

Teachers' Perceptions of Comprehensible Input on English Vocabulary Acquisition

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

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This study aims at exploring the teacher's perceptions about comprehensible input on English vocabulary acquisition, their knowledge about it, and the ways they provide it in the classroom. The participants are 10 teachers of English who are teaching General English at a university in the Mekong Delta. A questionnaire was used to collect data from the teachers. The results indicate that the teacher's knowledge of Krashen's hypothesis is quite good. Even though some teachers are unfamiliar with the Input Hypothesis, they still place much value on comprehensible input based on their own teaching experience. However, to raise the quality of teaching English, all the teachers should expand their knowledge and improve their professional development. Krashen's Hypothesis about comprehensible input should be spread more widely in the education field.

Introduction

Along with the great concern about vocabulary acquisition in SLA, comprehensible input has been marked by raising the interest of language researchers as well as its several significance (Barcroft, 2004). Vocabulary acquisition started to attract researchers in the last two decades and is studied in various issues such as incidental and intentional vocabulary learning, the nature of vocabulary acquisition, and strategies to enhance vocabulary acquisition. Vocabulary acquisition plays a vital in the success of SLA. In fact, to compare the importance of grammar and vocabulary in SLA, vocabulary would be more critical. "Lack of grammatical knowledge sometimes impedes the successful transmission of meaning. However, absence of vocabulary often impedes the transmission of meaning completely" (Wilkin, 1972, p.201 as cited in Barcrof, 2004). For instance, if an individual produces a sentence with incorrect grammar, it still can make sense. However, if a person makes a sentence with the wrong vocabulary or lacks precision in using vocabulary, that sentence actually makes a different meaning. In conjunction with vocabulary, comprehensible input is considered the prior factor to gain learners' vocabulary. Comprehensible input is defined by Krashen (1977). According to Krashen (1989), comprehensible input is the major environmental device that makes a great contribution to language acquisition. The input hypothesis (IH) concluded that a language is acquired by message understanding which is slightly beyond learners' current knowledge (Krashen, 1989). The comprehensible input hypothesis assumed that if the language learners' knowledge at the

current stage is "i", the input that the learners need to obtain is "i+1". This article was conducted to explore how CI was used in English classrooms, and how teachers understand it.

Literature review

This literature discusses some points of view related to vocabulary acquisition and comprehensible input. The literature reviewed three main aspects of some perspectives on vocabulary acquisition, comprehensible input principles, and its effectiveness on vocabulary acquisition.

Vocabulary acquisition from reading and listening

Vocabulary acquisition has been evaluated as one of the most important elements which contributes to the success of second language acquisition. Carroll (1971, as cited in Mackeow & Curtis 2014), vocabulary acquisition is one of the primary objectives of the teaching process. Thus, several studies discussed vocabulary acquisition and how to acquire vocabulary better. The following researches are examples. Firstly, in the study of the effectiveness of the comprehension hypothesis, Ponniah (2011) defined that when learners receive understandable input from reading and listening, the vocabulary acquisition process occurs. In his paper, to demonstrate his conclusion, he gave the data collection from the previous research which experimented on incidental vocabulary acquisition. For instance, Ponniah mentioned the research of Tekmen and Daloglu (2006). In their study, the participants were asked to read "The Golden Fleece" in 50 minutes without the dictionary. The participants were then assigned to take a pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test to check their understanding of thirty identified target words. The delayed post-test was conducted one week after the study. The data revealed that there were significant lexical gains in the scores of the participants after the post-test.

Regarding vocabulary acquisition, Mushait and Mohsen (2019) shared the idea that vocabulary acquisition is mostly based on listening and reading comprehensible input. Reading and listening are considered vital devices in providing meaningful input to language learners. For example, according to Nguyen (2022), reading can help to improve other skills; expand the source of vocabulary in different contexts. Moreover, Okebukola (2004, as cited in Nguyen, 2022) asserted that reading was a device to transmit knowledge from generation to generation. Mushait and Mohsen (2019) aimed to review the comparison between vocabulary gained from listening and reading. The researchers analyzed some international databases and concluded that vocabulary acquisition from listening and reading comprehension input was significant. However, the amount of vocabulary gained from listening is less than from reading.

Pigada and Schmitt (2006) supported the perspective that extensive reading helps learners acquire more vocabulary. The study method was a one-one interview. The results showed that more vocabulary acquisition is possible from extensive reading than previous studies have suggested. Not only reading and listening are basic comprehensible inputs to gain new words.

