

Research Article

A Study of Electronic Dictionary Use and Attitudes among Iranian Students of Translation during COVID-19 Pandemic

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Dictionaries are an integral part of language learning process to fulfill learners' linguistic and academic needs. Recently, COVID-19 pandemic has had many effects on students' life and learning styles, forcing them to switch to electronic learning during lockdown restrictions. As a result, electronic and Internet-based dictionaries became more available, altering learners' attitudes in dealing with various types of dictionaries. This study aims at presenting an overview of Iranian university students' attitudes, habits, and preferences in dictionary use in light of recent changes in their learning environment. Our goal is to gather data from Iranian students of translation studies through conducting a small-scale survey, adopted from the literature, and a number of semistructured interviews in order to explore their dictionary use and habits, means of obtaining dictionaries, types of dictionaries used for translation purposes, and the instructions they received on using dictionaries. The findings presented that the majority of students prefer electronic dictionaries; however, gender does not have a significant effect on the educational use of dictionaries. This study has some implications that could help authorities to advance electronic-based learning at universities.

1. Introduction

In language learning context, the concept of dictionary use has prime importance; as a result, there has been a growing interest regarding challenges and preferences regarding consulting dictionaries, especially since technological advances have made dictionaries more convenient and user-friendly. Both the dictionaries and users themselves play an important role in the learning process, and learners can optimize their performance if they are able to use various dictionary skills. Cowie [1] defined dictionary skills as "the skills which the user is assumed to possess, or can be expected to acquire, in handling a dictionary and making effective use of the information it contains." Later, Hartmann and James [2] provided another definition, asserting that dictionary skills include "[t]he abilities required on the part of the dictionary user to find the [information] being sought." Gouws and Prinsloo [3] also believed that good dictionaries are not limited to the display of linguistically sound treatment of some items, these

dictionaries are also learning tools used as linguistic instruments. There is a huge difference between electronic dictionaries and paper dictionaries regarding their outer and inner access structures, outer indicators are the ones that help users find particular entries, while inner indicators are those that can help the users locate various information inside entries [4].

Nesi [5] defines *electronic dictionary* (or ED) as any reference material which provides the user with information related to various aspects of a word, including spelling, meaning, or use of words, stored in electronic form. Nesi [5] categorized dictionaries into three distinct groups: monolingual, bilingual, and bilingualized dictionaries. Furthermore, electronic dictionaries are generally categorized under three main groups: hand-held dictionaries, dictionaries on CD-ROM, and Internet dictionaries. Mobile dictionaries are also classified as a subgroup of hand-held dictionaries. In order to look up a word in EDs, learners need to follow a different manner compared to paper dictionaries since information in a paper dictionary is displayed in an alphabetic structure, while it is

organized in nonlinear way in EDs, so that users are able to find the words in a much shorter time. Consequently, users of EDs face less problems while looking for information in these dictionaries [6]. One of the advantages provided by electronic dictionaries is that the producer can easily upgrade the dictionary's quality, so users can access and search even larger amounts of information in a short period of time [7].

In the process of language learning and teaching, the importance of using dictionaries cannot be denied. Clearly, dictionaries can be extremely useful learning resources, especially as they make the learners more independent of the teacher, thus promoting autonomy among language learners. The point here is that learners need to learn how to use a dictionary effectively. Only through this can they make effective use of the dictionary in their learning process.

The benefits of learning languages via dictionaries cannot be ignored in language classes. However, in most classrooms, including the context in which the present study was conducted, very little time and attention is devoted to dictionary use. Undeniably, learners who get to know how to use dictionaries successfully will be able to continue their learning outside the classroom without the help of their teacher. In language pedagogy, therefore, dictionary training should be an integral part of the syllabus.

With this in mind and given the little attention paid to the issue under investigation in the Iranian EFL context, the present study aims to fill in the gaps by providing more insight into this issue.

