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METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL**<http://mentaljournal-jspu.uz/index.php/mesmj/index>**INCIDENTAL VOCABULARY ACQUISITION IN THE DIGITAL WILDS: A
SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH MEDIA
CONSUMPTION****Mutabar Zikriddinova***Student at Jizzakh State Pedagogical University*zikriddinovamutabar6@gmail.com*Jizzakh, Uzbekistan***ABOUT ARTICLE**

Key words: incidental vocabulary acquisition, digital media, second language learning, vocabulary learning, audiovisual input, media consumption.

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Abstract: Digital media has become an important part of everyday life, creating new opportunities for second language learners to encounter vocabulary beyond the traditional classroom. Videos, films, television series, social media, podcasts, online games, and other forms of digital content expose learners to large amounts of authentic language. This systematic review examines how incidental vocabulary acquisition occurs through digital media consumption and identifies the factors that influence learning outcomes. Relevant studies on second language vocabulary learning through audiovisual and online media were reviewed and analyzed according to their research focus, media type, participants, and major findings. The reviewed literature suggests that regular exposure to meaningful and engaging media can support the incidental learning of new vocabulary, particularly when learners encounter words repeatedly in rich contexts. Audiovisual materials appear especially beneficial because learners can connect spoken and written language with images, actions, and situational information. However, vocabulary learning is not automatic. Factors such as frequency of exposure, learner proficiency, captions and subtitles, attention, motivation, and opportunities for repeated encounters strongly influence the extent to

which vocabulary is acquired. The review also shows that digital media can provide learners with a more personalized and enjoyable learning environment than traditional vocabulary exercises. Nevertheless, incidental learning through media should not be viewed as a complete replacement for explicit vocabulary instruction. Instead, the findings suggest that combining meaningful media exposure with intentional learning activities may produce stronger vocabulary outcomes. Overall, the digital environment offers a rich and largely unexplored space for vocabulary development, allowing language learning to continue beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

Introduction. Vocabulary is one of the most essential components of second language learning. Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, learners may struggle to understand spoken or written texts and express their own ideas effectively.[1] Traditionally, vocabulary learning has often been associated with deliberate activities such as memorizing word lists, completing exercises, or using dictionaries. Although these approaches remain useful, vocabulary can also be learned incidentally while learners focus primarily on understanding meaning rather than intentionally studying new words.[2] Incidental vocabulary acquisition has attracted considerable attention in second language research because it reflects the way language is often learned in real-life situations. Learners may encounter unfamiliar words while watching a film, listening to a podcast, scrolling through social media, playing an online game, or reading digital content. In such situations, vocabulary learning is often a secondary result of meaningful communication and engagement with content. The rapid expansion of digital technology has significantly increased the amount of authentic language available to learners. Unlike traditional classroom materials, digital media provides access to diverse forms of language input at almost any time and place.[3] A learner can watch an English-language YouTube video, follow international creators on social media, listen to podcasts, or play multiplayer games with speakers from different parts of the world. These experiences create what may be described as the “digital wilds,” an informal learning environment where language exposure occurs naturally outside formal educational settings. However, increased exposure does not necessarily guarantee vocabulary acquisition. Some learners may spend many hours consuming English-language media without remembering a significant number of new words. The effectiveness of incidental learning may depend on several factors, including the frequency of word occurrence, the learner’s level of proficiency, the presence of captions or subtitles,

motivation, attention, and the type of media being consumed. Therefore, this systematic review explores the role of digital media consumption in incidental second language vocabulary acquisition. It focuses on the types of digital media that support vocabulary learning and the major factors that influence learners' ability to notice, understand, and retain new vocabulary.

Materials and methods. This study employed a systematic review approach to examine existing research on incidental vocabulary acquisition through digital media consumption. A systematic review was selected because it allows researchers to identify common patterns, compare findings, and develop a broader understanding of a particular research area. The review focused on studies investigating vocabulary learning through different forms of digital media, including videos, television programs, films, social media platforms, podcasts, online games, and other forms of digital content.

