

## **Assessing the Effect of Utilizing Monolingual and Bilingual Dictionaries on EFL Learners' Vocabulary**

**Maryam Shamshirian**  
**Islamic Azad University of Arak**

=====

### **Abstract**

Learning vocabulary is one of the most important elements in learning a foreign language. Dictionary as a source of vocabulary learning can be really helpful for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of monolingual and bilingual dictionary on Iranian EFL learner vocabulary. For this purpose, 77 Iranian EFL students at Zeynabiyeh high school of Arak were asked to take part in an experiment. From this population, 66 intermediate students were selected on the basis of their scores on Nelson proficiency test. First, a vocabulary test as a pre-test was given to both groups and then they were randomly divided into two groups, bilingual and monolingual groups. Then a list of unfamiliar words was given to the bilingual group to find the meaning of the words by using bilingual dictionary, while the monolingual group was to use a monolingual dictionary for finding the meanings of the words. At the end, a post-test was given to both groups. [T-test was used to analyze data]. The findings of the study revealed a significant relationship between the use of bilingual and monolingual dictionaries and the EFL learners' vocabulary.

**Keywords:** Monolingual dictionaries, Bilingual dictionaries, vocabulary, EFL learners,

### **Introduction**

Vocabulary learning is a very important task of second language learners - maybe the most important one. According to Celce-Murcia (2001, p. 285), "vocabulary learning is central to language acquisition, whether the language is first, second, or foreign". Wilkins (1972) wrote that "while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (pp.111-112). This is why adults carry dictionaries, not grammars, when they

travel in foreign countries (Hatch 1978, cited by McLaughlin 1978). There is no doubt that all second language learners and their teachers are well aware of the fact that learning a second language (L2) involves the learning of a large numbers of words (Avila & Sadoski, 1996; Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001), but how to accomplish this task is often of great concern to them.

Dictionary as a source of vocabulary learning can be really helpful for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). According to Kirkness (2004),” the dictionary has long been and still is an essential source” and he has also stated that while there are a wide variety of ways to deal with vocabulary, the use of dictionary as the conventional method of instruction, in both first and second language learning, has been triggered by all the good results. Asher (1999) views dictionary use as a gateway to independent learning (p. 66). For instance, in an EFL setting such as Korea, where target language input is limited, a dictionary is an invaluable reference to the English language. They provide learners with useful linguistic and cultural information, especially when teachers are unavailable and the learners are responsible for their own learning. (Walz,1990; Cubillo, 2002)

### **Different Types of Dictionaries**

Atkins and Rundell (2008) defined a dictionary as a description of the vocabulary used by the members of a speech community. There are approximately seven types of dictionaries: 1) Monolingual (L1-L1) Dictionaries, 2) Bilingual (L1-L2) Dictionaries, 3) Learner Dictionaries, 4)Picture Dictionaries, 5) Electronic/Multimedia Dictionaries, 6) Production Dictionaries and 7) Pocket Dictionaries. These dictionaries are looked upon as tools to facilitate the development of more strategies for learning a foreign language

### **Monolingual and Bilingual Dictionaries: A Comparison**

Tomaszczyk (1979) was the first researcher who paid attention to dictionary use by non-native English speakers and conducted some researches based on that. As far as using bilingual dictionaries among L2 learners is concerned, Nation and Coady (2001) mentioned two major advantages for using bilingual dictionary: first, they provide meanings in a very accessible way; second, they are bi-directional English first language and first language - English. But as Fan

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 15:7 July 2015

Maryam Shamsirian

Assessing the Effect of Utilizing Monolingual and Bilingual Dictionaries on EFL Learners' Vocabulary