Luan and Sappathy (2011) claimed that the interaction between teacher and learners during the teaching process is also the main source of comprehensible input. In this study, 48 participants were taught vocabulary by the traditional method which used translations and pictures to modify the words. 24 of the 48 participants were assigned to join an additional two-way

interactive task that used audio/video to define the words. All the participants then were asked to take a pre-test and post-test. The results indicated that learners who received the meanings in the two-way task achieved higher vocabulary test scores. In general, reading and listening are two major sources of comprehensible input to gain vocabulary.

Medina (1990) explored the effects of music on English vocabulary acquisition. The participants were 48 second-grade limited-English-proficient children. They were divided into four groups. Group 1 was asked to hear a limited English story in sung version. Group 2 heard the story in the oral version. Group 3 heard the music and simultaneously vocabulary. The last group heard the oral version of the story and viewed pictures as well. The participants then took the pretest and posttest of vocabulary understanding. The tests were designed as a 20 - item multiple-choice paper. The findings indicated that there is no difference between acquiring vocabulary from a musical medium and a non-musical medium.

Comprehensible input principles

Various papers researched comprehensible input principles. Patrick (2019) stated that the understandable input principle started with five hypotheses. The first one is focusing on distinguishing between acquisition and learning. In this principle, he claimed that language acquisition happens unconsciously through reading, listening, and speaking. The second hypothesis is called the Nature Order Principle which explained that the order of human acquisition is unknown, and language learners cannot acquire a language until they are ready to do it. The third principle is the Monitor Principle "which also considers the brain's natural process for acquiring language" (Patrick, 2019, p. 6) and it also focuses on the actions that learners take through the monitor. The Affective Filter Principle is the fourth one. This principle pays attention to learners' anxiety which affects the language acquisition process. The Input Principle explains the means by which individuals acquire a second language through reading and listening (Patrick, 2019). Patrick agreed with Krashen's CI hypothesis in this principle. He claimed that language learners acquire a language better when they receive understandable messages (2019). The last principle is named The Compelling Input Principle which declares that compelling comprehensible input enhances second language acquisition (Patrick, 2019).

De la Garza and Harris (2017, as cited in Patrick, 2019) also fostered Krashen's perspective on the CI hypothesis. The two researchers studied the increasing number of unknown words in a text that would have on learner comprehension. 147 participants took pre and post-translation tests to examine comprehension of the text. The researchers found that if the number of unknown words in a text were under five, translation accuracy significantly increased. Thus, if the number of unknown words increased, the translation accuracy decreased.

Loschky (1994) tested the aspects of the input hypothesis (Krashen, 1980, 1983, 1985) and Long's definition of it (Long, 1980, 1983, 1985). One of Lochky's research questions is that "does greater L2 comprehension lead to greater L2 acquisition?" (1994, p. 307). There were 41 subjects at beginning-level learners of Japanese as a Foreign Language. They were divided into three experimental groups: (1) unmodified input with no interaction, (2) premodified input with no interaction, and (3) unmodified input with the chance for negotiated interaction. They then were compared in terms of their comprehension of the input and their retention of vocabulary

items. The final answer to the research question above is not confirmed. This study seems to support Long's (1980) revision of Krashen's hypothesis. In fact, Loschky concluded that "premodified input sometimes fails to improve learners' comprehension" (1994, p. 39).

In the study conducted by White (1987), he had great explanations and arguments against Krashen's Input Hypothesis. He claimed that this hypothesis is ambiguous in some ways. White (1987) argued the following:

It implies that by taking the hypothesis into account and providing comprehensible input, successful L2 acquisition is always possible and that where it is not possible, this is due to effective barriers alone. However, it runs into many difficulties, largely because of its lack of precision: where comprehensible input is interpreted as simplified input, one is in danger of providing less than adequate input to the acquirer. With its emphasis on meaning and extra-linguistic factors as crucial, the hypothesis neglects the role of system-internal changes, fails to consider cases where the input does not help at all and underestimates the problem of the acquisition of form. (1987, p. 108)

The Effects of Comprehensible Input (CI) on SLA

The comprehensible input is analyzed in two main aspects which are modified comprehensible input and interactional modified comprehensible input. Meleki and Pazhakh (2012) investigated the effects of these two kinds of comprehensible input on language learners' vocabulary understanding. 80 EFL learners participated in this study and the results revealed that the participants in interactively modified input were outperformed on vocabulary comprehension scores.