Search Strategy

Relevant studies were identified through academic databases and scholarly search engines. Search terms included combinations of the following keywords:

- incidental vocabulary acquisition;
- second language vocabulary learning;
- digital media and language learning;
- vocabulary learning through videos;
- vocabulary acquisition through television;
- social media and vocabulary learning;
- podcasts and second language learning;
- informal digital language learning.

The search primarily focused on research examining second or foreign language learners and their vocabulary development through exposure to authentic or semi-authentic digital content.

Inclusion Criteria

Studies were included in the review if they met the following criteria:

1. They focused on second or foreign language vocabulary learning.
2. They examined incidental or informal vocabulary acquisition.
3. They investigated learning through digital or media-based input.
4. They included empirical evidence, literature reviews, or theoretically relevant discussions.
5. They were published in academic journals, books, or other scholarly sources.

Studies focusing exclusively on intentional vocabulary memorization without meaningful media exposure were excluded from the main analysis.

Data Analysis

The selected studies were analyzed according to several categories, including:

- type of digital media;
- characteristics of the learners;
- language learning context;
- type of vocabulary learning measured;
- major findings;
- factors influencing vocabulary acquisition.

The findings were then compared to identify recurring themes and differences across different forms of media consumption.

Result and discussion. The reviewed literature indicates that digital media can create valuable conditions for incidental vocabulary acquisition. Although the effectiveness of different media types varies, several consistent patterns emerged across the studies.

Audiovisual Media and Vocabulary Learning

One of the most frequently discussed sources of incidental vocabulary learning is audiovisual media.[4] Films, television programs, online videos, and streaming content provide learners with language that is supported by visual information. When learners hear a new word while simultaneously seeing an action, object, facial expression, or situation, they may be better able to infer its meaning. For example, a learner watching a cooking video may encounter vocabulary such as ingredients, chop, boil, or season. Even without directly studying these words, the learner can connect the language with visible actions. This combination of sound and visual context may make vocabulary more memorable. Repeated exposure also appears to play an important role. [5] Learners are more likely to remember words that appear several times across different episodes or videos. However, a single encounter with an unfamiliar word may not be enough for long-term retention.

The Role of Captions and Subtitles

Another important finding concerns captions and subtitles. Many studies suggest that captions can support vocabulary learning by providing learners with written representations of spoken language. This may help learners notice unfamiliar words that might otherwise be difficult to understand through listening alone. Captions can be particularly useful for learners at lower or intermediate proficiency levels. When spoken language is fast, learners may struggle to identify individual words. Reading captions while listening can make the input easier to

process. However, the effectiveness of captions may depend on how learners use them. Some learners may focus mainly on reading and pay less attention to listening or visual information. Therefore, captions appear to be most beneficial when they support comprehension rather than replace active engagement with the audiovisual content.

Social Media as an Informal Learning Environment

Social media has created a unique environment for incidental vocabulary learning. Platforms that provide short videos, posts, comments, and discussions expose learners to a wide range of vocabulary and expressions. Unlike traditional educational materials, social media language is often current, informal, and connected to real communication. Learners may encounter slang, idiomatic expressions, abbreviations, and new vocabulary related to popular culture and everyday life. An important advantage of social media is that learners can select content based on their personal interests.[6] A student interested in fashion may follow fashion-related accounts, while another learner may watch sports videos or educational content. This personal choice may increase motivation and encourage longer and more frequent exposure to the target language. Nevertheless, the informal nature of social media also creates challenges. Learners may encounter incorrect grammar, non-standard language, or misleading vocabulary usage. Therefore, teachers may need to help learners develop critical awareness when using social media as a learning resource.

Podcasts and Audio-Based Learning

Podcasts provide another opportunity for incidental vocabulary acquisition. They expose learners to natural speech, different accents, and topic-specific vocabulary. Listening to podcasts can be particularly beneficial for advanced learners because they often contain longer discussions and more complex language. Learners may encounter academic vocabulary, professional terminology, and expressions that are less common in traditional textbooks. However, audio-only materials may be more challenging than videos because learners do not receive visual support. The effectiveness of podcasts may therefore depend strongly on the learner's listening ability and familiarity with the topic.

