

# EFL Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Dictionary Use and Preferences

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## Abstract

The present study provides insights into the perception of EFL teachers (Native and Non-native) and students of dictionary use. Participants were 99 (56 NS and 43 NNS) EFL teachers and 3993 (1815 male and 2178 female) students and were invited to respond to a questionnaires. 40 students participated in a follow-up interview. The results indicate that students overwhelmingly prefer bilingual dictionary to another type of dictionaries. Moreover, the students reported using online dictionaries and Google translator significantly more than print dictionaries. The study also revealed that meaning was reported to be the most lexical information sought by the subjects of the current study. Furthermore, the findings showed that most of the students refer to their dictionaries for word meaning and spelling but pay little attention to other aspects such as pronunciation, illustrated examples, and collocations. The findings revealed that EFL teachers held different perceptions on the role of the dictionary in their learning and teaching experiences. The results of the study suggest that the EFL teachers should incorporate ongoing training about dictionary use in the teaching-learning process and make the students aware of the extensive vocabulary input available in the standard dictionaries. Exposure to the parts of speech and collocation in dictionary entries can be useful for improving productive language abilities.

**Keywords:** Native speaker, non-speaker, EFL, Preparatory year, EFL

## 1. Introduction

Vocabulary is considered to be the most important source of language proficiency (Carter & McCarthy, 1988). EFL students employ vocabulary-learning strategies (VLS) to deal with unknown words they encounter. Hence, dictionaries are one of the most common lexical resource available in the form of books or in electronic versions where EFL students use VLS to acquire new vocabulary. Using these strategies efficiently and successfully for learning new words can lead to autonomy in students. Learners feel more confident in the ability to use a dictionary (Gonzalez, 1999). According to Tseng (2009) cited in Sevik (2014), dictionaries are trustworthy companions to second and foreign language learners because it guides them to uncover the meanings of unknown words. Research into the dictionary use reveals that they were only a few empirical studies before the 1980s (Nesi, 2014). Sevik (2014) argues that research on dictionary ownership, preferences, and attitudes its affects are not given equal importance in EFL contexts. Moreover, it has only drawn the attention of researchers and educators in the last three decades. A review of related literature in the use of dictionaries in Saudi EFL context indicates that there are few studies carried out in the field and the first study was conducted by Al-jarf (1999). Nesi (2014) points out that the history of research into dictionary use was characterized by small-scale studies carried out in a variety of different contexts, rather than large-scale, long-term funded projects. Since there is a need for a large-scale study focusing on preferences, attitudes and choice of dictionary use, the present research intends to bridge these gaps in the field lexicography.

While teaching the Preparatory Year Intensive English Language Program students, at the University of Hail, the researcher observed that most of them lack skills as well as the desire to use the dictionaries that are available in printed versions. It was also noticed that they prefer to use online dictionaries, but even while using these online dictionaries, they fail to take advantage of the rich information provided in the dictionary entries. These observations triggered the need to investigate and explore the reasons for such problems. Therefore, a study was conducted focusing on the students' as well as the teachers' assumptions and perceptions concerning dictionary practices in the Preparatory Year, at the University of Hail, Saudi Arabia. The present study intends to explore the students' choice and preferences to a particular dictionary/dictionaries as well as to find out possible ways to train them to use a dictionary in the best possible way.

## 2. Literature Review

### *2.1 Learners' Use and Preferences*

Dictionary is considered as an effective and reliable source for learning vocabulary in a second or a foreign language (Ali, 2012). Moreover, dictionaries are a vital pedagogical tool that exerts much influence in language learning, but the question is which kind of a dictionary should the EFL students use?

The availability of monolingual and bilingual dictionaries in traditional forms (books) and electronic versions resulted in diverse beliefs among the academicians. Although there is a common belief that monolingual dictionaries are beneficial regarding their usefulness as

language learning tools, the findings from surveys suggests that learners prefer bilingual dictionaries because it serves the dual purpose of translation as well as reference to monolingual entries. During the late 1990s, some studies compared electronic dictionaries with printed versions. Research into dictionary use shows that when students have a choice among dictionaries, the majority of L2 learners including those with a high level of L2 proficiency prefer bilingual dictionaries. (Tomaszcyk, (1979), Atkins and Varantola (1998), Schmitt (1997), Laufer (1997)). It is observed that the low proficient learners feel insecure using a monolingual dictionary because it requires L2 knowledge while on the other hand find bilingual dictionaries useful. Scholfield (1982) reasons out that learners use bilingual dictionaries because they can easily find the meanings or translations of unknown L2 words in their L1 as well. According to Stein (1989), the use of a bilingual dictionary for comprehension is effective because it provides a general understanding of certain kinds of words, such as the entries related to biological science, cultural institutions as well as scientific and cultural terms. She points out that the use of bilingual dictionaries is effective because they provide ready translation equivalents for common words and exact translation equivalents for institutional technical and scientific terms.

