

# A Voyage In Vocabulary Learning Of Intermediate ESL Learners In Sri Lanka: Intentional Or Incidental?

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**Abstract**—Vocabulary is primary for any Language Education. English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in Sri Lanka still require assistance in acquiring L2 vocabulary to enrich their language. Thus, this mixed-methods study aims to identify the most effective vocabulary learning method by comparing the effectiveness of intentional and incidental vocabulary learning as proposed by Krashen's Input Hypothesis using intermediate-level ESL learners and their attitudes towards L2 vocabulary acquisition. The study employed 60 learners from a reputed English Education Institute in Colombo, basically in two groups: the intentional and incidental vocabulary learning groups, comprising 30 individuals in each. In the first phase, the vocabulary knowledge was compared before and after the teaching interventions, integrating Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) tests. For the second phase, 20 learners were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews. The data were respectively analysed through SPSS and thematic analysis. The quantitative results unveiled the effectiveness of the intentional learning method over the incidental learning method. Moreover, the qualitative data explored attitudes and perceptions of the learners, including various motivations, learning methods, teaching strategies, challenges encountered, and suggestions for vocabulary enhancement. These findings provide valuable implications for educators and policymakers to enrich the learners' vocabulary repertoire and enhance fluency and proficiency in English.

**Keywords**—attitudes; incidental; intentional; intermediate ESL learners; L2 vocabulary learning

## I. INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the basic forms of communication among people, as it helps to unite people of different backgrounds and share their ideas and experiences. English is one of the few languages used in the whole world and is highly regarded as the international language of communication. English is crucial in the lives of the people of Sri Lanka, where they must learn it as a second language (L2) during schooling. Vocabulary is one of the key aspects of

language learning, which enables learners to communicate in English and express themselves. According to research conducted, a vocabulary base is required to develop proficiency, with Schmitt (2008) observing that learners need vocabulary knowledge on 8,000-to-9,000-word families to read and 5,000-to-7,000-word families to perform in oral discourse. Lifelong learning of vocabulary is a milestone of language learning (Tork, 2011; Thornbury, 2002). It makes learners exchange utterances precisely and comprehend different situations, hence its necessity in perfecting any language (Gifford, 2013). Nevertheless, vocabulary is one of the most ignored items in the context of learning either grammar or pronunciation, and more so in the context of Sri Lankan ESL education. The shortcoming of the traditional approach to teaching has also deprived many learners of the chance to use what they have learnt about vocabulary in their lives because it emphasizes grammar rather than getting more vocabulary (Gass & Selinker, 2001; Savington, 1997). This disparity therefore influences their speaking, reading, and writing skills whilst communicating. The study of vocabulary faces two major approaches, namely intentional learning and incidental learning. Intentional vocabulary learning involves positive but systematic planning in learner-initiated behavior of vocabulary acquisition in terms of word lists, flashcards, quizzes, and vocabulary games (Hulstijn, 2003; Schmitt, 1997). Conversely, learning incidental vocabulary is unintentional and automatic as a result of being exposed to language in a context, either by reading, listening, or conversations (Richards & Schmidt, 2002; Nation, 2001). The two methods can be used to increase vocabulary; however, their comparative performance, particularly in ESL learners in Sri Lanka, has not received much attention. This study seeks to fill this gap by comparing the effectiveness of intentional against incidental learning methods among intermediate ESL learners in Sri Lanka. It also examines the attitude that learners have towards learning vocabulary to establish what they like in learning English vocabulary, where they encounter problems, and how they cope with them in learning English vocabulary. According to the findings, educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers can use the information to develop a more efficient vocabulary teaching strategy that meets the needs of Sri Lankan students.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Vocabulary is a fundamental aspect of language proficiency, serving as a crucial foundation for effective communication in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The multifaceted nature of vocabulary knowledge involves not only the size of the lexicon but also the depth and precision of word understanding. Scholars have proposed frameworks to describe vocabulary knowledge, such as Richards' assumptions and Wesche and Paribakht's Vocabulary Knowledge Scale. This chapter explores the significance of vocabulary acquisition in English as a Second Language (ESL) learning, focusing on Sri Lankan ESL learners. Additionally, the chapter introduces the methods and techniques for improving vocabulary knowledge, emphasizing intentional and incidental vocabulary learning.

