

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' ONLINE DICTIONARY SKILLS.

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## ABSTRACT

Dictionaries are a great resource for language learners. However, there is no explicit teaching how to use dictionary effectively in my context. This paper aims to explore students' attitudes toward dictionary workshop and develop students' dictionary skills. The participants were 44 first year English major students. A semi-structured interview was administered to get in-depth data. Training took 6 hours during "Reading Strategies" class. The findings revealed that most of the students never got dictionary using skills. The results also showed that the students were satisfied with the workshop. The strength of the workshop was the workshop not relying on one dictionary. The workshop mixed three online dictionaries: Longman Dictionary, Merriam Dictionary and dictionary.com. Each dictionary contained their strengths. Moreover, the results showed that the students tended to use online dictionaries because it is fast and easy to access.

**Key words:** dictionary, online dictionaries, monolingual dictionaries, dictionary using skills

## INTRODUCTION

A dictionary is an essential tool for language learners. Landau [1] defined definition of dictionaries as books that contain lists of word in alphabetical order with descriptions of their meanings. Dictionaries are language learning materials in which language learners can find additional information about other components and aspects in the target language. If students used wisely, they can serve as a source of important information on language or as an instrument for self-study. Huang [2] stated that dictionaries are considered by many EFL learners as useful and helpful in learning English. Traditionally, paper dictionaries have been a common feature for ESL/EFL learners. Nowadays, with the easy access to the Internet, paper dictionaries have faded. With the rise in technological development, the ways of obtaining information have been diversified. Learners can consult online dictionaries by clicking the mouse or clicking the smart phones wherever they go. Macmillan English Dictionary, one of the 'Big Six', has ceased the publication of paper dictionaries in 2013 and decided in favor of an online version only [3]. Moreover, many ELT dictionaries are now freely available on the web where, for many purposes, they can be more quickly and conveniently consulted than the paper-based versions [4]. Yordchim, S., & Gibbs, T.J. [5] proposed that the use of technology can support a wide range of educational activity. The contents of online dictionaries can be as good as their traditional one. The strength of online dictionaries is innovative such as quick search and update frequency. However, it was found that many ESL/EFL learners, especially Asian learners, were not efficient dictionary users [6]. The training of dictionary skills is considered important and necessary because ESL/EFL learners may not be able to make good use of dictionaries without explicit instruction [7].

Hunt [8] proposed that training could make students become competent users of the learner's monolingual dictionaries. Hurman and Tall [9] stated in their recommendations that, "training in dictionary use should start early in a course of learning a modern language and should be an integral part of the pupils' learning." The lack of training and instruction can result in learning English. So, it is important to train learners to expertise in using dictionary.

## **OBJECTIVE**

1. To develop students' dictionary skills
2. To explore students' attitudes toward dictionary workshop

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Research design***

A qualitative research was used in this study. Participants were selected by convenience sampling. The study focused on dictionary skills by students who studying first year of English major. The interview questions and training session were used as an instrument to get the information from the participants.

### ***Participants***

The participants participated in the training were 44 first-year English major students who enrolled in "Reading Strategies course". They were convenience sampling selected from those to participate in the interview session. Of 44 participants, 3 were selected to take an interview. Those 3 participants (2 males and 1 female) were chosen because they had indicated their willingness to participate in an interview.

### ***Instruments***

An interview questions and training workshop were used as the research instrument. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three students to obtain qualitative data. The interview session was held before the training session that is "pre-interview". It took about 20 minutes for a single interview. The interview was held in Thai and recorded on mobile application and the researcher simultaneously took notes. One week after the training, the researcher conducted a post- interview. The researcher invited 3 students (who were invited to pre-interview questions) to take a post-interview questions. They commented on their dictionary use, gave feedback to the training. The interview was intended to elicit information on the training that students received on the use of a dictionary.

To ensure content validity of pre and post interview question, the researcher asked five teachers judge the appropriateness of each interview question. The validity of the study was calculated using Content Validity Index or CVI which four levels: Not relevant, somewhat relevant, quite relevant, and absolute relevant. The study got CVI at  $5/5 = 1.00$ . It means that all questions are reasonable to ask.

### ***Data Collection Procedure***

1. The pre-interview questions were held before a dictionary skill workshop. The pre-interview questions were held in Thai and recorded. It took about 20 minutes.
2. The researcher designed a dictionary skill workshop.
3. The researcher held a workshop during "Reading Strategies" class. It took about 6 hours. After the students got a workshop, they practiced the exercises related to dictionary skills.

4. After students had finished the workshop, students were requested to take a post-interview for data validation.

5. The post-interview questions were held after a workshop done. Questions asked were related to how they satisfied with the workshop and how well they used them in answering the exercises.

