Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Comprehensible Input Approach on the Speaking Skills of Non-English Major Students in English Classes

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of the Comprehensible Input (CI) approach in enhancing English-speaking skills among non-English major university students in Vietnam. Based on Krashen's Language Acquisition Theory (1985), a quasi-experimental design involved 360 students randomly assigned to an experimental group (CI-based instruction) and a control group (traditional grammar-based instruction). Pre- and post-tests assessed fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and communicative competence. Qualitative data from surveys and interviews complemented the findings. The CI group showed significant improvements across all domains ($p < 0.001$), with increased confidence and engagement. Qualitative results supported CI's effectiveness in fostering natural language use. This study advocates CI as a valuable strategy for EFL contexts and suggests practical applications for curriculum development in Vietnamese higher education.

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1 Introduction

1. 1.1 Background to this study

In today's globalized world, English proficiency is critical, yet many non-English major students in Viet Nam struggle to develop fluent speaking skills. Traditional teaching methods which emphasize grammar, translation, and rote memorization, often fail to foster effective communication [1, 2]. These approaches, prevalent in Viet Nam and other non-native English-speaking countries, prioritize linguistic accuracy over fluency, leaving students unable to communicate naturally despite years of formal education [2]. To address this, researchers and educators are exploring innovative methods that leverage naturalistic language exposure to enhance speaking abilities.

One such method is Stephen Krashen's Comprehensible Input (CI) Hypothesis, which posits that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to understandable input slightly above their current proficiency level ($I + 1$) [3]. Unlike traditional grammar-focused instruction, CI emphasizes meaningful, context-rich language exposure, promoting subconscious learning and natural speech production [4]. Research indicates that CI improves listening and speaking skills by fostering confidence and fluency without relying on forced output or explicit grammar teaching [5, 6]. Despite its success in various educational contexts globally, CI's effectiveness among Vietnamese non-English major students, where grammar-based teaching dominates, remains underexplored [7].

This study investigates the impact of the CI approach on the speaking skills of non-English major university students in Viet Nam, focusing on fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and communicative competence. By comparing CI with traditional methods through pre- and post-tests, student surveys, and

instructor interviews, the study aims to provide evidence-based insights into effective language teaching strategies [8, 9]. With the growing demand for fluent English speakers in the global marketplace, identifying methods that enhance communicative competence is essential [11]. This research contributes to second language acquisition literature and offers practical recommendations for improving English instruction in Viet Nam and potentially other EFL contexts.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.2 Theoretical Framework of CI

Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) is a cornerstone of language acquisition theory, asserting that learners acquire language through exposure to comprehensible input at the $(i + 1)$ level, just beyond their current understanding [13]. This implicit process prioritizes meaningful communication over formal grammar instruction, fostering natural language development. Long's Interaction Hypothesis complements this by highlighting the role of interaction and negotiation of meaning in enhancing comprehension and language growth [6]. Together, these theories suggest that CI, combined with interactive opportunities, effectively supports speaking skill development by creating an environment conducive to authentic language use.

1.2.3 Empirical Evidence Supporting the Effectiveness of CI

Numerous studies validate CI's effectiveness in enhancing speaking skills. Nation [9] found that CI facilitates vocabulary acquisition and oral proficiency by exposing learners to contextually relevant input, enabling them to recognize and use new linguistic elements. VanPatten [3] emphasized that CI-based activities lower affective barriers, such as anxiety, leading to more confident and spontaneous speech production. In a Vietnamese context, Hoang [7] demonstrated that CI improves the production of grammatically accurate and contextually appropriate sentences. Additionally, research shows that CI increases students' willingness to communicate, a critical factor in speaking proficiency [10]. These findings highlight CI's ability to promote natural language use and communicative competence in classroom settings.

1.2.4 Comparison with Traditional Teaching Methods

Traditional English instruction for non-English major students often relies on the Grammar-Translation Method, focusing on explicit grammar rules, rote memorization, and translation exercises [11]. While being effective for teaching grammatical accuracy, these methods rarely prioritize communicative ability, limiting students' fluency and spontaneous speech [12]. Long [6] argues that traditional approaches provide limited opportunities for authentic language use, hindering the development of communicative competence. In contrast, CI offers significant advantages by exposing learners to real-world language contexts, encouraging natural speech production [11]. Empirical comparisons consistently demonstrate CI's superiority in fostering fluency and engagement over grammar-focused methods [6, 15]. For non-English major students who often lack exposure to authentic language, CI provides a more effective pathway to developing practical speaking skills. (đã sửa)

1.2.5 Conclusion

The literature underscores CI as a robust alternative to traditional grammar-based instruction, significantly enhancing speaking proficiency among non-English major students. Its success depends on high-quality input, learner motivation, and effective instructional design. However, challenges in material development and assessment persist. Future research should explore hybrid models that integrate CI with output-focused activities to optimize language acquisition, particularly in EFL contexts like Viet Nam, where traditional methods remain prevalent.

