

The Role of Online Dictionaries in EFL Learning within a Digitally Transformed Educational Context

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Abstract

Educational digitalization has played a significant role in reshaping EFL teaching and learning, particularly in enhancing vocabulary development. The integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) has fostered more personalized, interactive, and autonomous learning environments, enabling learners to actively engage with language beyond classroom boundaries. Within this context, online dictionaries have emerged as essential digital tools supporting lexical development and learner agency. Unlike traditional print dictionaries, online dictionaries function as dynamic, multifunctional platforms that provide immediate access to definitions, phonetic transcriptions, audio pronunciation, authentic usage examples, collocations, frequency data, and corpus-based information. These features enable learners to conceptualize vocabulary as a multidimensional construct encompassing form, meaning, and use rather than isolated word-meaning pairs. Empirical research consistently indicates that dictionary use positively impacts second language vocabulary development, with online dictionaries often proving more effective than print versions due to their accessibility, multimodal support, and increased consultation frequency.

Introduction

The rapid digital transformation of education has fundamentally reshaped language teaching and learning, particularly in the area of vocabulary acquisition within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. The integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) has fostered more interactive, personalized, and learner-centred environments, promoting greater autonomy and engagement. As digital tools become increasingly embedded in everyday learning practices, traditional approaches to vocabulary development are being supplemented and, in some cases, replaced by technology-enhanced methods.

Within this evolving educational landscape, online dictionaries have become essential resources for EFL learners. Unlike traditional print dictionaries, digital dictionaries function as dynamic and multifunctional tools, providing immediate access to a wide range of linguistic

information, including definitions, phonetic transcriptions, audio pronunciation, usage examples, collocations, and corpus-based frequency data. These features facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of vocabulary by addressing meaning, form, and use. Research has consistently shown that dictionary use supports second language vocabulary acquisition, with online dictionaries often offering greater effectiveness due to their accessibility, multimodal design, and frequency of use. As a result, they play a significant role in enhancing vocabulary development and fostering learner autonomy in contemporary EFL education.

1. Monolingual Online Dictionaries and L2 Development: The Pedagogical Value of Monolingual Online Dictionaries in EFL Contexts

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, monolingual online dictionaries are increasingly recognized as valuable pedagogical tools that facilitate deeper cognitive engagement and promote thinking directly in the target language. Unlike bilingual dictionaries, which typically encourage rapid lexical access through first-language (L1) translation, monolingual dictionaries require learners to process meanings through the second language (L2) itself. This process has been shown to foster stronger lexical networks and more refined conceptual representations in the target language, thereby supporting more durable vocabulary acquisition (Béjoint & Moulin, 1987; Laufer & Messerman, 2010).

Empirical research comparing dictionary types suggests that learners who use monolingual dictionaries, particularly at intermediate and advanced proficiency levels, often demonstrate superior vocabulary learning outcomes. For example, experimental studies have found that monolingual dictionary use leads to significantly higher gains in vocabulary retention and more accurate lexical use in productive tasks, such as sentence construction and written output, compared to bilingual dictionary use (Ahangari & Dogolsara, 2015; Laufer & Hadar, 1997). These findings support the claim that monolingual dictionaries promote deeper semantic processing, as learners must interpret definitions, usage notes, and examples without relying on direct translation equivalents.

Large-scale quantitative evidence further reinforces the pedagogical effectiveness of dictionary consultation. A comprehensive meta-analysis by Zhang, Xu, and Zhang (2020), which synthesized 125 effect sizes from 44 studies involving over 3,400 learners, reported large overall effect sizes for dictionary use in L2 vocabulary learning ($g = 1.03\text{--}2.10$). Importantly, the analysis demonstrated that dictionary type and learner training significantly moderated learning outcomes, indicating that learners who are instructed in effective lookup strategies benefit substantially more from dictionary use than untrained learners.

Moreover, digital monolingual dictionaries offer affordances that extend beyond basic word meaning. Online learner dictionaries provide access to authentic usage examples, collocational patterns, frequency information, pronunciation models, and pragmatic constraints, all of which contribute to the development of lexical competence and pragmatic awareness (Lew, 2019; Nation, 2013). Exposure to such rich, contextualized input aligns with usage-based theories of language acquisition, which emphasize the role of meaningful input and repeated exposure in internalizing lexical and grammatical patterns.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that monolingual online dictionaries constitute powerful instructional resources in EFL settings, particularly when integrated with explicit learner training. Their use not only enhances vocabulary retention and productive accuracy but

also supports the development of autonomous learning skills and target-language conceptualization, which are essential for long-term L2 proficiency.

2. Learner Autonomy, Digital Literacy, and Pedagogical Implications

The growing integration of online dictionaries into EFL learning aligns closely with broader educational paradigms associated with digital transformation, particularly those emphasizing learner autonomy, self-regulated learning, and lifelong learning competencies. Learner autonomy, defined as the learner's capacity to take charge of their own learning (Holec, 1981), has long been regarded as a central goal of communicative and learner-centred language pedagogy (Benson, 2011). Online dictionaries support this goal by enabling learners to independently identify lexical gaps, explore meanings, and verify usage without immediate reliance on teacher mediation. Such practices encourage metacognitive engagement and support the development of strategic competence in vocabulary learning (Nation, 2013).

From a self-regulation perspective, dictionary consultation can function as a form of strategic problem-solving, allowing learners to set goals (e.g., understanding a text), select appropriate resources, and evaluate outcomes (Oxford, 2017). Digital monolingual dictionaries particularly facilitate inquiry-based learning by providing rich layers of lexical information, including definition hierarchies, collocations, example sentences, and pragmatic notes (Lew, 2019). Through repeated exposure to such features, learners gradually develop sensitivity to contextualized meaning and usage patterns, which is essential for achieving depth of vocabulary knowledge rather than surface-level form-meaning associations.

However, the pedagogical benefits of online dictionary use are closely intertwined with digital literacy, understood as the ability to locate, evaluate, interpret, and use digital information critically and effectively (Dudeny, Hockly, & Pegrum, 2013). In open online environments, learners are confronted with a wide range of lexical resources of varying quality, including learner dictionaries, crowdsourced platforms, and AI-driven reference tools. Without sufficient digital and lexical literacy, learners may struggle to assess the reliability, accuracy, or pedagogical suitability of dictionary entries, potentially leading to fossilized errors or superficial learning (Godwin-Jones, 2018). This underscores the need for explicit instruction not only in dictionary mechanics but also in critical evaluation of digital language resources.

Despite their pedagogical potential, online dictionaries also pose several challenges. One frequently cited concern is information overload, as learners may be overwhelmed by excessive lexical data, particularly at lower proficiency levels (Lew & Doroszewska, 2009). In addition, the convenience of instant lookup may encourage over-reliance on rapid consultation, reducing opportunities for lexical inferencing from context a strategy known to support deeper processing and longer retention (Nation & Webb, 2011). These issues suggest that unregulated dictionary use may not automatically result in optimal learning outcomes.

Furthermore, unequal access to digital technologies continues to shape learners' opportunities to benefit from online tools. The digital divide, manifested in disparities in access to devices, internet connectivity, and digital competence, remains a critical issue in many EFL contexts, particularly in under-resourced educational settings (van Dijk, 2020). Such inequalities may limit the effectiveness of technology-mediated learning and exacerbate existing achievement gaps if not addressed through institutional support and inclusive pedagogical policies.

Taken together, these considerations highlight the importance of pedagogically mediated dictionary use. Research consistently indicates that learners who receive explicit training in dictionary strategies such as selecting appropriate entries, interpreting definitions, and applying usage information achieve significantly greater vocabulary gains than untrained learners (Zhang, Xu, & Zhang, 2020). Consequently, EFL curricula should integrate systematic dictionary instruction as part of broader vocabulary learning strategy training. By doing so, educators can ensure that online dictionaries function not merely as reference tools but as catalysts for autonomous learning, critical digital engagement, and sustained lexical development.

3. Integrating Online Dictionaries into Task-Based and Context-Based Learning

The integration of online dictionaries into task-based and context-based learning reflects a shift from decontextualized vocabulary instruction toward meaning-focused and communicative language use. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emphasizes the completion of authentic, goal-oriented tasks in which language is used as a means rather than an end (Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2007). Within such tasks, online dictionaries function as supportive cognitive tools, enabling learners to resolve lexical problems encountered during reading, writing, or interaction.

When embedded into communicative tasks such as problem-solving activities, collaborative writing, or project-based assignments online dictionaries promote incidental vocabulary learning, as learners consult lexical entries in response to immediate communicative needs (Nation, 2013). Context-based learning further enhances this process by encouraging learners to interpret dictionary information in relation to authentic linguistic input. Research suggests that vocabulary acquired through meaningful contexts is more likely to be retained and transferred to productive use than vocabulary learned through isolated lists (Webb, 2008). Thus, pedagogically guided dictionary use within tasks can facilitate deeper semantic processing and contextualized lexical knowledge.

