Developing EFL Reading Skills through English Dictionary at the Higher Secondary Level in Sahiwal District, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

As the language of tertiary education, English enjoys considerable importance in Pakistan. For the Pakistani ESL learners, navigating academia successfully is contingent upon advanced proficiency in L2 skills. In turn, academic success translates into better jobs and employability for the learners. In particular, literature reports a key nexus between effective L2 reading and academic success. With the language of classroom instruction, materials, texts, assessments and academic discourse being English, proficiency in L2 reading means that Pakistani ESL learners who are able to read effectively are also likely to process information and convey their ideas, whether in speech or writing, effectively. However, research suggests that Pakistani ESL learners have poor L2 reading skills which ultimately affects their access to higher education and better career prospects. Against this backdrop, the present experimental study was designed to help selected Pakistani higher secondary school learners learn to make strategic use of the dictionary for comprehending English texts more effectively. Analysis of pre-test and post-test data from the control and experimental groups of participants found that the learners in the experimental group made significant improvements in reading and comprehension of L2 texts, with their post test scores improving by 90% when compared against their baseline performance.

INTRODUCTION

With the increasing spread and importance of English, particularly in multi-lingual communities across the world, Grabe and Stoller (2002) point out that language learners are expected to demonstrate an advanced level of proficiency in L2 reading. As one of the four key language skills, Krashen and Brown (2007) observe that reading is essential to developing overall proficiency in the target language.

While reading in itself is a 'complex cognitive skill, involving many subskills, processes and knowledge sources (Nasssaji, 2011, p.175), L2 reading comprehension is even more complex because it is influenced by multiple text-related variables (e.g. length of the text, linguistic load and text structure) and reader-related factors (e.g. preexisting knowledge, aptitude and working memory) (Leeser, 2007). Within L2 settings, reading is influenced by the proficiency, age, motivation of the learners, teacher-pertinent issues, the relationship between the learners' L1 and their L2 as well as their cognitive processing of the text (Grabe, 2004). In terms of L2 reading at the level of the individual L2 reader, Jeon and Yamshita (2014), based on their meta-analysis of L2 reading comprehension, point out the influence of the L2 readers' grammatical and lexical knowledge, orthographic and phonological knowledge and awareness, L2 decoding and working memory.

In Pakistani educational settings, the prevalence of a grammar-translation pedagogy means that L2 learners learn to read and write without completely understanding syntactic rules which can enable them to arrive at an accurate interpretation of the meaning in the texts, thus detracting from their ability to establish new parameters in the L2 (Warsi, 2004). An additional challenge is that within Pakistani school contexts, L2 readers are expected to pick up the ability to read in English implicitly, with limited instruction being provided to help L2 learners develop into strategic readers (Muhammad, 2013, p.1404). Another issue is that L2 readers in Pakistan are not trained to develop their L2 vocabulary actively (Bhatti, Butt & Khanam, 2019, p.121) which makes it difficult for them to process the meaning of the text due to unfamiliarity of the words.

Within L1 and L2 research, there is considerable support for the deployment of reading strategies to develop effective L2 reading comprehension (Nassaji, 2011). Observing that reading is a strategic process, Grabe (2009, p.15) points out that effective L2 reading involves multiple skills as well as processes. These include anticipating text information and selecting, organizing, and mentally summarizing information, monitoring comprehension, repairing breakdowns incomprehension, and matching the output of comprehension to the goals of the readers (Grabe, 2009, p.15). Effective readers make use of both top-down or higher level (e.g. drawing upon prior knowledge, inferencing, predicting what will transpire in the text next) and bottom-up and lower level (e.g. word-recognition and syntactic parsing) processes (Kazemi, Hosseini & Kohandani, 2013, p.2334-2335).

