

Design and Case Analysis of Listening Teaching in Junior High School English Unit Integrated Instruction Based on Core Literacy

Fengzhi Xiao^{1,*}, Lan Yuan²

¹Foreign Languages, Nanning Normal University, Nanning, China

²Foreign Languages and Literatures, School of Languages, Shanghai University of International Business and Economics, Shanghai, China

*Corresponding author: 2788063801@qq.com

Abstract

Against the backdrop of the implementation of Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition), fostering students' core literacy has become the fundamental goal of junior high school English teaching [1]. Listening, as the primary channel for language input, plays a crucial role in developing comprehensive language competence. However, traditional listening teaching is plagued by problems such as fragmented instruction, decontextualized materials, and outcome-oriented evaluation, which hinder the integration of core literacy cultivation. Unit Integrated Instruction (UII), characterized by "theme leadership and multi-element integration", provides a systematic framework for addressing these dilemmas. This study adopts a mixed-method research design combining literature review, questionnaire survey, classroom observation, and case study. This study enriches the theoretical system of core literacy-oriented listening teaching and provides practical reference for junior high school English teachers to implement UILT.

Keywords

Core Literacy, Junior High School English, Unit Integrated Instruction, Listening Teaching, Case Analysis

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

The release of Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) (hereinafter referred to as the "2022 Standards") marks a new stage of China's basic English education reform, which clearly takes "core literacy" as the soul of teaching and advocates "theme-led, discourse-based, and multi-element integrated" Unit Integrated Instruction (UII). Listening, as the most basic and frequently used language skill, accounts for 45% of daily communicative activities, serving as the foundation for developing speaking, reading, and writing abilities. However, the current junior high school English listening teaching still deviates from the requirements of the 2022 Standards and UII concepts.

A survey by the National Institute of Education Sciences shows that 76% of junior high school students only access listening materials from textbooks, and over 60% of teachers adopt the "play recording-do exercises-check answers" mode, which isolates listening from other language skills and unit themes. Such fragmented teaching fails to provide real contextual support, leading to students' weak ability to transfer listening skills to practical scenarios and insufficient development of cultural awareness and thinking quality. In this context, exploring Listening Teaching under Unit Integrated Instruction (UILT) based on core literacy has become an urgent need to break through the bottleneck of current listening teaching.

Unit Integrated Instruction, proposed by Chinese scholars such as Wang Qiang, emphasizes integrating language knowledge, cultural content, and skills training around unit themes to achieve the organic integration of core literacy [2]. When applied to listening teaching, it can integrate fragmented listening tasks into the unit's theme context, design multi-modal and hierarchical listening activities, and realize the penetration of core literacy in the listening process. This study aims to construct a feasible UILT design framework and verify its effectiveness through case studies, providing empirical support for the deep integration of core literacy and listening teaching.

1.2 Research Significance

1.2.1 Theoretical Significance

This study enriches the theoretical connotation of core literacy-oriented listening teaching. Existing studies mostly focus on single listening strategies or UII models independently, while lacking systematic exploration of how to integrate the four dimensions of core literacy into UILT. By clarifying the logical connection between core literacy, UII, and listening teaching, this study constructs a "goal-design-implementation-evaluation" integrated theoretical

framework, which fills the gap in the research on the integration of these three elements.

Additionally, it expands the application scope of task-based teaching and cognitive listening theories in Chinese basic education contexts. By combining Willis' task-based teaching framework with the 2022 Standards' requirements for listening skills, this study realizes the localization innovation of international listening teaching theories, providing a theoretical reference for cross-cultural listening teaching research.

1.2.2 Practical Significance

For front-line teachers, this study provides operable UILT strategies and case models. The proposed material integration methods, hierarchical activity designs, and multi-dimensional evaluation tools can directly guide teachers to break the traditional teaching mode and implement core literacy-oriented listening teaching. For students, UILT can effectively improve their listening proficiency and learning motivation. Through real contextual tasks and collaborative inquiry, students can transform from passive "audience" to active "participants", thereby promoting the all-round development of core literacy.

