

Research of the Application of the “i+1” Language Input Method in IELTS Listening on Unlock 4 Listening

Lan Ao¹, Siying Di^{2,*}

¹College of Continuing Education,
Beihang University, Beijing,
Beijing, 100191, China

²College of Humanities, Huaiyin
Institute of Technology, Huai'an,
Jiangsu, 223299, China

*Corresponding author: zz4862@
nyu.edu

Abstract:

This study explores the application of Krashen's i+1 Language Input Method in IELTS listening instruction through a case study of Unlock 4 Listening Teaching. “I” represents the level of the learner's existing second language, and 1 represents a language material that is slightly higher than the current level of the learners. Building on the theory that language acquisition is most effective when input slightly exceeds learners' current proficiency, this research investigates whether structured i+1 input can enhance students' listening comprehension and learning motivation. The study involved an experimental and a control class of Chinese students in a Beijing university's preparatory program. Through questionnaires, pre-tests and post-tests, and targeted listening activities, findings revealed that the i+1 method significantly improved students' IELTS listening skills and boosted their confidence and interest in listening tasks. The results suggest that integrating i+1 input in curriculum design fosters more effective and engaging listening instruction. Therefore, the i+1 language input method has obvious effects in teaching applications.

Keywords: i+1 Input Hypothesis; IELTS listening; language acquisition; learning motivation.

1. Introduction

The i+1 Input Hypothesis, proposed by Krashen, has long served as a foundational theory in second language acquisition [1]. It suggests that learners acquire language most effectively when they are exposed to language input that is just slightly beyond their current proficiency level (i+1) [2]. This balance challenges learners while remaining comprehensible,

thereby fostering both language development and sustained motivation [3]. In the context of IELTS listening instruction, applying the i+1 Input Method holds significant promise for improving learners' listening comprehension and enhancing their motivation to engage actively in learning.

Existing research underscores the importance of comprehensible input in language learning. Li highlights that authentic and well-structured listening ma-

materials tailored to learners' proficiency levels significantly improve listening outcomes [4]. Moreover, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis stresses that emotional factors—such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence—play a crucial role in how effectively learners absorb new language input [1]. This is particularly relevant in high-stakes environments like IELTS preparation, where test anxiety can negatively affect listening performance. Studies by Ostad et al. and Tabrizi & Ranjbar further confirm that task-based listening activities aligned with the i+1 principle not only enhance listening comprehension but also reduce learners' anxiety and foster higher motivation [5, 6].

Despite these theoretical insights, there remains a research gap concerning how the i+1 Input Hypothesis can be practically applied through structured curriculum resources. The Unlock 4 listening textbook, published by Cambridge University Press, emphasizes the integration of authentic academic contexts and progressively challenging listening tasks [7]. However, empirical research examining how this textbook supports the application of the i+1 Input Method, particularly in the context of IELTS listening preparation, is still limited. For instance, in one classroom application, the teacher used Unlock 4 Unit 2 on the topic “Education” and introduced Section 4 from Cambridge IELTS 8, which focused on research related to doctors. Although students were familiar with the topic of education, the university-level research content presented a manageable challenge beyond their current knowledge, aligning with the i+1 principle. The listening activity lasted about 10 minutes and was played only once to raise the difficulty appropriately. This was followed by targeted vocabulary instruction and listening exercises from Unlock 4 to reinforce comprehension and improve listening proficiency, illustrating how structured i+1 input can effectively enhance both listening skills and learning motivation.

Accordingly, this research will explore the extent to which applying Krashen's i+1 Input Theory through Unlock 4 Listening Teaching can improve students' IELTS listening comprehension. It will also investigate how this approach affects students' perceptions of the learning materials and their motivation to actively engage in IELTS listening classes.

This research seeks to apply the i+1 Language Input Method in the context of teaching IELTS Listening, using the case study of Unlock 4 Listening Teaching. Specifically, this study will examine whether the application of Krashen's i+1 Input Theory in Unlock 4 Listening Teaching enhances students' IELTS listening comprehension and how it influences their attitudes toward the learning content and their motivation to participate in IELTS listening classes.

This research aims to answer the following research questions:

Can the use of the i+1 language input teaching method in listening instruction improve students' IELTS listening comprehension ability?

After applying the i+1 language input teaching method in listening instruction, can it enhance students' motivation and interest in learning?