As mentioned earlier, Pakistani L2 readers struggle to comprehend L2 texts due to a number of reasons which include limited vocabulary development (Bhatti, Butt & Khanam, 2019, p.131) and the implicit nature of L2 reading instruction in Pakistani educational settings (Muhammad, 2013, p.1404).These issues can be addressed with a focus on bottom-up reading strategies which enable readers to process information at the level of the sentence unit by focusing on the meaning of the word as well as its grammatical category and syntax amongst others (Lopera Medina, 2019, p.131). Research suggests that language learners can improve their reading skills by making strategic use of dictionaries (e.g. Chen, 2012; Shen, 2013). Studies on dictionary use by language learners to improve their L2 reading have reported improvement in reading comprehension tests (Summers, 1988), lexical retention (Robinson, 2003; Peters, 2007), vocabulary acquisition (Mokhtaar, Mohd & Omar, 2013), and learner efficiency (Liu, 2014).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Reading is an independent variable linked to all academic processes, and our communication skills, reading skills, exploring knowledge and advancing knowledge, and getting information depend on reading. On the other hand, reading is a dependent variable because it depends on understanding. If a student does not understand the meaning of the text, then he cannot get information. So dictionary is an independent variable for the reading process.

Various researchers are also researching using a dictionary to improve students' language skills (Alharbi, 2016; Kanglong & Afzaal 2020). Alharbi from King Saud University. He emphasizes the use of a dictionary for improvement in EFL reading. He evaluates the positive impact of the use of dictionaries on EFL learners. His experiment provides authentic support for my research. He takes 140 participants from the English Department of language Fatality, King Khalid Saud University. All participants' native language is Arabic. He divided into four groups. Through the test at the beginning of the research, he cheques the reading condition and its understanding of the students then started the treatment. The students face so many problems like recognising new words and their spelling and vocabulary problems. He provides the pop-up dictionary for checking meanings and getting information about their native language. His method of research is very well. He points out some aspects of the use of a dictionary. According to his reading, text and comprehension are wholly developed by the comprehension strategies and dictionary use. He gives theory in his research mega. According to his mental efforts, it is totally developed through the performance.This thing is to construct the relationship with our research because by the motivation of the student Can give proper interest during the duration of the research.

A review of existing research on the strategic use of dictionaries to improve L2 reading comprehension in Pakistan reveals that most of the studies inquire into patterns in strategy use or perceptions of strategies in L2 reading. They investigate university ESL learners' habits of dictionary use (Ayoub, Mehmood & Awan, 2017; Ahmed, Jawaid & Kaur et al, 2018), use and usefulness of mono-lingual, bilingual or semi-bilingual dictionaries (Aslam, Iqbal & Chaudhary, 2017), teachers' perceptions of reading strategies (e.g. text scanning, dictionary use) in Pakistan (Channa, Nordina & Simming et al, 2017), teachers' strategies in L2 reading and impact on school learners' performance (Teeveno, Bhatti & Devi, 2020) or learners' perceptions of monolingual dictionaries in learning English (Abbasi, Ahmad & Mohammed, 2019). The one experimental study found in the review comprises a comparative investigation of the impact of dictionary-based and context-based vocabulary development on Pakistani university L2 learners' proficiency. The present study seeks to investigate the impact of teaching Pakistani ESL learners to make strategic use of English dictionaries to improve their reading comprehension.

Learning to make strategic and effective use of dictionary is not a simple process. For instance, Scholfield (1982, p. 186-193) breaks down the process of searching for a word in the dictionary into seven steps, with corresponding strategies associated with each step (pp. 186-93). These steps include i) finding the unknown word or phrase, ii) locating the citation form of the words that are inflected, iii) searching for the word alphabetically, iv) using appropriate strategy for looking up main entry for any item that is unknown, v) learning to filter out the senses for the word that are not applicable, vi) understanding the explanation or definition for the entry and contextualizing it to the context of its occurrence in source text and vii) making appropriate inference as to sense from information available, even if it does not appear immediately relevant. Noting the limitations of the strategies outlined by Schofield (1982), Wingate (2004, p.10) used the findings from her empirical investigation into dictionary use by foreign language learners of German to propose dictionary skills training that took into account the complex nature of L2 dictionary usage by foreign or second language learners. Wingate suggests the use of the following categories of dictionary use strategies for building up L2 reader comprehension:

DICTIONARY-SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

Foreign language learners need to be sensitized to varying dictionary conventions and taught to search for content words within the phrase they were looking up till the appropriate idiomatic phrase is found. Merely encouraging students to follow user instructions is inadequate.