(2000) stated, L2 learners who successfully find equal meanings of L1 and L2 words may come to this conclusion that the different languages have similar or the same word forms or stylistic characteristics. Some scholars like Thomson (1987) believed that all the details which are in a monolingual dictionary for a single word can be equally given in a bilingual dictionary as well. Moreover, he thinks that bilingual dictionary is more worthwhile than monolingual one. Meanwhile, Yorio (1971) has pointed out that the bilingual dictionaries seem to give students security of concrete answers, while monolingual dictionaries often force students to guess and predict the meaning, and lead to doubt and confusion. (Bensoussan, et al. 1984, as cited in Hayati, 2006, p. 126) According to Béjoint and Moulin (1987), bilingual dictionaries are ideal for quick consultation, while monolingual ones "though more difficult to use, have the extra merits of introducing the user right into the lexical system of L2". (p. 104)

In spite of the fact that monolingual dictionaries are less helpful in L2 to L2 translations, a high percentage of teachers are advising their students to use them to assist their reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition (Folse, 2004; Schofield, 1997). Baxter (1980) states that more emphasis should be given to the use of monolingual dictionary, because it gives the meaning of words in a context (Luppescu & Day, 1993). Underhill (1985) has pointed out that the attention of monolingual dictionaries on high frequency words is found to be much more than in bilingual dictionaries (Hayati & Fattahzadeh, 2006). Also Schofield (1997) mentioned that some experts regard monolingual dictionaries as the most helpful vocabulary references. Hayati and Fattahzadeh (2006) have also stated that a monolingual dictionary not only demonstrates definitions, but also other important aspects. He believes that more encouragement should be given to the use of monolingual dictionary, because it promotes fluency by offering definitions in context.

### **Purpose**

The present study attempts to find out the effect of using bilingual and monolingual dictionaries on the vocabulary of Iranian EFL learners because learning vocabulary has a significant role in improving four English skills.

## **Related Review of Literature**

Throughout history, scientists have conducted many studies to find out the differences between monolingual and bilingual dictionaries in language learning. For instance, in Knight's investigation (1994) which blocked the students on the basis of their level of language proficiency, students who used a bilingual dictionary scored higher on all the vocabulary tests administered than those who did not. In addition Hayati and Pour Mohammadi (2005) investigated the impact of the bilingual dictionary compared with the monolingual on reading comprehension among EFL Iranian intermediate students studying at Shahid Chamran University of Ahwaz. The results indicated that using a dictionary during reading can aid intermediate students to comprehend a text more efficiently. Regarding the effectiveness of the bilingual dictionary, the results reveal that the bilingual dictionary is a powerful and effective pedagogical tool; it can appear as useful as a monolingual one in reading comprehension of intermediate EFL students.

Lupescu and Day (1993) examined whether the use of a bilingual dictionary enhanced vocabulary learning in a reading task. A group of Japanese university students (N = 293) read a story that included 17 unknown words whose meaning could be inferred; half the group had access to a bilingual dictionary while half had no dictionary. After reading, all were given a multiple choice vocabulary test. The group that had accessed to the dictionary had a mean score on the vocabulary test that was 50% higher than the no dictionary group. This suggests that the use of a bilingual dictionary can enhance vocabulary learning (through reading).

Another study by Laufer & Levitzky-Avaid (2006), showed the superiority of bilingual dictionaries to the monolingual and bilingualized dictionaries.

Also Hayati & Fattahzadedh (2006) in other research examined the effect of bilingual and monolingual dictionaries on vocabulary retention and recall of EFL learners at Shahid Chamran university of Ahvaz among 100 Iranian student who were studying English as a foreign language; the results indicated, there was no significant difference between two dictionaries which were used by groups in vocabulary recall and retention. And if the time is not limited, the

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 15:7 July 2015

Maryam Shamsirian

Assessing the Effect of Utilizing Monolingual and Bilingual Dictionaries on EFL Learners' Vocabulary

monolingual dictionary helps its users to process the words deeply for retention purpose, but under the pressure of time, the use of the bilingual dictionary, while reading, can facilitate learning vocabulary.

So this research seeks to find the answer to the following question:

Is there any significant relationship between using bilingual and monolingual dictionaries on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary?