1.3 Research Methods and Structure

1.3.1 Research Methods

Literature Review: Combs domestic and foreign literature on core literacy, UII, and listening teaching, including 2022 Standards, works by Wang Qiang and Chen Zehang, and international studies on task-based listening, to construct the theoretical foundation.

Questionnaire Survey: Distributes 60 teacher questionnaires and 450 student questionnaires to 3 junior high schools (1 key school, 1 ordinary school, 1 rural school) in Jiangsu Province, to investigate the current status of UILT implementation.

Classroom Observation: Observes 12 listening classes of Grade 7-8, records teaching processes and student participation, and analyzes the problems of traditional teaching.

Case Study: Conducts a 12-week teaching experiment in two parallel classes of Grade 7 in a municipal key junior high school, takes Go for it! Unit 4 "School Life" as the case, and evaluates teaching effectiveness through pre-test/post-test, student interviews, and work analysis.

1.3.2 Paper Structure

The paper consists of seven parts: Introduction clarifies research background and significance; Theoretical Foundation defines core concepts and their connections; Current Status Analysis explores teaching dilemmas based on survey data; Teaching Design Strategies proposes a three-dimensional framework; Case Analysis presents detailed implementation and effects; Conclusion summarizes findings and limitations.

2. Theoretical Foundation

2.1 Connotation of Core Literacy in Junior High School English

The 2022 Standards define English core literacy as a comprehensive ability system composed of four interactive dimensions: language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability. **Language Ability:** The foundation of core literacy, referring to the ability to understand and express meaning in real contexts. For listening, it includes skills such as identifying main ideas, capturing key details, and understanding logical relationships. For example, Grade 8 students should be able to infer speakers' relationships through tone and wording.

Cultural Awareness: The value orientation of core literacy, involving understanding and respecting cultural differences. In listening teaching, it manifests as the ability to perceive cultural connotations in materials (e.g., etiquette differences in English-speaking countries' school interactions).

Thinking Quality: The core of core literacy, including logical thinking, critical thinking, and creative thinking. It requires students to not only "hear" information but also analyze its authenticity, infer implicit meanings, and form independent judgments. **Learning Ability:** The guarantee of core literacy development, referring to autonomous and collaborative learning abilities. In listening, it involves using prediction, note-taking, and other strategies independently, and completing tasks through group cooperation.

2.2 Unit Integrated Instruction (UII) and Listening Teaching

Unit Integrated Instruction takes "theme" as the core link, integrates "theme, discourse, language knowledge, cultural knowledge, language skills, and learning strategies" (six elements), and designs teaching activities in a systematic manner [2]. Its integration with listening teaching (i.e., UILT) presents three characteristics:

Theme Coherence: Listening materials and tasks are closely linked to the unit theme, avoiding fragmentation. For example, in the "Environmental Protection" unit, listening materials can include interviews with environmentalists, public service announcements, and cross-cultural discussions on environmental policies.

Skill Integration: Listening is combined with speaking, reading, and writing to form an "input-output" closed loop. For instance, after listening to a school activity notice, students can discuss its details (speaking) and write a similar notice (writing).

Layered Progression: Listening tasks are designed from shallow to deep, matching students' cognitive development. It starts with basic information extraction, progresses to logical analysis, and finally reaches creative application.

2.3 Supporting Theories

2.3.1 Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Willis' TBLT framework (pre-task, while-task, post-task) provides a procedural basis for UILT. Pre-task activates prior knowledge and predicts content; while-task focuses on meaning comprehension and strategy use; post-task emphasizes language output and reflection [3]. This framework ensures that listening teaching is not limited to "decoding" but focuses on "meaning construction" and "ability application".