Thompson (1987:286) supported the development of “a new generation of learners’ bilingual dictionaries” and argued against monolingual dictionaries. He opines that monolingual dictionaries tend to be orbicular in defining the entries, e.g., an entry laugh, has synonyms amuse, amusement, humour. One can also observe that these entries are routinely used as synonyms for each other's definitions. However, in the context of vocabulary definitions being restricted, monolingual dictionaries might still “employ a special register which is not necessarily the most useful or rewarding for learners to be exposed to” (Thompson 1987:284), and so they are considered to have less value to entry level EFL students. However, Laufer (1997) argues that even if the majority learners tend to use a bilingual dictionary, it does not imply that bilingual dictionaries are always reliable. According to Bejoint (1981:47), “those learners who use monolingual dictionaries would help them to get into the habit of thinking in the target language.” These observations reveal that there are advantages as well as shortcomings and drawbacks in using bilingual dictionaries as well. In the past, researchers argued that bilingual dictionaries narrow down the thinking process of L2 learners in the target language and L2 learners may cultivate the tendency to understand L2 words by way of translating them to L1 (Stein 1989, Scholfield 1995). Also, bilingual dictionaries have more than one L1 or L2 equivalents for a given L2 or L1 entry which might pose a problem for the dictionary users. Unlike the intermediate or advanced learners who have a certain command of the target language, the entry- level EFL beginners are likely to be confused by undifferentiated lists of translation equivalents, and so they may find themselves unable to select an appropriate equivalent for the given text (Stein 1989).

Tomaszcyk (1979) conducted the first survey of the dictionary requirements of English learners. The findings of Tomaszcyk’s study suggests that despite their perception that bilingual dictionaries were inferior in terms of content and reliability, the subjects reported more use of bilingual dictionaries when compared to monolingual dictionaries.

“Not only did the beginning and the intermediate FL learners rely on the bilingual

dictionaries almost exclusively, but also secondary school and university language teachers used them more than L2 and other monolingual dictionaries, even though the latter were available to them" (Tomaszczyk, p. 46).

Similar findings were reported in the studies conducted by Bejoint (1981), Schmitt (1997), Laufer (1997), Lew (2004), AlQahtani (2005), and Schmitt's (1997) that Japanese EFL students prefer a bilingual dictionary regardless of their achievement level. The results of a comprehensive study carried out on 1000 learners in seven European countries by Atkins & Knowles (1990, cited in Laufer 1997), suggest that a majority (75%) of the students used bilingual dictionaries.

Laufer and Melamed (1997) carried the first in a series of studies comparing the effect of different dictionary types. These researchers relied on Longman *dictionary of contemporary English*, *The Megiddo modern dictionary* (bilingual) and the *Oxford student dictionary for Hebrew speakers* (bilingualised). After consulting entries from these dictionaries, the researchers tested 123 students for their reading comprehension and production of words. The results showed that comprehension scores for the user of the bilingualised dictionary were significantly better than those for others users. The study also revealed that production scores for users of bilingualised and bilingual dictionaries were significantly better than those of monolingual users. However, the monolingual dictionary was found to be least effective, thus challenging the view that it is the best choice for language learners. This study is an evidence of the importance of the bilingualised dictionary over bilingualised dictionaries.

Laufer and her associates continued to investigate the effectiveness of various dictionary types. Laufer and Levitzky-Aviad (2006) in their study introduced the concept of a bilingualised dictionary for language production which provides English translation option and usage for L1 search terms. Students were given the task of translating sentences from Hebrew into English using a standard bilingualised dictionary with English monolingual entries and L2 translation and a standard L1-L2 bilingual dictionary. They also rated the dictionaries in terms of usefulness. Results for the bilingualised dictionary were significantly better than for the other dictionary types. These studies reveal the fact that monolingual dictionaries are used less frequently when compared to that of bilingual dictionaries in EFL contexts.

It is also observed that the positive and negative characteristic features of monolingual and bilingual dictionaries often influence the EFL learners choice of one dictionary to the another. According to Baxter (1980), the positive features of a dictionary include a comprehensive coverage of information about each L2 word, such as its accurate explanation and syntactic construction. He is of the opinion that a monolingual dictionary gives definitions as well as other important aspects. Baxter believes that the monolingual dictionaries promote fluency because they offer definitions in contexts when compared to the bilingual dictionaries which tend to give the word for word translation equivalents. He supports the use of monolingual dictionaries and opines that bilingual dictionaries might cause confusion and ambiguity and may not be appropriate in certain situations. In contrast, Yorio (1971); and Bensoussan et al. (1984) argue that monolingual dictionaries often compel the students to guess and predict the

meanings which inturn can lead to doubt and confusion while the bilingual dictionaries tend to give security of definite answers. Furthermore, monolingual dictionaries are likely to give a long and confusing description that might not suggest the intended and desired meaning. However, the views of Thompson (1987) also suggests the monolingual dictionaries can be a hindrance because the learners may not be able to access an L2 item which they do not know, and also the use of L2 for definitions and examples can cause problems for learners. Another issue with monolingual dictionaries was raised by Nesi and Meara (1994), who showed that many adult learners systematically misinterpret dictionary entries while using monolingual dictionaries. Therefore, the authors question the effectiveness of definitions in EFL dictionaries. According to Nesi and Meara (1994: 14) there are two reasons for that: firstly, "dictionary users latch onto a part of the dictionary definition without really understanding how it relates to the word they are looking up"; secondly "the dictionary entries were actually misleading given the starting point of the user"

Scholfield (1982, 1999) states that we are mistaken if we think that learners can open the dictionary and be provided with words to fit with the context. To avoid making mistakes, he advises the users to follow Underhill's (1980:88) and Scholfield (1999) advice of scanning all the given definitions in the entry before considering the best choice. On the other hand, some studies recently starting investigating and comparing conventional dictionaries versus electronic dictionaries. When students need to look up information about words or lexical phrases, they have several dictionary resources from which to choose, including paper-based, online resources, and handheld electronic devices. Traditionally, paper dictionaries have been a common choice for the EFL students. Picture dictionaries give essential vocabulary in word form along with illustrations instead of definitions and it is very helpful for low proficient learners (Wolter, 2015).