4. The Role of Dictionary Training Strategies and Online Dictionaries in Supporting Self-Regulated, Lifelong Vocabulary Learning in EFL Contexts

Online dictionaries also play a pivotal role in fostering self-regulated learning, a process in which learners actively plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning (Zimmerman, 2002). By allowing learners to independently identify vocabulary gaps, select appropriate lexical resources, and reflect on usage, dictionaries support learner autonomy—a core objective in contemporary EFL pedagogy (Benson, 2011).

From a lifelong learning perspective, the availability of digital dictionaries beyond formal classroom settings enables learners to engage in continuous language development. Vocabulary learning is widely recognized as a cumulative and long-term process (Nation, 2013), and online dictionaries empower learners to manage this process autonomously across academic, professional, and social contexts. Moreover, the multimodal features of digital dictionaries such as audio pronunciation, usage notes, and hyperlinks enhance learner engagement and accommodate diverse learning preferences, thereby supporting sustainable language learning practices (Lew, 2019).

While online dictionaries offer considerable pedagogical potential, research consistently demonstrates that dictionary training is a crucial determinant of their effectiveness. Dictionary

use is not an intuitive skill; untrained learners often focus narrowly on the first definition or rely excessively on translation, resulting in shallow processing and misuse of lexical items (Laufer & Hadar, 1997).

Empirical studies indicate that learners who receive explicit instruction in dictionary strategies such as interpreting definitions, analysing example sentences, and selecting context-appropriate meanings achieve significantly higher gains in vocabulary acquisition and retention (Ahangari & Dogolsara, 2015). Meta-analytical evidence further confirms the robustness of these findings. Zhang, Xu, and Zhang (2020) report large effect sizes for dictionary use in L2 vocabulary learning, particularly when learners are trained in effective consultation strategies. These results underscore the importance of incorporating systematic dictionary instruction into EFL curricula as part of broader vocabulary learning strategy training.

5. Technology and Digital Transformation Perspectives: Online Dictionaries within the Digital Language Learning Ecosystem

Online dictionaries should not be conceptualized as stand-alone reference resources; rather, they constitute integral elements of a broader digital language learning ecosystem that encompasses learning management systems (LMSs), corpus-based tools, mobile applications, online reading environments, and AI-driven language technologies. Within this interconnected ecosystem, online dictionaries function as mediational artifacts that facilitate meaning negotiation, lexical development, and metalinguistic awareness during digitally mediated learning processes (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

In technology-enhanced learning contexts, online dictionaries frequently interact with complementary digital tools, including electronic textbooks, automated writing evaluation systems, and virtual classrooms. This interoperability enables learners to access lexical information seamlessly while engaging in communicative and task-based activities. Research in computer-assisted language learning (CALL) indicates that such integration supports just-in-time learning, allowing learners to resolve lexical gaps dynamically as they arise in authentic language use (Chapelle, 2009). As a result, online dictionaries contribute to a pedagogical shift away from teacher-centred instruction toward learner-driven, resource-rich environments that are emblematic of digitally transformed education (Stockwell, 2022).

6. The Role of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and the Digital Divide in Shaping Access to and Use of Online Dictionaries

The widespread proliferation of smartphones and mobile devices has significantly altered patterns of dictionary consultation, firmly situating online dictionaries within the domain of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL). Mobile technologies afford learners continuous, location-independent access to lexical resources, thereby promoting frequent and spontaneous dictionary use beyond formal instructional settings (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). This mobility facilitates microlearning practices, whereby learners engage with vocabulary through brief, contextually meaningful interactions distributed across time and diverse communicative situations.

Empirical evidence suggests that the use of mobile dictionaries enhances learner engagement and supports vocabulary acquisition by enabling rapid verification of word

meanings, pronunciation, and usage during real-world language encounters (Chiu & Liu, 2013). Nevertheless, existing research also highlights potential limitations, cautioning that excessive reliance on rapid mobile lookups may result in shallow lexical processing if efficiency is prioritized over deeper semantic analysis (Stockwell, 2010). These findings underscore the need for pedagogical scaffolding to ensure that mobile dictionary use fosters durable lexical knowledge rather than superficial familiarity, balancing accessibility with cognitive depth.

Despite the considerable pedagogical potential of online dictionaries, their effectiveness is shaped by persistent inequalities in access to digital technologies, commonly referred to as the digital divide. Variations in device availability, internet connectivity, and technological infrastructure continue to influence learners' ability to engage fully with online lexical resources, particularly in under-resourced or rural EFL contexts (van Dijk, 2020).

Research in digital education further emphasizes that access alone does not guarantee effective use; second-level digital divides, including disparities in digital literacy, strategic competence, and critical evaluation skills, play a crucial role in shaping learning outcomes (Hargittai, 2010). In EFL settings, learners with limited technological proficiency may experience difficulties navigating complex dictionary interfaces or discerning the reliability and relevance of lexical information, thereby reducing the potential learning benefits of online tools. If left unaddressed, such disparities risk reinforcing existing educational inequalities.

To address these challenges, scholars advocate for context-sensitive and inclusive approaches to digital integration. These include the strategic combination of online and offline resources, as well as explicit instruction in digital literacy and effective dictionary use (Dudeney, Hockly, & Pegrum, 2013). Such measures are essential to ensuring that online dictionaries serve as instruments of equitable language learning and contribute positively to digitally transformed EFL education rather than exacerbating systemic disparities.

In the context of the ongoing digital transformation of education, it is increasingly important to examine how learners engage with digital tools that support language development, particularly within specific national and institutional settings. In Albanian schools, where English as a Foreign Language (EFL) holds a prominent position in the curriculum, students are progressively exposed to online resources, including online dictionaries. However, the ways in which these tools are perceived and utilized for vocabulary learning remain insufficiently investigated. While existing literature underscores the potential of online dictionaries to enhance lexical development and learner autonomy, there is limited empirical evidence focusing on learners' own perspectives within the Albanian school context. Therefore, this study is guided by a set of research questions that aim to explore how online dictionaries are integrated into EFL teaching and learning practices in Albanian schools, how learners use these resources across classroom-based and mobile learning environments, and, crucially, how EFL learners perceive the role of online dictionaries in supporting their vocabulary development. Additionally, the study seeks to identify contextual challenges related to access, digital literacy, and pedagogical support that may influence the effectiveness of online dictionary use in this setting.

Research Questions

1. How do EFL learners perceive the role of online dictionaries in vocabulary development?

This question seeks to explore learner perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes toward online dictionary use as a vocabulary learning tool. From a socio-cognitive perspective, learners' perceptions shape their engagement with learning resources and influence strategy choice and effectiveness (Benson, 2011; Oxford, 2017). Investigating this question may involve examining learners' views on the usefulness, ease of use, reliability, and motivational impact of online dictionaries in comparison with traditional or bilingual resources.

Methodologically, this question lends itself to qualitative and mixed-methods approaches, such as questionnaires, interviews, or reflective learning journals. It may also consider variables such as proficiency level, prior digital experience, and learning context. Understanding learner perceptions is particularly important, as positive beliefs about dictionary use have been shown to correlate with more frequent and strategic consultation behaviours (Lew, 2019).

2. To what extent does monolingual online dictionary use contribute to L2 proficiency?

This research question addresses the relationship between monolingual dictionary use and measurable gains in second-language proficiency, particularly lexical depth, accuracy, and productive use. Theoretically, monolingual dictionaries are believed to facilitate deeper semantic processing by encouraging learners to operate within the target language, thereby strengthening L2 lexical networks (Laufer & Hadar, 1997; Nation, 2013).

Empirical investigation of this question may involve experimental or quasi-experimental designs, comparing learners who primarily use monolingual online dictionaries with those using bilingual or mixed resources. Proficiency outcomes may be measured through vocabulary tests, writing tasks, or speaking assessments. This question is particularly relevant to ongoing debates regarding optimal dictionary types for different proficiency levels and instructional contexts.

3. What challenges do EFL students face when using online dictionaries in digital learning environments?

This question focuses on identifying cognitive, technological, and pedagogical constraints associated with online dictionary use. Prior research suggests that learners may struggle with information overload, inappropriate sense selection, over-reliance on direct lookup, and limited ability to evaluate the reliability of digital lexical resources (Lew & Doroszewska, 2009; Godwin-Jones, 2018). Additionally, challenges related to digital literacy and unequal access to technology may affect learners' ability to use online dictionaries effectively.

Investigating this question can provide valuable insights into barriers to effective digital vocabulary learning, informing teacher intervention and curriculum design. Data may be collected through learner surveys, error analysis, classroom observations, or think-aloud protocols. Addressing these challenges is essential for ensuring that online dictionaries enhance, rather than hinder, vocabulary acquisition.

