

The Benefits of using Dictionary Skills among the Third Year Pharmacy Students

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ABSTRACT

The latest gadgets equipped with a variety of applications for learning a language which includes learning from letters of alphabet to writing advanced academic papers. For the improvement of language skills, one needs to refer the dictionary for developing one's vocabulary for exhibiting better performance in their career or in higher education. It is essential that the students should be provided proper training in using of dictionary in the language classroom for getting linguistic proficiency in their professional academic settings. The present paper attempts to trace out the benefits of dictionary skills and various strategies used for developing dictionary referring skills among the third year pharmacy graduate students. As part of the study, the students' questionnaires were used as a research tool for the collection of data. The collected data was analyzed quantitatively for understanding the students' perceptions about the use of dictionary. The results of the study revealed that the pharmacy graduates are untrained in using dictionary in the language classroom. It was also found that the students were not aware of different uses/benefits of dictionary. It was also suggested that the use of dictionary may serve as a learning tool for overall language development.

Keywords

Dictionary Skills, Pharmacy Students, Use of Dictionary

1. INTRODUCTION

With the advent of latest technology and advanced gadgets such as smart phones, notebooks and tablets has made language learning more fascinating and much easier than ever before. Now-a-days most of the students have access to these advanced paraphernalia at their disposal. These gadgets equipped with a variety of applications for learning a language from letters of alphabet to writing advanced academic papers. All the learners will get the advantage of all these applications for the development of language skills. However, words are basis of learning a

language, so the students' communicative abilities are stalled by their inability to comprehend the words. Hence, the dictionary use can assist the learners to tackle the unknown words' meanings. The learners may feel empower when they have ability to use a dictionary (Gonzalez, 1999).

It is well-known that a dictionary is considered to be an important learning tool for L2 learners for the development of all four language skills. Often, dictionary is found in the reference section of the library for the benefit of the readers. For this reason, dictionary is treated as a reference book and it is assumed that the dictionary is used by intellectual people for reference purposes. The use of dictionary has a high influence on the students' language performance. Because of these reasons, it is essential that the students should be provided certain techniques and strategies in using both the forms of dictionaries - electronic as well as print dictionaries in a language learning context. However, the learners resort to dictionaries to make out the meanings of the unknown words. If the learners are familiar with the words, they will not refer it in the dictionary for meaning.

1.1. Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the study are to explore the use of dictionary skills and to explore pharmacy students' awareness in using dictionary. In addition to that, it is also to find out various strategies for developing the skill of referring a dictionary.

1.2. Research questions

The paper attempts to find out the answers to the following research questions.

1. Are teachers really teaching students how to refer a dictionary?
2. Do students know how to use dictionary in language learning?

3. What extend the use of dictionary in the classroom teaching assist in developing language skills?

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dictionary is derived from the Latin word *dictio*, 'the act of speaking' and *dictionarius*, it means 'a manual or book of words'. Online Oxford Dictionaries website defines dictionary as a book or electronic resource that lists the words of a language particularly in alphabetical order and provides their meanings, often also gives about pronunciation, origin and usage. A dictionary is a significant instructional tool for anyone who wants to learn a new language.

The dictionary can be a helpful tool for the students if they learn how to use it effectively in learning context. Teaching of proper use of a dictionary would assist learner in choosing appropriate words in the given setting. Sarigul (?) claims that a good dictionary provides generally for each word the following information in detail that can be used by the language learners such as spellings, pronunciation, definitions, parts of speech, example sentences, synonym, antonym, collocations, phrasal verbs and idioms for language development.

When a dictionary was used in the classroom, it enabled the learners to build up their language skills. It also assisted in conducting collaborated activities such as pair work and group work among the students.