With the rise in technological development, the use of conventional book dictionaries has decreased because of advancements in computer-mediated tools. Studies conducted in the last 20 years found that English language learners in classrooms had embraced using electronic dictionaries over paper-based dictionaries (Al-Jarf, 1999; Tang, 1997,). However, few studies have researched electronic dictionary use (Liou, 2000; Liu & Lin, 2011). The two kinds of computer-mediated look-up aids identified by Liu and Lin (2011) are the online type-in dictionary and the pop-up dictionary. They recognized that a desired word or phrase could be searched using the online type-in dictionary and a pop-up dictionary. Moreover, they are also useful because the words in a text can be selected or clicked to make the dictionary entries appear alongside the text on the screen. Bower and McMillan (2006) found that 96% of the students owned electronic dictionaries, and 90% of them were very active electronic users on reading and writing task (writing 53% and 37%). There has been an ever increasing interest in the use of electronic dictionaries for learning of foreign languages. The availability and quick access to electronic dictionaries influenced student community across the nations to make use this valuable resource. Also, many studies were conducted to evaluate students' perception on and attitudes toward the use of electronic dictionaries. The results of most the studies showed that students adopt very positive attitudes towards the use of electronic dictionaries either in reading or writing and also found it beneficial for their learning

(Dashtestani, 2013). In his study, Wsechler (2000) came to a conclusion that while using a paper-based dictionary, the average look-up time for ten words was 168 seconds (about 17 seconds per word), whereas an electronic dictionary requires 130 seconds per word (about 13 seconds per word). Weschler's findings suggests that the students could look up words about 23% faster with an electronic dictionary. It is also observed that the current models of smart phones and notepads are capable of offering a variety of educational applications, or apps, such as dictionaries. Type-in computer-mediated dictionaries offer a more convenient way to search for words (Liu & Lin, 2011) and do not require that users have the alphabetical knowledge, a skill that many EFL students lack.

## *2.2 Information User Checks in Dictionaries*

It is quite common among the dictionary users to look-up for information in dictionaries. Many researchers were interested in researching on the kind of information that L2 learners tend to look-up while using dictionaries. In the past, there were many different studies conducted in this area. However, these studies were found difficult to compare because of the overlapping categories of information found in these studies. An important finding presented in most of the earlier studies points to the fact that L2 learners refer to their dictionaries for the purpose of meaning making. Further, there also seems to be a lack of clarity among the researchers while referring to the categories such as L1 translation of an equivalent L2 vocabulary, definitions and synonyms of an L2 word, translation of an L1 word into L2. In order to overcome this vagueness on 'meaning-making,' researchers should be precise about what constitutes a word meaning because a reference to 'meaning' may often not include the categories mentioned above. Often EFL students might be interested in learning the translation equivalent of an L2 word in L1 rather than the meaning of an L2 word. It is also observed that students rarely use dictionaries to look-up a word pronunciation, collocations, usage, etymology or parts of speech. Svensen (1993: 9) stated that: 'the types of linguistic information needed in the dictionary are of course determined by the types of linguistic activity'. While referring to dictionaries, EFL learners might also consciously engage in decoding as well as progress in learning new vocabulary items from monolingual or bilingual dictionaries. During the process of decoding, it is quite natural to target on the word meaning, but while in learning, it may perhaps be any lexical information (Nakamura 2000; Lew 2004). Decoding is considered to be a primary activity often associated with dictionary use. The dictionary users might initially prefer looking up for the word meaning and also progress towards referring to the spelling or grammar that fits their decoding process. In an investigation conducted by Harvey & Yuill (1997) on the use of monolingual dictionary by L2 learners during writing tasks, students reported that they checked for spellings more often than for any other lexical information. It is observed that surveys often do not differentiate between the types of word information from the types of words which dictionary users look-up. According to Bèjoint (1981), a few of the most looked-up words include entries related to idioms, abbreviations, encyclopedic words, culture-specific words, taboo words, function words, and common words.

This observation requires more systematic study, as does how successful the learner was in achieving their "look-up" goals in relation to all these distinctions. However, nowadays with

the capability of the automatic logging of lookups when using online dictionaries these uncertainties can be satisfactorily addressed (de Schryver&Joffe 2004). The interaction between information type and dictionaries also needs attention. Sánchez Ramos (2005) found the same top two types of information (meaning, spelling) sought in both bilingual and monolingual dictionary use. The findings of Atkins & Varantola (1998) suggest that subjects use bilingual dictionaries to find equivalents while they refer to monolingual dictionaries to confirm their notions about the familiar equivalents.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Subjects