### A. Word and Vocabulary

Although both 'word' and 'vocabulary' are closely related to vocabulary knowledge, more clarity is often needed between these two terms. Vocabulary is the whole collection of words that a person or group of people knows and uses, whereas a word is a single unit of language with a meaning. A word can be defined as a sound, a combination of sounds, or its representation in text that conveys and symbolizes a meaning.

It is challenging to give an exact meaning of a word because there are so many viewpoints and definitions introduced by different scholars. A word is a single meaningful element of speech or writing. According to Read (2001), "Words are the basic building blocks of language, the units of meaning from which larger structures such as sentences, paragraphs, and whole texts are formed" (p.1). Singleton (1999) states that "words possess a rather confidential status in the general understanding of what a language is, and that is because they are vital to linguistic communication" (p. 9). Words are not only jumbled up in our brains like leaves on a fall bonfire. Instead, they form part of a complex, interconnected system with understandable fundamental ideas (Aitchison, 2003, p.5). Mastering a word is learning its meaning and register, association, collocation, grammatical behavior, written form, spoken form, and frequency. All these properties are known as "word knowledge" (Schmitt, 2000, p.5).

According to the Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (2023), vocabulary is defined as all the

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Identify applicable sponsor/s here. (*sponsors*)

words that a person knows. It is the body of words used in a particular language (Laufer, 2011). Vocabulary constitutes knowledge of words, including

definitions of word meanings. As a key element of language proficiency, vocabulary is a significant foundation for students' ability to read, write, talk, and listen (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Vocabulary is more than a mere collection of words; it represents the linguistic toolkit individuals use for effective communication. Nation (2001) said that vocabulary knowledge has several dimensions, including word clarity and depth and lexicon size. It underscores the importance of knowing words and understanding them in various contexts.

### B. Vocabulary Learning

Acquiring vocabulary is a fundamental aspect of acquiring linguistic skills. Our ability to communicate effectively in writing and speech is also reflected in our vocabulary. According to Nation and Waring (1997), "vocabulary knowledge enables language use; language use enables the increase of vocabulary knowledge; knowledge of the world enables the increase of vocabulary knowledge and language use and so on" (p. 6). Nation (2001) states that comprehending a word means knowing the elements of its word family, and the elements of the word family will improve as proficiency develops. Additionally, Nation (1990) opined that word knowledge encompasses proficiency in several information domains:

Meaning: to know the explicit and implicit (if any) meaning of a word.

Written form: to know the spelling or dictation of a word.

Spoken form: to know the pronunciation of a word.

Part of speech: to know if the word is a noun, verb, adjective, etc.

Frequency: to know if the word is old-fashioned, common, or rare.

Collocations: to know certain words that accompany a word. Register: to know if the word is formal, informal, general, or technical.

Associations: to know how a word relates to other words.

According to Lubliner & Scott (2008), there are degrees of word knowledge, from "I've never heard this word before" to "I know this word and can apply it in multiple contexts." Different scholars have investigated diverse vocabulary knowledge frameworks. Specifically, Richards (1976) outlined eight assumptions as a framework for describing vocabulary knowledge:

1. Whereas adult syntax growth is relatively little, the native speaker keeps growing his vocabulary throughout life.

2. Knowing a word means understanding how likely it is to hear or read it. We also know what kinds of words usually go with it.

3. Knowing a word means understanding when and how to use it in different situations.

4. Knowing a word means understanding how it fits into sentences.

5. Knowing a word means knowing its basic form and other words that come from it.

6. Knowing a word means understanding how it connects to other words in the language.

7. Knowing a word means understanding what it means.

8. Knowing a word means knowing some of its different meanings.

(Richards, 1976)

Wesche and Paribakht (1996) created the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS), one of the most well-known and often-used depth-of-knowledge measures. They recommend five possible word knowledge stages for students. The five phases represent the various levels of a learner's word knowledge. Listed below is the VKS format:

Stage 1: I don't remember having seen this word before. (1 point)

Stage 2: I have seen this word before but don't know what it means. (2 points)

Stage 3: I have seen this word before, and I think it means \_\_\_\_\_. (synonym or translation) (3 points)

Stage 4: I know this word. It means \_\_\_\_\_. (synonym or translation) (4 points)

Stage 5: I can use this word in a sentence: \_\_\_\_\_. (4 or 5 points)

Wesche and Paribakht

(1996, p.28)

Wesche and Paribakht (1997) conducted research to compare two methods for reading for theme-related vocabulary acquisition: reading only and reading plus themes. Pre-tests and post-tests using VKS assessed how well students had learned the target vocabulary.