2.3.2 Cognitive Listening Theory

Rivers points out that listening comprehension is a dynamic process of "decoding-meaning reconstruction-contextual integration", which is affected by language knowledge, background knowledge, and cognitive strategies. UILT's multi-modal materials and hierarchical tasks provide sufficient support for each link of this cognitive process, helping students establish connections between listening information and real contexts.

2.3.3 "Assessment-Learning-Teaching" Integration Theory

Proposed by Chen Zehang and Wang Qiang, this theory emphasizes using formative assessment to guide teaching design and personalized learning. In UILT, technologies such as intelligent platforms can track students' listening strategy use and task completion in real time, and push targeted resources to promote core literacy development.

3. Current Status and Dilemmas of Listening Teaching in Junior High School English Unit Integrated Instruction

3.1 Survey Overview

The survey was conducted from March to April 2025, covering 60 English teachers (teaching experience: 1-5 years accounting for 35%, 6-10 years 40%, over 10 years 25%) and 450 students (Grade 7 40%, Grade 8 35%, Grade 9 25%) from 3 junior high schools in Jiangsu Province. A total of 60 teacher questionnaires and 442 student questionnaires were valid, with an effective rate of 98.2%.

3.2 Main Findings

3.2.1 Positive Changes in Teaching Awareness

83% of teachers believe that "listening teaching should be integrated with unit themes", and 78% have tried to supplement extracurricular listening materials.

67% of students think that "theme-related listening materials are more interesting" than isolated exercises.

3.2.2 Dominant Dilemmas

3.2.2.1 Misalignment Between Teaching Goals and Core Literacy

The survey shows that 72% of teachers still take "improving test scores" as the primary listening goal, while only 28% explicitly include "cultural awareness" and "thinking quality" in teaching objectives. In classroom observation, when teaching Go for it! Unit 3 "Daily Routines", teachers focused on training students to "listen for time and activities" but ignored guiding them to compare cultural differences in daily schedules between China and Western countries.

3.2.2.2 Monotony and Decontextualization of Listening Materials

Source Monotony: 76% of teachers mainly use textbook materials, and only 15% regularly supplement multi-modal materials such as English news, podcasts, or VR scenarios.

Theme Disconnection: 68% of supplementary materials are not closely linked to the unit theme. For example, in the "Technology" unit, some teachers used travel-themed dialogues, leading to fragmented learning.

Difficulty Mismatch: 45% of students reported that textbook listening materials are "too simple and lack challenge", while 32% found supplementary materials "too difficult to understand".

3.2.2.3 Isolation of Teaching Activities and Ignorance of Strategy Training

Skill Isolation: 69% of classes adopt the "listening-only" mode, without integrating speaking, reading, and writing. For example, after listening to a dialogue about school clubs, students only did multiple-choice questions instead of discussing club recruitment (speaking). **Weak Strategy Guidance:** Only 21% of teachers systematically teach listening strategies such as prediction and note-taking. Most students "listen blindly" without effective methods, leading to low

efficiency. Lack of Interaction: 73% of listening activities are individual tasks, and collaborative inquiry accounts for less than 10%. Students lack opportunities to discuss listening confusion and share strategies.

3.2.2.4 Single Evaluation Method and Inattention to Process

Evaluation Content: 88% of evaluation focuses on "answer accuracy", while ignoring strategy use, cultural understanding, and collaborative performance. Evaluation Method: 92% of teachers use only written tests, and formative evaluation such as classroom observation and portfolio assessment is rarely used. Students cannot obtain timely feedback on their listening process.

4. Core Literacy-Oriented Design Strategies for Listening Teaching in Junior High School English Unit Integrated Instruction

Based on the above dilemmas and theoretical foundations, this study constructs a UILT design framework with three dimensions: goal anchoring, material integration, and activity design, and matches corresponding evaluation methods to ensure the penetration of core literacy.