In the present study, the focus is on the skills used in working with paper and electronic dictionaries and learners' preferences. Although many studies have investigated the dictionary used in Iran, none were specifically focusing on EFL students' dictionary use and habits, means of obtaining dictionaries, types of dictionaries used for translation purposes, and the instructions they received on using dictionaries. Furthermore, this study particularly investigates the use of dictionaries by English translation studies majors, while the other studies were focusing on the wider EFL context.

The purpose of this study is threefold; first, to investigate the dictionary use, attitudes, and habits of English translation students in Iran; the second purpose is to find learners' preferences regarding paper-based and e-dictionaries and the underlying reasons for their choice; and the third aim is to collect information about means of obtaining dictionaries. In addition, the male and female students are compared as dictionary users in the current EFL context.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. Theoretical Background. Since technological advancements have mostly replaced traditional methods of language teaching in various learning contexts, language classes have gone through significant changes in recent years [8]. There has also been an increasing amount of literature on dictionary use since electronic dictionaries have become more accessible to students, and their pedagogical potential is too great to be ignored [5], yet, there has always been considerable debate regarding the use of various types of dictionaries. The

electronic supports provided by mobile phones that are equipped with software are quite widespread today, giving learners all over the world an opportunity to facilitate the process of finding meaning and other related information in a more convenient way. It was reported by Chen et al. [9] that EFL learners are becoming more and more interested in using online and electronic dictionaries over paper dictionaries. Weschler and Pitts [10] reported that although electronic dictionaries seem like an attractive technology tool, they can also cause distractions to students since they may use their mobile phones for noneducational activities such as text messaging. It should be noted that there is a difference between using a dictionary app and using a paper or an e-pocket dictionary. The linguistic information of a dictionary app is deployed within the functional framework of a smartphone operating system [11]. The difference also applies to the size of a smartphone screens and touch-sensitive screen displays that in turn changes dictionary use and strategies needed.

In an investigation into dictionaries, Béjoint [12] interestingly asserted that “[e]-dictionaries do not have the appearance, the binding, the thickness, the weight, the leather of the Bible, and they do not have the respectability either: anybody can produce an electronic document and change it immediately—literally—without anybody noticing.” One might wonder which one to use: the paper-based dictionaries that were used traditionally and seem to be more reliable or the electronic ones that are more convenient and user-friendly?

2.2. Experimental Background. Dziemianko [13] conducted a study to compare students' actual use of electronic and paper dictionaries, and the findings showed that the students consulting the ED outperformed those who were using hard copies. There was a significant difference in both productive and receptive tasks. Consequently, it seemed more convenient for the learners to use the ED compared to the paper one. Finally, she noted that ED can be regarded as a better learning tool providing students with advantages regarding withholding of meaning and higher chances of recovery of learned words.

One well-known study that is cited in research-related dictionary use is that of Lew's [14], in which the participants translated six English sentences using English words with paper-based dictionary entries provided to them. In his study, while 50% of the participants could consult unmodified OALDCE7 entries, the other half had to work with modified OALDCE7 entries. Lew [14] reported that “Shortcuts-equipped entries lead to significantly better translations, and the accuracy with which shortcuts users identified the relevant senses was 15% higher (though not significantly so) than for those using menus. These findings point to an advantage of shortcuts, a distributed cues system (also known as Guidewords or Signposts), over a single entry-initial Menu.”

Additionally, another researcher [9] mentioned that when it comes to quick understanding of the words, bilingual entries are the best choice. He asserted that language learners at beginner and intermediate levels who feel insecure in using

monolingual dictionaries generally adopt bilingual ones to find the meaning of unknown words and terms.

Following the previous studies, a number of researchers [15–17] conducted research related to visual aids that can be used in electronic dictionaries, and they concluded that these aids are more useful compared to paper dictionaries. To support this, Al-Jarf [15] showed that visual aids can help learners outperform those who use text-only dictionaries, and also these aids proved to be useful in understanding more complex concepts.