2 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with pre- and post-tests to compare the Comprehensible Input (CI) approach with traditional grammar-based instruction. The experimental group (n = 180) received CI-based teaching, while the control group (n = 180) followed conventional methods. Pre-tests established baseline speaking abilities, and post-tests measured progress, isolating the effect of the teaching method. Qualitative data from student surveys and instructor interviews complemented quantitative results, providing insights into learning experiences and perceived effectiveness.

2.2 Research Site

The study was conducted during the first semester of 2025 at the Foreign Language Center of Nguyen Tat

Thanh University (NTTU), Vietnam. The center focuses on delivering effective language training to non-English major undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as those in continuing education programs.

2.3 Participants

Of approximately 8,000 non-English major students at NTTU, 360 were randomly selected from four classes taught by the researcher during the first semester of 2025. Participants were evenly divided into experimental (n = 180) and control (n = 180) groups. The sample size was determined using the formula:

$$n = \frac{Nz^2p(1-p)}{d^2(N-1) + z^2p(1-p)}$$

$$\Rightarrow N = \frac{8,000 \times 1.960^2 \; x \; 0.5 \times (1-0.5)}{0.05^2 \times (8,000-1) + 1.960^2 \times 0.5 \times (1-0.5)}$$

z = confidence coefficient; z = 1.960
d = margin of error; d = 0.05
p = proportion of the population; p = 0.5
N = total population; N = 8,000

Inclusion Criteria:
- Non-English major students at NTTU.

- Equivalent English proficiency based on placement tests.
- At least 80% class attendance during the study.

The experimental group received CI-based instruction, while the control group followed traditional grammar-based methods. Instructors had at least three years of teaching experience, and random assignment ensured fair comparison between groups.

2.4 Instruments

2.4.1 Speaking Tests:

Pre- and post-tests assessed fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and communicative competence using a CEFR-based rubric. Two independent raters scored responses to ensure reliability. The tests included general introductions, picture descriptions, and opinion-based questions.

2.4.2 Surveys and Questionnaires:

- Student Perception Survey: Collected feedback on learning experiences, focusing on confidence, input exposure, challenges, and comparisons with traditional methods.
- Instructor Feedback Questionnaire: Assessed the method's effectiveness, student engagement, challenges, and suggestions for improvement.

Table 1 Instruments used in the study and their key features

Instrument	Purpose	Key Components
Speaking Test	Measure students' speaking proficiency before and after intervention	General introduction, picture description, opinion-based questions
Student Perception Survey	Gather students' feedback on learning experiences	Confidence in speaking, exposure to input, challenges, comparison with traditional methods
Instructor Feedback Questionnaire	Understand teachers' perspectives on the teaching method	Effectiveness, student engagement, challenges, and suggestions

2.5 Procedure

The study spanned 14 weeks, with two weekly lessons totaling 250 minutes. As shown in Figure 1, the experimental group received CI-based instruction, including:
- Authentic materials (e.g., ESL Pod, BBC Learning English podcasts, conversational videos) aligned with CEFR i+1 levels.
- Storytelling and narrative-based activities for natural language exposure.

- Interactive discussions and role-plays with minimal grammar explanation.

In contrast, the control group followed traditional grammar-translation methods, including:
- Vocabulary memorization and grammar drills.
- Structured dialogues with limited real-world language exposure.

Both groups completed pre-tests to establish baseline speaking abilities and post-tests after 14 weeks to measure progress. Surveys and interviews were

conducted post-intervention to gather qualitative feedback on the teaching methods.

Figure 1 Flowchart of the Comprehensible Input teaching process.

2.6 Data Analysis

2.6.1 Quantitative Analysis

Speaking test data were analyzed using SPSS. Paired-samples t-tests assessed within-group improvements, while independent-samples t-tests compared improvements between the experimental and control groups. F-tests confirmed homogeneity of variances ($p > 0.05$) before t-tests.