4. How does digital transformation shape learners' dictionary consultation strategies?

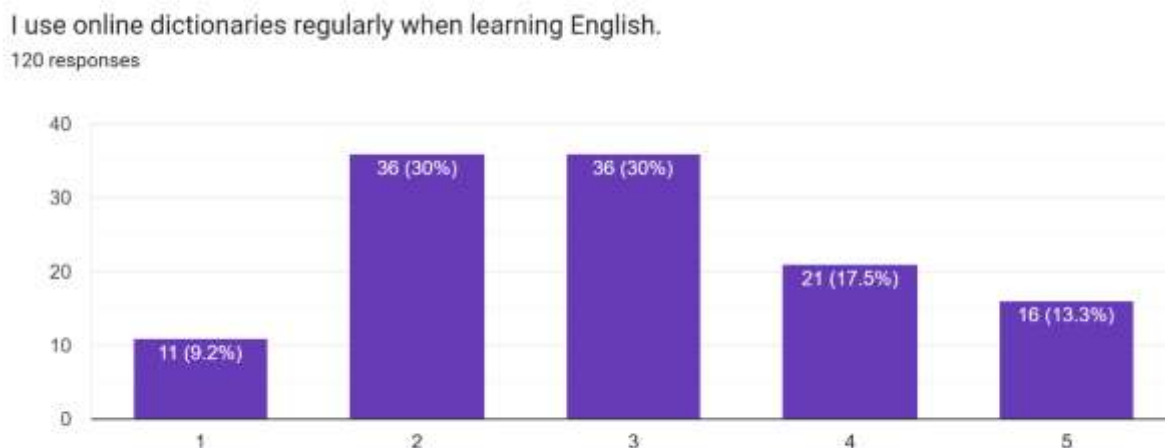
This question situates dictionary use within the broader context of digital transformation in education, examining how technological developments influence the ways learners search for, interpret, and apply lexical information. The shift toward mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), AI-enhanced tools, and multimodal platforms has altered traditional dictionary consultation practices, often favouring immediacy, mobility, and personalization (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008; Stockwell, 2022).

Research addressing this question may analyse changes in lookup frequency, preference for mobile versus desktop dictionaries, reliance on AI-generated suggestions, and the balance between inferencing and direct consultation. Methodologically, this question can be explored through usage logs, learner self-reports, or longitudinal studies tracking strategy development over time. The findings may contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital technologies reshape vocabulary learning strategies and learner autonomy in EFL contexts.

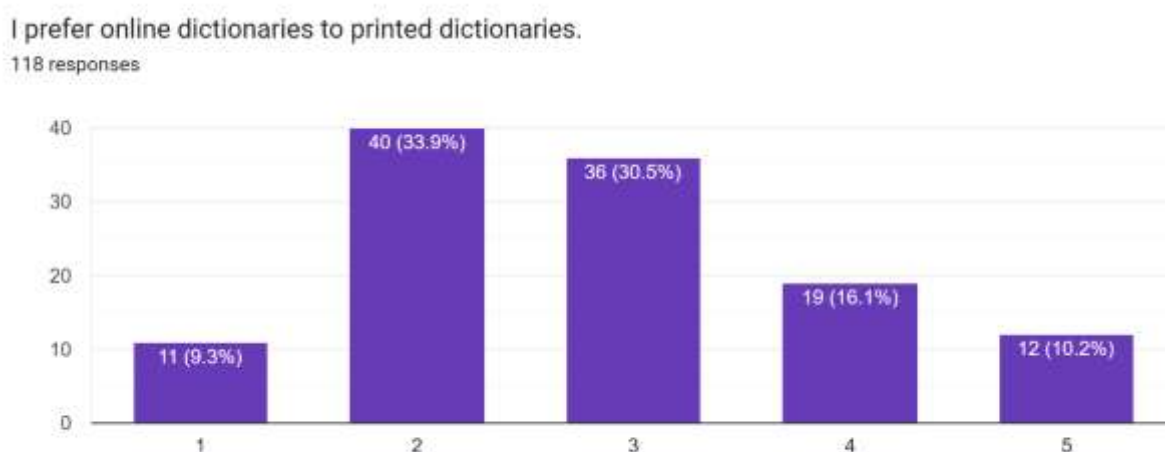
Quantitative Analysis

A questionnaire was administered to 121 students aged 12 to 18 drawn from a range of schools across Albania in order to explore their perceptions and experiences concerning the use of teaching aids in learning homonymous words. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure representation from both rural and urban educational contexts, as well as from schools characterized by diverse socioeconomic and instructional environments. Participants were selected based on their availability and their engagement in English language learning, with particular emphasis on exposure to vocabulary-focused instruction. The instrument was administered in English, enabling learners to interact directly with the linguistic features under investigation.

This balanced and heterogeneous sample provides a comprehensive view of students' experiences with online dictionaries across different developmental stages, academic contexts, and geographical settings. Such diversity enables the study to capture variations in learners' vocabulary needs, cognitive readiness, access to digital resources, and familiarity with dictionary use in English language learning. The questionnaire was designed and distributed via Google Forms, offering an efficient, accessible, and user-friendly means of collecting data from participants throughout Albania. Administering the instrument exclusively in English encouraged authentic engagement with the target language and allowed for more accurate insights into students' use of online dictionaries as vocabulary-learning tools, and related classroom practices in English language instruction.



The results indicate that the majority of respondents cluster around the lower-to-mid points of the scale. Specifically, responses of 2 and 3 each account for 30% (36 respondents), together comprising 60% of the total sample. This concentration suggests that most learners perceive their use of online dictionaries as occasional rather than regular, or hold a neutral stance toward the statement. Such a pattern implies that while online dictionaries are familiar tools, they may not be consistently integrated into learners' study routines. Higher levels of agreement are less prevalent. Responses of 4 and 5, which reflect regular or very frequent use, represent 17.5% (21 respondents) and 13.3% (16 respondents) respectively. Combined, these categories account for 30.8% of the responses, indicating that nearly one-third of learners rely heavily on online dictionaries as a learning aid. This subgroup likely views online dictionaries as an essential and effective resource for vocabulary development and comprehension. In contrast, strong disagreement is relatively uncommon. Only 9.2% (11 respondents) selected option 1, suggesting that outright rejection of online dictionary use is limited among respondents. This finding reinforces the idea that online dictionaries are broadly accepted, even among learners who do not use them frequently.

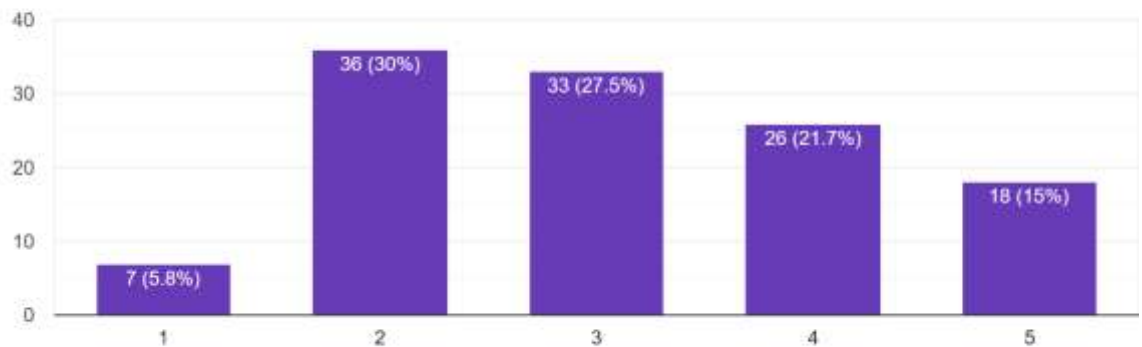


The results show that responses were predominantly concentrated at the lower and middle points of the scale. The most frequently selected option was 2, chosen by 40 respondents

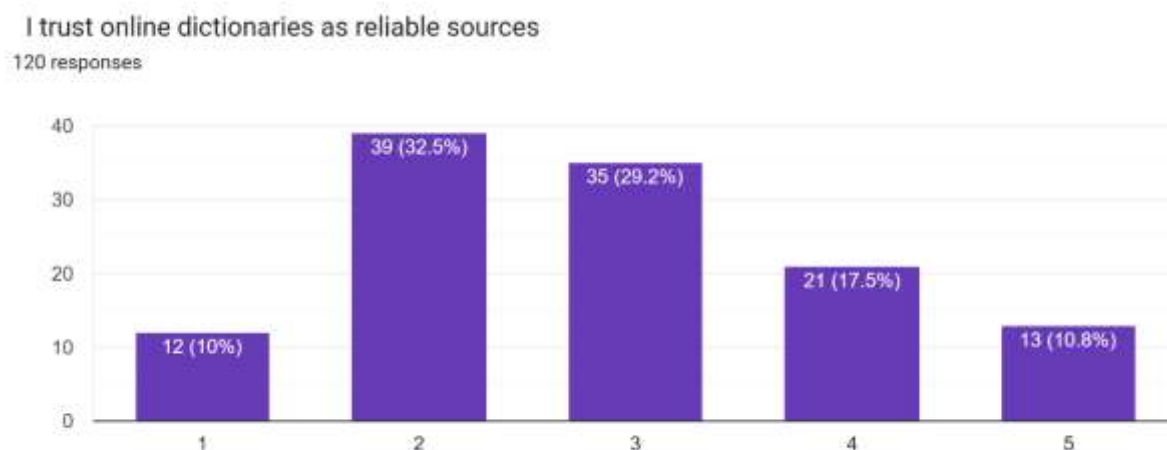
(33.9%), followed by 3, selected by 36 respondents (30.5%). Together, these categories account for 64.4% of all responses, indicating that most participants either slightly disagreed with the statement or expressed a neutral stance. Higher agreement levels were less common. Nineteen respondents (16.1%) selected 4, while only twelve respondents (10.2%) selected 5, suggesting that just over one quarter (26.3%) of the sample clearly preferred online dictionaries over printed ones. At the lowest end of the scale, 11 respondents (9.3%) reported strong disagreement.