Controversial questions have been raised since the advent of electronic dictionaries, comparing them with paper dictionaries. However, one needs to pay attention to the fact that the way the dictionaries are used by learners is more influential in determining the final success in vocabulary learning than the type of dictionary used [18]. Teachers need to be aware of technology-enhanced tools (dictionaries, applications, etc.) and try to lead their students toward using them in various activities in the classroom [16].

Zorigt and Tumurbat [19], in their comparison of paper and e-dictionaries, found that e-dictionary is commonly appreciated for everyday usage since using them takes less time, but the words learnt are only stored in short-term memory.

2.3. The Current Study. To the researchers' knowledge, no empirical research has been done up to now to establish the profile of Iranian undergraduate students of translation studies as dictionary users, specifically comparing male and female students together. And yet, researching the types of dictionaries used and the purpose of using them is crucial as it may affect pedagogical decisions with regard to recommendations of dictionaries for learners and dictionary skills needed to be taught.

If students learn to use dictionaries properly, their language level will likely improve as well. Consequently, knowing how to find the equivalence of a word in another language is of the utmost importance to students who study translation. The results of our study will address the following research questions:

- (RQ1) What are the most common situations and purposes for participants to use dictionaries?
- (RQ2) What are the most common means for participants to obtain dictionaries?
- (RQ3) Have they been taught how to use a dictionary?
- (RQ4) What are students' opinions toward using dictionaries?
- (RQ5) What is the most common type of dictionary among participants used for translation purposes (i.e., paper-based or e-dictionaries)?

Research hypothesis

- (H1) There is no statistically significant relationship at 0.05 between EFL students' use of dictionary and their gender.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Participants. Since it is believed that the most crucial factor for reviewing a dictionary has to be the users and their situations [20], the students in the current study provided demographic information related to their gender and age. The project used a convenience sample of 64 English translation studies undergraduate students from Azad University in Rasht, Iran, including 47 females and 17 males aged between 19 and 35 years. Jager et al. [21] stated that despite their disadvantaged generalizability relative to probability samples, convenience samples are widely used in research studies for being cost-prohibitive and most available. All participants took part in the study voluntarily. They had 6 years of English in high school prior to their university studies and had also passed a number of general English courses (including English grammar and reading comprehension) before taking this two-credit translation course which is offered in the fourth semester.

3.2. Materials. The research conducted about dictionary use is classified as "questionnaire based," "test based," and "observation based" by Nesi [5]. Consequently, to assess students' use of dictionary a questionnaire and a number of semistructured interviews were used. This questionnaire, comprising 25 questions, was based on a number of questionnaires used in previous studies [2, 22–25]. Adapted for Iranian users, it is believed that the questionnaire covers all the aspects of dictionary use related to our research questions. The response rate was 57% (64 completed questionnaires out of a total of 112 distributed).

All in all, the questionnaire has 15 five-point Likert scale items plus 10 multiple-choice questions. Both the validity and reliability of the designed questionnaire were checked using related statistical methods.

Content validation can be done through expert judgment, which is defined [26, p. 29] as an informed opinion from individuals with a track record in the field who are regarded by others as qualified experts and who can provide judgments and assessments. We asked a number of EFL teachers to make judgments and express their opinions on a different aspect of the designed questionnaire. Based on their comments and suggestions, the questionnaire was revised by the researchers. Also, in order to check the reliability, we entered all the items of the questionnaire into SPSS, and the reliability has been calculated based on Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.86$).

After conducting the survey study, follow-up semistructured interviews were held with a number of participants. H. J. Rubin and I. S. Rubin [27] state that a semistructured interview "allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses." As a result, in order to develop the interview questions, the literature was reviewed once more, and the opinions of the same group of EFL teachers were collected and implied in order to validate the content of the questions. Finally, the semistructured interviews are conducted to gain in-depth information about the research questions.

TABLE 1: Learners' purposes/reasons for consulting dictionary.