Research Hypothesis: There is no relationship between using bilingual and monolingual dictionaries on Iranian EFL learners.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

The participants were 77 females EFL high school students from Arak in Iran. They were at the first grade of high school and their ages ranged from 15 to 16. They were intermediate students. They were divided in two groups and these two groups randomly assigned to one of the two dictionaries used for finding meaning of vocabularies (bilingual and monolingual).

### **Instruments**

#### ***Language proficiency test (Nelson)***

Nelson proficiency test was utilized in this study as the pedestal for evaluating the subjects' level of proficiency in English and homogenize subjects. This proficiency test consisted of 50 multiple-choice items that assessed the test taker's grammar and vocabulary.

#### ***Vocabulary test***

This teacher-made test consisted of 30 fill in the blanks items. Every question contained one sentence that asked the student to fill in the blank or choose the answer from the target language words.

## **Procedure**

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 15:7 July 2015

Maryam Shamshirian

Assessing the Effect of Utilizing Monolingual and Bilingual Dictionaries on EFL Learners' Vocabulary

In process of carrying out the present research, the investigator took the following procedure to achieve the objectives of the current study. In the first phase, two classes randomly selected among first grade high school classes of Zeynabieye high school in Arak. The proficiency level of subjects was measured by Nelson proficiency test. It was decided to choose a homogeneous group of subjects to begin with intermediate students. At first students were 77 but after the proficiency test, 10 students were deleted from research. They were female students from 15 to 16 years old. In the second phase, the vocabulary test was administered to two classes and the words which were familiar for students in vocabulary pre-test, were deleted from the list and new words were substituted in the list. The time for answering the vocabulary test was 30 minutes, then two classes randomly divided in two groups to use bilingual or monolingual dictionaries. In the third phase, the researcher gave the subjects a list of words containing 35 unfamiliar words. The bilingual group found the meaning of words by using the bilingual dictionary and the monolingual group used monolingual dictionaries for finding the meaning. In the fourth phase, after one week the vocabulary post-test was administered to two classes at the same time, which was the same as pre-test.

## **Result and Discussion**

To determine the effect of monolingual dictionary and bilingual dictionary on learners' vocabulary the research question and hypothesis were analyzed and discussed in the following ways:

At first, the performances of the bilingual group and monolingual group were analyzed by an independent sample T-test.

As it shows in tables, sig (tailed)=.000, and it is lower than P- value, so hypothesis of current study was rejected and two numbers in column ( 95% confidence interval of the difference) have not included zero and it shows, there is a significant differences between performances of students who used bilingual and monolingual dictionaries.

