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Effects of Using Urdu Dictionary as a Teaching Tool for Teaching Urdu in Urdu Language Classroom in Pakistan

Zafar Iqbal, Ph.D.

Ali Ahmad, M.A, M.Ed., Ph.D. Candidate

Rana Faqir Muhammad Aslam, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

Abstract

Dictionary can be a great tool for teaching and learning language as it covers the language at stretch.

The present study aims at investigating the effects of using a dictionary during language teaching at secondary level. The hypothesis tested was that the use of dictionary brings no difference in language learning.

The study, quantitative in nature, followed a pre-test, post-test single group experimental design. A questionnaire was also administered among the teachers imparting language education. The population of the study consisted of the high school students learning Urdu as a subject as well as the teachers teaching Urdu at this level. Fifty secondary school teachers teaching Urdu at secondary level and 100 students learning Urdu at the said level were selected as the sample of the study. It was found that the use of dictionary during teaching enhanced the language learning. The students started taking more interest in language learning and the use of dictionary made Language in India www.languageinindia.com 215

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Zafar Iqbal, Ph.D., Ali Ahmad, M.A., M.Ed., Ph.D. Candidate and

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language teaching very powerful and learners brought significantly different results from the group who were learning language without using a dictionary.

Key Words: language; teaching and learning; dictionary; students; Urdu.

1. Introduction

Teaching dictionary skills hold great importance in language teaching. Assam (2006:196) advises to avoid negligence about the teaching of dictionary skills and providing them with the education of dictionary culture. Hadebe (2004) suggests that the dictionary skills can be incorporated by including the said activity in “teacher training syllabi”.

A dictionary is a “book about language” (Jackson, 2002:21) which can play a vital role in language teaching. As a reference book, dictionaries help to do away with confusions about a language. Dictionaries have developed not only as a theoretical instrument but as practical tools (Al-Kasimi, 1977) with the increased roles language has assumed. A dictionary, an encyclopaedia and a thesaurus are learner’s great aids to learning. A dictionary is a part of language learners’ essential equipment and may be regarded as the repository of final linguistic authority and a bank account of words. Reliable information about words as well as their usage is taken from it. The success of a dictionary largely depends on the way information is organized and patterned in it.

Dictionaries are a great source of information about words; their origin, their meaning and the context in which they are used. From primary to higher level, it is vocabulary that poses a great deal of problems since vocabulary is more than learning more words; rather it is concerned with knowing more about them.

Words have literal and contextual meanings. The meanings of a word is composed of a number of features: its relation with real world, the association that it carries with it, its relationship with other words in the vocabulary and the regular company that it keeps with other words in sentence and text structure. Many words have more than one meaning (Jackson, 2002).

Dictionaries can be used in class rooms to enhance the impact of language teaching and learning. In order to explain the exact meanings of a word and its use in a particular context, the dictionaries can be used as a part of the curriculum as well. Chi (2003) suggests that the dictionary teaching should be introduced in the curriculum of tertiary level; moreover, she maintains that the teacher of language should be trained about using dictionary.

Urdu is the national language of Pakistan. It is used as a lingua franca in this society where a lot of linguistic diversity exists.

The research work on Urdu language generally and particularly on Urdu lexicography is very little. The teaching of Urdu in the class room is based on literature. From tertiary to master level, literature is used to teach the language. Unfortunately, the syllabi on all the levels do not contain element regarding use of dictionary. As it is stated above, the use of dictionary for teaching language can be of great help. The present study aims at finding out the role of dictionary skills in improving language learning.

1.1 Aim of the study

Dictionaries can play very important role in the learning of language. These comprehensive books of language can be a great source for enhancement of language skill. The main aim of the study is to investigate the effects of using dictionary as a teaching tool during teaching of language to a language class room. The study is limited to find the answer to the following questions:

1.1.1 Research Questions

1. Does dictionary affect language learning?
2. Is there any significant difference between the language learners who use a dictionary and those who do not use a dictionary?

2. Methodology

The method of research opted for this study is quantitative. The study followed a single group pre-test post test experimental design. A questionnaire was also administered among the teachers teaching language to the secondary students.