LANGUAGE-SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

The language learners must also be taught to be provided with the skills to analyze unknown items morphologically as well as syntactically. They must learn to identify the components making up compounds. The learners must also be able to know what part of speech the item they are looking for belongs to. This facilitates in finding the item and prevents them from choosing equivalents that are not suitable.

MEANING-SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

To train language learners not to rely on reading dictionary information superficially or focus only on equivalents, they must be trained to learn to consult dictionaries authentically for their language tasks. They must practice the steps and strategies till these become automatic. Wingae (2004) suggests that when learners encounter polysemous items, they must be taught to scan the complete entry and review all meanings, discarding those which are unsuitable. In case they are accessing monolingual dictionaries, the learners must also be trained to transform the complete definitional sentence and integrate it contextually with the unfamiliar word or phrase.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted an experimental methodology. XYZ female secondary school learners aged between 16 to 18 years participated in the study. Twenty-eight percent of the students spoke Urdu as their first language (L1), whereas 72% spoke Punjabi speak as of their L1, although they were also proficient in Urdu. Institutional approval for the study was obtained from the School Principal, and parental consent was arranged from the learners' parents via an explanatory letter and permission slip sent home to them.

Training in dictionary use with a view to improving their L2 comprehension.

Phase 1

In phase 1, a pre-test to assess the L2 comprehension of ESL learners was administered. One hundred students took part in the test. Based on pre-test results, 20 students were selected for participation in the experiment. The twenty participants were randomly assigned a number from 1 to 20, and the ten participants with the odd numbers were selected to the control group, whereas the remaining learners with the even numbers were selected to the experimental group.

Phase 2

Training based on the three categories of dictionary-use strategies suggested by Wingate (2004) was implemented with the experimental group to improve their L2 reading comprehension was over the course of three months. The control group was taught using a conventional reading pedagogy based on course book use alone. Daily classes of 120 minutes for this activity were held on each day of the school week.

The aim of the training was to enable the ESL learners in the experimental group to become familiar with dictionary conventions, phonetic information to aid pronunciation of the words, morphological and syntactic analysis of dictionary items, and a deeper understanding of the words or phrases they were trying to locate.

A paragraph was given to the students every day. In the experimental group, the learners were taught to locate the unfamiliar items from the paragraph, their denotative meanings, synonyms, antonyms, and word transcriptions through the Oxford Advanced Learners' Bi-lingual dictionary. The learners also maintained word lists of the new items they were learning. At the end of the training period, a post-test was administered to the control group and experimental group learners to evaluate changes in their L2 reading comprehension if any.

STUDENT'S PERFORMANCE IN THE PRE-TEST

Student performance in pre-test is very poor because they do not perform well in this test. They do not take the whole exam properly; they do not understand the meanings of the given words. This activity indicates EFL learners' learning and reading habits. And also shows their way of reading text is not good and effective.

Table 1. Pre-test result of students selected for participation in the study

Participants	Meanings	Spelling	Synonyms	Antonyms	Transcription	Translate text
Total words	10	10	10	10	10	One paragraph
Selected student's result	3	5	4	2	0	Not correct

In this test which was conducted to check the students' L2 reading comprehension of the given text, ten words were dictated to the students.

RESULTS OF POST-TEST

After teaching the student from the dictionary, is conducted the post-test to check how much progress that student achieves. Table no three points out learner's grades in Post-test. This time research team enhance the test material. And they give 20, 20 words of each discipline and two paragraphs of transportation in the Post-test.

Table 2. This table shows the results of the post-test

Participants	Meanings	Spellings	Synonyms	Antonyms	Transcriptions	Translation
Total words	20	20	20	20	10	Paragraph

Scores Experimental group	17	18	19	14	9	Approximately correct
Scores Control group	5	9	3	4	2	Not attempt properly

Table two shows how experimental students learn many things through the use of the dictionary, and their improvement is shown in the table in the form of grades. But there is a point to notice table control group students' grades show that they do not perform well in this test. At this time, the research team gives more words than pre-test and gives two paragraphs for English to Urdu translation for takes estimate in the students' progress is achieved by the use of dictionaries.