The target participants in the study were 3993 (male and female) Saudi EFL students enrolled in an intensive English language program in the Preparatory Year Program at the University of Ha'il. After the completion of the enrollment process, these students take a placement test, wherein their current levels of language proficiency is tested. The scores in the placement test helps to determine the level (first, second, third, or fourth) to which a student has to register in the Preparatory Year Programme. Since the main goal of the Preparatory Year is to prepare the students for university undergraduate courses, the learning objectives of the course are based on helping learners to develop their communicative, general and academic English skills. The program has four levels, beginning with level one for the beginners and level four is the advanced level course, which all the students need to complete before progressing to an undergraduate university course. As mentioned earlier, the scores in the placement tests determine to which a level a student has to register, thus, allowing students to register for different levels, beginning from level one and the advanced being the fourth level. It also implies that not all the students follow the same linear path of progression from the lowest to the advanced levels. This variation in the language needs, as well as the field of study, is reflected in the curriculum as well. The curriculum in level four is tailored to match the proficiency levels as well as the field of study. If the students are opting for the medical field, the content of the course will be related to medical English, as it will prepare them for the health sciences colleges. On the other hand, if the students are opting for majoring in science, level four will focus on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) syllabi because it is expected to help them to progress to the field of science and engineering. Furthermore, the students opting for majoring in humanities are supposed to study academic English in level four, so as to enable them to cope up with their future undergraduate level courses of the humanities and social sciences colleges.

#### 3.2 Teachers

Gender	Male	Female
	41	58
Mother tongue	Native speaker of English	Non-native speaker of English
	56	43

<b>Nationalities</b>	USA	UK	Canada	Arabs	Asia	West Europe	South Africa
	10	14	5	37	5	1	27
<b>Qualifications</b>	CELAT		TEFL Certificates		MA in TESOL, ELT and Applied Linguistics		Other
	17		29		41		12
<b>Teaching experience</b>	One year		2-5 years		6-10 years		More than 10 years
	3		36		31		29

As shown in the table (1) above, 99 English language teachers (41 males and 58 females) volunteered to participate in this study. The teachers are from different nationalities such as United States, UK, South Africa, Europe, Asia and the Arab world. Among them, 56 are native speakers of English while 41 are non-native speakers of English. As shown in the table above, these teachers are well-qualified and have obtained their degrees in the teaching of English. However, their teaching experiences vary from two years to twenty-five years. It is observed that most of them have substantial experience in teaching English at the tertiary level. In the past, these teachers have traveled and taught English (EFL and ESL) in other countries as well.

### 3.3 Instruments

#### 3.3.1 Student Questionnaire

A student questionnaire was administered to gather information about the preferences to dictionaries and the frequency of dictionary use. The questionnaires of Tomaszczyk (1979), Baxter (1980), Bejoint (1981), Diab (1989), Battenburg (1990), Schmitt (1997), Atkins and Varantola (1998), Lew (2004), and Alhaisoni (2008) were reviewed and certain criteria that seems to be relevant to the student questionnaire have been used for the current research. However, it required some content validation by two refereed professors of Applied Linguistics. In order to avoid ambiguity in the language and ensure content validity of the items, professional Arabic language teachers reviewed the Arabic version of the questionnaire before being administered to the respondents. The questionnaire consists of 22 items to which students are asked to respond on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. A range of 3.5-5 is thought to reflect the high use of that strategy, 2.5-3.4 medium use, and 1.0-2.4 low use (Oxford, 1990). The internal reliability analysis was performed using alpha to determine the extent to which the items in the questionnaire are related to each other. Alpha shows the internal consistency, based on the average inter-item correlation. The internal reliability of the questionnaire was .87.



### 3.3.2 Teacher Questionnaire

A closed-ended questionnaire was administered to the teachers on a voluntary basis. Teachers were asked to respond to a range of closed-ended questions related to dictionary use in the classroom as well as the training they provide in the class. The questionnaire also focused on demographic information, such as gender, nationalities, mother tongue and their teaching experiences.

### 3.3.3 Semi-Structured Interview

The researcher used a semi-structured interview to probe students' use and preferences of dictionaries and whether they rely on print or electronic dictionaries. In order to avoid any influence of the questionnaires on the students' responses during the interview period, the questionnaires that were already administered to the students were deleted from the web portal. The interview was intended to elicit information on the training that students received on the use of a dictionary. Students' willingness to participate in the interview process were also considered before the commencement of the interview. A total of 40 students (male 20, female 20) participated in the interview.

### 3.4 Procedure

The student and teacher questionnaire were uploaded on the e-services system. This system is designed mainly only for the Preparatory year students and teachers. The students are expected to log on into this system using their usernames and passwords to check their records in the course on a daily basis. On the other hand, teachers use the system to upload their students' absences and grades and follow up tasks assigned by the head of the department. The questionnaires were uploaded to the e-service system, wherein, the software allows the students to have a choice of either skipping it or responding to the items of the questionnaire. Once a student fills the questionnaire or opts to skip it, the questionnaire does not again appear on the web page for the second time. At the front webpage of the questionnaire, students were informed that there were no right or wrong answers to any of the given questions. They were also told that their responses remain confidential and would be used for research purposes only.

Data was analyzed using SPSS 19.0. Frequency, means and standard deviation, t-test, Two-way repeated measure ANOVA tests. P value less than 0.05 was considered significant.

## 4. Results and Discussion

This section provides an interpretation of the findings of the study and gives a report and analysis of the types of dictionaries used by Saudi EFL students enrolled in an intensive English language programme in the preparatory year at the University of Hail. It is followed with a discussion on the interpretation of the relationship between types of dictionaries used and proficiency level, gender and track.