I feel more motivated to learn English when I can use online dictionaries.

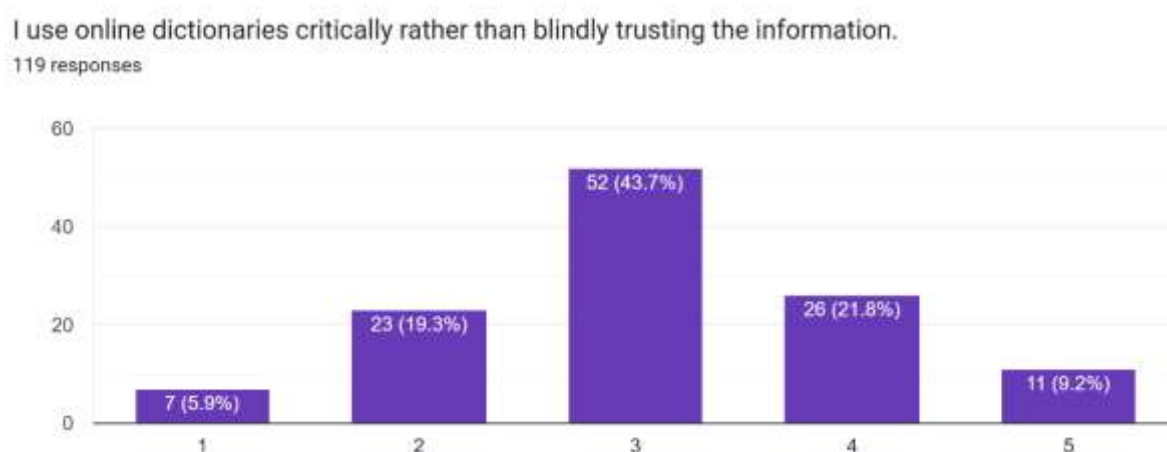
120 responses



The response pattern suggests a moderately positive link between the accessibility of online dictionaries and learner motivation. The most frequent response is 2, selected by 36 respondents (30%), suggesting that a significant proportion of learners do not strongly associate online dictionary use with increased motivation. Similarly, 33 respondents (27.5%) chose 3, reflecting a neutral position. Together, these two categories comprise 57.5% of the sample, indicating that over half of respondents experience limited or uncertain motivational impact from online dictionary use. However, higher levels of agreement are also notable. Twenty-six respondents (21.7%) selected 4, and 18 respondents (15%) selected 5. Combined, 36.7% of participants reported that access to online dictionaries positively influences their motivation to learn English. This suggests that for more than one-third of learners, online dictionaries function as a meaningful motivational tool, potentially by increasing confidence, reducing frustration, or facilitating independent learning. At the lower end of the scale, only 7 respondents (5.8%) selected 1, indicating strong disagreement. This relatively small percentage implies that negative perceptions of online dictionaries as a motivational factor are uncommon.



The responses are largely concentrated in the lower and middle categories. The most frequently selected option is 2, chosen by 39 respondents (32.5%), followed by 3, selected by 35 respondents (29.2%). Together, these two categories account for 61.7% of all responses, indicating that the majority of participants either express mild distrust or remain uncertain about the reliability of online dictionaries. This suggests that confidence in such resources is not firmly established among most respondents. Higher levels of trust are less prevalent. Twenty-one respondents (17.5%) selected 4, while 13 respondents (10.8%) selected 5. Combined, only 28.3% of participants clearly perceive online dictionaries as reliable sources. Although this represents a substantial minority, it falls short of indicating broad consensus or strong overall trust. At the lower end of the scale, 12 respondents (10%) selected 1, reflecting strong disagreement. While this group is relatively small, it shows that a notable portion of respondents actively distrust online dictionaries rather than simply feeling neutral.

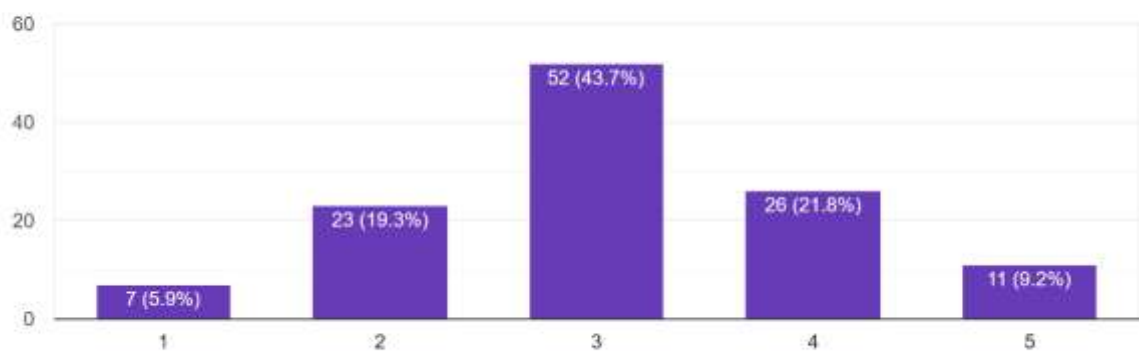


The most prominent response category is 3, selected by 52 respondents (43.7%). This strong concentration at the midpoint indicates that nearly half of the participants hold a neutral or moderate position, suggesting partial awareness of the need for critical evaluation but perhaps inconsistent application of such practices. These respondents may sometimes question dictionary content but do not consistently engage in critical checking. Responses showing

agreement are also notable. Twenty-six respondents (21.8%) selected 4, and 11 respondents (9.2%) selected 5. Together, 31% of participants indicate that they consciously approach online dictionary information with a critical mindset. This suggests that nearly one-third of learners actively evaluate definitions, examples, or sources rather than accepting information at face value. Lower levels of agreement are comparatively limited. Twenty-three respondents (19.3%) selected 2, and only 7 respondents (5.9%) selected 1, reflecting disagreement with the statement. This relatively small proportion suggests that few learners rely entirely on online dictionaries without any degree of scepticism or evaluation. Overall, the distribution suggests a generally cautious but not strongly critical approach to online dictionary use. While outright blind trust is uncommon, strong critical engagement is also not dominant. The prevalence of neutral responses indicates that learners may benefit from explicit instruction on how to evaluate online dictionary reliability, such as cross-checking definitions, considering source credibility, and comparing multiple resources. Encouraging these skills could strengthen learners' confidence and effectiveness in using online dictionaries as language-learning tools.

I use online dictionaries critically rather than blindly trusting the information.

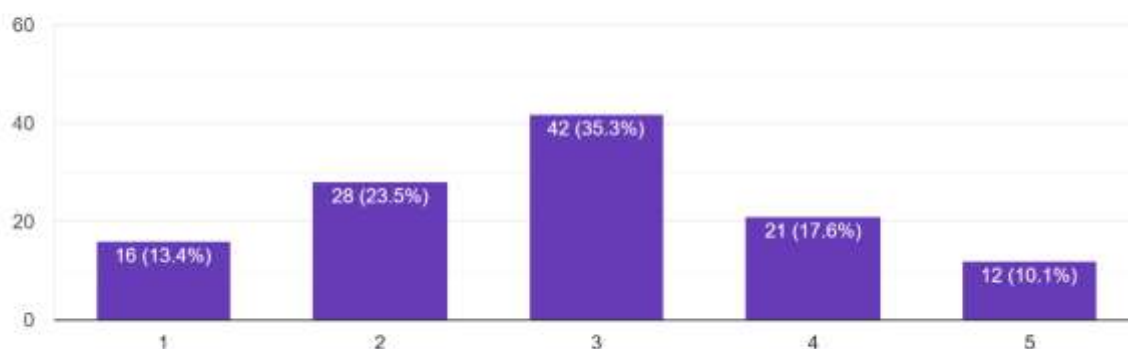
119 responses



The results demonstrate a marked central tendency around the midpoint. The most common response is 3, selected by 52 respondents (43.7%), indicating that nearly half of the participants perceive themselves as moderately critical users. This suggests partial awareness of the need to evaluate online dictionary information, though not necessarily consistent or confident critical practice. Agreement with the statement is relatively moderate. Twenty-six respondents (21.8%) selected 4, and 11 respondents (9.2%) selected 5, meaning that 31% of participants actively report using online dictionaries critically. This group likely engages in practices such as cross-checking definitions or questioning source reliability. Lower levels of agreement are less prominent. Nineteen percent (23 respondents) selected 2, and only 5.9% (7 respondents) selected 1, indicating that relatively few learners admit to blindly trusting online dictionary information.

