

Editorial

Incidental Vocabulary Learning in Practice

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The editors proposed the theme of this special issue, incidental vocabulary learning in practice, to address the long overdue bridging of research and practice within this active area. In recent years, vocabulary learning has received an increasing amount of attention (e.g., Webb, 2020), and the editors took this increased interest as a starting point for exploring what support might be appropriate for incidental vocabulary learning in practice within and beyond the classroom. In order to be able to make suggestions on directions for the most appropriate kind of support for incidental vocabulary learning, it is essential to explore how language learners, particularly in the Asian foreign language context, can be supported for better outcomes. Learning English as a foreign language (EFL) does not have to be difficult. It should be enjoyable. Vocabulary learning requires continual exercise to strengthen learners' innovative thinking, cognitive processes, communicative proficiency, and ability to infer meaning from context. Thus, we aimed for this special issue to inspire English teachers to consider whether what they do in the classroom prepares learners for meaningful engagement in activities outside the classroom requiring meaning-focused English use. It is essential to find ways to disseminate good practice and, perhaps most importantly, to integrate innovative approaches across curricula, institutions, and contexts to broadly influence vocabulary learning. These concerns prompted this special issue, which aimed to introduce the conceptual and methodological

shifts in research to fully explore and understand the challenges of vocabulary instruction and inform effective, enjoyable, and sustainable incidental vocabulary learning.

Conceptual Article

Contributions to the special issue focus specifically on incidental vocabulary learning in practice. Teng's (2023) conceptual feature article, "Understanding Incidental Vocabulary Learning in Practice," starts off the special issue. The article summarizes the main jobs of a vocabulary teacher and learner and ends with suggestions for effective incidental vocabulary learning in practice. Seven critical issues are discussed, including the potential and importance of incidental vocabulary learning, the role of reading input in incidental vocabulary learning, the role of captioned videos in incidental vocabulary learning, the key to motivating and fostering deeper mental processing and better retention for incidental vocabulary learning, the comparison of different sources of input, and the importance of vocabulary learning strategies. Teachers' attention should be refocused on training learners to improve their syntactic and lexical knowledge; teachers should plan different vocabulary learning activities and provide sources of language input for incidental vocabulary learning.

Empirical Studies

Teng, Huang, and Mizumoto (2023) highlight the role of reading as an important source of input for incidental vocabulary learning. A total of 486 Chinese university EFL students were randomly and equally assigned to three word-focused exercise conditions: reading with marginal glosses plus comprehension questions, reading with a digital dictionary, and reading and filling in the blanks with a digital dictionary. The students also completed a questionnaire on vocabulary learning strategies. Results support the benefits of reading and filling in blanks with the use of a digital dictionary for incidental vocabulary learning outcomes. Vocabulary learning strategies are shown to play different roles; encoding strategies predicted participants' posttest scores best. Among the many contributions of the article are the emphases on the need to consider *evaluation* when designing word-focused exercises and the difference in the predictive role of vocabulary learning strategies.

Unlike most existing incidental vocabulary acquisition studies framed by the involvement load hypothesis, Ma and Reynolds (2023) chose to investigate the incidental learning of secondary school students in lieu of adult learners. In one of the few studies investigating the incidental vocabulary learning of young learners, Ma and Reynolds found motivation (operationalized as reading interest) to play an important role, with intrinsically motivated learners incidentally acquiring more vocabulary knowledge than those extrinsically motivated or not informed about the purpose for completing the reading task. These results provide guidance for secondary school teachers when assigning reading assignments. Teachers should minimally provide reasons for why reading assignments have been given to students, and, if possible, students should have a say in what topics and texts they read. Doing so could significantly increase the amount of vocabulary knowledge that students incidentally acquire from reading those texts.

The contribution by Lin (2023) centers on the role of vocabulary knowledge in developing EFL learners' writing skills. She examined this role by taking into consideration the contextual factors in language learning, which have a major impact on learners' input and output opportunities. A singular lack of such opportunities can place a severe constraint on learners' incidental vocabulary learning, which is essential for the development of productive vocabulary skills. Drawing upon two vocabulary tests, one writing test, three focus group interviews, and two case studies, this paper investigates how the participants' vocabulary knowledge affected their writing abilities from multifaceted perspectives. The findings of the study provided empirical evidence for the essential role of vocabulary knowledge in EFL learners' writing proficiency. The quantitative and qualitative analyses also offered insights into the centrality of incidental vocabulary learning in developing learners' writing proficiency. The participants in the study were elite secondary school graduates in China who were just enrolled in a university in Hong Kong. All of them completed their primary and secondary school education in mainland China, where there is a paucity of conducive English learning environments. The study has profound implications for EFL teaching pedagogy, in particular, vocabulary teaching.

Wang and Liu (2023) analyze vocabulary use in the major college reading-and-writing textbooks of Chinese universities and explore the potential for incidental learning of vocabulary from textbooks. Based on the analysis of vocabulary use in a textbook corpus, the study reveals

interesting findings in the single words and collocations in the textbook. The study shows that textbooks might not provide enough opportunities for students' incidental learning of vocabulary. In addition, the study also shows that the overlap between the single words and the required vocabulary list issued by the Ministry of Education in China is relatively modest. The study draws upon the reading texts in a widely used textbook series and thus has important implications for both college teachers and students alike. Enhancement activities are prerequisites for vocabulary learning to take place based on the reading texts in textbooks. The gap between the vocabulary items from the present study and the required vocabulary list issued by the Ministry of Education calls for a revision of the required vocabulary list to address the latest teaching concerns.

Interview

We are fortunate to have an interview with a renowned vocabulary expert, Professor Stuart Webb. He provides implications and conceptualizations for understanding incidental vocabulary learning in practice. In particular, he offers a clear definition of incidental vocabulary learning. He highlights the importance of incidental vocabulary learning to lexical development, teachers' and learners' roles in incidental vocabulary learning, and the principles that teachers should adhere to in support of students' encounters with vocabulary. He finally provides useful references and tips for researchers to conduct research on incidental vocabulary learning.

Book Review

We are fortunate to be able to feature in this special issue a review of a book on incidental vocabulary learning. A recent book by Teng (2021) can be a useful resource for preparing learners to adopt captioned videos for incidental vocabulary learning both inside and outside the classroom. This book is reviewed by Ning Ren and Barry Lee Reynolds.

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