Table 2. Frequency of dictionary use by all subjects in terms of language instructions

Statement	Mean	SD	Inferential statistics					
			Gender		Level		Track	
			t	p	t	p	F	p
I use E-A dictionary	2.99	1.150	-3.728	.001	-.0849	.396	23.266	.001
I use A-E dictionary	2.81	1.129	-3.945	.001	.391	.695	.661	.516
I use E-E-A dictionary	2.38	1.191	1.052	.293	-.729	.466	8.062	.001
I use E-E dictionary	2.07	1.091	-.358	.721	-1.725	.085	.721	.486

As shown in table 2, The results indicate that the frequency of dictionary use by Saudi EFL students was moderate with an overall mean of 2.76 and standard deviation 1.23. Thus, none in absolute terms is rated 'frequent.' Based on this study finding, the students in the current study seem to be relatively less sophisticated dictionary users, using all type of dictionaries at moderate levels.

Four possible explanations can be offered for this finding. First, the students have just finished high school and joined the preparatory year program and the high school students rely more on their teachers' translation than on dictionaries. Second, the teachers do not encourage students to buy dictionaries and use them. Third, the participants study English in an EFL setting and do not need it for daily life. Thus, it was not urgent for them to use dictionary frequently. Fourth, it might indicate that this sample did not consist of language learners who were as sophisticated as other groups in other contexts, and this may be due in part to the lack of an input-rich environment.

The results showed that E-A dictionary is used more frequently than other types of dictionaries whether overall (2.99) or for each group separately. These differences were corroborated through one-way repeated measures ANOVA, which showed significant differences in use of types of dictionaries by all the subjects ( $F = 117.649$ ,  $p = .001$ ).

To know where the difference lies between the four types of dictionaries, Bonferroni adjusted multiple comparisons were performed. The results showed that the E-A bilingual dictionary is used significantly more than all the other types ( $p = .001$ ). Furthermore, the A-E bilingual dictionary is used significantly more often than ( $p = .001$ ) the E-E dictionary which in turn, is the least-frequently used reference work in the study. On the other hand, no significant differences were found between other types. The result agrees with the other studies reviewed in the literature which found that L2-L1 bilingual dictionaries were used more frequently than other types of dictionaries (Tomaszcyk, 1979; Baxter, 1980; Battenburg, 1989; Schmitt, 1997; Alqahtani, 2005; Ali & Siddiek, 2015; Wolter, 2015). "L2 learners, even those who have achieved a very high level of L2 proficiency and have been trained in academic skills, including dictionary use, still reach out for a bilingual dictionary" (Laufer and Hadar, 1997:189). It is very obvious that the subjects of the study rely more frequently on L2-L1 bilingual dictionaries. The reasons for being overdependence could be due to the tendency to feel that it is not until they know the Arabic translation of an English word that they fully

understand the meaning of a word.

The A-E bilingual dictionary was the second most used dictionary type among our subjects (mean, 2.81), (SD=1.12). The result is in line with Al-Jarf (1999) who found that 53% of Saudi EFL students used the A-E bilingual dictionaries whereas only 27% used the monolingual and also agrees with what Nakamura (2000) found among Japanese learners of English. The preference for A-E bilingual dictionaries over monolingual dictionaries could be related to the students' needs and the types of courses that they take. A-E bilingual dictionaries are usually used for production.

The bilingualised dictionary is the third most used dictionary type (mean, 2.38) (SD, 1.19). This result appears to be inconsistent with what Mackintosh (1998) found among her subjects in the university of Ottawa. Moreover, Fan (2000) found that the majority of Chinese students use the bilingualised dictionary. In a more recent study Ali & Siddiek, (2015) found that Sudanese students disregard bilingualised dictionaries. They found that 44% are not aware of the existence of bilingualised dictionaries while 42% dismiss them as being of little use. This result indicates that our subjects are not aware of the existence or advantages of the bilingualised dictionary. Furthermore, bilingualised dictionaries have not received the attention they deserve since they absorb the benefits of both worlds (Raudaskoski, 2002).

Regarding the frequency use of monolingual dictionary, the results show that it was the least used dictionary (mean, 2.07) (SD, 1.09). This result goes in line with previous research (Tomaszczyk, 1979; Baxter, 1980; Battenburg, 1989; Wolter, 2012; Al-Amin & El-Sayed, 2014; Wolter, 2015). Alqahtani (2005) found in his study about the use of VLS that Saudi students use the monolingual dictionary less frequently when compared with the bilingual dictionary and electronic dictionary. Moreover, Al-Jarf (1999) found that 23% of Saudi university students use the monolingual dictionary. It could be argued that lack of L2 vocabulary knowledge to understand monolingual entries caused less use of it. According to Nesi and Meara, 1994, the monolingual explanation is often only partially understood by some learners and may be misunderstood by some.

Concerning the effect of gender on the frequency of dictionary use, it is noticed that there is a significant difference between male and female in the use of E-A and A-E dictionaries whereas no significant difference between male and female in the use of E-E-A and E-E dictionaries. The results showed that females use all type of dictionaries more frequently than males. This result is in line with AlQahtani's (2005) who found in his study that Saudi female students reported using dictionaries more frequently than males. On the other hand, the results showed no significant difference in use of all dictionary types with regard to proficiency level. This finding aligns with Wolter's (2015) findings. However, high proficient students reported using all dictionary types more frequently than low proficient.