The following table four has shown as the identification mark of grammatical improvements to the EFL learner's daily process through using dictionaries. And also indicates that a dictionary is a tool of effective learning. Students' marks are showing percentage form in below the table.

Table 3. This table shows the acquirement percentage of EFL learners from the experimental group

Column No. 1	10 learners Experimental Group	Colum.No:2 Acquirement	Column No. 3 Remaining
Noun	8	85%	15%
Pronunciation	9	86%	14%
Phrases	7	76%	24%
Idioms	8	68%	32%
Punctuation rules	6	55%	45%
Example sentences	8	90%	10%

This table depicts the acquirement percentage of EFL learners from the experimental group and shows students' progress. This tabular form shows how many students answer the given words and how many remain that they do not respond in the form of a percentage. This data is not only collected by Post-test but also collected through daily activities.

DATA ANALYSIS

Alahmadi and Foltz (2020) have noticed the effect and impact of using the dictionary as a beneficial tool for building and advancing learner knowledge about the English language and gaining comprehension of reading. Hakim and Jafre (2018) State that being a fellow learner, students' death proficiency in the English language with the help of Elecan Electrical Dictionary and by the use of dictionaries learners will be able to deep comprehension of any writing material.

Reading is an overall complex process. The most important things are considering how to teach the ESL learners and gain their reading, advance their knowledge, and solve their language-related problems. Because if students can't understand the text, they cannot pay attention properly in their studies. After the pre-test result and the experiment turned on them, our team found out which words and sentences students can understand. To experiment, our team has been able to know which word they know better and how much they can understand any writing. All of these things are judged by the experiment that is put on them. Then researcher decides on the Next course of action that will be helpful for the EFL learner

Table 4. This table shows the learner's daily activities and development and learning timetable during these three months.

Students daily activity
Objectives
To learn new words meaning, vocabulary and pronunciation.
2. To use the thesaurus option for synonyms and Antonyms.
3. To improve reading skills.
Timing: two hours approximately
Development
1. Students are given a short text on it.
2. The teacher explained that everyone has to read at least ten sentences of given text aloud, tell the meaning, check their pronunciation, give feedback orally, and ask them to compare their answers with their fellows.

Throughout three months, this process starts continually without a break. During this time, students learn many things with the help of the Oxford Advance learners' dictionary and Longman dictionary, Cambridge advanced learner's monolingual dictionary, Oxford modern grammar and punctuation dictionary.
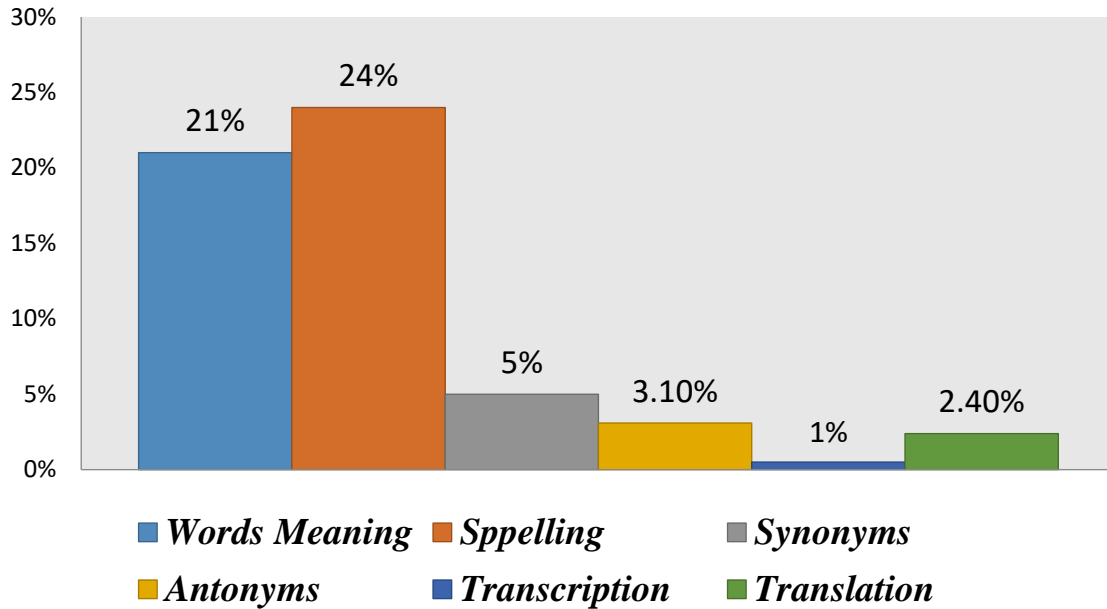
Figure 1. Reading understanding in the pre-test