Some of the previous studies confirmed that the use of dictionary assisted the learners in developing their language skills. In a study conducted by Rahimi & Miri (2014), it was found that the learners who used the mobile dictionary for learning English improved their language performance more than that of who used the offline dictionary i.e. printed one for learning. According Takahashi (2012), the effective use of dictionary would raise the language awareness among the learners and teachers for developing their second language writing skills (p. 104). The medical students just treated dictionaries as learning tools that was used to get the required information such as explanation of medical terms and their encyclopedic information (Mansoor-ul-Haq & Ahmad, 2010). In another study by Hayati (2005), it was established that the use of dictionary such as bilingual dictionary compared with monolingual dictionary that can make a difference in the performance of second language reading comprehension of the learners.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

The sample of the study was ninety B. Pharmacy third year students who were studying in one of the professional pharmacy colleges in the suburban of Hyderabad, Telangana, India. These students were from two different sections of the same class. Among the participants, sixty-six were female and twenty-four were male students. Their age group was between 19 and 21. They all had almost ten years of exposure to the English language.

3.2. Procedure

The data was collected by administering the students' questionnaire among the pharmacy students in the second semester of the third year. They were given 15 minutes of time for filling up the questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised of ten questions and they were divided into three main sections such as the use of dictionary, purpose of using dictionary and dictionary use in teaching learning context.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis was done by question wise quantitatively to reach an understanding of the perceptions of the students in ESL context as regards their use of dictionary in the language classroom. For this purpose, the questionnaires were analyzed in a detailed manner.

The results obtained through the students' questionnaires revealed the following points.

The use of dictionary

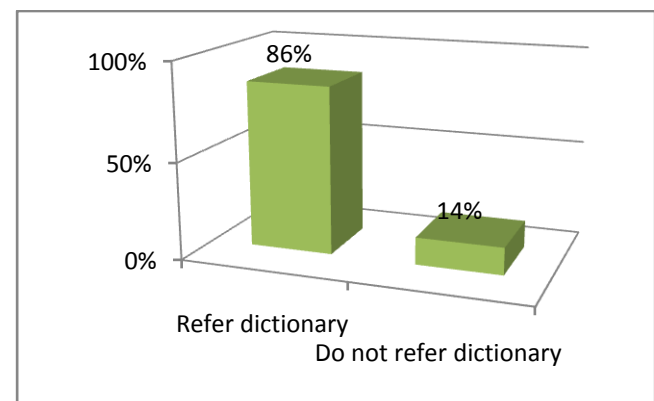


Figure 1: Students refer dictionary

For the first question, the data in the figure 1 above shows that majority of the students i.e. 86% stated that they did

not use any dictionary in the language classroom whereas a few students mentioned that they refer dictionary in various contexts. Further out of 14 students, 59% of them use mobile dictionary for looking up words and their meanings while 41% of the students check online dictionary in their PCs whenever they need. The data reveals that most of the students do not have a dictionary at home/at college. It was proved that they do have habit of using dictionary neither in the classroom nor at home.

Majority of the students i.e. 90% do not have a dictionary at home whereas a few students own a dictionary either in mobile or computer or a printed one. Among all the students who own dictionary was a bilingual dictionary. It was evident that majority of them do not have access to the use of dictionary at home or in classroom.