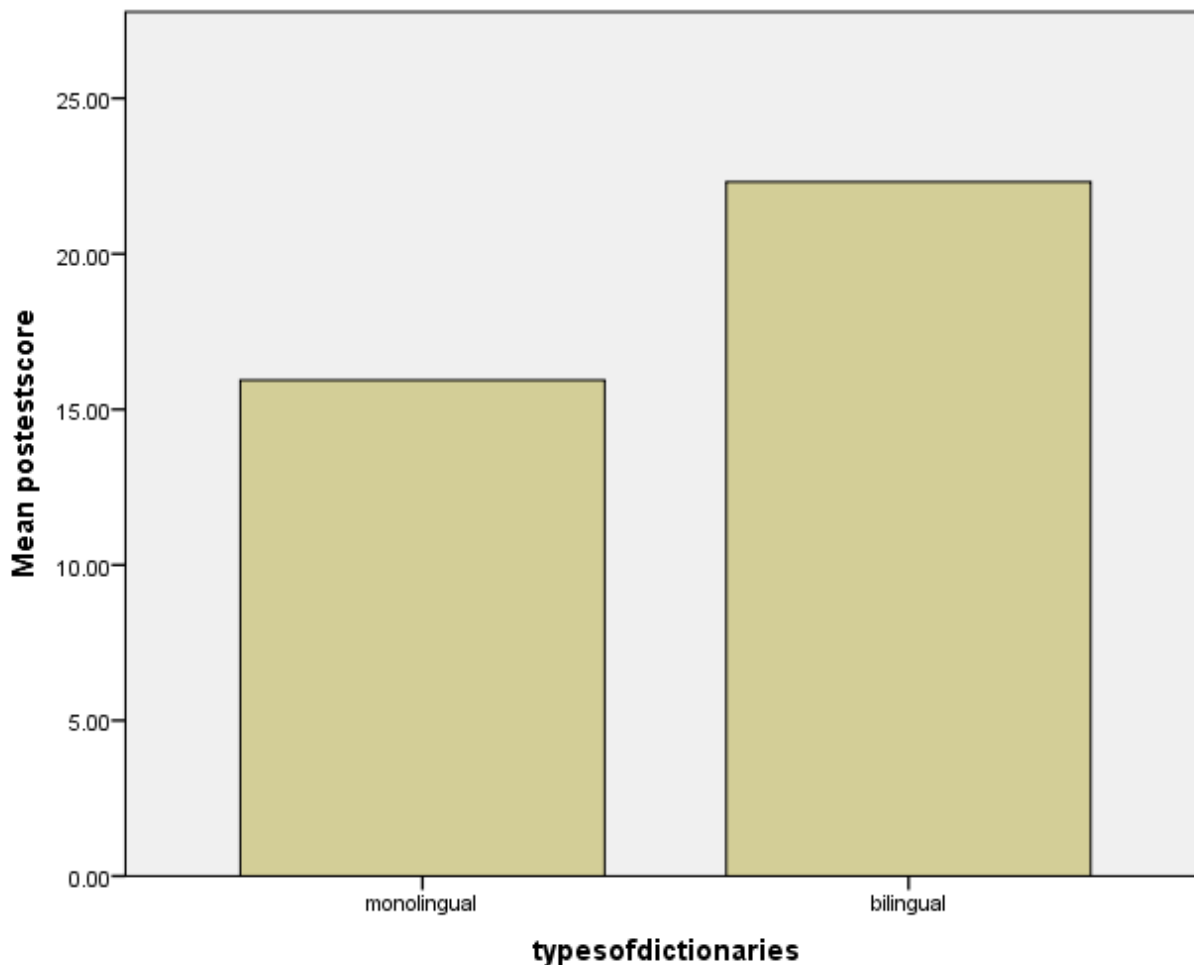
Sig (tailed) =.000 < 0.05 = □□□□□□□

### Group Statistics

	Types of dictionaries	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post- test score	Monolingual	32	15.9375	3.72383	.65829
	Bilingual	35	22.3143	3.24283	.54814

### Independent samples test

	Leven's Test Equal Variance		T-test for Equality of means							
	F	Sig.	t	D f	Sig. (tailed)	Mean difference	St .Error Difference	95% confidence interval of difference		
								Lower	upper	
Post score	.333	.566	-	65	.000	-6.37679	.85128	-	-	
Equal Variance assumed			7.491	62.84	.000	-6.37679	.85662	8.07692	4.67665	
Equal Variance not assumed			-					-	-	
			7.449					8.08925	4.66432	