I mainly use monolingual online dictionaries (English–English).

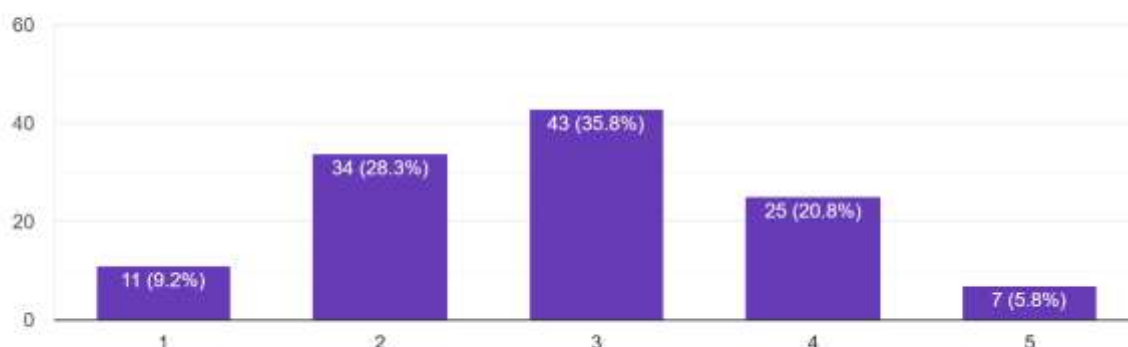
119 responses



The distribution of responses is predominantly centred around the midpoint. The most frequent response is 3, selected by 42 respondents (35.3%), indicating that over one-third of participants neither clearly rely on nor clearly avoid monolingual online dictionaries. This suggests a mixed or situational use, where learners may alternate between monolingual and bilingual resources depending on task difficulty or proficiency level. Lower agreement responses are also prominent. Twenty-eight respondents (23.5%) selected 2, and 16 respondents (13.4%) selected 1, resulting in 36.9% of participants expressing disagreement with the statement. This substantial proportion indicates that many learners do not mainly use monolingual dictionaries and may prefer bilingual dictionaries, particularly for efficiency, clarity, or lower cognitive load. Higher levels of agreement are less frequent. Twenty-one respondents (17.6%) selected 4, and only 12 respondents (10.1%) selected 5, meaning that just 27.7% of respondents clearly favour monolingual online dictionaries. While this group represents learners likely operating at higher proficiency levels, it remains a minority within the sample.

I mainly use bilingual online dictionaries (English–L1).

120 responses

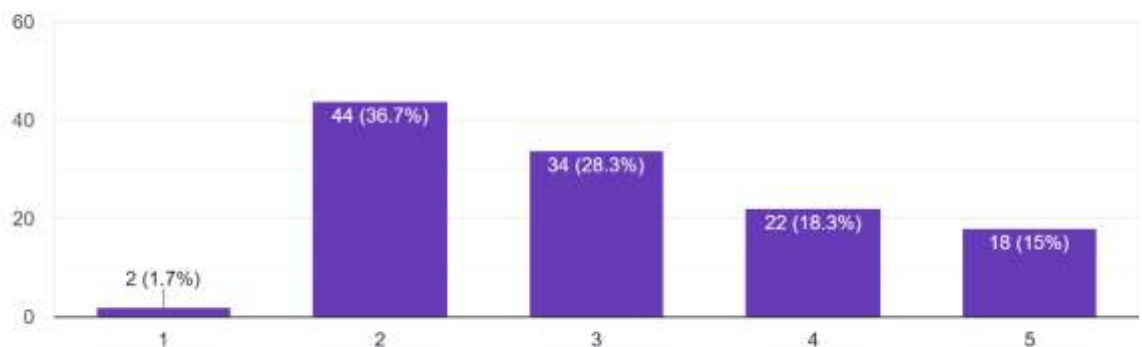


The chart illustrating responses from 120 participants to the statement "I mainly use bilingual online dictionaries (English–L1)" reveals a balanced but generally moderate reliance on bilingual dictionaries. The largest proportion of respondents (43 participants, 35.8%)

selected the neutral option, indicating uncertainty or flexible usage depending on context. A combined 37.5% of participants (11 respondents, 9.2% strongly disagree and 34 respondents, 28.3% disagree) reported that they do not primarily use bilingual dictionaries, slightly exceeding the 26.6% who expressed agreement (25 respondents, 20.8% agree and 7 respondents, 5.8% strongly agree). The relatively low percentage of strong agreement suggests that exclusive dependence on bilingual dictionaries is limited. Overall, the findings indicate that while bilingual dictionaries are used by a portion of learners, they are not the dominant resource, and many learners likely adopt a mixed or situational approach to dictionary use, reflecting diverse strategies and preferences in vocabulary learning.

Online dictionaries help me use words accurately in context

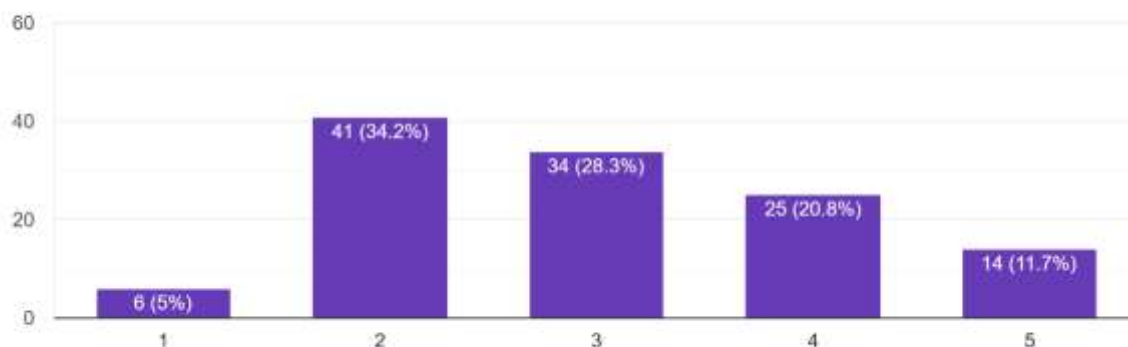
120 responses



The largest group of respondents (44 participants, 36.7%) selected "2," indicating disagreement, while 2 participants (1.7%) strongly disagreed, resulting in a total of 38.4% expressing negative views. In contrast, 22 participants (18.3%) agreed, and 18 participants (15%) strongly agreed, giving a combined 33.3% with positive perceptions. Meanwhile, 34 respondents (28.3%) selected the neutral option, suggesting uncertainty or variability in experiences. Overall, although a considerable number of learners acknowledge the usefulness of online dictionaries for accurate word use, a slightly higher proportion remains unconvinced. This distribution indicates that while online dictionaries have potential to support contextual vocabulary use, their effectiveness may depend on factors such as learners' dictionary skills, strategy use, or the quality of dictionary consultation.

Online dictionaries encourage me to learn vocabulary independently.

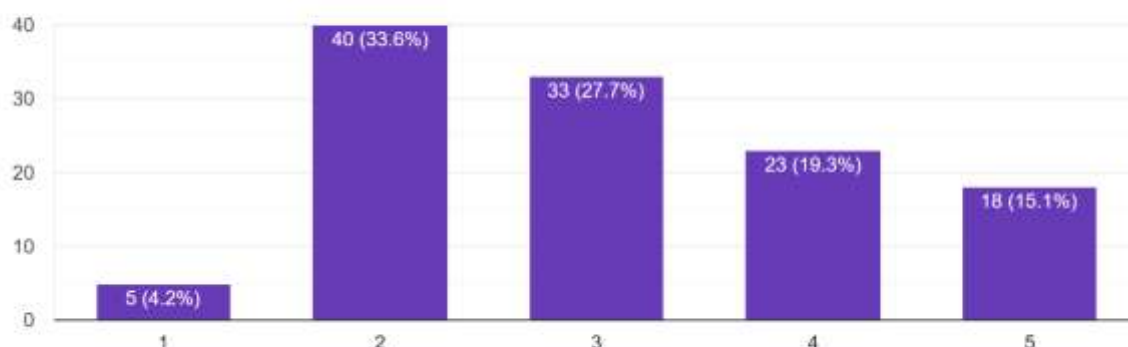
120 responses



The data indicate a significant clustering of responses in the lower-to-middle range of the scale. The most frequently selected response is 2, chosen by 41 respondents (34.2%), indicating that a substantial proportion of learners do not strongly feel that online dictionaries promote independent vocabulary learning. In addition, 34 respondents (28.3%) selected 3, reflecting a neutral or uncertain stance. Together, these two categories account for 62.5% of all responses, suggesting that most learners perceive the role of online dictionaries in fostering autonomy as limited or inconsistent. Positive responses are present but less dominant. Twenty-five respondents (20.8%) selected 4, and 14 respondents (11.7%) selected 5, meaning that 32.5% of participants believe that online dictionaries actively encourage them to learn vocabulary independently. This group likely benefits from features such as ease of access, example sentences, pronunciation tools, and hyperlinks to related words, which may support self-directed learning. Strong disagreement is relatively rare, with only 6 respondents (5%) selecting 1. This indicates that very few learners view online dictionaries as discouraging or ineffective for independent vocabulary learning.

