The Impact of Monolingual Dictionaries on Reading Comprehension among Sudanese English Majors

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Abstract

Vocabulary is recognized as a central aspect of mastery of the language and the use of monolingual dictionaries is regarded as a crucial tool in determining meanings of words in reading exercises. This paper aims at exploring the effects of dictionaries on reading appreciation among Sudanese students. The reading comprehension test was a replication of the text used in an experiment by Nesi and Meara (1992). Its rationale is simple: since monolingual dictionaries are designed to help in reading comprehension, it is reasonable to assume that dictionary users will score significantly better than non-dictionary users. The study sample comprised 50 students from a Public Sudanese university, with half the students carrying out the test using monolingual dictionaries and the other half without this aid. Dictionary users were asked to tick the words they had looked up and to write down their meanings. The meanings selected were matched with the original context, and judgment was made as to whether the degree of correctness had affected the scores. The results indicate that no statistically significant differences exist between the two groups. This conclusion contradicts the bulk of research and the researcher proposes a number of explanations for this apparent failure. It is suggested that the poor reference skills of the subjects is the major responsible factor.

Keywords

monolingual dictionary, reading comprehension, vocabulary test, decoding

1. Introduction

It was only fairly recently that the component of vocabulary has received any significant attention in foreign language theories. However, the role of lexis within the language proficiency has been acknowledged during the 1990s (e.g., McCarthy, 1990; Lewis, 1993; Oxford, 1990; Carter, 1998). There is a general consensus now that vocabulary underlies all language skills; it is essential to conveying meaning and ensures an efficient communication. This is to say, words are the building blocks of a language without which one cannot communicate successfully or express ideas (Krashen,

1989). In the same vein, Nation (2001, p. 9) claims that without words that name object, items, actions and concepts, learners unable to convey deliberate meanings. Consequently, the more words one is able to use correctly, the better one will be able to express oneself easily and with self-confidence and to understand the world one inhabits. Also, Lewis (1997, p. 31) believes that vocabulary is more important than grammar because people generally use vocabulary and reduce grammar, particularly when transmitting a message across quickly and precisely as in telegrams, panic situations or times when emotions are very high. Indeed, the recognition of the role of vocabulary has led to the establishment of The Lexical Approach (Lewis, 1993, 1997, 2006) which relates the act of communication to the mastery by the learner of discrete lexical items, collocations and prefabricated chunks which are readily available in times of need.

The most visible embodiment of vocabulary combinations is the written text in the form of a recipe, summary, advertisement, essay, article, etc. In fact, extended reading is a daily and a basic experience for EFL learners and one requiring a large lexicon. Since vocabulary is an open set, the learner will inevitably encounter new words, and researchers such as Cohen (1998), Schmitt (2010) and Nation (2001) have developed taxonomies of vocabulary acquisition strategies including mnemonics, metacognitive protocols, contextual guessing and the use of dictionaries to determine meanings of words. The employment of monolingual dictionaries in decoding and encoding language activities has only begun to be investigated. As a matter of fact, Stein (2002) observes that the user perspective has been largely ignored and the focus has been on dictionary typology and history. Like vocabulary research, the utilization of dictionaries to facilitate reading (among other areas) has seriously begun only during the 1990s. Once involved, while in the act of reading, it is natural to expect dictionaries to be a great asset in aiding reading comprehension. While this view is universal, it was negated in the important study by Benossuson et al. (1984) and its replication by Nesi and Meara (1992) who contend that the availability of dictionaries did not significantly raise students' scores in such tests, and that dictionary use is ineffectual. During the following decade, a considerable body of researches (e.g., Luppesu & Day, 1993; Atkins, 1998; Kinight, 1994; Hayatti, 2005; Hamilton, 2012; Hamdi, 2015) on the relation between dictionaries and performance in reading tests tends to contradict earlier investigations, and to conclude that the permitted use of monolingual dictionaries did indeed significantly raise scores. These researchers suggest that the use of any dictionary leads to better scores in reading comprehension tests and vocabulary acquisition. With these contradictory results in mind, the present paper will attempt to inquire into whether the deployment of monolingual dictionaries for decoding purposes by Sudanese students will result in a substantial improvement of performance in a comprehension test. The results will be measured against the findings of previous research and expounded within the Sudanese pedagogical context.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Defining Reading Comprehension

Comprehension literally means, understanding what we read. According to Grabe and Stoller (2001), reading comprehension is the ability to understand information from texts and interpret this information appropriately. However, this definition is inadequate in appreciating the nature of reading comprehension. It does not much enlighten us how texts are understood by readers. In fact, reading comprehension is a highly complex cognitive process, which includes the coordination of many different processing skills. Also, the above definition largely overlooks the multiple dimensions of reading. Reading is one of the most important skills to be learned in any language. It used not only as a source of information and pleasure, but also as a means of consolidating and extending knowledge of the language. According to Duke and Joanne (2011, p. 202), reading comprehension involves understanding vocabulary, detecting relationships among words and concepts, organizing ideas, recognizing the author's purpose, evaluating the context, and making judgment. Moreover, reading is inherently the construction of the meaning of texts. It is an active and strategic process, in which the reader's skills and knowledge interact with the characteristics of the text, for instance, genre, the wording and structure of the text (Proctor et al., 2005). Furthermore, comprehension is an act of intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed via interaction between text and reader, (Harris & Hodges, 1997, p. 207). A reader's schemata comprise abstract knowledge structures already stored in the memory, whether it be knowledge related to the text topic or the text structure. When digesting the text, the schemata are activated and help readers to decode and interpret message beyond the printed words. Furthermore, Carrel (1991) believes that within the Top-down Model, higher-level information helps the reader to identify lower-level information to build a framework for comprehension). Hence, the reader is an active agent, making predictions, making inferences and processing information and, simultaneously using background linguistic knowledge (linguistic schemata), background knowledge of the content area (content schemata) and the rhetorical structure of the text (formal schemata) to perceive the text.