4.1 Goal Anchoring: Aligning with Core Literacy and Unit Themes

UILT goals should take the unit theme as the core and cover the four dimensions of core literacy, forming a "unit overall goal-lesson-level goal" hierarchical system. Taking Go for it! Grade 7 Unit 4 "School Life" (theme: Understanding and introducing school facilities and activities) as an example, the goal design is as follows: Core Literacy Dimension Unit Listening Goal Lesson-Level Goal (Listening & Speaking) Language Ability Master school-related vocabulary (e.g., library, lab) and functional sentences; use prediction and key word capture strategies Understand dialogues about "asking for directions in school"; accurately capture locations and guidance methods Cultural Awareness Perceive differences in school life between China and English-speaking countries Identify cultural elements in listening materials (e.g., lockers in American schools) Thinking Quality Infer speakers' identities and needs through contextual clues Infer whether the speaker is a student or teacher based on dialogue content. Learning Ability Complete collaborative listening tasks independently; reflect on strategy use Cooperate to compile a "school guide" based on listening information; summarize effective note-taking methods

4.2 Material Integration: Constructing Multi-Modal and Thematic Resource Systems

Listening materials should follow the principles of "theme relevance, difficulty hierarchy, and form diversity" to provide rich input for core literacy development.

4.2.1 Material Selection: From Textbook to Multi-Modal Extension

Textbook-Based Adaptation: Adjust textbook materials according to students' level. For simple dialogues, add details (e.g., background sounds) to increase authenticity; for difficult passages, split them into segments with pre-listening prompts.

Theme-Related Supplementary Materials: Authentic Materials: English news clips (e.g., BBC "School Life in UK"), educational podcasts (e.g., "Story Pirates" for teenagers), and interviews with international students. Multi-Modal Materials: VR scenarios (e.g., virtual tour of an American high school), animated videos (e.g., "School Facilities" explainer), and audio-visual dialogues with subtitles. Cultural Comparative Materials: Materials reflecting cultural differences, such as dialogues about "lunchtime in Chinese vs. American schools" or "after-school activities in Japan vs. Germany" [4].

4.2.2 Material Classification: Hierarchical Design Based on Cognitive Levels

Referencing the "learning understanding-application practice framework in the 2022 Standards, materials are divided into three levels: Basic Level focus on literal meaning, such as short dialogues about "asking for directions to the library" (suitable for Grade 7 beginners). Intermediate Level involves logical analysis, such as a radio interview about "advantages and disadvantages of school clubs" (suitable for Grade 8).

Advanced Level requires creative application, such as a speech about "improving school facilities" and a follow-up discussion (suitable for Grade 9).

4.3 Activity Design: Implementing Core Literacy Through Three-Stage Tasks

Drawing on Willis' TBLT framework, UILT activities are divided into pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening stages, with each stage targeting different core literacy dimensions.

4.3.1 Pre-Listening Stage: Activating Prior Knowledge and Cultivating Learning Ability

The goal is to stimulate interest, clarify tasks, and activate relevant knowledge, focusing on developing learning ability and language ability.

Theme Introduction: Use videos, pictures, or real objects to introduce the unit theme. For example, in "School Life", play a VR clip of a foreign campus to arouse curiosity. Prediction Activities: Guide students to predict content based on titles, pictures, or keywords. For example, show a picture of a library and ask: "What questions might the speaker

ask about the library?". Strategy Preview: Briefly explain 1-2 core strategies (e.g., "key word capture: pay attention to nouns like 'library' and verbs like 'find'") [5].

4.3.2 While-Listening Stage: Deepening Comprehension and Developing Thinking Quality

The core stage of listening teaching, focusing on information processing and strategy application, targeting language ability and thinking quality.

Layered Task Design:

1. Basic Task: Extract explicit information (e.g., "Fill in the table: Opening hours of the library").
2. Intermediate Task: Analyze logical relationships (e.g., "Draw a map of the school based on the dialogue's direction guidance").
3. Advanced Task: Infer implicit meaning (e.g., "What is the speaker's attitude towards the new lab? Support your answer with evidence").