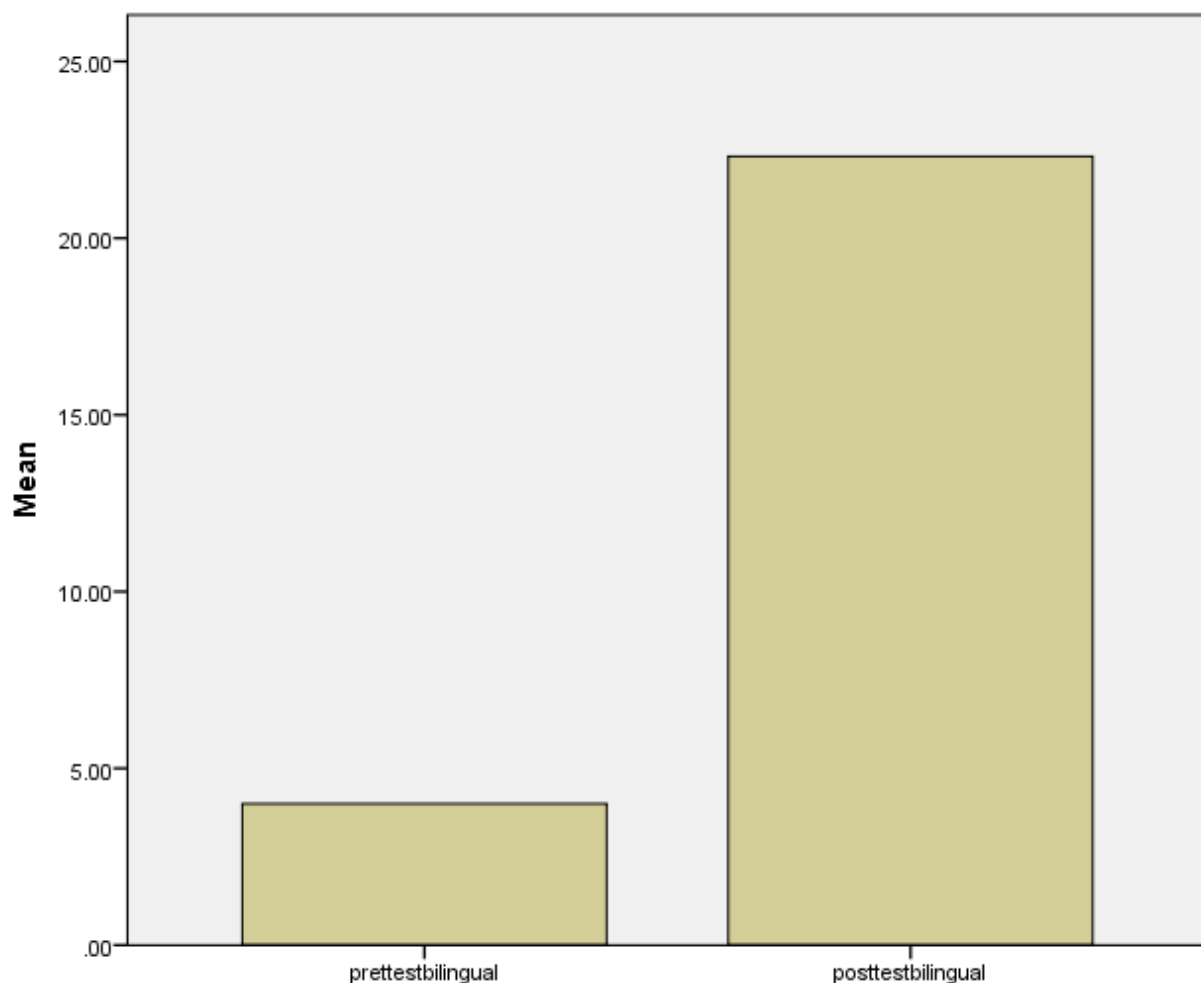


As mentioned before in different studies, both bilingual and monolingual dictionaries have effect on vocabulary learning and the following graph indicates effect of utilizing monolingual and bilingual dictionaries in every group separately by paired sample t-test.

At it can be noticed the finding of the present researcher is in line with finding of Laufer & Levitzky-Avaid (2006) that pointed out the superiority of bilingual dictionaries to the monolingual dictionaries, on English learners' vocabulary. Also the result of this study supported Knight's investigation (1994), which reported Students who used a bilingual dictionary scored higher on all the vocabulary tests administered than those who did not.



On the other hand, this result was incongruent with the research done by Hayati and Pour Mohammadi (2005) and Hayati & Fattahzadedh (2006). In their studies they pointed out that there is no significant difference between two dictionaries which were used by groups in vocabulary recall and retention.