I feel more motivated to learn English when I can use online dictionaries.

119 responses

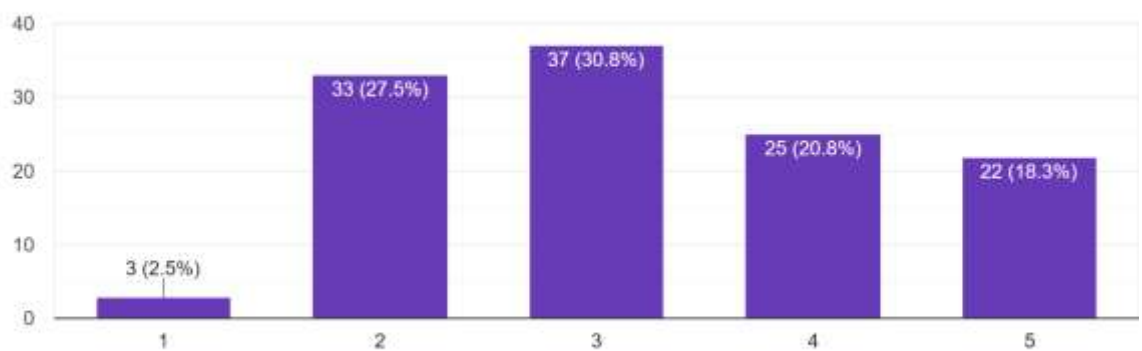


The data reveal a primary concentration in the lower-to-middle range. The most frequently selected option is 2, chosen by 40 respondents (33.6%), indicating that many learners do not strongly perceive online dictionaries as a motivating factor in their English

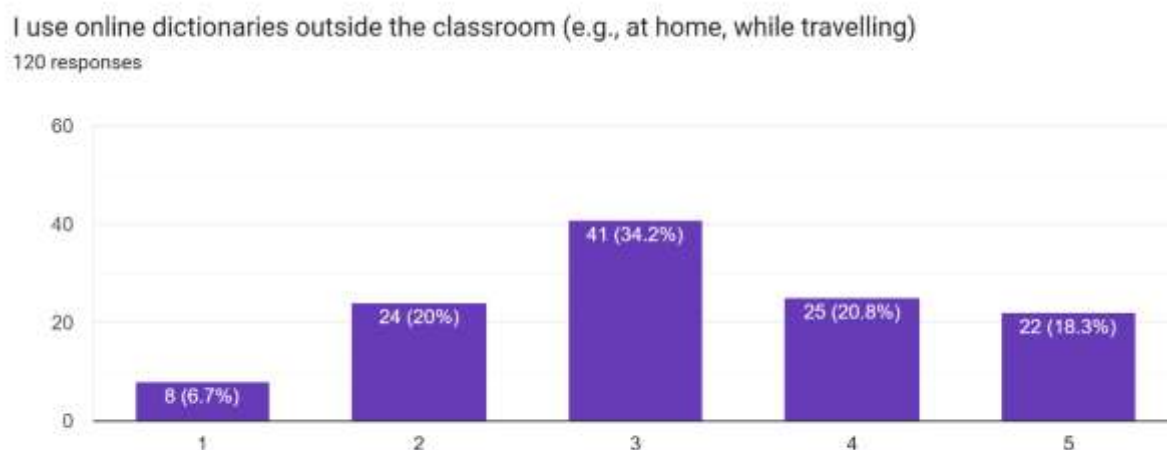
learning. This is followed by 33 respondents (27.7%) selecting 3, reflecting a neutral stance. Together, these two categories account for 61.3% of the responses, suggesting that the majority of participants experience limited or moderate motivational benefits from using online dictionaries. Positive responses are present but less dominant. Twenty-three respondents (19.3%) selected 4, while 18 respondents (15.1%) selected 5, meaning that 34.4% of learners feel that online dictionaries do enhance their motivation to learn English. For this group, online dictionaries may reduce learning anxiety, increase confidence, or support independent problem-solving, thereby contributing to greater engagement. Strong disagreement is relatively rare, with only 5 respondents (4.2%) selecting 1. This indicates that very few participants view online dictionaries as having a negative effect on their motivation.

I usually access online dictionaries using my mobile phone

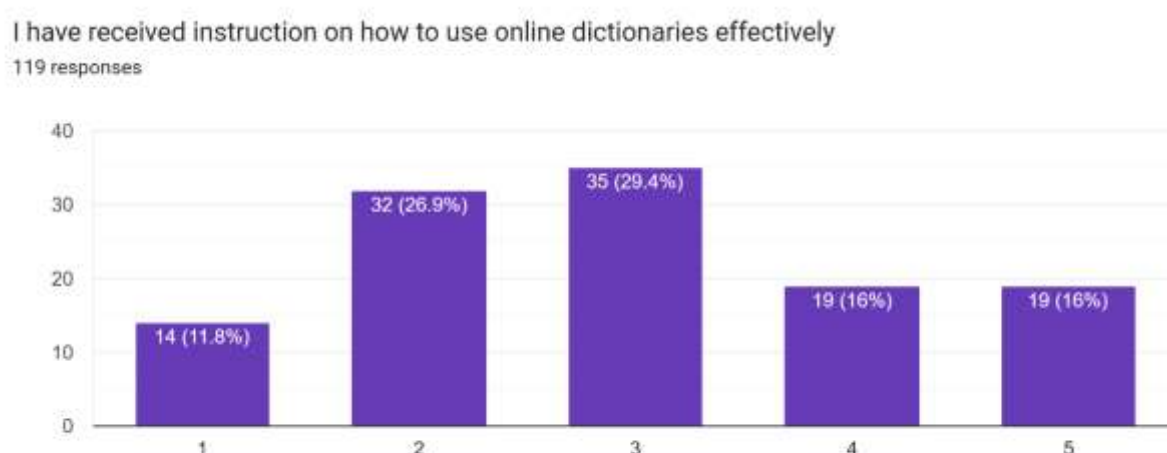
120 responses



The overall distribution suggests a generally positive inclination toward the use of mobile phones for accessing online dictionaries. The most common response is 3, reported by 37 respondents (30.8%), indicating that a substantial proportion of learners use mobile devices moderately or on an occasional basis for dictionary consultation. This is followed by 33 respondents (27.5%) selecting 2, reflecting a degree of limited or less frequent usage. Taken together, these results indicate that while mobile access is widespread, it is not consistently relied upon by all users. Higher levels of agreement are also evident, with 25 respondents (20.8%) selecting 4 and 22 respondents (18.3%) selecting 5, meaning that 39.1% of participants regularly or strongly prefer mobile phones for accessing online dictionaries. This considerable proportion underscores the practical value of mobile devices, likely attributed to their portability and immediate accessibility. In contrast, strong disagreement is minimal, with only 3 respondents (2.5%) selecting 1, suggesting that very few learners avoid using mobile devices for this purpose.



The overall response pattern is primarily concentrated toward the middle-to-upper range of the scale, indicating relatively frequent use of online dictionaries beyond classroom contexts. The most common response is 3, selected by 41 respondents (34.2%), suggesting that many learners engage in moderate or occasional out-of-class dictionary use. This pattern implies that online dictionaries are integrated into everyday learning practices, though not uniformly or consistently. Higher levels of agreement are also evident, with 25 respondents (20.8%) selecting 4 and 22 respondents (18.3%) selecting 5, meaning that 39.1% of participants regularly and actively use online dictionaries outside formal instructional settings. This notable proportion highlights the importance of online dictionaries as accessible and convenient tools supporting independent learning in informal contexts such as home study or personal practice. In contrast, lower levels of agreement are less prominent, with 24 respondents (20%) selecting 2 and only 8 respondents (6.7%) selecting 1, indicating that relatively few learners refrain from using online dictionaries beyond the classroom. Overall, the findings suggest broad acceptance of online dictionaries as valuable resources for out-of-class learning.

