

An investigation into dictionary use by Saudi tertiary EFL students

Submitted by

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to investigate empirically the impacts of dictionary strategy instruction and exposure on the dictionary performance, perceptions of and attitudes towards dictionary use, and knowledge of dictionary strategy and use by tertiary students of English in Saudi Arabia.

Data were collected by means of questionnaires, interviews, observation and students interview feedback. The study was carried out in two phases; phase I, in which 14 participants were chosen to carry out the interviews, and in which the questionnaire was conducted on 77 male students in the preparatory year at the College of Applied Health Science of Qassim University in Saudi Arabia; and phase II where four participants were chosen to carry out the training in dictionary use through a one-to-one tutorial mode. The data in the second phase were collected through observation and students interview feedback.

The findings from phase I of the study indicated that the Saudi students did not have appropriate knowledge of their own dictionary. It revealed some instances of failing to take advantage of the potential of dictionary use for language learning and identified factors behind this ineffective use. It demonstrated how the teacher's role was essential in this respect and could directly influence the process of dictionary implementation inside the classroom

The results of phase II demonstrated that strategy training was effective in disseminating the knowledge and skills required of students in using their dictionaries to solve linguistic problems. More importantly, the results showed that the strategy training approach holds great potential for developing students' independence and that it moves them towards greater autonomy. Thus, it is recommended that training be provided to English language learners to optimise their use of this important tool. Finally, specific implications for both teaching and future research are identified.

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