2. Research Design

2.1 The Subjects of Research

The authors conducted a questionnaire survey on English listening teaching in two parallel classes at a university in Beijing. The students in these two classes are research subjects being taught by the authors. They are required to complete English vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, reading, and writing courses over one year, as instructed by the overseas preparatory program. Students in this program have listening lessons four times a week, with Class 6 serving as the experimental class and Class 5 as the control class. There are 30 students in each class. The majority of these students come from international schools, and some of the students studied in public schools before. All of these students are Chinese, and their ages range from 15 to 18. They are divided into different classes according to their overall English scores; therefore, their proficiency in English is similar.

The length of this experiment is half a semester, starting from March 2025 to June 2025. Before the experiment, the monthly tests of the students in the experimental and the control class were divided into independent samples using the SPSS t-test.

2.2 Research Instruments

2.2.1 Questionnaire

This research uses questionnaires to understand these students' listening learning methods and learning motivations. The questionnaire for this study was “Hybrid English learning methods of overseas preparatory program students.” Ten questions were included in the questionnaire. There are three to five options for each question. This research counts the students' scores on the selected choices, then collects the data and analyses it by means of SPSS to view students' listening learning methods and learning motivations.

2.2.2 Test

In addition to questionnaires, the pre-test and post-test were conducted on the experimental and control classes.

Traditional listening teaching methods were used in the control class; to put it another way, teaching was done according to the directions of the textbook *Unlock 4*, which includes vocabulary, grammar, and listening teaching. Meanwhile, the teaching method based on Krashen's Input Hypothesis $i+1$ was utilised in the experimental class. Then the data of the pre-test and post-test were collected, and the mean test was performed through the statistical software SPSS so that it is possible to determine whether the experimental class and the control class differ significantly.

To gain insight into the undergraduate preparatory class students' English listening teaching program, based on Krashen's Input Hypothesis, pre-tests and post-tests were conducted for the students of the experimental class and the control class [8]. The monthly test taken in March is the pre-test. After three months, the final exam, which was taken at the end of June, is the post-test.

2.3 Research Procedure

2.3.1 Preparation before the Research

At the very beginning of the research, the questionnaire will be handed out to students, so that students' listening learning methods and their motivation will be analysed.

2.3.2 Teaching cases for IELTS learning students

The following teaching procedures are devised according to Krashen's $i+1$ input theory.

Warm-up is of great significance for students, and it is helpful to arouse students' interest in the lesson [9]. Based on Krashen's $i+1$ input theory, the listening materials should be interesting and relevant [10]. Two activities can be utilized in this process: providing an explanation of IELTS listening exercises and the background information.

Concerning the textbook *Unlock 4*, in which the topic of unit 2 is Education. Students are familiar with this topic. However, they are uncertain what their education would be like at the university. Therefore, the authors chose the

listening part, Section 4 of Cambridge IELTS 8, as the listening material at the beginning of the lesson. This practice lasted about 10 minutes. The listening would be played only once. This listening is related to the research on questions about doctors. Students were capable of having a better understanding of their university studies after listening. The difficulty of the exercise was above the students' current English proficiency.

After that, the knowledge of unit 2 in *Unlock 4* will be taught, which includes words and phrases from Listening 1, some exercises of vocabulary, and then exercises of Listening 1.

3. Analyses and Discussion

3.1 Examination of the Survey

A survey of 32 pre-foundation students revealed that half (50%) have studied English for 5–10 years, another 34.4% for over 10 years, and only 15.6% for less than five years—indicating a generally solid linguistic background. Despite this, weekly listening practice remains light: 34.4% report spending only 1–3 hours, 28.1% less than one hour, and just 18.8% exceed five hours, suggesting that many learners struggle to integrate listening into their routines.

Results showed both classes improved, but the experimental class exhibited significantly greater gains. Pre-test averages were nearly identical (23.40 vs. 23.17), whereas post-test scores rose to 32.62 for the experimental group compared with 30.70 for the control group. Questionnaire feedback also indicated heightened interest, confidence, and engagement among students exposed to the $i+1$ method.

3.2 Pre-Test and Post-Test Score Analysis

3.2.1 Comparison of the experimental and control groups' students' pre-listening test results

The following is a comparison of the data between these two classes.