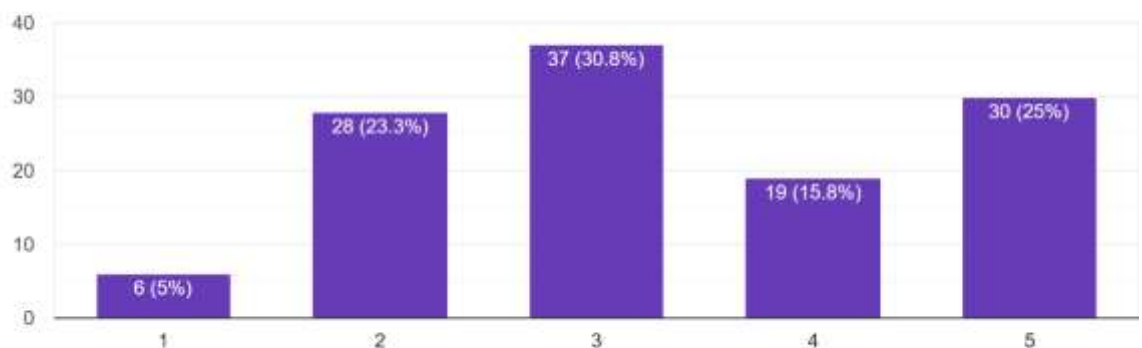


The responses reflect a predominance of neutral and low levels of agreement. The most common response is 3, selected by 35 respondents (29.4%), suggesting that nearly one-third of participants are uncertain or only moderately confident that they have received effective

instruction. Similarly, 32 respondents (26.9%) selected 2, indicating mild disagreement. Together, these two categories account for 56.3% of responses, implying that more than half of the learners feel they have received limited or unclear guidance on how to use online dictionaries effectively. Higher levels of agreement are less frequent. Nineteen respondents (16%) selected 4, and another 19 respondents (16%) selected 5, meaning that only 32% of participants clearly report having received effective instruction. This suggests that while a notable minority has benefited from explicit guidance, structured training is not consistently provided across the learning context. Lower-end responses are also present. Fourteen respondents (11.8%) selected 1, indicating strong disagreement. This group represents learners who feel they have received no meaningful instruction at all, highlighting a lack of formal emphasis on dictionary skills for some students.

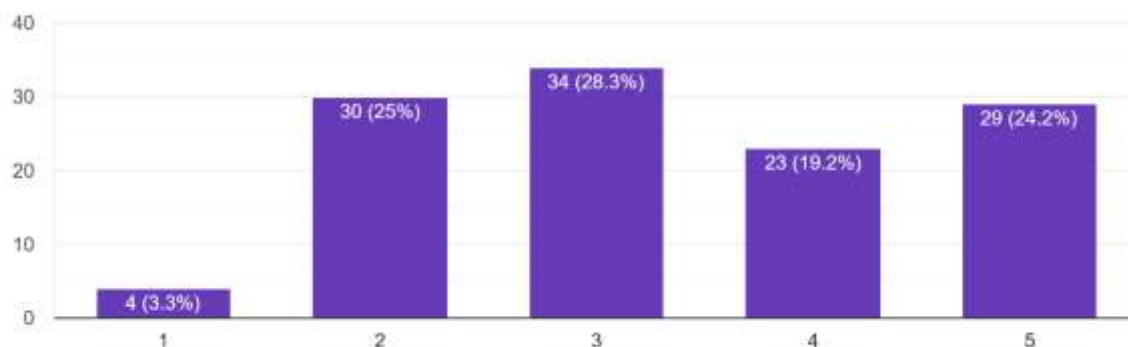
Teachers should integrate online dictionaries into vocabulary lessons

120 responses



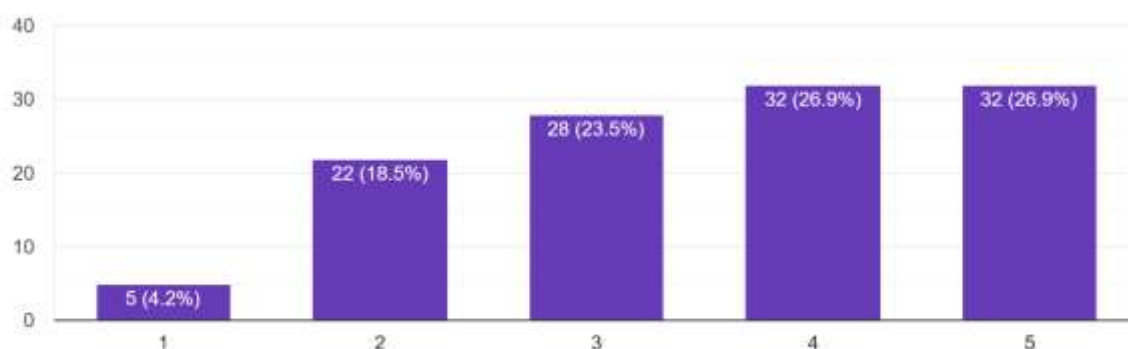
The overall distribution reveals cautiously positive attitudes, with responses spread across the middle and higher ends of the scale. The most frequent response is 3, selected by 37 respondents (30.8%), indicating that many participants hold a neutral or moderately supportive view. This suggests general openness to integration, though not necessarily strong conviction. Positive responses are substantial. Nineteen respondents (15.8%) selected 4, and 30 respondents (25%) selected 5, meaning that 40.8% of participants clearly believe that online dictionaries should be incorporated into vocabulary instruction. This sizeable proportion reflects a recognition of the pedagogical value of online dictionaries, possibly due to their accessibility, up-to-date content, and supportive features such as pronunciation tools and example sentences. Lower levels of agreement are less dominant but still present. Twenty-eight respondents (23.3%) selected 2, and only 6 respondents (5%) selected 1, indicating that a minority are sceptical of or opposed to integrating online dictionaries into lessons. This reluctance may stem from concerns about over-reliance, distraction, or limited guidance on effective use.

I would benefit from more training on dictionary use in class.
120 responses



The results are largely centred on the middle and upper ends of the scale, suggesting a notable perceived need for additional instruction. The most frequent response is 3, chosen by 34 respondents (28.3%), suggesting that many learners are moderately uncertain but open to the idea that further training could be helpful. Positive agreement is substantial. Twenty-three respondents (19.2%) selected 4, and 29 respondents (24.2%) selected 5, meaning that 43.4% of participants clearly believe they would benefit from more classroom training on dictionary use. This sizeable proportion points to a recognized gap between students' frequent use of dictionaries and their confidence in using them effectively. Lower agreement responses are less dominant but still present. Thirty respondents (25%) selected 2, indicating mild disagreement or hesitation, while only 4 respondents (3.3%) selected 1, showing strong disagreement. The very small proportion of strong disagreement suggests that resistance to further training is minimal.

Teachers should guide students on how to use online dictionaries properly.
119 responses

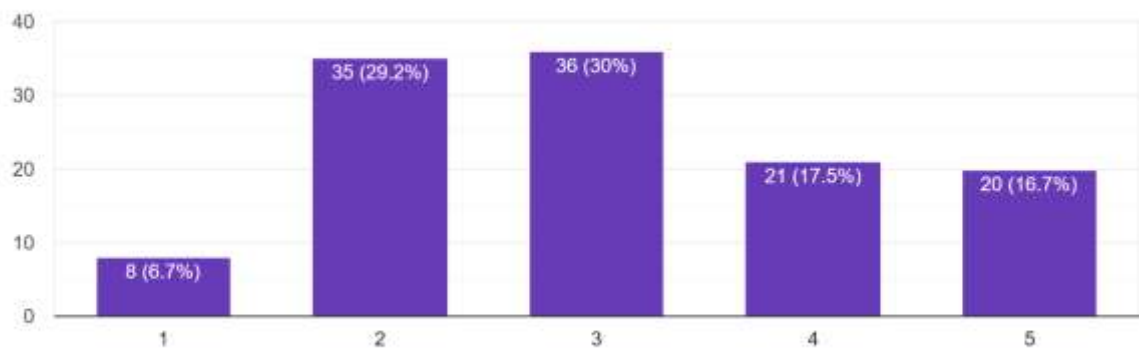


The overall distribution shows a strong tendency toward agreement. The highest levels of agreement are reflected in responses 4 and 5, each selected by 32 respondents (26.9%). Combined, these categories account for 53.8% of the responses, indicating that more than half of the participants clearly believe teachers should play an active role in guiding students on effective online dictionary use. This strong endorsement highlights learners' recognition of the