Rodrigo et al., (2004) had a study examining the impacts of two different approaches based on comprehensible input at the intermediate level for students of Spanish as a foreign language at the university level. This study included two parts. Both parts consisted of three groups of participants Experimental Reading Group, Reading-Discussion group, and Comparison group - Traditional Grammar and Composition. The students were asked to write a checkmark next to the words they did not know after the readings. The findings showed that the gains of the two experimental groups (Reading & Reading - Discussion) were significantly higher than the gains from the traditional group. These results clearly indicated that comprehensible input affects SLA positively.

Kara and Eveyik-Aydin (2019) researched to answer the question that whether TPRS (Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling) affects young language learners' vocabulary acquisition. Nineteen four-year-old Turkish kindergarten students took part in this study which provided pretest-treatment immediate post-test - and delayed post-test design. The vocabulary was taught based on the stages of TPRS. Data collection consisted of receptive and productive picture tests. The results showed that TPRS, which is considered the comprehensible input device, has a positive influence on both recall and retention of receptive and productive vocabulary.

To sum up, the literature review has just concluded some research that is related to vocabulary

acquisition and different perspectives on the effects of comprehensible input. The limitation of this study is the small size of participants. There are only 20 subjects. Moreover, the limited time may influence the quality of the findings. However, the next studies can explore more specifically the challenges that the teachers may take when they prepare for comprehensible input activities. Then, there will be some solutions to improve the quality of comprehensible input in English language teaching.

Research Questions

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the survey was seeking to answer the following research questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of the comprehensible input hypothesis?
2. Do these language teachers implement comprehensible input hypotheses in their classrooms? And if so, how?

Methods

Research Design

This study was aimed at exploring teachers' perceptions of comprehensible input in EFL classrooms, their knowledge about it, and how they conducted activities with comprehensible input in teaching English vocabulary. To complete the research, a quantitative design was used to collect data from teachers of English.

Participants

The study was contributed by the participation of ten teachers, male and female, who teach General English at a university in Mekong Delta. They are from 25 to 40 years old and their teaching experience was from three to over five years. The participants were selected because they work at the same place and their learners are at the same levels – university students. Moreover, almost all the participants are high professional development. It is possible to get information about the importance of providing students with comprehensible input, their techniques or strategies to teach vocabulary including applications of the comprehensible input hypothesis.

Procedure

In this research design, to get the information a survey was conducted using the Google Forms program and it was sent to the participants by Zalo and Gmail. This survey was designed based on Krashen's ideas about the Input Hypothesis most of the questions were closed-ended questions and there was only one question that was open-ended to collect the information about the activities that the teachers often use in the classroom delivering comprehensible input.

Results/Findings and discussion

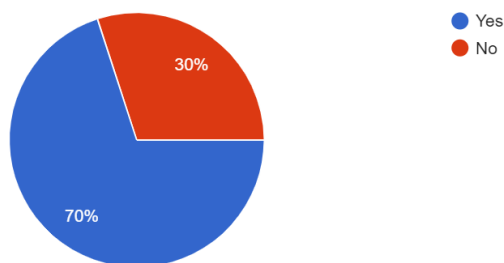
In this part, the information was analyzed to show the teachers' perceptions of the comprehensible input hypothesis, their knowledge about it, and the ways that they apply it in classroom activities to teach vocabulary.

Focusing on the aims of the investigation, there was a question to explore whether the

participants know about Krashen's Input Hypothesis. The results in graphic 1 show that the Input Hypothesis was quite familiar to the teachers. Seven out of ten teachers mentioned that they have already known about the Input Hypothesis, and only three of them said that they have never heard about the hypothesis before. The results indicate that almost the teachers teaching EFL at the university know Krashen's Input Hypothesis. Moreover, it shows that these teachers have good professional development since they may learn about it in a teaching course or they may read it in a book. This knowledge helps them to increase their teaching proficiency. In contrast, those who reported that they have never known about the Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, do not know clearly about the hypothesis, but they might apply it in the classroom without the intention.