2.1 Population and sample

The population and sample of the study is as following:

1. The teachers engaged in teaching Urdu at secondary level and the students engaged in learning Urdu language at the same level were selected as the population of the study.
2. 100 students and 50 teachers were selected as the sample of the study. A questionnaire was administered among these teachers. A test of language skills of the students was taken from the students as a pre-test. Then the researchers managed to teach the students language during which they used dictionary as a tool of teaching language. The proper use of dictionary during language learning was also taught separately. After the teaching of 6 weeks, a post-test was conducted and the results were analyzed.

2.2 The Questionnaire

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The questionnaire was adapted from Hartmann (1999), Nesi (2000), Tono (2001), Lan (2009) and Ahmad (2009). The questionnaire included 13 questions. The questionnaire was administered among the teachers teaching language at secondary level. The questionnaire included questions about the habits of using dictionaries, the use of specific type of the dictionary, the frequency of dictionary use during language teaching tasks, information about the ownership of dictionaries, the use of electronic and online dictionaries and teaching the use of dictionaries in language class rooms.

2.3 The Test

A pre-test was taken from the selected 100 students to assess their language skills. Then training was managed one hour daily for six weeks about the use of a dictionary during language learning tasks. After the training, a post-test was administered to the same group of students. The pre-test and the post-test included 100 questions based on the following areas:

1. Using dictionary to know the meaning of lexemes.
2. Finding out grammatical information in a dictionary.
3. Arranging lexemes in alphabetical order.
4. Explaining pronunciations of the words.
5. Finding collocations of phrases and idioms from the dictionary.

The test was evaluated and t-test was used to compare the results of pre-test and post-test results.

3. Findings

The findings of the tests and questionnaire are discussed below separately:

3.1 The test

The students selected as sample went through an experiment. A test was administered among these students before the start of the study. The researchers then taught the students for 6 weeks. During the training of the students, the researchers used dictionary as a tool of teaching. A training of dictionary use was also given to the same group of student. The results of both the tests were calculated using t-test experimental design. Following are the results of the test:

Table 1: T-test Whole Sample

		Mean	N	St. Deviation	T Value	P Value
Pair	Overall Pre-test	45.02	100	14.94	-32.66	.001
1	Overall Post-test	51.71	100	15.98		

Table 1 shows the results for the whole sample. The comparison of the achievements of the whole group from the pre-test to the post-test reflects a change of the mean score from 45.02 to 51.71. Hence there is a mean difference of 6.69. The t value is quite high at -32.66 which is quite significant at the selected probability level. Therefore, we can conclude that there is a significant difference between the achievement of the whole group on the pre-test and the post-test scores.

Table 2: Low Achievers

		Mean	N	St. Deviation	T Value	P Value
Pair	Overall Pre-test	32.04	50	7.35	-19.83	.0001
1	Overall Post-test	39	50	9.20		

The comparison of the achievements of the low achievers from the pre-test to the post-test reflects a change of the mean score from 34.04 to 39. Hence there is a mean difference of 6.96. The t value is quite high at -19.83, which is quite significant at the selected probability level. Therefore, we can conclude that there is a significant difference between the achievement of the low achievers on the pre-test and the post-test scores.

Table 3: High Achievers

		Mean	N	St. Deviation	T Value	P Value
Pair	Overall Pre-test	58	50	7.28	-30.48	.0001
1	Overall Post-test	64.4	50	6.76		

The comparison of the achievements of the High Achievers from the pre-test to the post-test reflects a change of the mean score from 58 to 64.4. Hence there is a mean difference of 6.4. The t value is quite high at -30.48 which is quite significant at the selected probability level. Therefore, we can conclude that there is a significant difference between the achievement of the High achievers on the pre-test and the post-test scores.

3.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was administered among 50 language teachers imparting language education at secondary level. The analysis in table 4 is drawn manually based on the responses of the respondents.