Even if a student attempts Category 4 and Category 5 but is unsuccessful, they will still receive 2 points for the entire test. If they provide an inaccurate response in Category 3, a score of 2 is awarded. A score of 3 is awarded if the statement in category 5 has the correct meaning but the term needs to be employed correctly in the sentence context. If the target term is used in the proper context but in the incorrect grammatical form, the score is 4. A score of 5 indicates that the target term was used semantically and grammatically correctly. Before the text or unit is taught, the VKS is given as a pre-test. It is then given again after teaching to gauge student progress (Dougherty et al., 2010).

### C. Vocabulary Learning Strategies

According to Schmitt (2008), academics and teachers delve into methods and approaches to improve language learners' vocabulary development while learning a new language. Teachers can use the most effective teaching strategies to enhance language learners' vocabulary knowledge. Apart from the teaching strategies, vocabulary learning strategies impact vocabulary acquisition. Learning strategies are how learners automate previously established L2 rules and acquire new ones (Ellis, 1985). Cameron (2001) also defines VLS as "actions that learners take to help themselves understand and remember vocabulary" (p. 92). Read (2000) asserts that vocabulary knowledge is necessary for language learners to acquire successfully because it helps them better understand the meaning of more extended structures. In other words, being well-versed in a target language's vocabulary facilitates language learners' ability to utilize it receptively and productively.

In that vein, ESL learners use different strategies to acquire vocabulary knowledge. Schmitt (1997) states that cognitive strategies (including written and spoken repetition, word lists, and flashcards) are common worldwide. In separate research conducted by Shiwu (2005), it was shown that the strategies most often employed by students across various age groups and proficiency levels were guessing word meanings from context and using electronic dictionaries, especially bilingual dictionaries. Other than these mentioned tactics, students use word cards where they go through a set of cards and try to recall their meaning (Nation, 2001, p. 297). Moreover, learners use imagery, word hunting, word matching, word supply, word jumble, sentence or paragraph completion, and gap-filling activities to enhance their L2 vocabulary knowledge. According to Ghazal (2007), to effectively acquire L2 vocabulary, students must be trained to become autonomous. This is because self-directed learners can take charge of their education and develop their self-esteem, engagement, and competency (Oxford, 1990, as cited in Ghazal, 2007). With that, learners can try different

strategies and select the most effective methods for enriching their vocabulary knowledge.

#### *D. Intentional Vs. Incidental Vocabulary Learning*

Vocabulary learning strategies encompass various techniques and approaches to expand one's lexicon and improve language proficiency. Among these strategies, intentional and incidental learning represent two distinct categories that play pivotal roles in vocabulary acquisition. Krashen (1989) emphasizes the role of "comprehensible input" in vocabulary growth, highlighting the importance of context in learning new words. Carlisle et al. (2000) said, "Incidental word learning involves a process of inferring the meaning of words from context, while intentional word learning provides explicit instruction about word meanings by teachers" (p.186). Nation (2013) extends this idea, stating that conscious learning is beneficial for improved vocabulary retention, suggesting that intentional and incidental methods are significant contributors. Both approaches have been claimed to contribute to the increase of L2 vocabulary knowledge (Hulstijn, 2001). It is intentional learning when students are informed that they will be tested on the subject; otherwise, the subject matter is said to have been acquired accidentally.

#### *E. The Significance of Vocabulary in Second Language Learning*

Learning English as a Second Language (ESL) is a complex process that involves various linguistic components, with vocabulary acquisition being a fundamental pillar. In the old days, vocabulary learning was not essential and popular among language teachers and learners. Tylor (1990) states that vocabulary has been underestimated for a long time, yet it is essential for language mastery. Wilkins (1974) stated that "without grammar, very little can be conveyed. Without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed" (p.43). According to Zimmerman (1997), vocabulary is essential to language and plays a crucial role in the language acquisition process for most people. According to Ahmad (2012), word learning also improves students' language proficiency in speaking, listening, writing, and reading.