The different purposes of using dictionary

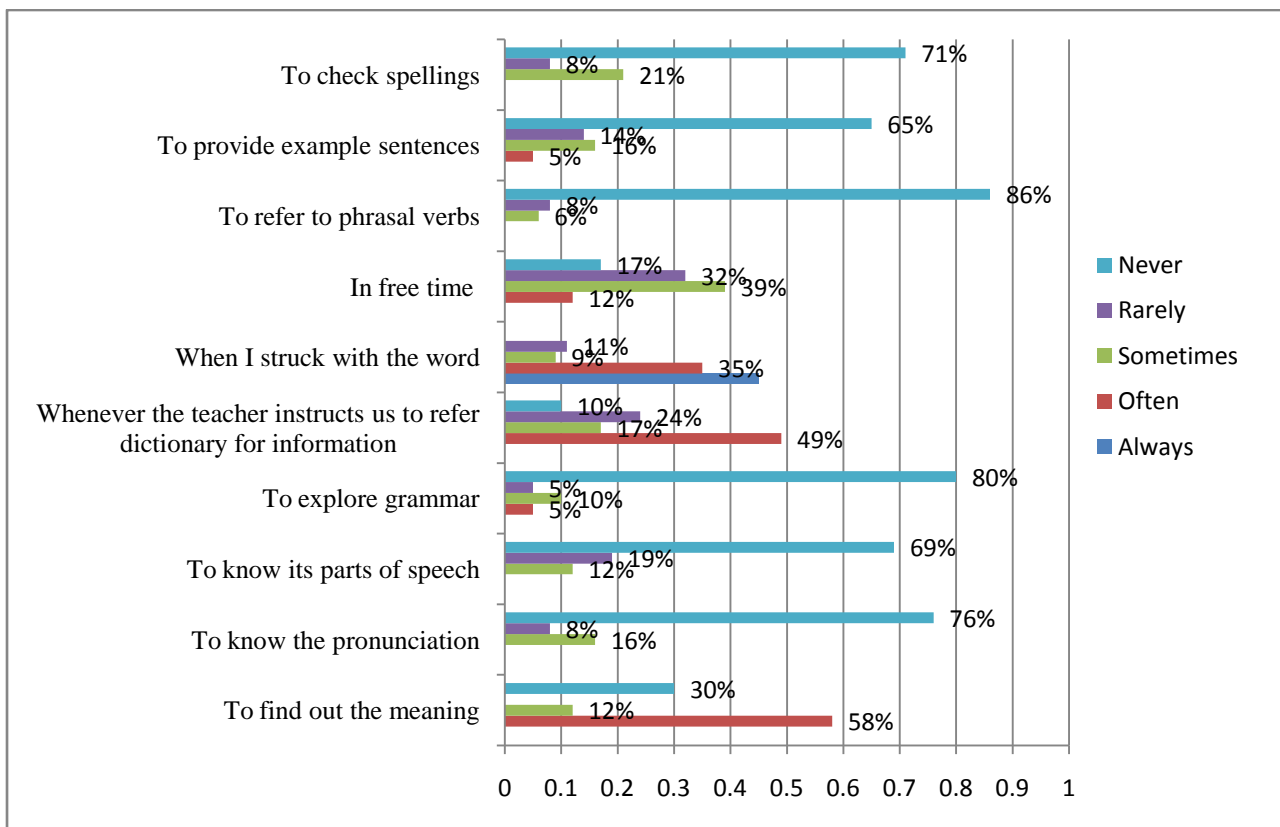


Figure 2: Purposes and frequency of using dictionary

The data in the figure 2 shows that the purposes and how often dictionary is used by the students in their language classroom. Majority of the students i.e. 70% were consulted dictionary to find out the meaning whereas 30% of them did not look up dictionary. The majority of them (i.e. 66%) looked at dictionary when the teacher instructed them to consult the dictionary whereas a few of them did not refer the dictionary. The majority of students (i.e.80%) also referred the dictionary whenever they struck with the strange/new word whereas 20% of them did not use any dictionary. The interpretation of data indicated that most of the students referred dictionary when it is compulsory for them.

The majority of the students did not turn to dictionary to make out additional information such as its pronunciation, parts of speech, grammar, for checking spellings, phrasal verbs and example sentences whereas a few students checked dictionary to find out the pronunciation, parts of speech, explore grammar, to check spellings, phrasal verbs, example sentences and in their free time. The above analysis of the data presented that the students would not focus on developing their language skills. Their focus was on simply to know the meaning of the word or understand the meaning in context.

The use of dictionary in the language classroom

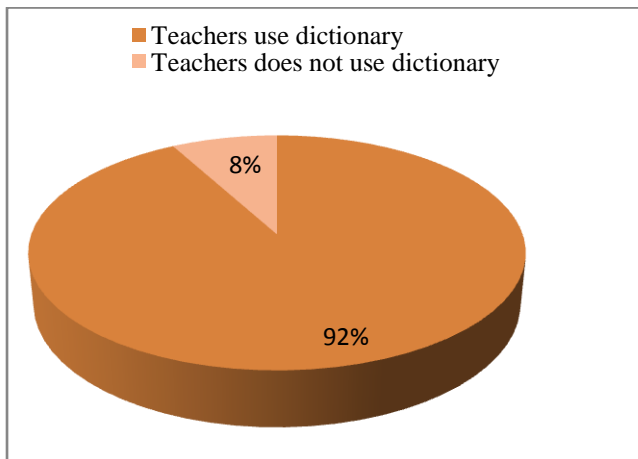


Figure 3: Use of dictionary

The data in the figure 3 indicates that majority of the students i.e. 92% stated that no teacher uses the dictionary in language classroom while a very few students mentioned that the language teacher refers the dictionary in their class. The analysis of the data revealed that most of the teachers do not refer dictionary in their classroom and they also discourage the students to use of electronic/mobile dictionaries in the class.

