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The Effects of Electronic Dictionary Use on Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Retention of EFL Students

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Abstract
The dictionary is an essential learning tool for second and foreign language (L2) learners. Yet, the effects of dictionaries, either in printed or electronic form, have never been systematically investigated in the Algerian context. Consequently, this paper compared readers' L2 text comprehension and vocabulary retention across two dictionary conditions. Reading time, dictionary usage, degree of comprehension, and recall of words were the dependent measures employed. Forty-four EFL sophomores were assigned two reading tasks under two conditions: using a printed dictionary (PD) at one time and an electronic dictionary (ED) at another. The presentation mode of the reading tests was on computer screen alone. We used a piece of monitoring software (MS) to record the subjects' lookups in the ED condition and to take notes of the time each subject needed to finish the reading task in both conditions. A paired-samples t-test was then conducted to test the research hypotheses. As for the vocabulary retention tests, we administered a pretest and posttest to the subjects in both lookup conditions (PD and ED), and an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare memory for words. The analysis of information revealed that the ED enabled the subjects to read the text in significantly less time than the PD did. It was also found that the subjects looked up significantly more words in the ED than in the PD. However, the results indicate that the type of dictionary accessed does not significantly influence comprehension. With regard to vocabulary retention, the findings revealed that PD lookup fosters better recall of vocabulary. It was concluded that EDs would be effective and motivating aids to reading comprehension but could be detrimental to vocabulary retention.

Keywords: Electronic dictionary, printed dictionary, Log files, reading comprehension, Vocabulary retention