Table 1 Comparison of average Pre-test scores in listening ability between the experimental class and the control class

	control class	experimental class
Pre-test scores in listening ability	23.17	23.4

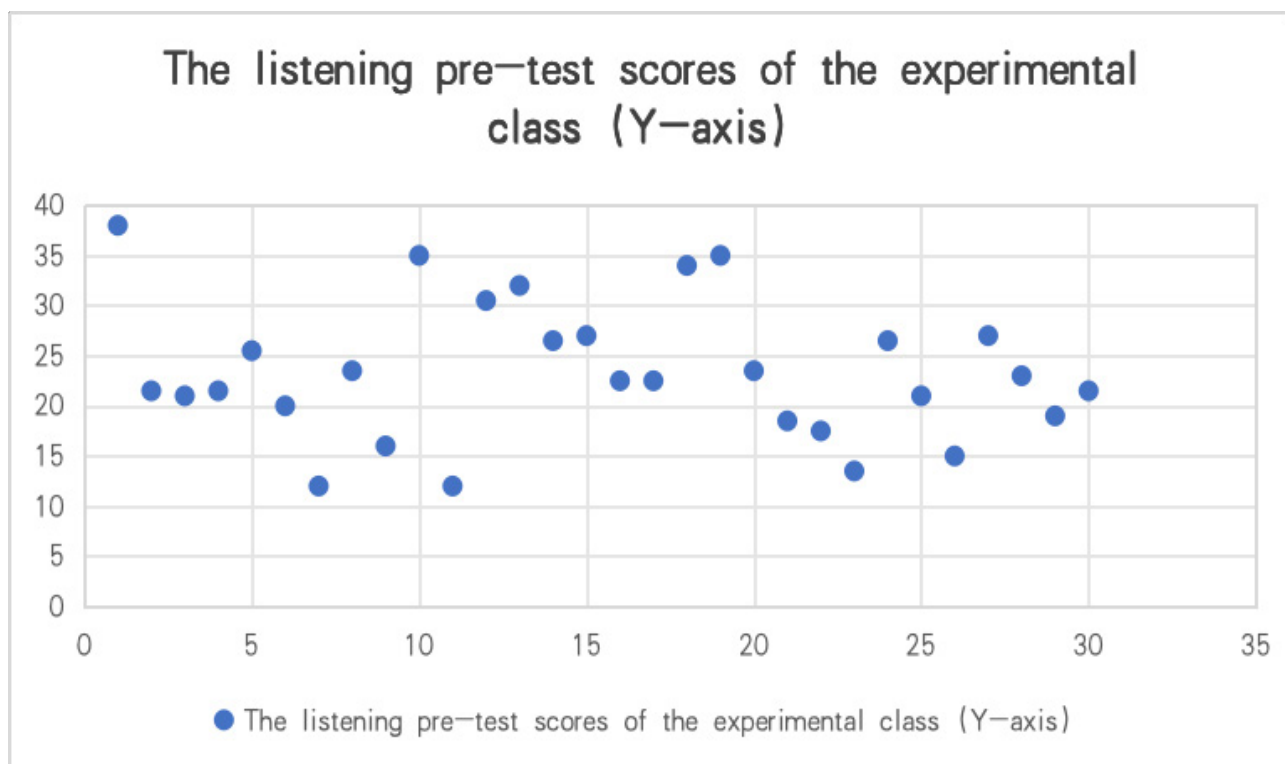


Fig. 1 scatter plots of the experimental class's listening pre-test results

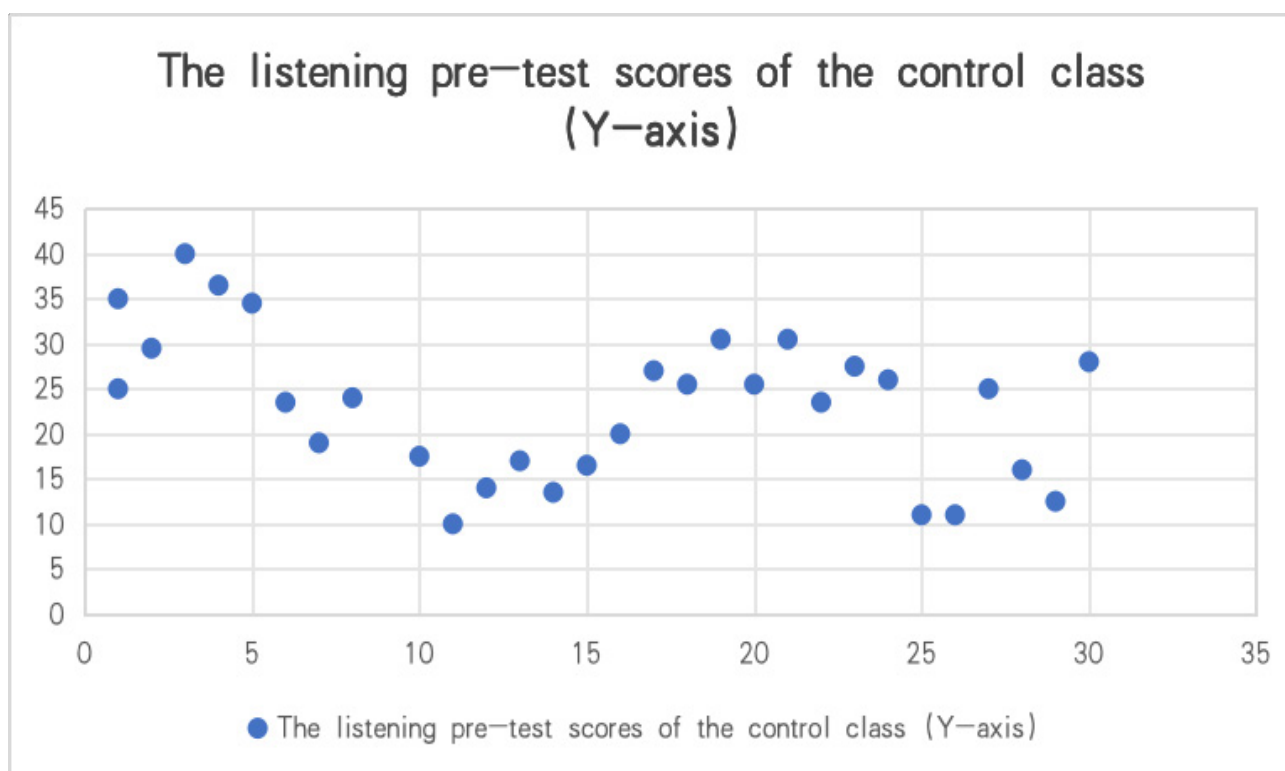


Fig. 2 Scatter plots of the control class's listening pre-test results

According to Table 1, prior to the trial, the experimental class's and the control class's average scores were nearly identical. Figures 1 and 2 show the frequency of the

scores of the two classes before the experiment, reflecting the distribution of scores of the two teaching classes in different score ranges. According to the chart, it can

be seen that the students of the two teaching classes had comparable listening scores before the experiment.

Table 2 Comparison of the experimental class's and the control class's mean listening skills test results before and after the experiment

	control class	experimental class
Pre-test scores in listening ability	23.17	23.40
Post-test scores in listening ability	30.70	32.62