Vocabulary acquisition is a key element in ESL learning, influencing learners' ability to comprehend and express themselves in English. In ESL contexts, the challenge often lies in understanding the meanings of words and using them appropriately in different contexts. Meara (1980) states that vocabulary is a weak point for L2 learners. Ruban (1975) claims that "if we knew more about what the 'successful learners' did, we might be able to teach these strategies to poorer learners to enhance their success record" (p.42). Since vocabulary has many meanings and is complicated, Oxford (1990) claims that learning vocabulary is the most significant and most challenging aspect of learning any language.

According to Coady and Huckin (1997), vocabulary development is essential for ESL students' language learning and language use. In a recent study, Bei (2011) concluded that vocabulary acquisition is the main component and prerequisite for mastering a language. As Min (2013) pointed out, ESL students would need to increase their word power to excel in their academic pursuits in English. Gass (1999) asserts that mastering a second language entails mastering its vocabulary, implying that mastering a lexical item means mastering various concepts.

#### *F. Vocabulary Teaching and Learning in Sri Lankan English Classrooms*

The crucial role and value of English have become increasingly apparent to Sri Lankan people because of the economic growth and cultural exchange between countries. Starting as a link language, English is now utilized for almost all official purposes in Sri Lanka. In line with that, English has been made a compulsory subject in schools and taught as a second language. It is introduced at the kindergarten level and taught from Grade 1 in the state school system (Aloysius, 2015). It is the medium of instruction in almost all international schools (Wettewa, 2016). According to McCulloch et al. (2020), around 80% of university courses, mainly in the STEM fields of science, technology, engineering, and math, are solely offered in English. Students who enroll in undergraduate courses taught in local languages also take English as a subject.

Further, vocabulary, a significant constituent in language learning, plays an important role, especially for intermediate and advanced ESL learners, because they are expected to have extensive vocabulary knowledge to become fluent users of the language. Coady and Huckin (1997) argued that developing vocabulary skills among ESL learners is fundamental to language learning and use. Similarly, Min (2013) argued that ESL learners would need to build up their word power to succeed in their academic endeavors in English. Despite that, Nguyen and Khuat (2003) report that many students find vocabulary study boring, primarily due to the need for memorization of unfamiliar terms. It highlights the need for innovative and engaging vocabulary learning and teaching methods to enhance student motivation and effectiveness in vocabulary acquisition.

#### *G. The Significance of Intentional and Incidental Vocabulary Learning*

Vocabulary can be identified by two main approaches: Intentional and incidental vocabulary learning. Intentional learning involves conscious attempts to acquire new words through memorization, drills, and exercises. In contrast, incidental vocabulary learning occurs naturally through exposure to language in different contexts, such as reading, listening, and communication. Recognizing the

significance of both approaches can help students maintain a balanced approach to expanding their vocabulary, whereas identifying the most effective approach will empower students to optimize their overall vocabulary acquisition process.

#### H. *Intentional Vocabulary Learning*

Intentional vocabulary learning means learning vocabulary items with an intention, and it involves synonyms, antonyms, word substitution, scrambled words, and crossword puzzles. According to Hulstijn (2003), intentional learning includes 'the deliberate committing to memory of thousands of words (their meaning, sound, and spelling) and dozens of grammar rules' (p.349). As Schmitt (2008) pointed out, Intentional vocabulary learning always results in better and faster outcomes and a higher chance for retention. In a similar vein, Hung (2015) claimed that "Intentional learning of vocabulary speeds up the learners' process of lexical development due to focused repetition or memorization strategies, which can be completed individually in a short period" (p.107). Yali (2010) asserts that intentional learning consistently emphasizes the word itself "and combines with all kinds of conscious vocabulary learning strategies and means of memorizing words" (p.74).

Many investigations have been carried out to find the efficacy or inefficacy of intentional vocabulary learning. According to Elgort and Nation (2010), methods and strategies for intentional vocabulary learning, such as making word lists, keeping vocabulary notebooks, and employing word cards, are helpful in vocabulary development. A study conducted by Ahmed (2017) concluded that intentional learning is better than incidental learning. Barcroft (2009) found that "intentional learning positively affected L2 word-form learning during reading as compared with instructing learners to read for meaning only." (p.97). According to Elgort (2011), intentional vocabulary learning performs better than incidental vocabulary learning because it does not need a natural environment.