Figure one depicts the overall 32.5% performance of the students before the research in Pre-test in the form of a percentage. Their performance in the Pre-test is respectively 21% in words recognition and understanding of meaning,24% in spelling writing, 5% in synonyms, 10% in antonyms, 0.1% in transcription, 2.40%in translation writing. After taking and collecting the pre-test results, the researchers' team is selected the same students whose performance in the text is very low. This test shows that the learners are not aware of the use of the dictionary nor know about phonemic symbols. The first researcher asks all the students whether they are in the control group or the experimental group. All students are given a lecture on English phonemic symbols. So they all are aware of English phonemes equally. And the students of the experimental group are practice finding the meanings of difficult words in the paragraph through the Longman and oxford advance learner's dictionaries and collect and memorize them. During all these procedures, the EFL learners accumulated enough vocabulary. And then they are again taken a test.
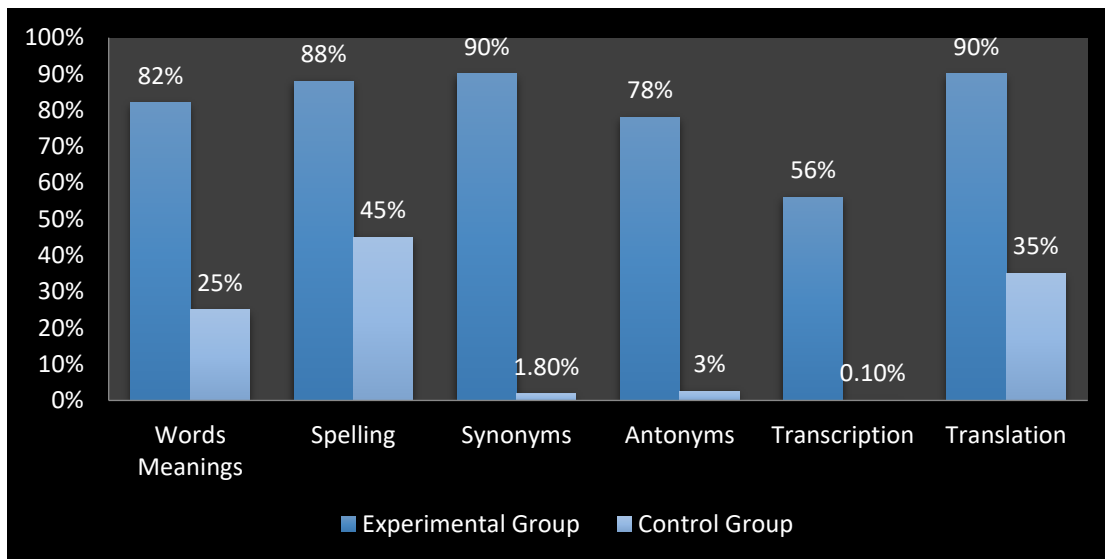

Figure 2. Learner's Improvements in post-test

Figure two indicates the progress of overall 90% of the experimental group's students and 33% experimental group's students in the post-test. It distinguishes between experimental and control group's students with dark blue and light blue. Dark blue shows the progress of the practical student, and light blue shows control group students progress. The performance in this

test as following experimental group student correctness in words, meanings 82%, spelling 88%, synonyms 90%, antonyms 78%, transcription 56%, translation 90% and control group performance as a word meaning 25%, spelling 45%, synonyms 1.8%, antonym 3%, translation 35%. As in the pre-test, the meanings of the words of the ESL learners are correct up to 21%, and in the post-test, it is 82%.