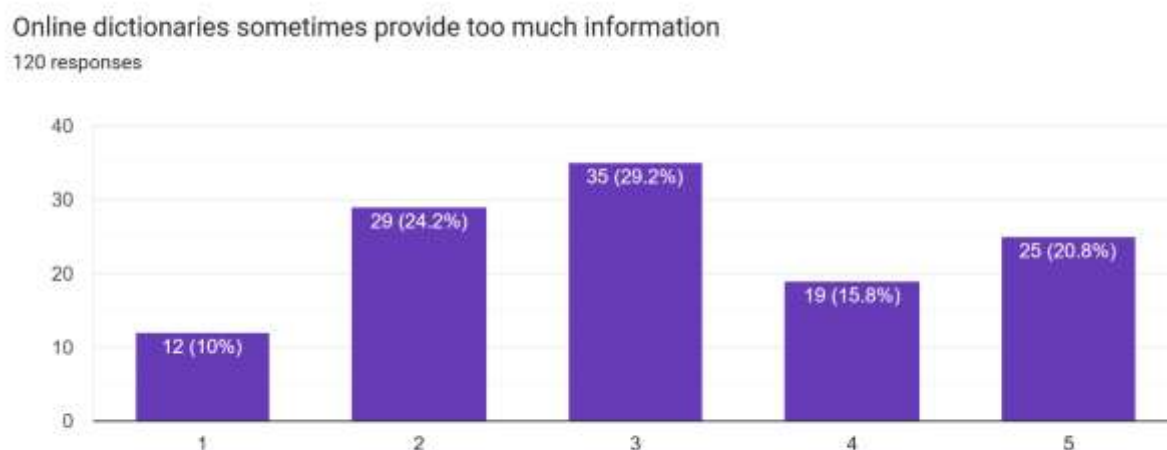
importance of pedagogical support in developing dictionary skills. Moderate and neutral responses are also present. Twenty-eight respondents (23.5%) selected 3, suggesting that nearly one-quarter of participants are receptive but not strongly committed to the idea of teacher guidance. Additionally, 22 respondents (18.5%) selected 2, indicating mild disagreement or uncertainty, possibly reflecting learners who feel confident using online dictionaries independently. Strong disagreement is minimal, with only 5 respondents (4.2%) selecting 1. This very small proportion suggests that opposition to teacher guidance is rare and that most learners see value in instructional support.

I rely too much on online dictionaries instead of guessing from context.

120 responses



Most responses cluster around the midpoint, indicating a moderate recognition of potential over-reliance on online dictionaries. The most frequent response is 3, selected by 36 respondents (30%), suggesting that many learners are uncertain or ambivalent about whether they depend excessively on dictionaries rather than contextual inference. This neutrality may reflect inconsistent strategies, where learners sometimes attempt contextual guessing but often resort quickly to dictionary use. Lower levels of agreement are also prominent. Thirty-five respondents (29.2%) selected 2, and 8 respondents (6.7%) selected 1, meaning that 35.9% of participants generally do not perceive themselves as overly reliant on online dictionaries. This group may feel confident using contextual clues or balancing dictionary use with inferencing strategies. Higher agreement responses are less dominant but remain significant. Twenty-one respondents (17.5%) selected 4, and 20 respondents (16.7%) selected 5, resulting in 34.2% of participants acknowledging that they rely too heavily on online dictionaries. This substantial minority suggests that for many learners, dictionary consultation may replace deeper cognitive processing involved in guessing meaning from context.



The most frequent response is 3, selected by 35 respondents (29.2%), suggesting that nearly one-third of participants are neutral or uncertain about whether online dictionaries overwhelm users with excessive information. This neutrality may reflect learners' varied experiences, depending on dictionary design, proficiency level, or specific learning tasks. Lower agreement responses are also notable. Twenty-nine respondents (24.2%) selected 2, and 12 respondents (10%) selected 1, meaning that 34.2% of participants generally disagree with the statement. This group may perceive the detailed information in online dictionaries such as definitions, examples, collocations, and usage notes as beneficial rather than overwhelming. Higher levels of agreement are similarly substantial. Nineteen respondents (15.8%) selected 4, and 25 respondents (20.8%) selected 5, resulting in 36.6% of respondents agreeing that online dictionaries sometimes present too much information. For these learners, information overload may cause confusion, slow down learning, or make it difficult to identify relevant meanings, especially when multiple definitions or technical details are provided.

Discussion

Overall, the findings indicate that learners do not show a strong preference for online dictionaries over printed ones. Most respondents express neutral or slightly negative attitudes toward exclusive reliance on digital resources, reflecting a cautious and pragmatic approach rather than strong acceptance or rejection. This tendency suggests that learners often turn to online dictionaries primarily for convenience and immediacy, rather than as a result of informed or critical evaluation of available resources. The high frequency of neutral responses further points to a lack of clear awareness or confidence in using dictionaries effectively. In this sense, learners' behaviour appears to be shaped more by habitual or situational factors than by strategic decision-making, which highlights the importance of explicit instruction in developing critical dictionary skills. Such instruction should include evaluating the reliability of sources, cross-checking meanings, interpreting contextualized examples, and understanding differences between dictionary types and entries.

Regarding dictionary type, monolingual online dictionaries are not the preferred option for most learners, who instead rely considerably on bilingual resources to support comprehension. This pattern reflects the continued importance of first-language (L1) mediation in vocabulary learning, particularly when learners encounter unfamiliar, complex, or abstract

lexical items. While bilingual dictionaries can provide quick access to meaning and reduce cognitive load, especially at lower proficiency levels, an over-dependence on them may hinder deeper processing and limit exposure to target-language input. Consequently, learners may miss valuable opportunities to develop inferencing skills, contextual awareness, and sensitivity to collocations and grammatical patterns. These findings therefore underline the need for pedagogical support that gradually encourages learners to engage more actively with monolingual dictionaries, helping them build confidence in interpreting definitions, analysing example sentences, and extracting richer lexical information.

Although online dictionaries are generally perceived as useful and accessible tools, their effectiveness in promoting accurate contextual usage and learner autonomy appears moderate rather than strong. The data suggest that learners tend to use dictionaries primarily for immediate meaning retrieval, treating them as quick-reference tools rather than as comprehensive learning resources. This limited use implies that many learners are either unaware of or do not fully exploit advanced features such as usage notes, collocations, frequency indicators, pronunciation guides, and example sentences. As a result, dictionary consultation often facilitates short-term comprehension but does not necessarily contribute to long-term retention, productive use, or nuanced understanding of vocabulary. Furthermore, while some learners report that online dictionaries can be motivating, this motivational impact seems secondary and supportive rather than central to sustained engagement with vocabulary learning.

The findings also highlight the growing role of online dictionaries in mobile-assisted and autonomous learning contexts. Learners frequently access these resources via mobile devices and often use them outside formal classroom environments, which enhances flexibility and allows for just-in-time learning. This accessibility supports independent study habits and aligns with broader trends in digital language learning. However, the variation in usage frequency, intensity, and purposes suggests that access alone is insufficient to ensure meaningful engagement. Without appropriate guidance and strategies, learners may use online dictionaries in a fragmented or superficial manner, limiting their potential to support deeper and more systematic vocabulary development.

Importantly, the study reveals that training in effective online dictionary use remains limited and uneven across learning contexts. Many learners report receiving little or no formal instruction in how to use dictionaries strategically, despite relying on them regularly. At the same time, there is a clear and consistent demand for greater teacher guidance and classroom integration. This gap highlights a critical pedagogical issue: while digital tools are readily available, learners are not always equipped to use them effectively. Therefore, integrating structured dictionary training into language instruction becomes essential. Such training should focus on developing learners' ability to evaluate sources critically, apply lexical information appropriately in context, and make informed decisions about when and how to use different types of dictionaries. By fostering these competencies, educators can help learners move beyond surface-level consultation toward more reflective, strategic, and autonomous vocabulary learning practices.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that while online dictionaries are widely accessible and frequently used, learners engage with them in a cautious, pragmatic, and largely

surface-level manner. Rather than showing a clear preference for digital over printed resources, learners tend to adopt flexible and convenience-driven approaches, often without strong critical evaluation or strategic use. The continued reliance on bilingual dictionaries highlights the enduring role of first-language support, but also reveals limitations in deeper engagement with target-language input.

Although online dictionaries are generally perceived as useful, their potential to enhance contextual accuracy, learner autonomy, and long-term vocabulary development remains underexploited. Learners often use them primarily for immediate meaning retrieval, indicating limited awareness of more advanced features that support richer lexical learning. At the same time, the widespread use of mobile devices and out-of-class consultation underscores the importance of online dictionaries in supporting autonomous and mobile-assisted learning.

Crucially, the findings point to a significant gap in training and pedagogical support. Without explicit instruction, learners may not develop the skills necessary to use online dictionaries effectively and critically. Therefore, integrating systematic dictionary training into language curricula is essential. Such training can help learners move beyond passive use toward more strategic, informed, and autonomous vocabulary learning, ultimately improving their linguistic competence and confidence.

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