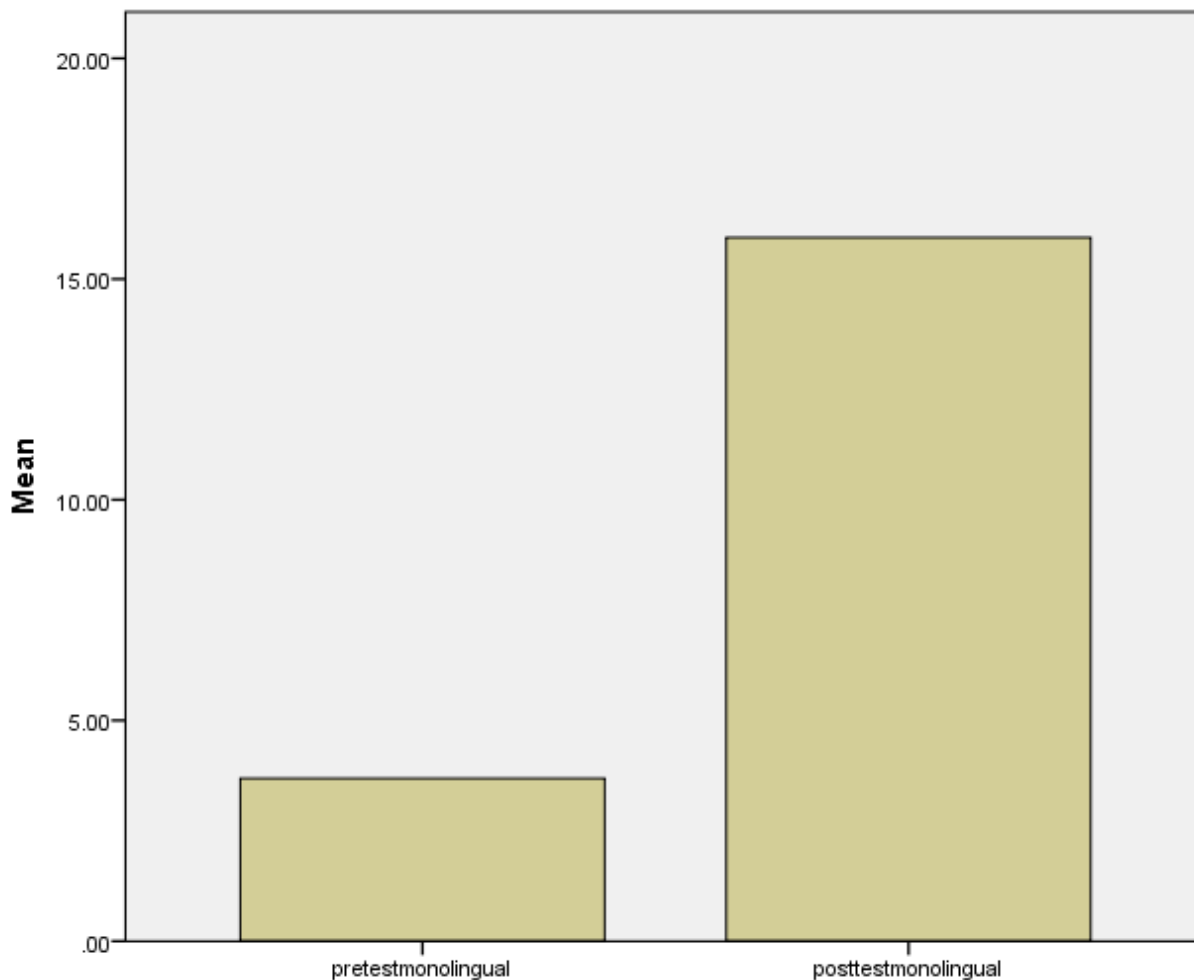


The above graph shows the effect of bilingual on Iranian EFL vocabularies and students have better performance in doing posttest after using bilingual dictionary

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 15:7 July 2015

Maryam Shamshirian

Assessing the Effect of Utilizing Monolingual and Bilingual Dictionaries on EFL Learners' Vocabulary



The graph above indicates the impact of using monolingual dictionaries on Iranian EFL learners.