Table number three points to the improvement of experimental group EFL learners in the early school of thought.
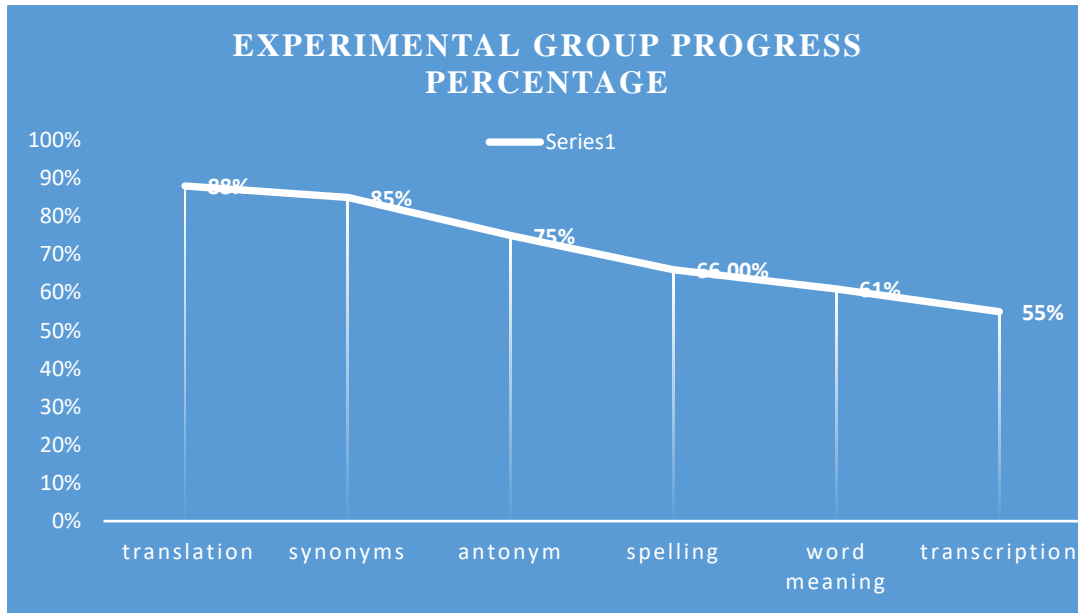

Figure 3. Grammatical improvement of EFL experimental learners through the using dictionaries
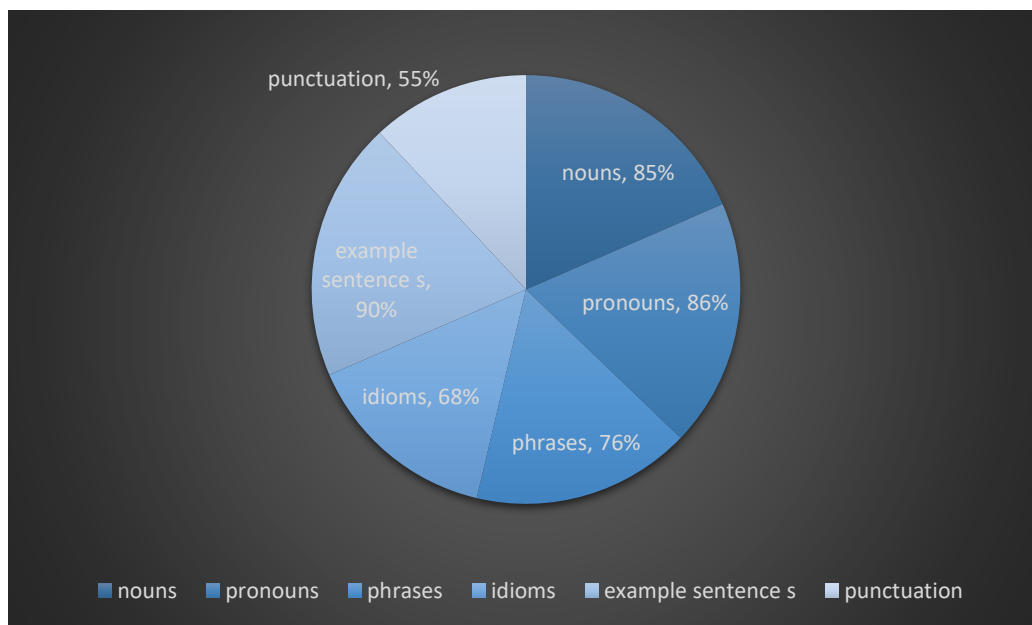