1. Have you heard about Krashen's Input Hypothesis before?

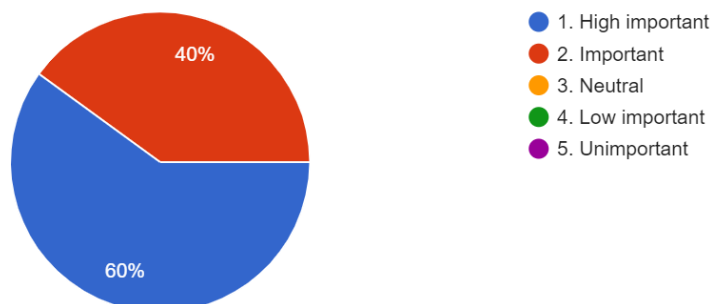
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The following graphic reveals the teachers' knowledge of the importance of comprehensible input in teaching vocabulary. The results show clearly the two main perceptions of the importance of comprehensible input in English language teaching. In fact, all the participants agree that comprehensible input plays an important role in English language teaching. Specifically, six out of ten teachers stated that providing activities with comprehensible input is highly important in helping the learners acquire a language easier. The best part of the participants thinks that providing comprehensible input activities is important. All the teachers have a high awareness of teaching English with comprehensible input.

2. How important is providing students with comprehensible input?

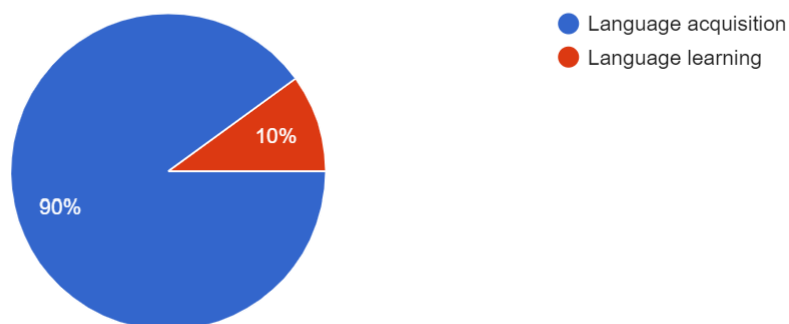
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Graphic 3 indicates the results of teachers' understanding of the distinction between "learning" and "acquisition". According to Krashen (1982), learning is "knowing a language" and acquisition is "picking up a language" (1982, p. 10). Being a teacher, knowing learning and acquisition distinction is very important. It helps to contribute to the success of the language development process. As a result of this issue in the questionnaire, 90% of the participants answered that good input cause language acquisition. This result indicates that the participants have the right perception of the Comprehensible Input Hypothesis.

3. Does input cause language acquisition or language learning?

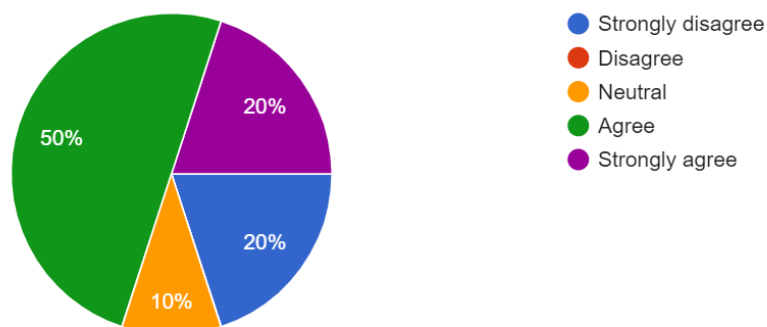
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Graphic 4 presents the participants' perceptions of the quality of input. The teachers need to distinguish between good and bad input that they provide in the ELT classroom. So that they can choose appropriate techniques to teach vocabulary in order to avoid students from feeling frustrated, discouraged, or uncomfortable. This question shows different points of view on the quality of input. Half of the participants agreed on the idea that input provided to learners should be comprehensible or meaningful. Only two out of ten participants strongly agreed on the same idea. Contrastingly, the number of participants that strongly disagreed was equal to the number of participants that said strongly agree. The different percentages indicate the different understanding of input.