Table 4: Analysis of questionnaires

Sr. #	Statement	Always	Nearly Always	Half of the time	Rarely	Never
1	I use a dictionary while language learning.	10* 20%**	05 10%	07 14%	18 36%	10 20%
2	I use a monolingual dictionary.	21 42%	11 22%	10 20%	07 14%	01 02%
3	I use a bilingual dictionary.	10 20%	22 44%	08 40%	03 06%	07 14%
4	I got a training of dictionary use.	00 0%	03 06%	06 12%	07 14%	34 68%
5	My teachers used a dictionary during teaching language in class room.	00 0%	00 0%	01 02%	03 06%	46 92%
6	We were encouraged to use a dictionary while language learning.	00 0%	00 0%	00 0%	06 12%	44 88%
7	Dictionary use enhances language learning.	36 72%	12 24%	02 04%	00 0%	00 0%
8	Dictionary is an enjoyable activity.	10 20%	05 10%	21 42%	04 8%	10 20%
9	I use dictionary as a tool of language teaching to the language learners.	02 4%	05 10%	03 6%	11 22%	29 58%
10	I encourage my students to use a dictionary.	07 14%	09 18%	14 28%	08 16%	12 24%

*The Numbers in the columns show the frequency of the responses.

** The percentages are denoting percentages of this frequency, calculated manually.

The table 4 shows the results of the analysis of the questionnaires administered among the teachers. The results show that the most of the teachers avoid (20%) or try to avoid (36%) dictionary use. The teachers who claim to use a dictionary regularly are only 20% which is a very low ratio. The use of monolingual dictionary is almost equal. The users who always or nearly always use a monolingual or a bilingual dictionary is 32%.

The training of dictionary use in Pakistan is almost nothing. 68% of the teachers never and 14% rarely got a training of dictionary use. They learnt the use of dictionary by hit and trial method. Only 18% of the respondents are those who got the training half of the time or more than it. The teachers claimed that their teachers did not use a dictionary in the class room (92%), and only 6% of the respondents said that their teachers rarely used a dictionary in the class room for teaching. Same is the case with question of encouraging the learners towards getting help from a dictionary to enhance the learning. The respondents told that in 88% cases, they were never encouraged to use a dictionary. Only 12% were such teachers who said that they were rarely encouraged for this activity.

Though the respondents gave a mixed response regarding the activity of dictionary use; 30% declared it always or nearly always enjoyable and 42% admitted that it is enjoyable half of the time, there was a clear cut opinion of the teachers that the dictionary use enhances the learning of language (72+24%=96%).

The teachers, despite the fact that they affirmed that the dictionary use can improve language learning, told that they mostly (58%) do not use a dictionary as a tool of teaching or they rarely (22%) use it. That is the perhaps reason that they do not encourage (24%), rarely encourage (14%) or half of the time (28%) encourage their students to use a dictionary.

The results show a very hopeless situation of dictionary use in Pakistan. Though the teachers know that the use of a dictionary is very helpful in language learning, it increases the language abilities and basic knowledge of a learner about the language, they do not attempt to inculcate the activity in teaching practices. The teachers were not trained to use a dictionary and now they are trying to keep that custom alive.

4. Conclusion

The above discussion elucidates that the use of dictionary in the class room as a tool of language learning and training the students about the appropriate use of the dictionary effects the learning positively. It serves a lot in improving language skills. The students showed great interest in using dictionary for knowing language during the treatment. The students themselves explored

about the language and it was a fascinating experience for them. They were not used to it. The language was being taught through the instructions of the teacher or by consulting help books. Hadebe (2004) has recommended that the teachers should be taught using dictionary which is only possible through the training of teachers.

The teachers established the view that the dictionary use can be of great help in learning a language. However, they admit that they do not ask the students to use a dictionary. They started using a dictionary by chance and they are expecting the same from their students. They admit that the dictionary can be an enormous source of learning language and it can accelerate the process of learning, they do not encourage their students to pick up a dictionary to consult it.

The study suggests that there is a terrible need of introducing dictionary use in the language class room. It can be done by incorporating dictionary use in curriculum with which we will be getting maximum and rapid results from language teaching.

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Zafar Iqbal Ph.D.
Department of English
University of Education
Multan
Pakistan

Ali Ahmad, M.A. M.Ed., Ph.D. Candidate
Department of English
Bahauddin Zakariya University
Multan
Pakistan
ali72678@yahoo.com

Rana Faqir Muhammad Aslam, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate
Department of English
Bahauddin Zakariya University
Multan
Pakistan
fmarana@yahoo.com