Figure 4.the experimental group's EFL learners have also improved grammar

Learners' ability to understand the meanings of words increased by 61% and improved spelling 66%, synonyms 85%, Antonyms 74.80%, Transcription 55%, and translation understanding ability increased around 87.60%. In addition, due to the correct use of the dictionaries, our EFL learners take more interest in reading because they properly understand the text and built a habit of using dictionaries.

Students learn grammar through dictionaries, and they collect the knowledge. Every school of thought indicates a different colour in graph number 4 that draws in below.

Figure fore is a depiction that the experimental group's EFL learners have also improved grammar. They have collected the knowledge about nouns 85%; pronouns 86%, phrases 76%, idioms 68%, and have collected several example sentences improvement is approximately 90%, Information about punctuations 55%. Students are learnt a lot of things through the use of a dictionary during this procedure. And they are achieved grammatical improvement like they collect knowledge about nouns, pronounces, idioms, phrases, and example sentences and punctuation. Their improvements and achievements are shown in the upper graph in the form of a percentage. In this session is taken feedback about the use of a dictionary to the student and teachers of higher secondary School Farid town Sahiwal. All school teachers are included in this session with tough English subjects, and our experimental and control group students have. The feedback that takes the answer shows that students ignore the use of the dictionary and are not award the benefit of the uses of the dictionary. That is the fundamental reason, so students are not able to understand the text correctly. The ring is also related to our communication and writing skills, so first, the need is to develop student reading skills; then, EFL students can use the English language properly. Corresponding teachers and experimental students strongly agree with the benefits of dictionaries, and they are given 90% to 80% positive feedback about the use of a dictionary. And other students and teachers give feedback 43 per cent to 39% positive, and they about another way of learning are very effective compared to the dictionary. Teachers provide 43% use of dictionary because they think every student cannot take and use a dictionary properly.
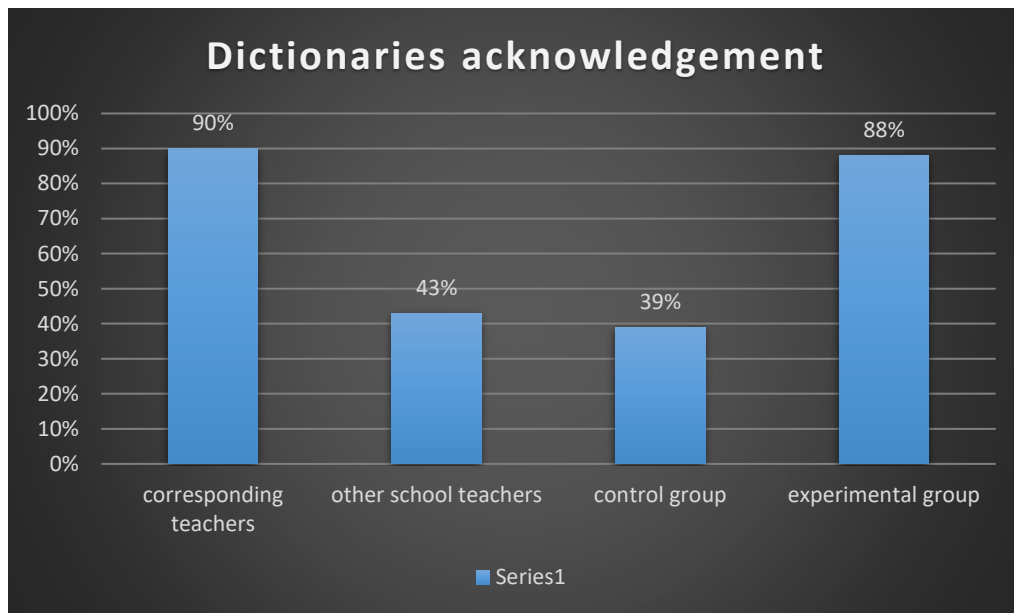