	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Always (%)
I use a dictionary to find meanings	0	4.7	23.4	40.6	31.2
I read the grammatical information given with the word	0	14.1	48.4	28.1	9.4
I use a dictionary to find out pronunciation of the words	0	14.1	15.6	40.6	29.7
I read the users' guide given in the dictionary	7.8	43.8	26.6	17.2	4.7
I prefer to use a specialized dictionary	3.1	9.4	35.9	34.4	17.2
I avoid going into the details given against a word in the dictionary. It saves my time	23.4	20.3	39.1	10.9	6.2

3.3. *Data Collection and Analysis.* A mixed-methods design was used in the present study to gain a deeper insight into learners' preferences in working with paper and electronic dictionaries since methodological triangulation is considered as a vital factor in ensuring the validity of the results obtained from various instruments [28].

The questionnaire was distributed among all 112 students of translation after giving them some background information about the research study; however, only 64 completed versions were returned to the researchers.

In total, 17 students (5 males and 12 females) took part in semistructured interviews, and informed consent was obtained from them using oral informed consent process since it is more appropriate when interviewing participants as part of the research. In an attempt to make each interviewee feel as comfortable as possible, the interviewer let them choose the language in which the interview would be conducted (either Persian or English). The researchers continued semistructured interviews until they reached the saturation point. In qualitative studies, "data saturation" or "thematic saturation" [29] is commonly used as "the most frequently touted guarantee of qualitative rigor offered by authors to reviewers and readers" [30, p. 587] and it refers to "the point at which gathering more data about a theoretical construct reveals no new properties, nor yields any further theoretical insights about the emerging grounded theory" [31], signifying that an adequate sample size is reached [32], and in our study, after conducting the interview with 17 students, we realized that we have reached that point and the sample is adequate for the phenomenon studied. After recording and transcribing the data, it was analyzed in two phases, focusing on the results obtained from the survey and the interviews. First, the frequency of answers was calculated to analyze the results of the questionnaires. Next, the content analysis was employed, and the answers obtained from the interviews were read and analyzed by two researchers so that emerging themes can be identified. Also, the Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient was run to determine whether there exists a relationship between students' gender and their use of dictionary to accept or reject the null hypothesis.

4. Results

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS software, and the results are reported under different sections based on the order of our research questions.

(RQ1) What are the most common situations and purposes for participants to use dictionaries?

To answer the research question (RQ1), the answers to two questions in the second section of the questionnaire regarding the most common places and situations for dictionary use were analyzed. The results show that students use their dictionaries the most while they are studying at home ($F=52$) and when they work on a translation exercise ($F=41$). The results obtained from the interviews were mostly in line with the results of the questionnaire. Students once more commented that they use their dictionaries mostly while they are doing their homework at home:

#Student 5: When I have to translate a passage, as a part of my homework, I check my dictionary all the time. I cannot be sure about the meanings unless I check it in a good dictionary, normally on my mobile phone. This way, I can reassure myself that my translation is correct, or revise it if it is not.

#Student 17: Honestly, I don't use my dictionary during classes, but I do use it at home. We have a lot of assignments, you know... and they are being graded. So to achieve a higher grade, I check the meanings and some are really difficult. Cannot be done without the help of a dictionary in fact!

Table 1 provides the answers to Likert-type questions in the first section of the questionnaire, which displays students' purposes/reasons for consulting the dictionary. The EFL students often use a dictionary to find meanings and pronunciations. They sometimes use grammatical information given, but they rarely read the users' guide and avoid reading the details related to each word. The descriptive analysis also showed that students mostly prefer to use a specialized dictionary.

Furthermore, students' responses to the first question in Section 2 showed that learners prioritize the relevance of the dictionary to their needs when they decide to purchase a new dictionary. As mentioned in the interviews:

#Student 1: I'm not actually interested in reading the extra information, or instruction at all. I just want to find the meanings as quickly as

TABLE 2: Most common means of obtaining dictionaries.