When it comes to the effect of track on the frequency of dictionary use, it showed that there is a positive correlation between track and the use of E-A and E-E-A dictionaries whereas no significant differences between the students according to the track and the frequency of E-E and A-E dictionaries use. To know exactly where the difference lies in the use E-A and E-E-A dictionaries, we ran the Tukey test and found science and medical use E-A and E-E-A

dictionaries more frequently than humanity students. The reason might be that the science and the medical students are studious, and the competition among students is high. They work hard to get a high GPA to enable them to get a seat in health science colleges and engineering college. They have to improve their English because the medium of instruction in their colleges is English. On the other hand, students of Humanities branch will join education and social science colleges when they finish the preparatory year, and the medium of instruction is Arabic.

Table 3. Frequency of dictionary use by all subjects in terms of medium

Statement	Mean	SD	Inferential statistics					
			Gender		Level		Track	
			t	p	t	p	F	P
I use paper dictionary	2.14	1.113	-1.305	.192	.773	.439	.807	.446
I use HHE dictionary	2.36	1.253	-.294	.769	.646	.519	3.934	.020
I use my mobile	3.47	1.334	-2.563	.010	-4.647	.001	43.852	.001
I use Google translator	3.45	1.303	-3.510	.001	-3.396	.001	8.170	.001

The results showed that the students reported using mobile to find the meanings of unknown words more often than any other kind of dictionary (mean,3.47) (SD 1.334). These differences were corroborated through one-way repeated measures ANOVA, which showed significant differences in use of types of dictionaries by all the subjects ( $F = 112.215$ ,  $p = .001$ ).

In order to know where the differences lie among use of these type of dictionaries, Bonferroni adjusted multiple comparisons were performed. The results indicate that the mobile dictionary is statistically significantly different from all other dictionary types except Google translator where no significant difference. The preference of using mobile dictionary over other type of dictionaries support Liu & Lin's (2011) argument who claim that developed smart phones and notepads are capable of offering a variety of educational applications, or apps, such as dictionaries. Type-in computer-mediated dictionaries offer a more convenient way to search for words and do not require that users have the alphabetical knowledge, a skill that many EFL students lack. The students might no longer need conventional dictionaries where they can get all the information they need instantly.

The second most popular dictionary type among the students was the Google translator, (mean,3.45), (SD,1.30). This result supports the findings mentioned above where students reported using their mobile dictionaries to check unknown vocabulary. In the interview, the students mentioned that they use their mobile to check unknown words either by using dictionaries installed on their mobiles or using Google translator and this shows the high frequent use of mobile and Google translator over other type of dictionaries in terms of the medium. Dwaik (2015) found that the highest reading proficiency is acquired by the students who use online dictionaries.

It should be noted here that our subjects use print and HHE dictionaries less frequently and the mean frequency is below the middle point.

Concerning the effect of gender on the frequency of dictionary use in terms of medium, it noted that female students use mobile and google translator significantly more than male students. Several studies have established the existence of gender differences in language learning. The results indicate that females are more frequent users of strategies (Ehrman and Oxford, 1989; Green and Oxford, 1995; Oxford, 1993). Green and Oxford (1995) found that females use strategies more frequently than males.

When it comes to the effect of proficiency levels on the use of the dictionary in terms of medium, the results showed that high proficiency level students use mobile and google translator significantly more than low proficiency level students.

When it comes to the effect of track on the frequency of dictionary use in terms of medium, it showed that there is a positive correlation between track and the use of mobile and google translator whereas no significant differences between the students according to the track and the frequency of print and HHE dictionaries use. To know exactly where the difference lies in the use of mobile and Google translator, we conducted the Tukey test, and found science and medical use mobile and google translator more frequently than humanity students. This result supports the findings we mentioned in table 2 where medical and science students use dictionaries more frequently than the students of humanities.

Table 5. Frequency of lexical information sought by all

Statement	Mean	SD	Inferential statistics					
			Gender		Level		Track	
			t	p	t	p	F	p
To know meaning in Arabic	3.29	1.271	-2.403	.016	-.534	.396	9.979	.001
Arabic to English	3.12	1.224	-2.764	.006	1.609	.695	1.992	.137
Explanation in English	2.85	1.218	-1.910	.056	1.726	.084	3.723	.024
Synonyms and antonyms	2.67	1.175	-.251	.802	.976	.329	1.325	.266
Pictures	2.82	1.311	-4.073	.001	3.500	.001	.477	.621
Different meanings	2.92	1.174	-1.741	.082	-.505	.614	6.241	.002
Spelling	3.19	1.250	-3.151	.002	.368	.713	6.784	.001
Pronunciation	3.11	1.247	-4.896	.001	.339	.735	7.634	.001
Illustrated examples	2.70	1.153	-.660	.509	.932	.351	1.865	.155
Parts of speech	2.83	1.209	-2.779	.005	2.147	.032	2.562	.077
Derivations	2.73	1.197	-2.518	.012	.872	.383	2.749	.064
Origin	2.46	1.168	.677	.498	1.443	.149	1.191	.304
Tenses	2.83	1.209	-3.460	.001	.147	.883	3.010	.049

Singular and plural	2.77	1.204	-3.226	.001	3.241	.001	.004	.996
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The results of the survey showed that using a dictionary to find meaning of a word in Arabic reported to be the most frequent checked item in the dictionary (mean, 3.29) (SD,1.27). This view is largely present in other studies. This results goes in line with Wolter's (2015) findings. She found that the vast majority of the students look for a definition when they use their dictionaries. Bejoint (1981) found that 87% of his subjects placed meaning among the most sought-after piece of information. Hartmann (2005) also found that his subjects showed a strong preference for looking up definitions and a parallel lack of interest in other items.