Figure 5. Perception and feedback about the use of a dictionary

At the end of the research, some questions are asked about using the dictionary and its benefits from the participants and fellow teachers and other school students and teachers.   After taking the feedback and perceptions about dictionaries, our team members have learned about the use of dictionaries in Pakistan. After this procedure, the result is that the student does not properly use the dictionary during the reading, and the teacher does not properly suggest and emphasize its use.

FINDING

This study aims to give attention to the use of the dictionary and its effect on the learner in this way learning new vocabulary memorizing and recalling the word and its meaning. The other thing is that it explored a student's attitude toward the use of dictionaries in reading. With the help of this research, we explore that a dictionary is very beneficial for ESL learners.

BENEFITS OF DICTIONARY ON LEARNERS

1. Enhancement of the reading skills through the use of dictionary because it provides understanding about the translation comprehension, increases motivation and learns vocabulary, and helps to memorize new words and their spelling.
2. In the sense and tool of linking word with the learner's mother tongue. It is very beneficial for EFL learners.
3. It is a constructive approach for the student. It has helped the learners to learn the language and allows knowing about the other culture. Because it improves the students' reading skills through the reading, every person learns about other cultures and their country values and gives opportunity to learns lifestyle of that country which is about the learns.

Through this research, our experimental group learns many things and gives full attention to their study because they know how to read the text and use a dictionary through this experiment.

ATTITUDE OF LEARNER

Our team noticed after the experiment that the students are not aware of the transcriptions or their phonemic symbols. Students have avoided the use of dictionaries during reading. So that they do not fully understand the text because there are some words in each paragraph those students do not understand its meaning completely.   Due to this, they do not spend my time reading. And their knowledge has limited.

RECOMMENDATION

Researchers offer further advice regarding the use of dictionaries and reading, which can be helpful for the EFL learner and improve their proficiency.

- First of they all are set their reading goals.
- Students should be Must read any books and articles maximum of 30 minutes a day. The students should choose the books of their choice for this purpose to concentrate on their reading activities with full attention.
- Underline the problematic words and phrases and find their meanings in a dictionary.
- Make notes of these difficult words daily and recall them.
- Students should pay close attention to the pronunciation and transcriptions of words using the dictionary to improve their accent.
- Students should talk with their teachers and tell them their problems, and also, teachers should notice student performances, and if they will be able to find the problem, they give a possible solution. Teachers should be conducted some activities related to language improvement as well as reading like collecting new words, Regular oral reading, choosing some words and asking the student it's meanings, synonyms, and antonyms, and also checking the reading pronunciation, correct their pronunciation if students pronounce wrong, introduce phonetic symbols, encourage good performing students and also motivate the weak students.

CONCLUSION

The detail of this course is showed that EFL learners face many challenges in reading skills. The student has been successful in achieving the objective of using a dictionary during reading. The student has faced many problems regarding learning English as a second language in Pakistan at a higher secondary level. The challenges have been described clearly through this research and will be helped in understanding the cause of the low performance of EFL learners. The challenges found in this study include the issue related to the second language like understanding the text, new words, and their meanings, variation of accent, lack of interest in reading. This study has contributed by pointing out the student language-related core issue and trying to provide their possible solution with the help of dictionaries.

CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

Fehmida Rao: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software **Muhammad Babar Jamil.**: Data curation, Supervision, Writing-Original draft preparation. **Muhammad Iqbal**: Visualization, Investigation, Writing- Reviewing and Editing

COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

It is declared that all authors don't have any conflict of interest. Furthermore, informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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