Statements	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Always (%)
I download dictionary app to my phone from an application store	1.6	4.7	10.9	15.6	67.2
I go online when I need to consult a dictionary for a word	4.7	6.2	20.3	39.1	29.7
I download dictionary app to my tablet/computer from an application store	6.2	7.8	26.6	15.6	43.8
I purchased a paper dictionary myself	7.8	34.1	21.9	15.6	20.6
I received a CD copy of my paper dictionary when I bought it	40.6	20.3	6.2	14.1	18.8
I purchased an electronic dictionary myself	45.3	14.1	21.9	3.1	15.6
I borrowed an electronic dictionary from a friend	51.6	29.7	14.1	3.1	1.6
I have downloaded a free copy of an electronic dictionary illegally	42.2	21.9	17.2	6.2	12.5

possible, and mostly they are easier to find in the technical dictionaries, engineering or medical dictionaries for example, depending on the text itself.

#Student 15: Nobody read(s) the guides and stuff at the beginning, I've never done it! However, I check how to read a word, its pronunciation I mean. Also there are examples, synonyms, collocations, I check those too.

(RQ2) What are the most common means for participants to obtain dictionaries?

Table 2 provides the answers regarding the most common means for participants to obtain dictionaries.

Whereas the majority of participants (67.2%) reported that they always download dictionaries to their mobile phones from application stores, almost half of the students (43.8%) reported that they always download the same dictionary applications to their computers. They often (39%) went online when they had to look up a word in a dictionary. On the other hand, they rarely (34.1%) purchased a paper dictionary and when they did, almost half of them never (40.6%) received a CD copy of the dictionaries obtained. It was very interesting to see that since downloading free copies was an option, almost half of the students never bought an e-dictionary, nor they borrowed one. Also, 42% asserted that they have never downloaded a free copy of dictionary illegally. Their answer to the question in the second section asking them about the main reason of choosing a dictionary over others to buy revealed that students, in most cases ($F=39$), followed their teachers' or university professors' recommendations. Moreover, from the in-depth semistructured interviews, the following information emerged, mostly showing how students prefer electronic, free versions of dictionaries over other types:

#Student 8: I always use my mobile phone to check new words and I am almost always online. Even when I am not, my dictionary provides me with offline pronunciation of words and everything. I downloaded it for free, but I can't update it. You can find all apps for free if you search

enough, and we can't pay to international websites anyway, so why should we bother? There are always free options!

#Student 10: I have bought a dictionary many years ago, before I have a cellphone, but since then... I mean, I don't need it at all. I read most my books in pdf forms in my phone, actually, everything get(s) done online these days! Even our professors suggested us to use online dictionaries for looking up different words.

(RQ3) Have they been taught how to use a dictionary?

Among 64 students of translation studies, almost half of them ($F=29$) stated they have received instructions on using dictionaries, and another half ($F=30$) asserted that they have been instructed a little, while almost one-third of them ($F=19$) mentioned that they had received a little on how to use a dictionary at university. Only a small fraction ($F=5$) believed that they have never received any instruction at university on how to work with dictionaries.

Student 3: Our professors told us a little bit, now and then, on how to find meanings faster, or how to choose among many various definitions provided in front of a specific word. They talked about the role of context, types of texts etc., whenever we needed to look up a word in a class. Never in form of a course on how to use dictionaries, we never had any assignments related, but the information was useful. And I guess you learn by doing it, just searching again and again till you can do it better.

(RQ4) What are students' opinions toward using dictionaries?

Table 3 shows the students' opinions toward using dictionary. Apparently, half of the participants (48.4%) asserted that sometimes using a dictionary is an enjoyable activity. Just under 10% of the participants found said that it is never or rarely enjoyable, and more than 90% of them enjoyed working with dictionaries. Furthermore, the responses to

TABLE 3: Opinions toward dictionary use.