Interactive Feedback: Use intelligent platforms (e.g., "Zhihui Xueban") to display students' task completion in real time. Teachers provide targeted guidance for common mistakes [6].

4.3.3 Post-Listening Stage: Integrating Skills and Cultivating Cultural Awareness

The stage of output and reflection, integrating listening with other skills, focusing on cultural awareness and creative thinking [7]. Skill Integration Activities:

Speaking: Role-play based on listening content (e.g., "Act as a guide to introduce the school to new students").

Writing: Write a summary or extension (e.g., "Write a proposal for improving the school library based on the listening interview").

Cultural Exploration: Discuss cultural differences in listening materials. For example, "Why do American schools have lockers while Chinese schools usually don't?".

Reflection and Summary: Students share listening strategies they used (e.g., "I noted down numbers for opening hours") and reflect on deficiencies [8].

4.4 Evaluation System: Multi-Dimensional Assessment Focusing on Literacy Development

Construct a "process + outcome, teacher + student, quantitative + qualitative" integrated evaluation system to comprehensively track core literacy development.

4.4.1 Evaluation Content: Covering Four Core Literacy Dimensions

Evaluation Dimension Specific Indicators

Language Ability Accuracy of information extraction; proficiency in strategy use (e.g., prediction, note-taking) Cultural Awareness Ability to identify cultural elements; respect for cultural differences in discussions Thinking Quality Logic of inferences; depth of analysis of listening content Learning Ability Initiative in pre-listening preparation; contribution to collaborative tasks [9].

4.4.2 Evaluation Methods

Process Evaluation (60%): Include listening logs (students record strategy use), classroom observation records (teachers track participation), and group task reports.

Outcome Evaluation (40%): Include unit listening tests (covering three difficulty levels) and project works (e.g., "school guide" compiled based on listening materials).

Multi-Subject Evaluation: Combine teacher evaluation, student self-evaluation, and peer evaluation. Use evaluation rubrics to ensure objectivity.

5. Case Analysis: UILT Practice of Go for it! Grade 7 Unit 4 "School Life"

5.1 Case Background

This case was implemented in two parallel classes of Grade 7 in a municipal key junior high school in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, from September to November 2025. The experimental class (EC, 42 students) adopted the UILT strategies proposed in this study, while the control class (CC, 40 students) used traditional listening teaching. The unit theme is "School Life", and the core listening objective is to "understand dialogues about school facilities and directions, and perceive cultural differences in school life".

5.2 UILT Design and Implementation

5.2.1 Stage 1: Project Launch and Pre-Listening Preparation (2 class hours)

Theme Activation: Play a 3-minute VR clip of a high school in New York, showing facilities like lockers, cafeterias, and labs. Ask: "What's different from our school?" to activate cultural awareness.

Driving Question: Propose the project task: "Compile an English 'School Guide' for new international students, including facility introductions and direction guidance".

Group Division: Students form 8 groups (5-6 people/group) with roles: "Material Collector", "Strategy Coordinator", "Cultural Analyst", and "Editor".

5.2.2 Stage 2: Thematic Listening and Strategy Training (4 class hours)

Provide three levels of listening materials and design layered tasks:

Listening Materials for "School Life" Unit Material Level Type Content Target Skill Basic Textbook dialogue Students asking for directions to the library Key word capture Intermediate BBC audio clip Introduction to British school facilities Logical analysis Advanced Interview recording International students talking about school life in China Implicit meaning inference [10].

While-Listening Tasks:

1. Basic: Fill in the "Facility Opening Hours" table based on the textbook dialogue.
2. Intermediate: Draw a "British School Layout Map" based on the BBC clip.
3. Advanced: Discuss "What difficulties do international students face in Chinese schools?" based on the interview.