### Conclusion and Implication

The main objective of this article was to find an answer to the question of whether the utilizing of monolingual and bilingual dictionaries have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary. So, the present researcher selected two groups of female students in the first grade of high school and after administering the proficiency test for homogenizing subjects, gave them a vocabulary test, and then randomly assigned them to find the meaning of un familiar words by using bilingual and monolingual dictionaries. Finally the researcher repeated the

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 15:7 July 2015

Maryam Shamsirian

Assessing the Effect of Utilizing Monolingual and Bilingual Dictionaries on EFL Learners' Vocabulary

vocabulary test for subjects. The result rejected the hypothesis which stated “There is no relationship between using bilingual and monolingual dictionaries on Iranian EFL learners”. The result indicated that using both bilingual and monolingual dictionaries can be a helpful device for improving learner vocabulary, but as the table shows the performance of students using bilingual dictionary tends to be significantly different from those who use monolingual ones and the former learned the vocabulary better than the latter.

Besides, the findings of this study may have some hints for English language teachers, educators and also the learners. Also the result of this research will be useful for Iran’s educational system; and teachers could use it in Iranian institutes and schools for helping students learn vocabulary better and more effectively, using different types of dictionaries, especially bilingual ones.

---

### **Acknowledgment**

I would like to thank all who have made this piece of work possible. I would particularly thank Dr. Mojtab Maghsoudi for all his help and encouragement over this paper. I would express my thanks to my beloved husband who encouraged me and gave his support. I am very grateful to students of Zeynabiye high school who patiently answered to my various tests and also my best friend Ftemeh Eskandari who helped me in carrying out my research in Zeynabiyeh high school.

---

### **References**

- [1] Avila, E., & Sadoski, M. (1996). Exploring new applications of the keyword method to acquire English vocabulary. *Language Learning*, 46,379-395.
- [2] Atkins, B.T.S. and M. Rundell.2008. *The Oxford Guide to Practical Lexicography*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [3] Asher, C. (1999). Using dictionaries in the GCSE examination of modern foreign languages: Teachers' views and learners' performance. *Studies in Modern Languages Education*, 7, 59-67

- [4] Baxter, J. (1980). The dictionary and vocabulary behavior: a single word or a handful? *TESOL Quarterly*, 14, 325-336.
- [5] Béjoint, H.B and Moulin. 1987. "The place of the dictionary in an EFL program". In A. Cowie (e d.). *The dictionary and the language learner*. Tübingen
- [6] Bensoussan, M., Sim, D. & Weiss, R. (1984). The effect of dictionary usage on EFL test performance compared with student and teacher attitudes and expectations. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 2, 262-276.
- [7] Celce-Marcia, M. (2001). *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (3rd ed.). Boston Massachusetts: Heinle & Heinle.
- [8] Cubillo, M. (2002). Dictionary Use and Dictionary Needs of ESP students: An experimental Approach. *International Journal of Lexicography* 15(2), 206-228
- [9] Fan, M. Y., 2000. "The dictionary look-up behavior of Hong Kong students: A large- scale survey", *Educational Journal* 28(1), pp. 2-17.
- [10] Folse, K., 2004. "Vocabulary myths: *Applying second language research to classroom teaching*, Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan.
- [11] Hulstijn, J., Hollander, M., & Greidanus, T. (1996). Incidental vocabulary learning by advanced foreign language students: The influence of marginal glosses, dictionary use and reoccurrence of unknown words. *Modern Language Journal*, 80, 327-339
- [12] Hatch, E. (1978). Discourse analysis and second language acquisition. In E. Haiti, (ed.), *Second language acquisition: a book of readings*. Newbury House, Rowley: Mass.
- [13] Hayati, M., & Fattahzadeh, A (2006). The effect on monolingual and bilingual dictionaries on vocabulary s recall and retention of EFL learners. *Journal of the Reading Matrix*, 6(2), 125-134.
- [14] Hayati, A. M., and M., Pourmohammadi, 2005. "A comparative study of using bilingual and monolingual dictionaries in reading comprehension of intermediate EFL students", *The Reading Matrix* 5 (2), pp. 61-66.
- [15] Kirkness, Alan (2004). "Lexicography" in the hand book of applied linguistics ed. by A Davis & Elder, Oxford Blackwell, pp.54-81.