#### I. *Incidental Vocabulary Learning*

Incidental learning means unintentionally learning vocabulary while engaging in activities such as reading or listening. Similarly, Ahmed (2012) considers incidental learning as learning something without intending to do so. It is learning one thing while intending to learn another (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). It happens in numerous ways: by assumptions, beliefs, and attributions (Cseh et al., 1999); from observation, repetition, social interaction, and problem-solving (Cahoon, 1995; Rogers, 1997); through watching or talking to colleagues or experts during the tasks (Van den Tillaart et al., 1998); or from being required to accept or adapt to situations (English, 1999).

Incidental vocabulary learning influences learners to understand the meanings of new words by guessing from the context. O'Hara (2004) claimed that "context is the setting and surrounding of a word. Therefore, when we listen to someone's talk, the context of a word is the statement that includes the word". The nearby words of the new words in a text may provide clues about the meaning of those words or explain the exact meaning. According to Ahmed (2012), "Learners understand not only the meanings in the given text but the related grammatical patterns, common lexical sets, and typical association of the word with the context" and also "reading new words and inferring the meaning through context will be more productive because it sharpens the ability for guessing."

Many researchers have conveyed that the incidental learning method is an effective way of learning vocabulary from context. Hulstijn and Laufer (2001) argue that the terms students come across while learning incidental vocabulary will be stored in their long-term memory and utilized with more assurance in various contexts. A research study conducted by Ponnaiih (2011) demonstrated that students who engaged in incidental learning outperformed students who learned vocabulary consciously. A research study was conducted by Ahmed (2012) to recognize the performance levels of both intentional and incidental vocabulary types among 20 Saudi ESL learners at the college level, and the results concluded that the incidental type performed significantly better than the intentional type. According to another study conducted by Fatemeh et al. (2015), the incidental young EFL Persian group of students performed better than the intentional group in the comprehension task.

#### J. *Krashen's Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Theory*

Second Language acquisition (SLA) refers to "the learning process of any language in addition to a person's mother tongue with or without conscious instruction, or even naturally" (Wang & Yang, 2003, p. 861). Many scholars have proposed numerous theories since it is a fundamental aspect of language learning. In the early 1980s, Krashen introduced his theory of SLA, including five hypotheses: the acquisition-learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the input hypothesis, the affective filter hypothesis, and the natural order hypothesis. The input hypothesis can be recognized as the most fundamental for developing second language learning. As emphasized by this input hypothesis, language is learned when a person is exposed to a comprehensible input (i+1) slightly beyond their current level of proficiency.

The researcher focuses on how ESL vocabulary learning is associated with second language acquisition theory, especially Krashen's Input

Hypothesis. Krashen's Input Hypothesis underscores the importance of meaningful contexts for vocabulary acquisition. Through intentional or incidental learning, learners benefit from encountering vocabulary in relevant, engaging, and meaningful contexts. In intentional vocabulary learning, learners receive explicit instruction and targeted exposure to new vocabulary. This instruction makes the input more comprehensible by providing explanations, definitions, and examples that scaffold the learners' understanding.

On the other hand, learners encounter new vocabulary naturally in context in incidental vocabulary learning. The input may not be explicitly presented here, but it should be comprehensible for vocabulary acquisition. Learners tend to acquire new vocabulary when it is presented in meaningful contexts. Therefore, teachers should provide comprehensible input for the learners to improve their ESL vocabulary knowledge.

### K. Underexplored Areas

Despite the significance of vocabulary learning in ESL contexts, there is a lack of research specific to the Sri Lankan context. The existing studies emphasize the importance of vocabulary acquisition, especially through intentional and incidental methods, in foreign settings. Those studies have also found mixed - results, as mentioned in 2.6.1. and 2.6.2. Thus, there is confusion about the most effective method of L2 vocabulary acquisition. Therefore, there is a gap in understanding how Sri Lankan ESL learners engage with and benefit from these approaches. This research aims to address this gap by conducting a comparative study on the effectiveness of intentional and incidental vocabulary learning among Sri Lankan intermediate-level ESL learners and exploring their attitudes and perceptions toward L2 vocabulary acquisition.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The current study was carried out in a reputed institute located in Colombo, which offered a perfect environment for analyzing ESL students' vocabulary acquisition. The conceptual framework, which summarized the relationships between variables and directed data collection and analysis, was the cornerstone of the research design and was informed by the definitions provided by Camp (2001) and Grant & Osanloo (2014). To fully answer the research questions, a mixed methods design that combined quantitative and qualitative techniques was used (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Creswell, 2003). Pre-tests and post-tests using the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) were used to collect quantitative data in the first phase, while semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data in the second phase to examine participant attitudes. ESL students enrolled in the Department of English at the intermediate level