Majority of the students mentioned that there was no chapter/lesson about the use of dictionary in the textbook whereas a few students stated that there were some exercises in the textbook that demanded to refer the dictionary. The data presented that there was no special lesson/chapter about the use of dictionary in the textbook. So the learners were unaware of lexicon use in the classroom. It was analyzed that students were not trained or taught to refer/use dictionary in the language learning context.

The interpretation of the data revealed that there was no training/teaching to the students in using dictionary at various levels such as primary, secondary and tertiary level. The data also provided that majority of the teachers do not provide any instructions in the use of dictionary whereas a few teachers instructed the students to consult the dictionary for completing the given assignments.

5. CONCLUSION

The study focused on the perceptions of students about the use of dictionary skill in the language classroom. In conclusion, it cannot be denied that the benefits of using dictionaries in language classroom. In most of the times, it is little emphasized that the use of dictionary in language

classes. It is found that the pharmacy students are untrained in referring a dictionary in and outside the classroom context. It is undeniable that a learner who makes use of dictionary will be able to continue learning outside the classroom. The use of dictionary assists the students to work collaboratively and it also promotes learner autonomy.

The general strategies are the students are instructed to use a dictionary when they want to understand how to say a word and to identify the part of speech of a word and using on their own sentences. It can be used in two ways for improving writing skill i). to check spelling ii). to check the grammar and it proper usage. Learning to use these features will serve to promote the students' research and writing skills.

The pedagogical implication of the study is that the use of dictionary may serve as a learning tool for weaker students who may be encouraged for the overall language development. Based on the results, it is suggested that training should be provided to the students in using dictionary so that they will aware of appropriate strategies in using dictionary as self-learning tool for the development of language.

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APPENDIX

Students' Questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire is to gather information related to the use of dictionary in the classroom. Kindly provide the information accurately for the purpose of my research. The given information will be kept confidential and it is used for research purpose only.

1. Do you refer dictionary?

Yes No

If yes, where do you use?

2. Which mode of dictionary do you use?

- a. Online dictionary
- b. Offline dictionary
- c. Electronic dictionary?
- d. any other

3. Which type of dictionary do you have/own?

- a. a monolingual dictionary
- b. a bilingual dictionary
- c. a pharmaceutical dictionary
- d. any other

4. For what purposes and how frequently do you refer dictionary?

S. No	Statement	Frequency				
		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1.	To find out the meaning					
2.	To know the pronunciation					
3.	To know its parts of speech					
4.	To explore grammar					
5.	Whenever the teacher instructs us to refer dictionary for information					
6.	When I struck with the word					
7.	In free time					
8.	To refer to phrasal verbs					
9.	To provide example sentences					
10.	To check spellings					

5. Does your teacher use dictionary in language classroom?

Yes No

If yes, how frequently does s/he use?

6. Do you have any chapter about the use of dictionary in your textbook?

Yes No

7. Have you trained/taught in using dictionary?

Yes No

If yes, at what level - primary, secondary and tertiary.

8. Is there any dictionary in your classroom/library for learning purposes?

Yes No

9. Does your teacher provide instructions in using dictionary?

Yes No

If yes, what instructions do they provide?

10. Please provide any other information which was not covered in above questions.

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AUTHOR PROFILE

Bonala Kondal is Assistant Professor at Geethanjali College of Pharmacy, Tarnaka, Secunderabad. He has submitted his Ph.D. thesis to the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India. His research interest includes second language writing, academic writing, second language acquisition, second language learning and computer assisted language learning.