- [16] Knight, S. (1994). Dictionary use while reading: The effects on comprehension and vocabulary acquisition for students of different verbal abilities. *The Modern Language Journal*, 78, 286-298.
- [17] Laufer, B & Hadar, L. (1997). Assessing the effectiveness of monolingual, bilingual, and "bilingualized" dictionaries in the comprehension and production of new words. *Modern Language Journal*, 81, 189–196.
- [18] Laufer, B., & Hulstijn, J. (2001). Incidental vocabulary acquisition in a second language: [19] Luppescu, S., & Day, R. R. (1993). Reading, dictionaries, and vocabulary learning. *Journal of Language Learning*, 43, 263-287.
- [20] McLaughlin, B. (1978). The monitor model: *Some methodological considerations*. *Language Learning*, 28, 309-332.
- [21] Nation, I. S. P., and J., Coady, 2001. "*Learning vocabulary in another language*", Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- [22] Piotrowski, T 1989. "Monolingual and bilingual dictionaries: fundamental differences." In M.L.
- [23] Raudaskoski, S. (2002). Translation, the key or equivalent? A study of dictionary use strategies of finish senior secondary school students. Retrieved October, 12, 2008 from <http://kdictionary.com/newsletter/kdn10-100.html>
- [24] Schmitt, N., Schmitt, D. and Clapham, C. (2001). «Developing and exploring the behavior of two new versions of the Vocabulary Levels Test», in *Language Testing*, 18, 1: 55-88.
- [25] Schmitt, & M. McCarthy (Eds.), *Vocabulary: Description, acquisition, and pedagogy* (pp.279-302). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- [26] Scholfield, P. 1982. "The role of bilingual dictionaries in ESL/EFL: a positive view". *Guidelines* 4 (1), pp. 84-98.
- [27] Schofield, P., 1997. "Vocabulary reference works in foreign language learning", In N. Schmitt, & M. McCarthy (Eds.), *Vocabulary: Description, acquisition, and pedagogy* (pp.279-302). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. .
- Summers, D. (1988). The language teaching (pp. 111) e role of dictionaries in language learning. In R. Carter & M. McCarthy (Eds.), *Vocabulary and* –125). London : Longman
- [28] Tickoo (ed.), *Learners' Dictionaries: State of the Art*. Anthology Series 23. SEAMEO

- [29] Tomaszczyk, J. (1979). Dictionaries: users and uses. *Glottodidactical*, 12, 103-119
- [30] Thompson, G. (1987). Using bilingual dictionaries. *ELT Journal*, 41, 282-286.
- [31] Underhill, A. (1985). Working with the monolingual learners' dictionary. In R. Ilson (Eds.), *Dictionaries, lexicography and language learning* (pp. 181–190). Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- [32] .Wilkins, D (1972).Linguistics in language teaching. London: Arnold
- [33] Walz, J. (1990). The Dictionary as a Secondary Source in Language Learning. *The French Review*, 64(1), 79 94.
- [34] Yorio, C.A. (1971). Some sources of reading problems for foreign language learners. *Language Learning*. 21: 107-15.
- [35] Zgusta, L. (1971). *Manual of lexicography* .Praha, Academia.
- 

Maryam Shamshirian  
Islamic Azad University of Arak  
[M\\_shamshirian@yahoo.com](mailto:M_shamshirian@yahoo.com)