2.6.2 Qualitative Analysis

Thematic coding was applied to survey and interview responses to identify themes related to student experiences, motivation, and challenges. Instructor

feedback was analyzed to derive pedagogical implications.

2.7 Comparing and Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Methods

The study evaluated the effectiveness of CI versus traditional methods by analyzing:

- Improvements in speaking skills (fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, communicative competence).
- Student perceptions of their learning experiences.
- Benefits and challenges of the CI approach, as reported by students and instructors.

By integrating quantitative test results with qualitative feedback, the study provides evidence-based recommendations for improving speaking instruction for non-English major students, contributing to language teaching research and pedagogy.

3 Results

Findings from the present study were divided into quantitative (numbers-based) and qualitative (experience-based). Quantitative data compare pre- and post-test speaking scores for the experimental (Comprehensible Input, CI) and control (traditional) groups to assess improvements. Qualitative data from student surveys and instructor feedback provide insights into engagement, perceptions, and teaching experiences.

3.1 Quantitative Findings

3.1.1 Comparison of Pre- and Post-Test Results

Pre- and post-test speaking assessments evaluated fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and communicative competence for the experimental ($n = 180$) and control ($n = 180$) groups. Scores (scale: 1-10) are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 Mean Pre- and Post-Test Scores

Speaking Skill	Experimental Group (CI) Pre-Test	Experimental Group (CI) Post-Test	Control Group (Traditional) Pre-Test	Control Group (Traditional) Post-Test
Fluency	5.2	7.8	5.1	6.3
Pronunciation	5.4	7.5	5.3	6.0
Vocabulary	5.0	7.6	5.1	6.2
Communicative Competence	5.3	8.0	5.2	6.4
Overall Score	**5.2**	**7.7**	**5.2**	**6.2**

3.1.2 Statistical Significance of Improvements In Speaking Skills

Paired t-tests assessed within-group improvements, while independent t-tests compared post-test scores between groups. F-tests confirmed variance homogeneity (p > 0.05), validating t-test assumptions.

- Experimental Group (CI): Significant improvements were observed across all domains − fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and communicative competence (p < 0.001), indicating CI's effectiveness.
- Control Group (Traditional): Improvements were statistically significant (p < 0.05) but less pronounced than in the CI group.
- Between-Group Comparison: The CI group outperformed the control group in all domains (p < 0.001), confirming CI's superior impact.
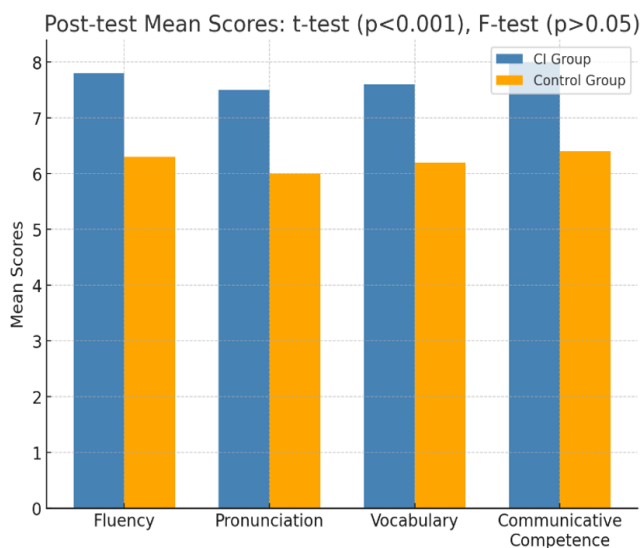

Figure 2 Post-test mean scores for CI and Control groups with t-test and F-test results.

The data demonstrate that the CI approach led to greater improvements in speaking skills compared to traditional methods.

3.2. Qualitative Insights

Classroom observations and instructor feedback highlighted differences in engagement:

- Experimental Group: Students showed increased enthusiasm, voluntary participation, and confidence in spontaneous speaking, likely due to exposure to authentic CI materials.
- Control Group: Students relied on memorized responses, hesitated in unstructured tasks, and focused on grammatical accuracy over fluency.

3.2.2. Participant Feedback on the Teaching Method

- Student Perceptions (Survey Results)

A post-intervention survey (n = 180, experimental group) revealed:

- 90% preferred CI over traditional methods, reporting greater confidence in speaking.
- 10% felt neutral, indicating some uncertainty.
- Initial challenges in understanding and responding to CI materials diminished over time as students adapted.