Spelling is ranked as the second most frequently checked lexical information by subjects in this study (mean, 3.19), (SD,1.25). This concurs with findings by Tomaszczyk, (1979); Hartmann, (1999) and Alqahtani, (2005) and indicates that spelling is of great importance for learners of English. For many people, spelling mistakes is a symptom of illiteracy. The fact that many English words are spelled illogically and inconsistently will probably cause confusion in students when they begin to write such words. Hence learners have to be aware of the source of correct spelling and the dictionary is their first choice to use as a reliable source for checking spelling.

Checking the equivalency of an Arabic word in English was reported to be the third most frequent kind of lexical information that Saudi EFL students look up in their dictionaries, (mean,3.12),(SD,1.22). Holzman (2000) found that Israeli students refer to their dictionaries to get the translation of Hebrew words in English.

Pronunciation is reported to be the fourth category of lexical information that Saudi students check in their dictionaries (mean,3.11), (SD,1.24) which indicates that our subjects sometimes use their dictionaries to check pronunciation of another word. In fact, no group of users reported consulting this material on a regular basis. Tomaszczyk (1979), Bejoint (1981), Kharma (1985), Iqbal (1987), Diab (1990), Al-Jarf (1999), and Holzman (2000) reported in their studies that students consulted pronunciation relatively infrequently. Such a finding is curious because language learners often insist they need assistance with pronunciation. Diab (1990), for example found that a vast majority of students desire help with pronunciation. Battenburg (1990) argued that the problem is that it is difficult to understand the pronunciation system employed in dictionaries. He added that instructors should teach their students how to use the pronunciation key and material concerning word stress (p.96). Research findings have shown that when students know how to say a word, it is easier for them to commit the word to memory (Chi et al., 1994; Fan, 1998). In the interview, the students reported that they check pronunciation from their mobiles but not frequently. However, the findings of the study show that our subjects as we mentioned earlier are not frequent users of dictionaries. Using dictionaries to find out different meanings of a word was reported to be the fifth item students reported to check in their dictionaries (mean,2.92), ( SD,1.17). These figures support the interest among L2 learners in using dictionaries to find the meaning of a word as the dictionary is an inventory of words with glosses.

Concerning independent variables (IV) of the study, the results showed that female check dictionary to find the meaning of a word in Arabic, spelling, Checking the equivalency of an

Arabic word in English and pronunciation significantly more than male whereas no significance difference between the subjects according to the proficiency level. However, the results showed that medical and science students use their dictionaries to check the above mentioned four items except Checking the equivalency of an Arabic word in English more frequently than humanities students.

Using dictionaries to find out different meanings of a word was reported to be used moderately with a mean frequency rating of 2.92 and SD of 1.174. These figures support to some extent the interest among L2 learners in using dictionaries to find the meaning of a word as the dictionary is basically an inventory of words with glosses. The results showed that medical and science students use their dictionaries to find out different meanings of a word more frequently than humanities. On the other hand, there is no difference according to the gender and proficiency level.

The use of dictionaries to check tense, pictures and part of speech reported to be used by our subjects on average. This trend lends some support to the research of Fan (2000) who found that such lexical information was not much referred to by subjects. It could be argued that some L2 learners consider it unnecessary to check these forms in the dictionary. Furthermore, with regard to checking tenses in the dictionary, teachers in Saudi Arabia focus mainly on grammar paying much attention to verb conjugation, and they give the students' quizzes regularly to evaluate student knowledge. In addition, students in high school and those at the intermediate level of proficiency must memorize irregular verbs from their text books. This may be one more reason why students do not feel the need to refer to their dictionaries to check the tense forms. On the other hand, other lexical information such as synonyms and antonyms, illustrated examples, Derivations, Origin and Singular and plural are reported to be infrequently used. This result supports the findings of the study which shows that our subjects are less frequent dictionary users.

Table 6. Teachers' Responses

Statement	NS		NNS		Exp.		Less exp.		Total	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
I like dictionaries	4.32	.724	4.45	.621	4.29	.821	4.46	.785	4.38	.912
Dictionaries are useful	4.62	.507	4.71	.621	4.59	.721	4.81	.853	4.67	.764
I use dictionaries in my class I teach	2.32	1.21	3.12	.921	2.75	.985	2.61	1.01	2.7	1.02
My students like online dictionaries	4.21	.899	4.26	.981	4.25	1.02	4.22	.865	4.22	.975
My students like	2.72	.854	2.76	.962	2.78	1.01	2.70	.991	2.75	.872

print dictionaries										
My students know how to use online dictionaries	4.15	.715	4.21	.967	4.17	1.05	4.19	1.21	4.21	1.06
My students know how to use print dictionaries	2.97	1.20	2.87	1.10	2.81	.991	3.03	1.11	2.94	1.25
I assign homework related to dictionary use	2.1	.745	2.8	1.21	2.42	1.2	2.57	.969	2.48	1.20
I would prefer to receive more training on how to use dictionary in my class	3.89	1.02	3.95	1.05	3.62	1.1	4.22	1.14	3.94	1.06

