

Research Articles

Understanding Incidental Vocabulary Learning in Practice

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In response to the recent surge of interest in incidental vocabulary learning, this article synthesizes ideas about such learning in practice. I specifically derive seven critical issues from studies on the topic. I also examine vocabulary learning through incidental means based on various input sources while considering frequency, context, motivation, and strategies and tasks to foster deeper mental processing and better retention. Findings can inform pedagogically sound guidelines for effective vocabulary instruction. Actionable suggestions are provided to enhance incidental vocabulary learning, given an understanding of relevant issues.

Introduction

Vocabulary is a catalyst for second language (L2) and foreign language (FL) learning. The importance of learning vocabulary becomes clear in the early phases of language acquisition. L2 and FL vocabulary learning has garnered academic interest over the past decades. Ample research has highlighted vocabulary as a key aspect of L2 acquisition, especially for incidental learning. These studies have documented the significance of vocabulary learning from this instructional focus. Considering how vocabulary can arise from instructional focus is useful for developing skills for language learning. Once a learner acquires their first thousand words through intentional learning during the initial stages of classroom instruction, vocabulary acquisition occurs mainly by guessing the