## RESULT

Before I designed a workshop, I interviewed students' needs towards dictionary skills. One of the pre-interview question is "Have you ever been trained on the use of a dictionary?" The semi-structured interview start with what kind of training that students have on the use of the dictionary. It will give background information about the students' previous experience with dictionaries. Three interviewees said they never receive the instruction before. The students never have been taught how to use dictionary both in high school education and university level. Two of the interviewees graduated from Science program in high school. I think it is usual for Science students that never got a dictionary skills training. This leaves a gap in dictionary training. Moreover, the researcher asked a question "Will the students join a workshop?" Three of them are willing to participate in the workshop. They would like to receive training on dictionary skills. All are agreed that training is necessary. Moreover, I asked the interviewees "Do they own any dictionaries?" One owns a monolingual dictionary and another own a bilingual dictionary. In-depth interview revealed that dictionary workshop is a very helpful tool in practicing English.

Question number one is "What are students' attitudes toward dictionary skills workshop?"

Student A: I really enjoy the workshop. I love online dictionary because it's fast and user-friendly. Also, I think I learn better when I consult dictionary with an appropriate way. I have ever known before how to know many syllables of the word. Moreover, I can practice both British accent and American accent. I love Collins dictionary the most because it provides translation into Thai. At first, I didn't expect much toward this workshop. After three hours of the course, I am really fun how to use dictionary.

Student B: I just know there are many details in dictionary. At first, I knew that there are meanings but now I realize there are many parts in dictionary entry. I love the program because it provides me to a better knowledge. The workshop is an effective way to learn vocabulary. I know how to use dictionaries not only to find meaning but also how see part of speech and how the word is stressed. However, I think I will take more time in practicing how to use dictionary.

Student C: I love Collins dictionary the most especially the video of how to pronounce the word. I like the workshop. I know more about how to use the dictionary. It is very useful. The workshop can help me in reading and writing subject for next semester. I really have fun and interesting experience in this workshop. I believe that dictionaries are language learning materials in which the learners can find additional information about other components. In the past, I focused only looking for meaning.

Three interviewees indicated that the most useful of the workshop is easy to understand. They agreed that without the workshop they will end with a chunk or broken English. The workshop really helps us to use English properly and effectively. Also, they agreed that the most interesting part is the collocations. Three interviewees never heard about collocation before. They know "do homework", "give presentations." However, they have ever known that these kinds of features called "collocation."

Question 2: What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the workshop?

Student A: I think I get more proficient in how to use a dictionary. I can consult many online dictionaries. It is not focus only one online dictionary. I can practice the workshop by myself at home. I can adapt the workshop to outside classroom situation. However, the weakness is not the workshop. My English skills are not quite well. When I consult monolingual dictionaries, I sometimes do not find clear examples that can help me to understand the meaning of a word. I can't find the right meaning of unknown words.

Student B: This workshop taught me things I haven't known before about word patterns. The most impression part is it is easy to change from one dictionary to another. So, it is a benefit of online dictionary. I can't easily switch from one paper dictionary to another. It is very easy and quick to look up words. However, it is time consuming. I take a lot of time for choosing the right meaning. That's why I prefer the bilingual one because it is really fast. Even though, I realized that the monolingual dictionary contains more definitions and examples of usage. Explanations provided in bilingual dictionary are not sufficient.

Students C: Well...the workshop makes life easier. I am also in love with many online dictionaries. That is the same with my friend "student B". I like the mixed-online dictionary. I would like to know the stressed syllable. I go for "dictionary.com" because it provides a bold font for stressed syllable. The other provides with the phonetics symbols. It is hard for me to understand the phonetics symbols. The workshop can enhance me to be an autonomous learning. I didn't waste time waiting the lecturer for vocabulary consultation. However, there is a difficulty in dictionary consultation. Accessing to the Internet is limited. The Internet connection around the university is not consistency.

Moreover, from the semi-structured interview two of the interviewees often consult dictionary for make sure the spelling of the word. One interviewee always open dictionary looking for definitions of unknown words.

## CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This study found out that students have never received dictionary skills. They do not know how to use the dictionary effectively. This finding is similar to many studies. [10]. Hamouda, Arafat [11] revealed a lack of dictionary skill training during the instruction. Li [12] stated that when teachers at the pre-university stages think it is not necessary to give formal instruction on dictionary use, while teachers at the university stage believe it is a part of the pre-university curriculum. Also, Chi Man Lai [13] suggested that dictionary skills should be integrated into English curriculum. Chan, A.Y.W. [14] recommended that teachers should raise students' awareness of the usefulness of a dictionary and help them develop dictionary skills. Organizers of teacher training programs should also consider including the training of dictionary skills as one of the chief components in their programs. This study investigated the efficiency of dictionary skills workshop. The students expressed positive attitudes and perceptions toward the workshop. In addition, the students reported that they found the workshop interesting and useful. They believe they could adapt what they get from the workshop to learn English. They are also eager to use it in other subjects and outside the classroom. They had fun, and interesting experience in joining the workshop. These findings agree with previous studies in practicing how to use dictionary [15] [16] [17] [18].

Moreover, the dictionary-using skills workshop is not only held for students but for teachers. Bae, S. [19] held dictionary training for English teachers. It was also found that explicit skill training can be a very effective mode of teaching for specific user groups such as non-native teachers of English. Future work should investigate the effectiveness of using monolingual online dictionaries especially for specific purposes such as verb phrases, compound nouns, or collocations. Further studies could also be conducted by integrating dictionary-using skills with other language learning activities.

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