

## Vocabulary learning through an uncontrolled, real-world task

### What this research was about and why it is important

Learners can learn new vocabulary words either intentionally—through instruction—or unintentionally—while doing other tasks. Because of the increasing use of learner-centered communicative tasks in second language (L2) learning, it is important for L2 researchers and teachers to understand to what extent students learn new vocabulary while completing tasks whose focus is not vocabulary learning. The current study examined the extent to which 13 Korean adolescent learners of English used and learned new English vocabulary items that they were exposed to at a historic site while creating a travel guide video about the site with little teacher guidance. The study also investigated students' perceptions of performing such a task. We found that, overall, the vocabulary items were not greatly used by students, but all students learned the meaning of some new vocabulary items (ranging from 4 to 16 items) and were able to use some vocabulary items in a sentence correctly (1-13 items) after carrying out the task. Students' perceptions of the benefits of the uncontrolled, real-world task seemed to relate to how they planned and completed the task.

### What the researchers did

- Before planning and creating their videos, students completed a background survey and a vocabulary test containing 93 potentially unknown English vocabulary items.
- On Day 1, the teacher introduced the travel guide video-making task and gave students a brochure with information about *Suwon Hwaseong*, the historic site. In groups, students planned how they wanted to create their video.
- Students visited *Suwon Hwaseong* and spent five hours collecting information that they needed to make their video (e.g., reading information boards, interviewing foreign visitors).
- In groups, students created a travel guide video in a computer lab at school using the information that they had collected.
- After they created their videos, students completed a second vocabulary test and a survey with questions about their experience completing the video task.

### What the researchers found

- Students talked about very few unknown vocabulary items while creating their video (range: 0-5 items) and included between zero and six vocabulary items in their video.
- The second vocabulary test showed that, on average, students learned the meaning of 8.69 new vocabulary items (range: 4-16) and were able to use an average of 5.69 items (range: 1-13) in a sentence after completing the task.
- The percentage of learned vocabulary items out of those that students discussed or used varied between 0% and 75%, indicating a wide range of association between the students' use of vocabulary items while creating their videos and the number of vocabulary items they learned.
- The majority of the students indicated that the video-creation task was either very helpful or helpful for learning new knowledge about the historical site.
- Students' perception of improving their English through the video task varied depending on how they planned and completed the task.

### Things to consider

- This video-making task did not require students to use specific vocabulary items, and in fact, students did not discuss or use new vocabulary items much at all. Thus, teachers might want to specify that students use new vocabulary items if this is a goal of the task.
- Although students did not discuss or use many target vocabulary items while planning or creating their videos, being exposed to those words at the historic site may explain how they showed knowledge of those items on the second vocabulary test. This supports the importance of being exposed to new vocabulary items in relevant contexts.
- The way students planned and completed their videos impacted their perceptions of the effectiveness of the task for learning new historical knowledge and a second/foreign language. Teachers may wish to require certain aspects or steps of tasks (e.g., interviewing foreigners for practicing speaking and listening as a part of video) in order to more greatly benefit students' learning.

**Materials, data, open access article:** N/A

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