Our concern in this section is to find out the teachers' perception about dictionary use. The data obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed using t-test to find out the overall frequencies of teachers responses to the questions. Moreover, the differences between NS and NNS and between experienced teachers and less experienced teachers were of interest to investigate. The results showed that teachers intensely like dictionaries and consider them useful with mean (4.38) and (4.67) along with the relatively small standard deviations. The results also showed no significant differences between NS and NNS and between experienced and less experienced which indicates that the teachers have a strong overall agreement about liking dictionaries. Nonetheless, the responses to the question about using a dictionary in the classroom suggest that dictionaries are infrequently used with mean 2.7. This implies that they believe in the usefulness of dictionaries, but they do not use it and do not incorporate dictionary use with great frequency in their classrooms. This point needs further investigation to find out the reason. The reason behind this might be that teachers are instructed to follow the instructions given in the textbooks. The researcher also observed that textbooks prescribed for the preparatory year programme do not have sections or subsections about dictionary use. In order to teach dictionary skills, one has to prepare additional course materials, and this requires effort and time, which teachers may not be able to spare. A reason could be that the programme is very intensive and the teachers have to follow a very detailed pacing schedule and complete the curriculum on time as planned by the departmental committee. The results showed that NNS use dictionaries in the classrooms significantly more than NS. It seems that NNS strongly believe in the importance of dictionaries as second language learners and they had experienced this when they learned the English language in their schools. On the other hand, most of the NNS participated in the study speak only English, and they did not have the experience to learn the second language.



The teachers' responses to the questionnaire items indicate that teachers see students as being both comfortable with and knowledgeable about using online dictionaries more than print dictionaries. These results support the findings in the students' questionnaire where they reported using online dictionary frequently and significantly more than print dictionaries. The comparison of the means shows that teachers observe or feel that students are more comfortable with online dictionaries than that of the printed versions.

The data analysis also revealed that teachers assign homework to the students related to dictionary use occasionally which goes in line with the responses of the teachers regarding the use of the dictionary in the classroom. The results showed that NNS teachers assign homework to the students related to the dictionary use significantly more than NS and this agrees with the findings mentioned earlier that NNS use dictionaries in the classroom considerably more than NS.

When it comes to training on how to use a dictionary in the classroom, the results showed that both NS and NNS prefer to receive training on dictionary use. Unfortunately, neither teachers nor students receive proper training on how to use a dictionary. Most of the studies found that teachers do not give much attention to the importance of training their students on how to use dictionaries.

## **5. Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore Saudi EFL preparatory year students' perception of dictionary use as well as teachers' opinion about dictionary use. The results revealed that students reported using bilingual dictionary more than other type of dictionaries. Moreover, online dictionaries and Google translator reported to be used significantly more than print versions. Hence, it would be beneficial for teachers to learn about the new technology in looking up words and then train their students in its use. Technology such as smartphones and dictionary applications make accessing word information a convenient process for many language learners. The study also revealed that meaning was reported to be the most lexical information sought by the subjects of the current study which goes in line with all the previous studies conducted on dictionary use and preference. Furthermore, the findings showed that most of the students check their dictionaries for word meaning and spelling and they pay little attention to other information such as pronunciation, illustrated examples, and collocations. It is certainly a pity that despite the time and efforts spent by lexicographers on supplying different information besides word definitions, they are not fully utilized by the users (Tono, 2001). Information about pronunciation and part of speech in an entry can be beneficial for students to improve their writing and speaking abilities with words. The ability to use words in a clear, comprehensible and grammatically correct way also becomes increasingly important as students advance in their language proficiency.

### *5.1 Pedagogical Implications*

English language teachers should take into consideration their students' abilities and needs related to the use of a dictionary. They should do their best to provide their students with information about dictionaries and the differences among them. Teachers should be aware of

their learners in order to guide them to the dictionary use. (Scholfield, 1997). Teachers are supposed to help their students to use dictionaries in a better way. Two levels of help should be offered: the first involves showing them how to find the relevant entry or subdivision, while the second concerns finding the piece of information they require within the entry itself (Béjoint, 1981). Concerning the first level, on the one hand, learners should be trained in, for example, where to look up a compound noun or an idiom. Their attention should be drawn to the differences between dictionaries in the topic under consideration. At the second level, on the other hand, learners should be trained in how to exploit all the available information in the entry before deciding on the meaning of the new word (Laufer and Hadar, 1997). Learners have to be trained in how to progress from definitions to examples, and the context in question, to be able to select the appropriate meaning (Baxter, 1980). In addition to meaning, learners also have to be trained in how to use different dictionary codes in order to be able to extract the information needed from what is provided. Moreover, teachers should share the dictionaries and look up sources that their students like and prefer to use, and those could be explored for the information about words they provide ( Wolter, 2015). Al-Amin and El-Sayed (2014) suggested that teachers include task-based activities that offer learners ways to experience the facets of dictionary entries, such as definitions, pronunciations, and collocations. It would be very beneficial for students to be asked to look up collocations for words while completing writing tasks, and these activities should be offered on an ongoing basis (Gonzalez & Martinez, 2011).

Teachers also need to develop syllabi and incorporate learner training programs to teach students appropriate dictionary use as well as strategies to facilitate language learning. To achieve this objective within a formal institutional setting, two sets of considerations are required in the order. First of all, teachers should decide what to teach concerning dictionary use and strategies, and how much time will be devoted to dictionary instruction (Huang, 2003). Moreover, it should be linked to specific course objectives and also integrated with other course content (Carduner, 2003). In brief, learners' awareness should be raised regarding all issues that are related to dictionaries, such as dictionary type and features. Their dictionary use strategies should be developed by training. Training would be more effective if it involved regular dictionary use 'in small doses rather than one monster session per month' (Wright, 1998: 12).

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