



CORRECT USE OF DICTIONARIES IN TEACHING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract: Dictionaries are far more than passive reference books: when used intentionally, they become active pedagogical tools that develop lexical, grammatical, and cultural competence in learners of English. This article synthesizes contemporary theoretical and practical perspectives on dictionary use in English language instruction, drawing on studies of educational lexicography, linguoculturological dictionaries, electronic resources, and historical-pedagogical experience. It offers a coherent framework for selecting dictionary types, integrating dictionary tasks into lesson sequences, and scaffolding students' lexicographic competence across proficiency levels. Practical classroom activities and sample lesson sequences are provided, along with recommendations for teacher training and further research.

Keywords: dictionary use, English as a foreign language, lexicographic competence, electronic dictionaries, linguodidactics.

Introduction

The effective use of dictionaries plays a crucial role in the process of teaching and learning the English language. As learners increasingly encounter new vocabulary in written and spoken contexts, dictionaries serve as essential tools that support comprehension, enhance lexical acquisition, and promote learner autonomy. In modern language classrooms, the dictionary is no longer viewed merely as a reference book but as an instructional resource that helps students develop critical skills such as pronunciation, word formation, semantic distinction, and contextual usage.

Dictionaries have long been central to language learning, but in modern English-language pedagogy their role has become more complex and multifaceted. Today, dictionaries are not simply reference books: they are pedagogical instruments that shape students' lexical, grammatical, communicative, and even cultural competence. This article synthesizes insights from contemporary educational lexicography, research on linguoculturological dictionaries, studies of electronic dictionary use, and historical pedagogical sources [1]. Its purpose is to present a coherent and meaningful perspective on how dictionaries should be used when teaching English, and how to help



students develop strong lexicographic habits.⁶⁵

Effective dictionary use begins with understanding the diversity of lexicographic resources. At the beginner stages, bilingual dictionaries with carefully adapted definitions, phonetic transcription, and visual aids help learners build their first vocabulary base. These tools allow students to quickly identify meanings and establish semantic connections. At the intermediate level, monolingual learner's dictionaries and high-quality bilingual dictionaries become essential; they introduce students to stylistic labels, collocations, usage notes, and example sentences. As learners progress to advanced stages, explanatory dictionaries, corpus-based resources, linguoculturological dictionaries, and subject-specific glossaries (such as dictionaries of IT, law, medicine, economics) provide the depth needed for nuanced reading, writing, and discipline-specific communication.

One important concept discussed in recent scholarly literature is lexicographic competence — the ability to choose the right dictionary, search efficiently, interpret entries correctly, and apply this information in speech or writing. Research on training dictionaries for foreign students emphasizes that dictionary skills do not develop automatically; they must be taught systematically. Students often misinterpret senses, choose incorrect collocations, or rely on literal translations because they lack strategies for evaluating dictionary information. Therefore, dictionary use should be explicitly incorporated into lesson plans. Teachers can demonstrate how to navigate an entry, how to compare senses across dictionaries, and how to select the most appropriate lexical variant based on context, register, or collocation frequency.

Electronic dictionaries have added a new dimension to lexicographic pedagogy. Their advantages are clear: instant access, audio pronunciation, interactive examples, and constantly updated content. Many contemporary studies highlight how electronic dictionaries increase learner autonomy and reduce classroom dependence on the teacher. However, digital tools also present challenges. Overreliance on online translators or unverified dictionary apps leads to semantic errors, unnatural phrasing, and stylistic mismatch. Educators must therefore teach learners not only to use digital dictionaries, but to use them critically — for example, by comparing multiple sources,

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1. ⁶⁵ Nafisa, K., & Kamola, A. (2024). The Problem Of Teaching Students Lexical And Phraseological Features In Translation Studies Of Phrasal Verbs In English And Uzbek Languages. *Eurasian Journal Of Academic Research*, 4(10), 39-42.



confirming the correct grammatical pattern for a verb, or checking collocations through corpus-based resources.⁶⁶

An important contribution to the field comes from research on linguoculturological dictionaries, which show how dictionaries can reveal the cultural and symbolic meanings embedded in lexical items [5]. English contains many culturally marked words, idioms, and concepts that cannot be translated accurately without cultural background. For foreign learners cultural gaps often block comprehension even when the grammatical structure is clear. Linguoculturological dictionaries help bridge this gap by offering explanations of cultural references, historical context, figurative uses, and connotations. Incorporating such dictionaries into lessons enriches students' intercultural competence and prevents literal misunderstanding.