made up the target population. For the qualitative phase, purposive homogeneous sampling was employed, and for the quantitative phase, random sampling (Curtin et al., 2005; Patton, 2002). Two groups of sixty students—intentional and incidental vocabulary learning—were chosen at random. Twenty more students were specifically chosen for interviews from the same group. Focusing on intermediate learners makes sense because of their crucial stage of language acquisition, where vocabulary growth is crucial (Horwitz, 1988; Schmitt, 1997). Institutional placement test results and pre-VKS test scores were used to guarantee homogeneity. Although some exclusionary factors restricted wider generalizability, participants' demographics included a range of genders, ages, and linguistic backgrounds. Primary data included pre- and post-VKS tests (Paribakht & Wesche, 1996) to assess learners' vocabulary knowledge before and after the intervention, and semi-structured interviews with 20 participants to gain qualitative insights into vocabulary learning attitudes (Burgess, 1984). Inclusive factors such as proficiency level and varied demographics supported the applicability of findings, while exclusive aspects such as unbalanced gender or linguistic representation in each group were acknowledged as limitations. Overall, this robust mixed-methods approach enabled a nuanced exploration of the effectiveness of intentional and incidental vocabulary learning among intermediate ESL learners in Sri Lanka.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Analysis of VKS Tests

Both intentional and incidental vocabulary learning interventions are effective for intermediate-level ESL learners in Sri Lanka, according to the results of the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) test. The intentional group's mean pre-test scores ( $M = 29.03$ ,  $SD = 5.18$ ) and the incidental group's ( $M = 29.33$ ,  $SD = 5.76$ ) were almost the same, according to descriptive statistics (see Table 1), indicating that the two groups were homogeneous before the intervention. The independent samples t-test ( $t = -0.212$ ,  $p = 0.833$ ) further supported this parity by showing that there was no statistically significant difference between the groups at baseline. This made it possible to rule out pre-existing vocabulary proficiency as the cause of any post-intervention differences and instead attribute them to the teaching strategy. Both groups' vocabulary acquisition showed significant gains after the instructional interventions, but the intentional learning group significantly outperformed the incidental group. Intentional group members' post-test mean score increased to 65.87 ( $SD = 6.77$ ), while incidental group members' mean score increased to 47.67 ( $SD = 7.34$ ). The difference was found to be highly significant ( $t = 9.982$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) using an independent samples t-test, with a mean difference of 18.2 points (refer to Table 2). These results indicate that incidental methods that

rely on passive exposure were significantly less successful in promoting vocabulary knowledge than intentional vocabulary instruction, which is defined by explicit teaching, targeted vocabulary activities, and focused reinforcement.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Pre- and Post-Test Scores**

Group	Test	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Intentional	Pre-test	30	23	45	29.03	5.183
Intentional	Post-test	30	49	76	65.87	6.771
Incidental	Pre-test	30	22	45	29.33	5.756
Incidental	Post-test	30	32	61	47.67	7.341

**Table 2: Independent Samples t-Test Results**

Test Group	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval (Lower-Upper)
Pre-test	0.212	58	0.833	-0.30	-3.13 – 2.53
Post-test	9.982	58	0.000	18.20	14.55 – 21.85

The claim that intentional learning produces better results in vocabulary acquisition than incidental learning is strongly supported by these quantitative findings. This is consistent with theoretical viewpoints like Schmidt's (1990) noticing hypothesis, which holds that conscious attention is essential for language acquisition, and Nation's (2001) emphasis on intentional vocabulary practice. The systematic exposure to word forms, meanings, and usage in supervised activities like sentence construction, matching tasks, and contextual drills may be the reason for the significant improvement in the intentional group. However, the incidental group's comparatively small gains indicate that while exposure and context (such as reading passages or listening exercises) can help with vocabulary acquisition, they might not be enough without deliberate focus, particularly during brief intervention periods.

