

Second Language Acquisition Research Findings and Their Teaching Implications

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SLA-informed language teaching should be our goal (Jordan & Long, 2022).

Bill VanPatten

- Renowned scholar
- Famous for *input processing* and *processing instruction*
- Former editor of the journal *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*

Some Important Definitions

Language is “(a) mental representation that is (b) abstract, (c) complex, and (d) implicit in nature (VanPatten & Simonsen, 2022, p.14).

Acquisition is “the creation of a linguistic system in the mind/brain of the learner” (VanPatten et al., 2025, p. 54).

“Communication is the expression, interpretation, and sometimes negotiation of meaning in a given context. What is more, communication is also purposeful” (VanPatten, 2017b, p.7).

“Input consists of language that L2 learners are exposed to in a communicative context. That is, it is language that they process for its message or meaning” (VanPatten & Benati, 2015, p.127).

RQ1. What SLA research findings are particularly relevant for second language pedagogy?

Research Finding 1

“The principal data for the acquisition of language is found in the communicatively embedded comprehensible input that learners receive. Comprehension precedes production in the acquisition process” (Lichtman & VanPatten, 2021, p.14).

Research Finding 2

“The complex and abstract mental representation of language is mainly built up through implicit learning processes as learners attempt to comprehend messages directed to them

in the language. Explicit learning plays a more minor role in the language acquisition process, contributing to metalinguistic knowledge rather than mental representation of language” (Lichtman & VanPatten, 2021, p.6).

Research Finding 3

“The evolution of the learner’s linguistic system occurs in ordered and predictable ways, and is largely impervious to outside influence such as instruction and explicit practice.” (Lichtman & VanPatten, 2021, p.11)

Research Finding 4

No strong case can be made for instruction speeding up acquisition (VanPatten et al., 2025).

Research Finding 5

The effects of instruction are short-term (VanPatten et al., 2025).

Research Finding 6

Language acquisition is piecemeal and slow (VanPatten, 2017a).

Research Finding 7

Learners do not acquire grammar ‘rules’ as presented in textbooks (VanPatten et al., 2025).

Research Finding 8

Output is beneficial to acquisition because it often results in modified and more comprehensible input. It remains to be seen whether ‘noticing the gap’ and ‘uptake’ play an indirect role in acquisition (VanPatten et al., 2025).

RQ2. What are the main teaching implications of these findings?

Teaching Implication 1

Input is the essential ingredient in language acquisition so it should be maximized.

Teaching Implication 2

We cannot use natural orders to structure a syllabus (VanPatten et al., 2025).

Teaching Implication 3

Since learning textbook rules and practicing them does not result in acquisition, we at least need to reconsider their value.

Teaching Implication 4

We should adopt a form of task-based learning (VanPatten, 2017b).

My Personal View on How Best to Teach

- Maximize Extensive Reading and Extensive Listening and find ways to motivate learners to be more autonomous when doing them.
- Do Story Listening (<https://www.story-listening.net/>, <https://www.youtube.com/@story-listening-GSSR>)
- Follow VanPatten's principles for task-based learning (see VanPatten, 2017b; Clarke, & Hastings, 2020)

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