Student Quotes:

- "Listening to real conversations helped me speak naturally without fearing mistakes."
- "I learned new words easily through context, not memorization."

3.2.3 Instructor Feedback

Instructors noted:

- Higher engagement and willingness to speak in the CI group.
- 90% observed improved interaction after regular CI exposure.
- Challenges in adapting materials to appropriate comprehension levels.

3.3 Summary of Results

- Quantitative Findings:

+ The CI group achieved significant gains in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and communicative competence (p < 0.001).

+ Post-test scores were significantly higher than the control group's (p < 0.001), supporting CI's effectiveness.

- Qualitative Insights:

+ CI students were more engaged and confident in speaking activities.

+ Students preferred CI, citing improved vocabulary and fluency.

+ Instructors observed enhanced participation but noted challenges in material adaptation.

The findings strongly support CI's efficacy in improving speaking skills, boosting confidence, and enhancing motivation among non-English major students.

3.4 Overall Conclusion from Visual Data

3.4.1 The Effectiveness of the Comprehensible Input Approach

Visual data (Table 2, Figure 2) show the CI group significantly outperformed the control group, particularly in fluency, vocabulary, and confidence.

Đại học Nguyễn Tất Thành

3.4.2 Student Satisfaction and Engagement

Over 90% of students reported greater confidence and preferred CI, noting its practicality for real-world communication.

3.4.3 Instructor Perspectives

Instructors observed improved engagement and vocabulary retention but highlighted the need for training to adapt CI materials effectively.

4 Conclusion

This study confirms that the Comprehensible Input (CI) approach significantly enhances the speaking skills of non-English major students in Vietnam, outperforming traditional grammar-based methods in fluency, vocabulary, and communicative competence ($p < 0.001$). Students exposed to CI exhibited greater confidence and spontaneity, aligning with Krashen's input hypothesis, which emphasizes understandable input just beyond learners' current level (i+1) for effective language acquisition. Increased engagement in the CI group further highlights its pedagogical value in EFL contexts where communicative competence is often neglected.

The findings advocate shifting from grammar-focused to meaning-focused instruction to foster authentic language use. Instructors should integrate CI techniques, such as storytelling, visual aids, and contextual dialogues, into classroom practice. Vietnamese universities should adopt authentic input sources, train instructors to align materials with (i + 1) level, and balance CI with output-focused activities to optimize communicative competence.

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Đánh giá hiệu quả của việc áp dụng phương pháp Comprehensible Input lên khả năng nói tiếng Anh của sinh viên trong lớp học tiếng Anh không chuyên

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Tóm tắt Nghiên cứu này khảo sát hiệu quả của phương pháp Comprehensible Input (CI) trong việc phát triển kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh của sinh viên không chuyên ngữ tại một trường đại học ở Việt Nam. Dựa trên Thuyết Tiếp thu Ngôn ngữ của Krashen (1985), nghiên cứu sử dụng thiết kế bán thực nghiệm với 360 sinh viên được phân ngẫu nhiên vào hai nhóm: nhóm thực nghiệm (được giảng dạy theo phương pháp CI) và nhóm đối chứng (được giảng dạy theo phương pháp truyền thống dựa vào ngữ pháp). Trước và sau can thiệp, các bài kiểm tra đánh giá năng lực nói ở bốn phương diện: độ trôi chảy, phát âm, vốn từ vựng và năng lực giao tiếp. Dữ liệu định tính bổ sung được thu thập thông qua khảo sát và phỏng vấn sinh viên và giảng viên nhằm làm rõ trải nghiệm học tập. Kết quả định lượng cho thấy nhóm học theo phương pháp CI đạt được sự cải thiện vượt trội ở tất cả các tiêu chí được đánh giá ($p < 0,001$). Các phát hiện định tính cũng củng cố kết quả trên, thể hiện qua sự gia tăng về sự tự tin, mức độ tham gia lớp học và khả năng sử dụng tiếng Anh một cách tự nhiên của người học. Nghiên cứu này góp phần bổ sung bằng chứng cho thấy CI là một chiến lược giảng dạy hiệu quả trong bối cảnh dạy học tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ (EFL) và đề xuất các ứng dụng thực tiễn cho việc xây dựng chương trình giảng dạy tại các cơ sở giáo dục đại học ở Việt Nam.

Từ khóa Comprehensible Input, sinh viên không chuyên Anh ngữ, phương pháp giảng dạy truyền thống, kỹ năng nói