiments, and ways of behaving related with the process of foreign language learning" [2]. Elkhafaifi was the pioneer to explore the effects of FLLA and concluded that FLLA is negatively correlated with listening performance [15]. In contrast, the study of foreign language anxiety related to English listening in China was carried out much later, but Chinese scholars also have made a comprehensive analysis of the causes and countermeasures of foreign language learning anxiety [16]. Zhang's experimental results showed that anxiety was common in the process of listening learning [17]. Besides, Deng found listening anxiety had a notable negative effect on the listening level and was negatively correlated with listening meta-cognitive awareness [18]. Liu and

Thondhlana investigated FLLAS and methods related to English listening proficiency in 5 universities in China [19]. Chang and Read explored four listening methods that influence the English listening anxiety scales of undergrads in Taiwan and then concluded strategies may improve the efficacy of listening exams [20]. Previous researches have paid attention to the relationship between FLLA and English listening performance and put up a series of strategies to ease FLLA of FL learners.

## 2.3. Research Questions

Although the guiding significance of input theory and listening anxiety and the links between them have been acknowledged in the literature, the discussion can be advanced in some more respects. Firstly, there have also been experiments on input theory before, but there are few empirical studies on college students' foreign language listening anxiety based on the theory. Secondly, there is less attention on college English CET-4 listening anxiety from the perspective of this theory. Given the lack of research mentioned above, it is crucial to establish links between input theory and foreign language listening anxiety. This research paper will take advantage of the usefulness of previous papers and look for solutions to the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What's the effect of anxiety on the English listening scores of non-English majors?
RQ2: What causes anxiety in English listening?
RQ3: How does introducing background information affect students' listening anxiety?

## 3. Materials and methods

## 3.1. Participants

The subjects of this study were 106 freshmen majored in news media, photography, broadcasting and hosting and so on at the Sichuan University of Media and Communication and they were all native Chinese speakers who had prior English learning experience before entering college. Besides, Their English scores in the college entrance examination were over 90, and none of them had ever taken the College English Test Band 4 Test before. Students ranging in age from 17 to 20 years old were divided into an experimental group (EG) (52 participants) and a control group (CG) (54 participants).

## 3.2. Instruments

In the study, with a reliability score of 0.953 and validity of 0.638, A 33-item Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale with an open question was adopted from that developed by Elkhafaifi [15]. He used quantitative research methods to propose the questionnaire, which confirmed listening anxiety and listening level were negatively correlated [15]. English listening comprehension tests were selected from the College English Test Band 4 from 2021 to 2022. It comprised 3 news report (7%), 2 long dialogues (8%) and 3 passages (20%) out of a possible 35 points.

## 3.3. Process

Initially, both the EG and the CG at the beginning of the experiment were arranged to respectively finish an English listening test and a questionnaire to confirm their basic English listening level and ELA. After that, in the following 4 weeks, in the experimental group, the teacher would introduce the background information and key vocabulary of the listening content before listening, while in the control group, the background knowledge was not introduced. Then both the EG and the CG completed another English listening test and the questionnaire at the end of the experiment.

### 3.4. Data analysis

Firstly, quantitative analyses were conducted on FLLAS results and listening test scores in terms of correlation and linear regression, designed to inspect the correlations between the measured variables (RQ1). Secondly, RQ2 was set as an open question in the questionnaire. Lastly, paired samples t-tests were applied to test whether there was a notable change between two groups.

## 4. Results

Participants listening anxiety was measured by a 33-item FLLAS questionnaire which was a 5-point Likert scale. Each item covered "Strongly disagree"(1 point), "Disagree"(2 points), "Neither agree nor disagree"(3 points), "Agree"(4 points), and "Strongly agree"(5 points). When the reverse problems were encountered, they were reversed to the forward problems before analyzing the data. This means respondent's anxiety of listening to English was revealed by the total score of the FLLAS, namely, In the meanwhile, the English listening test scores of the EG and the CG before and after the experiment were collected.

For the sake of knowing the relationships between measured variables, this paper conducted a correlation analysis by SPSS Statistics with reporting results in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlations between FLLAS and listening test scores.

| Subject | | r | p |
|---|---|---|---|
| EG | Before of Experiment | -0.326** | 0.000 |
| | End of Experiment | -0.297** | 0.000 |
| CG | Before of Experiment | -0.35** | 0.000 |
| | End of Experiment | -0.334** | 0.000 |
| * p<0.05 ** p<0.01 | | | |

As shown in Table 1, the Pearson correlation coefficient in EG (Before: r =-0.326, P < 0.01; After: r = -0.297, p<0.01) and the Pearson correlation coefficient in CG (Before: r = -0.35, P < 0.01; After: r = -0.334, p<0.01) showed a remarkable negative correlation between FLLAS and English listening test scores. This indicates that the higher the anxiety scales, the lower the listening scores.