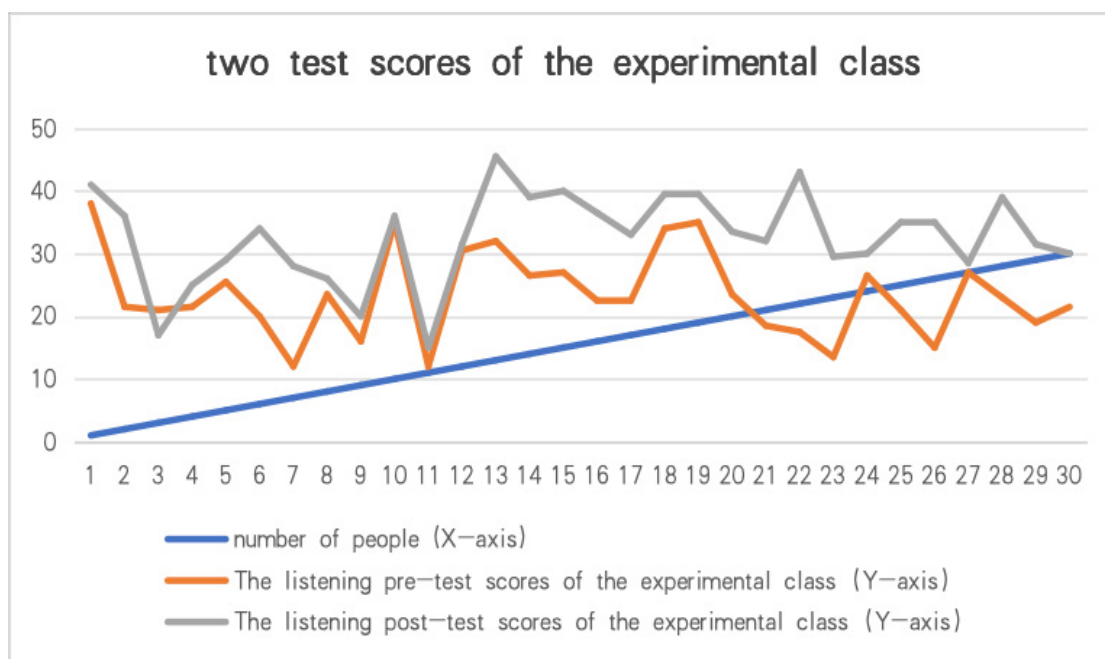


Fig. 3 Comparison of the two listening test scores of the experimental class

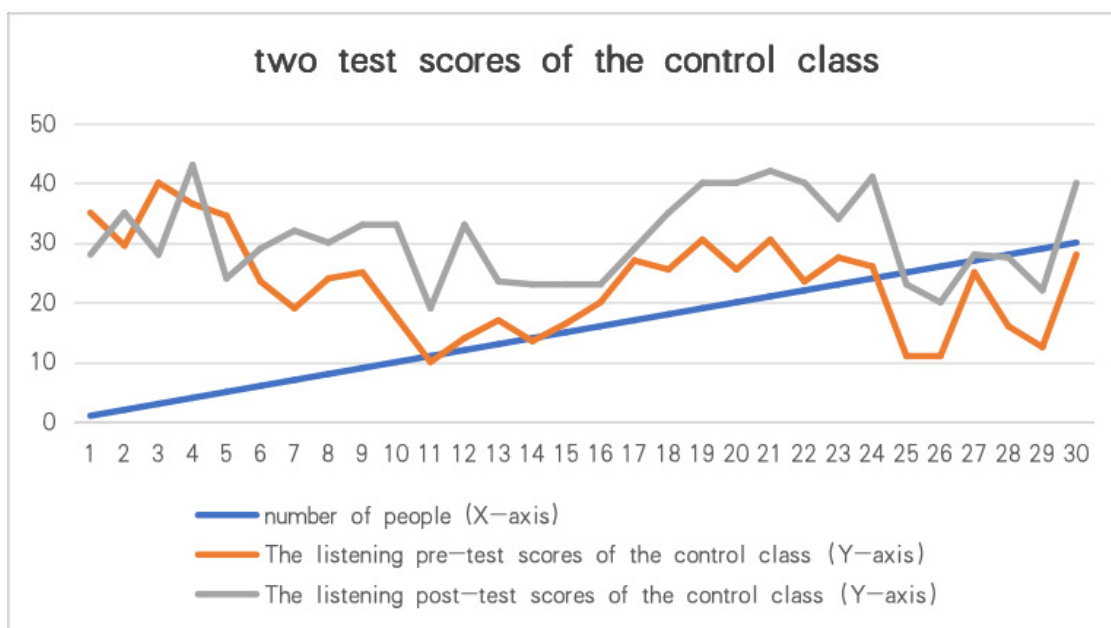


Fig. 4 Comparison of the two listening test scores of the control class

As can be seen from Table 2, after a semester of teaching, the average scores of the listening tests for both the

experimental class and the control class have improved to varying degrees. Nonetheless, the experimental class's score improvement was noticeably larger than the control class's. Figures 3 and 4 reflect the changes in the scores of each student in the two teaching classes. After a semester of listening skills training, to varying degrees, the majority of students' grades have improved. However, the progress in grades of the experimental group students was prominently greater than that of the control class students.

3.3 Discussion

In conclusion, during the experiment, students in the experimental group and the control group had identical language skills and learning capacities. The only variable that differed was the teaching method of the teachers. According to the experimental results, the experimental class's scores were noticeably higher than the control class's. Through data analysis, the authors concluded that the difference in teaching methods was the only variable causing the difference in teaching performance. Thus, using Krashen's input hypothesis to direct instruction in the experimental class can be argued to have a beneficial, encouraging impact on students' language competence growth, which is consistent with the theoretical analysis results before the experiment.

4. Conclusion

This study investigates the effectiveness of applying Krashen's *i+1* Input Hypothesis to IELTS listening instruction through a case study using the *Unlock 4* Listening textbook. Based on the idea that language acquisition is most effective when input is just a little bit above a learner's present proficiency level (*i+1*), the research aims to determine whether a structured *i+1* approach can enhance both listening comprehension and learner motivation in a high-stakes IELTS context.

Results showed both classes improved, but the experimental class exhibited significantly greater gains. Pre-test averages were nearly identical (23.17 vs. 23.40), whereas post-test scores rose to 32.62 for the experimental group compared with 30.70 for the control group. Questionnaire feedback also indicated heightened interest, confidence, and engagement among students exposed to the *i+1* method.

In the discussion, the authors conclude that integrating

graded, authentic listening materials aligned with learners' proximal development boosts performance and motivation. They note limitations—including the short duration, single-site setting, and reliance on teacher judgment for material difficulty—and recommend broader, longer-term studies. Practical suggestions encourage teachers to blend intensive and extensive listening, progressively raise input difficulty, and diversify topics; students are advised to engage in daily listening practice (e.g., BBC 6 Minute English) and systematically build vocabulary to support comprehensible input.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally, and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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