Statements	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Always (%)
Dictionary use is an enjoyable activity	1.6	7.8	48.4	20.3	21.9

TABLE 4: Correlation between students' gender and their use of dictionary.

		Use of dictionary	Gender
Spearman's ρ	Use of dictionary	Correlation coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	–
		N	64
	Gender	Correlation coefficient	0.136
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.283
		N	64

five multiple-choice questions revealed that they found idioms, proverbs, and phrases ($F=40$) the most difficult type of information to find, and the second rank belonged to specialized/technical terms ($F=26$).

#Student 12: I like working with dictionaries, and having a feeling of achievement when you find the meaning on your own, and you don't have to ask others for help. However, I kind of get confused when I have to look up a phrasal verb or an idiom, when it is more than one word, I don't know which one to check, for example, yesterday I needed to know the meaning of "talking through your hat," and I didn't know whether to search the word "talk," or "hat"!

The next question provided information on the causes of the difficulties in finding different information, where the most frequent answer was blaming dictionaries for lack of information in ($F=32$), and the lack of dictionary knowledge on students' part was mentioned as the second reason ($F=19$). However, it was very interesting to notice the participants' answers regarding their opinion toward dictionary use, where Sepedi reported dictionary use as both easy ($F=30$) and worthwhile/informative ($F=30$). A number of them have also found this activity exciting and fun ($F=18$).

#Student 7: I sometimes don't know how to exactly search for them, but at the end I manage, I find the meaning somehow and it feels good!

When the students were asked whether they generally were happy with their ability to use a dictionary, 59 out of 64 participants answered "yes," and only a small portion ($F=5$) said that they were not satisfied with their ability.

(RQ5) What is the most common type of dictionary among participants used for translation purposes (i.e., paper-based or e-dictionaries)?

The last item of the questionnaire measured the preference of students between working with either electronic or paper-based dictionaries. There was a significant difference

between the two choices, where 62 students chose electronic dictionaries over paper-based ones.

#Student 14: It is difficult to take a heavy hard copy of a dictionary here and there, so, I use my mobile phone. It is with me everywhere, and I can surf the net, look up a word online if I ever need more examples or some clarification.

4.1. *Research Hypothesis.* Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient was run to determine whether there exists a relationship between students' gender and their use of dictionary, as shown in Table 4.

This null-hypothesis was accepted since we observed a very low, positive correlation between students' gender and their use of dictionary, which was not statistically significant ($r=0.136$, $n=64$, $p=0.283$).

5. Discussion

Mobile phones and online learning tools are not considered as a novelty in Iranian educational environments; however, since the COVID-19 pandemic, most students have had no choice but to be present in online webinars and classes in order to continue their studies. Inevitably, their access to electronic and online dictionaries have increased as well, offering teachers more options regarding online e-learning tools. The major findings of the present study, as measured by the questionnaire and semistructured interviews, show that almost 97% of the respondents were clearly attracted to electronic dictionaries, that can be justified due to the conditions caused by the pandemic and new educational settings, switching to electronic platform in time of restrictions, and the advantages that tech-based dictionaries offer compared to paper-based ones [33]. It is somewhat surprising that 92% of them seem to be satisfied with their current ability related to dictionary use, which confirms the findings associated with European dictionary culture [2], reflecting learners' exaggerated feeling of self-confidence in spite of the difficulties they experience while checking the idioms and proverbs; these difficulties were also reported in Lew's study [34].

Also, the results declared that there is no significant relationship between learner's gender and their use of dictionaries, which is in contrast with the findings of Alhaisoni [35], who reported that female students use mobile and google translator significantly more than male students. Considering the fact that Alhaisoni's study was conducted in 2016, the difference in findings can be justified according to the advances made in technology, as well as the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on students' use of electronic means of learning, no matter what their gender is.