Strategy Guidance: Focus on "note-taking skills" (e.g., using abbreviations like "lib" for library) and "attitude inference" (e.g., judging from tone: excited → positive attitude).

5.2.3 Stage 3: Skill Integration and Outcome Output (4 class hours)

Post-Listening Activities:

1. Speaking: Role-play "international students asking for directions" using listening materials.
2. Writing: Draft the "School Guide" with sections: "Facility Introduction", "Direction Guidance", and "Cultural Tips" (e.g., "Chinese classrooms usually don't have lockers, so bring a schoolbag").
3. Exhibition: Each group presents their guide and explains "how listening materials supported the design".

5.2.4 Stage 4: Evaluation and Reflection (2 class hours)

Multi-Subject Evaluation:

Self-evaluation: Students reflect on "what listening strategies I used effectively" in logs. Peer evaluation: Use the rubric in Table 1 to score group members. Teacher evaluation: Comment on guide quality and listening strategy mastery. Feedback and Improvement: Push personalized resources (e.g., note-taking skill videos) to students who struggle with strategy use via the intelligent platform.

5.3 Case Effectiveness Analysis

5.3.1 Improvement of Listening Proficiency

The pre-test and post-test scores (full score 100) show that the EC's average score increased from 62.8 to 75.1 (an increase of 12.3 points), while the CC's average score increased from 63.2 to 69.3 (an increase of 6.1 points). In the post-test, 83% of EC students could use prediction and note-taking strategies, compared with only 31% in the CC.

5.3.2 Development of Core Literacy

Language Ability: 91% of EC students could accurately extract key information from intermediate-level materials, and 76% could use school-related vocabulary flexibly in the guide.

Cultural Awareness: 79% of guides included cultural tips (e.g., "Lunchtime in our school is 12:00-13:30, longer than in some Western schools"), showing improved cross-cultural understanding.

Thinking Quality: 72% of EC students could infer speakers' attitudes in advanced materials, and 45% proposed creative suggestions (e.g., "Set up a 'cultural exchange corner' in the library").

Learning Ability: 88% of EC students actively participated in group discussions, and 67% independently supplemented extracurricular listening materials (e.g., school-related podcasts).

5.3.3 Enhancement of Learning Motivation

Student questionnaires show that the proportion of EC students who "enjoy English listening" rose from 37% to 82%, while the CC only increased from 35% to 41%. EC students' average weekly extracurricular listening time increased from 45 minutes to 2.1 hours, mainly involving theme-related authentic materials.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Research Conclusion

Core literacy-oriented UILT effectively solves the dilemmas of traditional listening teaching. By anchoring theme-based goals, integrating multi-modal materials, and designing three-stage tasks, it realizes the organic integration of listening teaching with core literacy cultivation. The three-dimensional design framework (goal anchoring, material integration, activity design) is feasible in practice. The case shows that it can significantly improve students' listening proficiency, strategy use ability, and cross-cultural awareness. Multi-dimensional evaluation (process + outcome, multi-subject) is the key guarantee for UILT effectiveness. It not only reflects students' listening results but also tracks their core literacy development trajectory.

6.2 Limitations and Future Direction

The case was conducted in an urban key school, and the results may not be fully applicable to rural schools with limited resources. The 12-week experiment only verified short-term effects; long-term impacts on core literacy need further tracking. The proposed strategies rely on intelligent platforms and VR equipment, which may be difficult for schools with insufficient funding.

Develop simplified versions of UILT strategies for rural schools (e.g., using free podcasts instead of VR materials). Conduct a 3-year follow-up study to explore the sustainable impact of UILT on students' listening ability and core literacy. Combine listening teaching with other subjects (e.g., listening to English introductions of scientific experiments in biology class) to expand theme contexts. Collaborate with front-line teachers to build a "core literacy-oriented UILT resource bank" (including materials, task designs, and evaluation tools) to promote widespread application.

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