Moreover, the normal distribution of scores (evidenced by acceptable skewness and kurtosis values) supports the reliability of the data, while the slightly increased standard deviation in post-test scores indicates varying levels of vocabulary retention and internalization among learners. This variability, particularly within the incidental group, may reflect

differences in learners' ability to infer or retain vocabulary without direct instruction, suggesting a need for differentiated strategies in mixed-ability classrooms.

The pedagogical value of intentional vocabulary instruction is thus highlighted by the analysis, especially for intermediate-level ESL learners. For quantifiable vocabulary growth, structured and explicit instruction works much better than incidental learning techniques, which can facilitate passive vocabulary exposure. These results emphasize the significance of purposeful, goal-oriented learning in reaching linguistic competence and support the inclusion of intentional strategies in ESL curricula.

### B. Semi-structured Interviews

Twenty ESL students participated in semi-structured interviews that yielded profound insights into their attitudes, motivations, learning styles, and difficulties picking up L2 vocabulary. Five main themes emerged from the analysis using Braun and Clarke's Six-Phase Thematic Analysis Framework: Motivation and Background, Learning Methods and Tools, Teaching Strategies and Preferences, Challenges, and Ideas for Successful Vocabulary Learning. Each theme combined academic, social, and personal aspects to illustrate the intricate and varied nature of vocabulary acquisition among ESL students.

The first theme showed that the motivation of ESL learners to increase their vocabulary is greatly influenced by personal goals, work requirements, and familial influence. Parents' support demands at work, and personal aspirations for further education or international employment prospects frequently served as motivators for learners. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators emphasize how important it is for educators to understand the varied backgrounds of their students and create lessons that suit their personal goals and contexts. Students utilize a range of techniques to acquire vocabulary, from incidental exposure through media and conversations to intentional tactics like word list study and flashcard use. Because social interaction and media consumption (such as watching movies and TV shows with subtitles) are enjoyable and contextual, they were highly valued. This variety of methods emphasizes how crucial it is to support students in utilizing a variety of techniques to accommodate various learning environments and styles.

In terms of teaching strategies, students favored a mix of direct instruction (word lists), interactive activities (games and discussions), writing tasks, and comprehension-based reading exercises. These varied methods not only made vocabulary learning more engaging but also helped reinforce words through repeated exposure in different forms. The collaborative and integrated nature of classroom

activities also promoted incidental learning, helping students learn and practice new vocabulary naturally.

Pronunciation issues, limited comprehension from unfamiliar contexts, difficulty remembering new words, and difficulty expressing ideas fluently were among the difficulties that learners highlighted. Students proposed spaced repetition, contextual learning through media and visuals, using pronunciation apps, and listening to English outside of the classroom as ways to get around these obstacles. These observations highlight the importance of multimodal input and learner autonomy in vocabulary training. Overall, the results highlight that a learner-centered, diverse, and supportive approach that attends to linguistic, cognitive, and motivational needs is necessary for successful L2 vocabulary acquisition.

## V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research study could successfully investigate the effectiveness of intentional and incidental vocabulary learning and explore ESL learners' attitudes toward L2 vocabulary learning. The study's findings indicated that intentional vocabulary learning is more effective than incidental vocabulary learning. In addition, the ESL learners' perceptions revealed valuable insights into the diverse motivations among learners, learning strategies, teaching methods, challenges, and suggestions for improving L2 vocabulary acquisition. Pedagogical implications convey that educators should recognize the significance of teaching intervention in enhancing L2 vocabulary acquisition, prioritize intentional vocabulary learning methods, understand and tailor instructions to meet the learners' needs, provide opportunities for contextual vocabulary learning, and encourage collaborative learning in the classroom. However, the study had limitations related to the sample size and time constraints. The future research directions denote the importance of expanding the sample size, addressing diverse proficiency levels, conducting longitudinal studies, examining the effect of age on vocabulary acquisition, and conducting needs analysis to identify the needs and requirements of the learners. Overall, the study contributes to the body of L2 vocabulary learning by providing insights into the most effective vocabulary learning method and the role of the learners' needs, preferences, and challenges.

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