Table 2: Paired samples test results of English listening anxiety scale in different times.

| | N | Before of Experiment | | End of Experiment | | MD | t | Cohen's d | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | M | SD | M | SD | | | | |
| EG | 52 | 121.21 | 24.73 | 109.62 | 24.85 | 11.60 | 7.596 | 1.053 | 0.000** |
| CG | 54 | 124.24 | 23.73 | 120.33 | 22.68 | 3.91 | 3.402 | 0.463 | 0.001** |
| * p<0.05 ** p<0.01 | | | | | | | | | |

In Table 2, the results from paired samples t-test indicated students' ELA scales in the EG before the experiment were fundamentally not quite the same as those at the end of the experiment (t=7.596, p<0.01). In addition, the specific comparison of the differences showed the average value before the experiment (M = 121.21) was significantly higher than the average value after the experiment (M = 109.62), and the mean difference was 11.6. In terms of the CG, there was a massive distinction in anxiety value between the two experiments (t=3.402, p<0.05), but the overall reduction was smaller than that of the EG (MD=3.91). Although both the EG and CG revealed

significant differences during the experiment, Cohen's d value of the EG (Cohen's d =1.053) is higher than that of the CG(Cohen's d =0.463), which inferred the EG showed more significant changes.

## 5. Discussion

After analyzing the results of the questionnaire survey and the test results, this paper draw the following conclusion：

First, English listening anxiety is common among non-English majors students and is significantly negatively correlated with listening performance. This indicates that the higher the score, the higher the tension scales, which was consistent with the finding of Elkhafaifi in 2005 and Gardner in 1972 [15][21]. In light of this, English teachers can carry out teaching activities based on Krashen's affective filter hypothesis. The output of students should be affirmed to enhance their self-confidence and improve their learning motivation. Besides, teachers must also pay attention to the teaching tone and language. More praise will help students get a sense of achievement, which reduces their anxiety about English listening and improves their listening performance.

Secondly, according to the open question in the questionnaire, three main reasons for their anxiety were given by the participants when they took the test. Unfamiliarity with the topic was the first factor affecting their anxiety; The subsequent explanation was their anxiety about the mark they would acquire; Being allowed to listen only once was the third reason.

Lastly, experimental results showed that introducing the background knowledge of listening materials before listening can relieve students' listening anxiety to a certain extent, which was in line with the results of previous studies [19]. According to the "i +1" theory of Krashen, English teachers should provide students with sufficient and acceptable input "1" when students are in the current state "i". In the experiment, the researcher found that, compared with directly asking students to do the listening test without introducing the listening background, the students who are given the background of content within the acceptable range have lower levels of English listening anxiety. Therefore, English teachers can orally or with the help of multimedia introduce the background knowledge of the listening text to help students get familiar with the listening text, improving students' learning interest and achievement.

## 6. Conclusion

In this study, 106 non-English major freshmen from Sichuan University of Media and Communication were investigated on FLLAS and listening tests during four weeks. The study revealed the following findings: (1) English listening anxiety was significantly negatively correlated with listening performance. The higher the scale of listening anxiety, the lower the listening proficiency; (2) There are many reasons leading to participants' FLA, but in this study, unfamiliarity with the topic is the main reason; (3)Although both the EG and the CG revealed significant differences during the experiment, compared with the CG who have not introduced listening background information, the change in the experimental group was more dramatic after long-term background introduction.

According to the study's results, background information can indeed affect students' listening anxiety to a certain extent. In view of the discoveries of this paper, English educators ought to be aware of the importance of listening anxiety for students' second language acquisition, pay attention to emotional strategies in teaching and carry out understandable input teaching strategies for students to reduce their listening anxiety to improve their listening proficiency more effectively. However, introducing content background before listening is not the single component leading to the changes of learners' listening anxiety. More strategy instructions like question preview and

repeated input additionally improve the effectiveness of support in listening tests. For this reason, future research can center around the FLLA, and better strategies can be explored to relieve FL listening anxiety during listening process.

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