

STAGES OF USING DICTIONARY IN A TEACHING PROCESS

Tursunova Zulxumor Safarali qizi

Master of Kimyo International University of Tashkent Samarkhand branch

Abstract: This article about dictionary is an important source of improving spelling literacy and expanding vocabulary. Because working with dictionaries brings out the ability of observation in students, improves their speech culture, expands their thinking and outlook, increases their vocabulary, improves students' ability to write words correctly, and develops their creativity. In this article, the methods and a methods of using the dictionary in the process of teaching students are disclosed.

Keywords: language, dictionary, teaching, learners, process, vocabulary

Introduction.

A dictionary is an essential tool for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in the process of learning a language. Along with a course book and a grammar guide, a dictionary plays a crucial role in the language - learning process. Similar to these other resources, a learner's dictionary should also focus on teaching and guiding the student. The importance of dictionaries lies in their ability to provide not only words but also detailed information about them. In fact, dictionaries serve both productive purposes - helping to generate text and acquire vocabulary and receptive purposes - assisting in understanding new words or the details about them. As Summers (1988:111) states, "using a dictionary as a valuable activity for foreign learners of English, aiding both comprehension and production." However, the effectiveness of a dictionary depends on learners' ability to quickly and accurately find the information it provides. Utilizing a dictionary requires several skills that may not be immediately apparent when simply looking up a word.

As educators, it is essential to continuously assess and respond to different aspects of our teaching practices to ensure improvement. In this respect, this study is an action-research project focused on the use of dictionaries in the classroom. Our aim is to investigate methods for motivating students, fostering reflection and improving their vocabulary use skills during their teaching.

Main Body

Many researchers acknowledge that the American lexicographer Barnhart (1962) was a pioneer in empirical user research. He carried out a questionnaire survey among teachers who reproduced their students' ranking six information categories offered by their dictionaries and which were offered as follows: meaning, spelling, pronunciation, synonyms, usage notes, and etymology. While this survey faced criticism, its significance lies in being the starting point for the focus on user research. Despite being criticized, this survey is valuable as it serves as a starting point for focusing on user research. The study, along with Quirk's (1974) investigation, focused on dictionary use by native English speakers, although later research on EFL dictionary users revisited some of the questions from the original study.

McLaughlin (1978) suggests that developing vocabulary is the primary task for language learners. He explains that learners often carry dictionaries, rather than grammar books, when travelling abroad because vocabulary acquisition is crucial. Learners need to understand not only just individual words but also their syntactic relationships and collocations, which can be achieved through the use of a dictionary.

Folse (2014) defines vocabulary as including individual words, sets of phrases, variable phrases, phrasal verbs and idioms. He emphasizes that vocabulary is not only about the meaning of words but also involves their collocations, spelling, pronunciation, and other aspects of language use.

Teaching English as a second language in a developing country like Nigeria presents more challenges than in developed nations, where educational systems support the teaching of dictionary skills in language acquisition. In such countries, students can link word meanings to their background knowledge from their first language using bilingual dictionaries.

In Nigeria, traditional methods like chalk-and-talk instruction are still prevalent, though teachers are slowly adopting innovative learning strategies and ICT tools to enhance pedagogical activities in line with global best practices. However, the Nigeria educational systems struggle to keep up with the scientific advancements seen in developed countries, where educational policies are more closely aligned with students' needs, as opposed to being limited by the constraints of the economy. Hamilton (2012) observes the following: "Given that students' success in school and beyond depends in great measure upon their ability to read with comprehension, there is an urgency to providing instruction that equip students with the skills and strategies necessary for lifelong vocabulary development".

Recently, many educational administrators particularly in privately-owned secondary schools in Nigeria, have started to implement dictionary-based language instruction. This approach aims to significantly enhance students' communication skills, not only in vocabulary development but also in achieving proficiency in translation, reading, and writing. This aligns with the views of Gains and Redman (2005), who state that "a learner who effectively uses a dictionary can continue learning outside the classroom, gaining considerable autonomy in their educational decisions". Similarly, Leaney (2007:1) believes that "a good learner's dictionary contains a vast amount of information, sometimes even, overwhelming". The dictionary is a valuable tool for learning, particularly in an ESL context. According to Folse (2004), research on learner strategies, including the use of dictionaries and addressing students' needs, grew in the mid-1990s. Folse describes learner strategies as the particular actions students take to learn a language. Oxford (2003:8) defines learning strategies as "the specific behaviors or cognitive processes students employ to improve their second language learning." Teachers can also explore various strategies or resources to enhance effective language instruction. Some of these resources include using vocabulary cards, deducing meanings from contexts, translating from the learner's native language, breaking down word parts to understand new words, and consulting the dictionary.

Conclusion.

One of the hypotheses that has been tested through this project is that dictionaries are a stock of meanings to students and that they make very poor use of it (because they do not know how to). Besides, they do not read the introductory pages containing explanations of what the dictionary contains and instructions on how to use it. The first step should be to help the learners discover all the hidden possibilities by:

- a. teaching them what a learner's dictionary is
- b. teaching them how the information is organized
- c. devising a programme of activities to learn to use it

The dictionary-related activities encourage students' creativity, as they are not merely completing an exercise but actively exploring the language. This is also crucial because it can help build the self-confidence of less proficient learners. As we have observed, dictionary training involves various aspects, and it's not effective to teach them all at once. Instead, dictionary training should be a consistent part of classroom activities, allowing students to develop good habits and strengthen their skills. It is recommended that students practice these skills regularly throughout their academic journey, ensuring that the abilities they gain can be applied independently outside of the classroom. In fact, many researchers, such as Stark (1990: 28) and Prado Aragonés (2001: 209), agree that dictionary use should be incorporated into the teaching process. We argue that this approach should be part of the language curriculum, with the most effective method being to include it as an essential component within textbook units (for instance, when teaching verb complementation, phrasal verbs, word formation, and collocations)

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