Historical studies on dictionary use in pre-revolutionary Uzbek schools provide additional insights. They show that dictionary training has always been considered essential, even before the digital age. Teachers systematically assigned dictionary-based exercises, such as searching for word families, comparing synonyms, or finding examples in literature. Although tools have changed, the underlying pedagogical principles remain relevant: dictionary use must be purposeful, contextual, and guided.

The modern classroom requires integrating all these insights into a coherent method. Teachers can design meaningful activities around dictionary use, such as collocation hunts, sense-selection tasks, thematic glossary creation, or error-correction tasks based on dictionary entries. These activities not only teach vocabulary, but also develop higher-order skills such as analytical thinking, interpretation, and autonomous learning. Through regular practice, students become less dependent on literal translation and more capable of selecting expressions that match context, register, and intention.

The correct and methodically grounded use of dictionaries in the process of teaching the English language is far more than a technical skill; it is a fundamental component of linguistic development, intellectual autonomy, and intercultural communication. Modern research in linguodidactics, pedagogical lexicography, and digital language learning demonstrates that dictionaries—whether printed, electronic, bilingual, monolingual, or linguoculturological—represent a unique bridge between the learner's native

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2. ⁶⁶ Tasheva, D. S., & Kubaeva, N. A. (2022). Modern educational technologies in the aspect of a student-centered approach in teaching foreign languages. *Eurasian Journal of Learning and Academic Teaching*, 12, 35.



linguistic worldview and the complex semantic structure of English. When students learn to consult dictionaries thoughtfully, interpret entries critically, compare meanings, and apply the information in speech and writing, they gradually acquire the ability to navigate the English language independently and accurately.

The rise of electronic and corpus-based dictionaries has significantly expanded the possibilities for teaching and learning. These tools provide up-to-date lexical information, authentic usage examples, audio support, and advanced search functions—features that accelerate comprehension and improve accuracy. However, the benefits of digital lexicography can only be realized when accompanied by methodological instruction; without guidance, students may misuse or misinterpret digital resources, leading to lexical interference, semantic inaccuracies, or dependence on machine translation. Thus, educators must teach critical evaluation of digital sources, strategies for comparing multiple dictionaries, and methods for verifying the appropriateness of lexical choices.

Linguoculturological dictionaries add another important dimension by illuminating culturally significant concepts, historical associations, and symbolic meanings embedded in English vocabulary. For foreign learners—particularly those from non-Slavic linguistic backgrounds—such dictionaries help prevent cultural misinterpretations and deepen understanding of English-speaking communities. Their use also aligns with modern educational priorities, which emphasize cultural literacy, global competence, and respectful cross-cultural communication.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the correct use of dictionaries significantly enhances the quality of English language learning by providing learners with reliable linguistic information and fostering independent study skills. When students are trained to use dictionaries appropriately, they become more confident in understanding vocabulary, interpreting meanings, and applying new words in accurate contexts. Both print and digital dictionaries contribute to the development of essential language skills, including pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and semantic awareness.

Overall, the successful use of dictionaries in English-language teaching requires a balanced combination of traditional lexicographic knowledge, innovative digital tools, and pedagogically sound strategies. Teachers must cultivate students' lexicographic competence step by step, integrating dictionary work into all stages of the learning process and demonstrating practical techniques for extracting and applying lexical information. When this approach is implemented consistently, dictionaries become not merely auxiliary



tools, but powerful instruments of linguistic mastery, cognitive development, and cultural understanding. In this way, they contribute significantly to forming confident, independent, and culturally aware users of the English language.

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