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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Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE .................................................................................. 1
1. 1 Background of the study ............................................................... 1
1. 2 Context of the study .................................................................... 3
1.2.1 Administration and organization of the Saudi education system ...... 3
1.2.2 English in Saudi Arabia ......................................................... 4
1.2.3 Cultural influences ................................................................. 7
1.2.4 LLSs inside the Saudi classroom ........................................... 10
1.2.5 College of Applied Health Sciences ....................................... 13
1. 3 Purpose of the study ................................................................. 15
1. 4 Research questions .................................................................. 16
1. 5 Importance of dictionary use research ....................................... 16
1. 6 The situation of dictionary use in Saudi Arabia ................................ 19
1. 7 Significance of the study ........................................................... 20
1.7.1 Significance of the study for Saudi Arabia .................................. 22
1. 8 Definition of terms ................................................................... 22
1. 9 Summary of the chapter ............................................................ 25

CHAPTER TWO .................................................................................. 26
2. 1 Introduction ............................................................................. 26
2. 2 Theoretical framework ............................................................... 26
2.3 Language learning strategies (LLS) ............................................ 28
2.3.1 Definition and features of learning strategies ......................... 30
2.3.2 Skills versus strategies .......................................................... 32
2.3.3 Classification of language learning strategies .......................... 33
2.3.4 Classification system for vocabulary learning strategies .......... 36
2.3.5 Role of dictionaries in vocabulary acquisition ...................... 39
2.3.6 Learning strategies and social constructivism ......................... 44
2. 4 Importance of strategies teaching ............................................. 45
2. 5 Dictionary use research ............................................................. 46
2. 6 Dictionary ownership and attitudes .......................................... 47
2.6.1 Types of dictionaries ............................................................. 49
2.6.2 Types of dictionaries in terms of medium ............................... 63
2.6.3 Choice of dictionary (pre-ownership knowledge) .................... 67
2. 7 Reference needs ...................................................................... 69
2.7.1 Difficulties of dictionary use .................................................. 74
2. 8 Key studies in dictionary use research ....................................... 78
2. 9 Training in dictionary use ......................................................... 87
2.10 Analysis of research methods used in previous research ............ 96
2.10.1 Questionnaire .................................................................... 96
2.10.2 Interviews ......................................................................... 100
2.10.3 The protocol ..................................................................... 101
DISCUSSION

4. 4 Summary of the study

5. 1 Introduction

5. 2 Study overview

5.2.1 Summary of results related to the research questions

5.2.2 Three key findings affecting dictionary use

5.2.3 Putting these three together

5.2.4 Students’ dictionary knowledge

5.2.5 Factors affecting dictionary knowledge

5.2.6 Students’ motivation to use the dictionary

5.2.7 The influence of dictionary knowledge on students’ attitudes and difficulties

5. 1 Introduction

5. 2 Study overview

5.2.1 Summary of results related to the research questions

5.2.2 Three key findings affecting dictionary use

5.2.3 Putting these three together

5.3 Discussion of dictionary training (Phase II)

5.3.1 The impact of training on student knowledge

5.3.2 The impact of training on student attitudes

5.3.3 The impact of training on fostering confidence

5.3.4 The impact of training on student autonomy

5.3.5 Change in perceptions and performance

5. 4 Summary of the chapter

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

6. 1 Introduction

6. 2 Overview of the study

6. 3 Research contribution

6. 4 Pedagogical implications

6. 5 Methodological implications for strategies training

6. 6 Study limitations

6. 7 Suggestions for future research

Reference

Appendix A: The questionnaire: English version

Appendix B: The questionnaire: Arabic version

Appendix C: Interview

Appendix D: Observation schedule