Online Games and Interactive Media

Interactive digital environments, particularly online games, can also support vocabulary learning. Games require learners to understand instructions, communicate with other players, and respond to events in real time. Unlike passive media consumption, gaming often requires active participation. Learners may repeatedly use the same vocabulary while completing tasks or communicating with other players. This repeated and meaningful interaction can strengthen

vocabulary knowledge. However, vocabulary learning through games may vary depending on the type of game and the amount of interaction in the target language.

Factors Influencing Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition

Across the reviewed literature, several factors consistently influenced vocabulary learning:

First, frequency of exposure was important. Words encountered repeatedly were generally more likely to be remembered.

Second, contextual support helped learners understand unfamiliar vocabulary. Visual information, storylines, and meaningful situations made it easier to infer word meanings.

Third, learner proficiency influenced the ability to benefit from media exposure. More proficient learners could often understand unfamiliar vocabulary through context, while lower-level learners sometimes needed additional support.

Fourth, motivation and interest appeared to increase engagement. Learners who enjoyed the content were more likely to continue consuming it and experience repeated exposure to the target language.

Finally, attention and noticing played an essential role. Simply hearing or seeing a word does not necessarily result in learning. Learners must notice unfamiliar vocabulary and connect it with meaning.

The findings of this review suggest that digital media has considerable potential to support incidental vocabulary acquisition. The modern digital environment provides learners with access to authentic language in ways that were not possible for previous generations. One of the strongest advantages of digital media is the combination of language learning and personal interest. Learners do not always need to study vocabulary through traditional exercises. Instead, they can encounter language while doing activities they already enjoy, such as watching entertainment videos, listening to music-related podcasts, or participating in online communities. This finding is particularly important for foreign language learners who have limited opportunities to interact with native speakers. Digital media can provide a form of regular exposure to authentic language outside the classroom. In this sense, informal learning environments may complement formal education. However, incidental learning should not be considered a completely effortless process. Exposure alone does not guarantee that learners will acquire vocabulary. Many unfamiliar words may be ignored or forgotten after a single encounter. The findings therefore support a balanced approach. Digital media can provide rich and meaningful input, while teachers can help learners pay attention to useful vocabulary through follow-up activities. For example, after watching a video, students may discuss new

expressions, record useful vocabulary, or use newly encountered words in speaking and writing activities. Another important issue is learner autonomy. Digital media allows learners to choose what they want to watch, listen to, or read. This freedom can encourage students to take greater responsibility for their own learning. However, learners may need guidance in selecting materials appropriate to their language level and learning goals.

Overall, the digital wilds represent an important extension of the language learning environment. Learning no longer occurs only inside the classroom. Through smartphones, streaming platforms, online communities, and interactive media, learners can encounter English throughout their daily lives.

Conclusion. This systematic review examined incidental vocabulary acquisition through digital media consumption in second language learning. The findings suggest that audiovisual content, social media, podcasts, online games, and other forms of digital media can contribute to vocabulary development by exposing learners to meaningful and authentic language. The effectiveness of incidental vocabulary learning depends on several factors, particularly repeated exposure, contextual support, learner proficiency, motivation, attention, and opportunities for interaction. Audiovisual media appears especially useful because learners can connect language with visual information and real-life situations. However, digital media should not be viewed as a complete substitute for explicit vocabulary instruction.[7] Instead, the strongest learning outcomes may occur when informal media exposure is combined with intentional vocabulary activities and classroom support. The growing presence of digital media in everyday life provides language learners with opportunities to encounter vocabulary far beyond textbooks and classroom walls. Future research should continue investigating how different forms of digital media influence long-term vocabulary retention and how teachers can effectively integrate learners' informal media experiences into formal language education.

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