The results of a study conducted by Gavriilidou et al. [36] indicated that although students majoring in humanities get acquainted with dictionaries during their studies, career orientation does not seem to affect their strategic use of digital dictionaries and more precisely, the lemmatization, navigation, and look-up strategies they use. On the other hand, they have concluded that majoring in humanities does affect dictionary awareness strategies because the acquaintance of students majoring in humanities with dictionaries may have helped them develop a dictionary culture and knowledge of the different types of digital dictionaries and the circumstances during which these can be used. However, since their digital skills were not developed enough, they could not outperform students of science in navigation skills or during the performance of look-up strategies in new electronic environments.

In view of the conditions in Iranian educational settings, one needs to know that Iran has not joined any main international copyright agreements so far [37], which means that the rights of foreign publishers and authors are not legally protected in Iran, and students can download various dictionaries from websites free of charge. Although half of the respondents asserted that they have illegally downloaded dictionaries, the researchers believe that the rest have done the same without even being aware of it since not paying for dictionary applications seems quite natural to them.

Students of translation participating in this study also claimed to use their dictionaries the most while they were studying at home. It is argued that student autonomy can be achieved if EFL teachers are successful in motivating students to consult e-dictionaries outside of their EFL class [38]. Although this study has not investigated the relationship between dictionary use and students' autonomy, since students asserted that they frequently visit dictionaries while doing their assignments, we can realize that the use of electronic dictionaries can potentially increase learners' autonomy in EFL context.

There are similarities between the attitudes expressed in this study and those described by other researchers [7, 39–42]. The researcher observed that the learners frequently stated that dictionary use is “enjoyable,” “easy,” and “fun,” showing that they have positive attitudes about the use of e-dictionaries. It can be the result of the fact that they ignore their “lack of knowledge of dictionary skills,” instead, they mostly enjoy the speed and ease of finding meanings through electronic dictionaries, as confirmed in Alamri and Hakami [43] study showing speed and time-saving features of electronic dictionaries. It supports evidence from our observations and interviews mentioning that

students use dictionaries the most while they are doing their homework and assignments.

On the question of instruction, this study found that only half of the learners claimed to have received instruction on how to work with dictionaries. Although the crucial role of dictionary skills cannot be ignored, dictionary skill is not tested at any level of language education [12]. This finding seems to have practical implications for curriculum developers and policy-makers to design courses related to dictionary skills and literacy since dictionaries are proved to benefit study skills (such as writing and reading) [2]. Also, it can be implied that EFL students need to gain more knowledge in order to be able to obtain more benefits from e-dictionaries and other valuable sources. Finally, we need to emphasize the role that teachers need to play in teaching dictionary-related skills and strategies and design tasks to put these into practice.

The study is limited in some ways. First, the number of Iranian students of translation who participated in this study were limited, which means that in further studies, more significant results can be obtained if a more substantial number of students take part in the study and if the participants will not be restricted to scale of Iran. Also, the researchers have decided to take “age” into account as a factor, but since all the students fell into a limited range, age could not be incorporated as a variable into this study. Hopefully, future studies can be conducted with a wider range of participants and broader age groups and therefore will provide more sufficient insights into the factors of influencing dictionary use.

Overall, this research study extends our knowledge of dictionary use and preferences among Iranian students of English translation, showing us both the strengths and drawbacks of dictionary use in this context. One crucial factor to be taken into account in the condition of classes that were held during COVID-19 pandemic. Almost all the classes at universities were held online, so students had to have access to quality internet in order to participate in classes, hand in their assignments, and continue their studies. The specific conditions can justify why the finding is contrary to a previous study [44] conducted in Iran before the pandemic, which has suggested that “due to the problems with the Internet, the students preferred to use online e-learning tools as a last resort where free quality Internet was available.” These findings contribute in several ways to our understanding of dictionary use and provide a basis for researchers, learners, and teachers to consider the potential of electronic dictionaries in the light of new changes in accessibility and availability. The other contribution of this research could be related to the fact that the identification of dictionary users' profiles can help dictionary makers, and also, there are practical implications for learners' and teachers' activities designed to be done in classrooms or at homes.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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