4. Input has to be comprehensible and meaningful for learners.

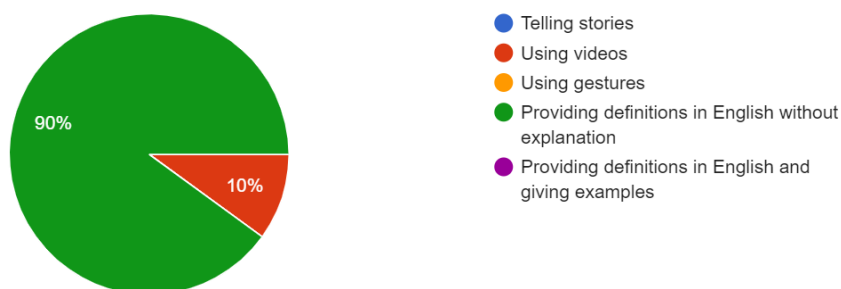
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Graphic 5 shows teachers' evaluation of the activities which present the characteristics of comprehensible input in teaching vocabulary. It is evident that only one out of ten teachers misunderstand the comprehensible input activity. From these results, it may indicate that almost all participants have good knowledge and a deep understanding of what comprehensible input is even though some of them, as mentioned above, do not know about Krashen's Comprehensible Input Hypothesis.

5. Which of these activities do NOT make reference to input delivery in teaching vocabulary?

10 câu trả lời



The next open-ended question in the survey was conducted to gather information related to participants' teaching experience. The question required the teachers to list their frequent classroom activities with comprehensible input in teaching vocabulary to EFL. The results are described below:

- Realia
- Gestures
- Monitoring, joint construction
- Storytelling
- Songs and chants
- Specialized reading texts
- Audios, videos and flashcards
- Personal explanations and examples

From these results, it is observable that almost all the participants used to provide a vocabulary to learners with good comprehensible input. However, to make the best use of comprehensible input in teaching vocabulary, teachers should know their students' current language ability. Hence, what the teachers are going to present in the next lessons is appropriate to Krashen's hypothesis "i+1".

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that almost all participated teachers have the right understanding about the importance of comprehensible input in English language teaching, especially in vocabulary acquisition. The study has investigated the teachers' perceptions towards the effectiveness of comprehensible input in vocabulary acquisition. On the other hand, the study also indicates that how the teachers produced comprehensible input in the classrooms. The results thus provide supports for Krashen's Comprehensible Input Hypothesis (1989). In addition, the findings of this study are also in line with some previous research. Firstly, they match with the findings of Rodrigo (2004). Rodrigo (2004) concluded that vocabulary and grammar can be acquire better through comprehensible input and the hypothesis of comprehensible input-based approaches are more effective than traditional methodology. Secondly, as for comprehensible input device, the study's investigation complements the findings of Pigada and Schmitt (2006) and Mushait and Mohsen (2019), who totally affirmed that reading and listening are two major means of comprehensible input providing. Comparably, the participated teachers responded to the open-ended question that they mostly used some activities such as videos, songs, storytelling and specialized reading texts. Lastly, the findings partly correspond to the findings from Wong (2012), which mostly emphasized the importance of teachers' beliefs in language teaching. Wong (2012) pointed out that teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning may have an impact on their teaching practice. Similarly, even though some of the participants have never heard about comprehensible input, their beliefs about it are also correct. These beliefs are basically built on their own teaching experience. Pajares (1993, as cited in Wong, 2012), for example, claimed that teachers can reshape their perceptions when they absorb new information from their teaching environment, and they apply it unconsciously based on their experience. Therefore, teachers' beliefs toward comprehensible input are also reflected through the activities that they use in the classroom. Those classroom activities are used commonly by the participants. However, those who have taken professional development courses may have a better understanding about the benefits of comprehensible input. Consequently, their preparations for vocabulary teaching may be more effective. In contrast, to those who have never heard about Krashen's hypothesis and implemented it in the classroom based on teaching experience only, still can access the benefits from input activities such as enhancing learners' motivation or providing an understandable language environment. However, the implemented activities may not make the best use of the comprehensible input hypothesis. Overall, this study suggested that English language teachers should be developed their profession as much as they can. Moreover, understanding learners' profiles and knowing their current knowledge are very important in the ways of establishing learners' language acquisition. Last but not least, this study implicates the next studies can explore deeper how EFL teachers conduct a good comprehensible input in teaching vocabulary.

Conclusion

To sum up, the findings indicate clearly the participating teachers' beliefs on comprehensible input in vocabulary teaching and how they provide it in the classroom. If the comprehensible input hypothesis is applied regularly in teaching vocabulary, English vocabulary will be acquired unconsciously. From the findings, it is observable that comprehensible input is based

on teachers' roles. Thus, the more effectiveness of input the teachers create, the more enhancing of learners' vocabulary acquisition will be made. Krashen (1992) claimed that more comprehensible input actually leads to more language acquisition. The amount of comprehensible input exposed in the target language is paralleled to automatic language acquisition.

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