2.2 Vocabulary Knowledge

All languages have words, vocabulary or a lexicon. Thus, a number of researchers have proposed various definitions to distinguish between those overlapping constructs. Stein (2002) indicates that the word is "an uninterruptible unit of structure consisting of one or more morphemes and which typically occurs in the structure of phrases". The morphemes are the ultimate grammatical constituents, the minimal meaningful units of language. However, vocabulary defined as synonymous with "lexis" or the "lexicon" and is viewed as "a collection of words" or "a package of sub-sets of words that are used in particular contexts (Read, 2000). Knowledge of a particular lexical item includes its general sense as well as its semantic, grammatical and collocational properties. These are termed word size and depth respectively, and are both central to the current study. Nation (2006) states that vocabulary breadth or (size) is the number of words that the language learners know. In fact, it covers the number of words

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the students know, i.e., the size of their lexicon (Qian, 2002). Therefore, the major issue for L2 vocabulary acquisition is: How many words does a L2 learner need? Regarding this, there are two considerations to be taken into account: the first is what is threshold level of vocabulary breadth for minimum proficiency in academic reading comprehension? The second is: does vocabulary breadth employ as efficient predictor of academic reading comprehension? Studies of native speakers' vocabulary (e.g., Laufer, 1989) seem to suggest that foreign language learners should acquire a vocabulary breadth of 2,000 high-frequency words to understand about 80% of the running text. This Band does not contain proper names, abbreviations, compound words, and foreign words, since a word formally includes root words, and a small number of repeated derived forms, according to Nation (1993). He believes that a learner should identify a minimum of 3,000 words family or such high-frequency words, because it provides coverage at least 95% of running text. Furthermore, most studies indicate that, knowledge of most frequent 5,000 words should give sufficient vocabulary to ease reading authentic text. Admittedly, there still remain some unknown words, but this level of knowledge should allow learners to understand most of the communicative content of the text and infer the meaning of many of the unfamiliar words from the co-text.

2.3 The Role of Vocabulary on Reading Comprehension

Vocabulary knowledge has been recognized as one of the essential contributors to reading comprehension (Bauer & Arazi, 2011; Oulette, 2006; Qian, 2002; Anderson & Freebody, 1983). Researchers of the nature of the lexicon have also noted the crucial role of vocabulary as predictor of overall reading ability (c.f., Nation, 2001). Equally, Schmitt (2010) asserts that vocabulary knowledge is not only a predictor of reading comprehension, but has a mutual relationship with reading comprehension. Furthermore, the independent contribution of vocabulary knowledge to reading comprehension a among various elements has been found in recent L1 studies (e.g., Milton, 2009) which showed that receptive vocabulary knowledge of young and adult learners demonstrated a great variability in reading comprehension, behind the effects of two noted predictors, oral language comprehension and decoding capability.

It is increasingly acknowledged that reading comprehension and vocabulary learning are closely related. It can be postulated that reading helps in vocabulary acquisition by providing opportunities to predict word meaning from the context. Likewise, vocabulary plays an important role in grasping the text and, by implication, reading comprehension, whether in first language or foreign language (Alderson, 2000; Read, 2000; Nation, 2001; Qian, 2002; Joshi, 2005). To construct a mental representation of a text and comprehending the text meaning relies upon one's knowledge of a large stock of vocabulary to decode the printed message. Having established the primacy of vocabulary, we will next outline its most clear realization, namely the dictionary.

2.4 EFL Dictionaries in Language Learning

EFL dictionaries have found their place and been included as an essential part of language leaner's indispensable equipment. As Atkins (1985) strongly states about dictionary use, "… *they are the most*

widespread single language improvement device ever invented". They are regarded by many as the repository of final linguistic authority (Wright, 2001) and a bank account of words to be drawn upon in time of need. Today, English pedagogical lexicography has changed considerably. It is now a flourishing field that has gathered momentum in the last three decades for three reasons. First, there has been a renewed interest in the nature of the lexicon and vocabulary acquisition, features invariably linked to dictionaries (e.g., Lewis, 1997, 2006; Nation, 2001, 2006; Nesselhauf, 2003; Schmitt, 2010). Second, simultaneous with the interest in vocabulary, there has been a huge advance in compilation and analysis of written and spoken corpora through the tools of computational linguistics which has eased the tools of traditional lexicographers and enabled them to produce dictionaries based on new insights (Sinclair, 1995). The result was an explosion in dictionary-making publishing industry, mainly of the British type. Also, as has been convincingly demonstrated by Hyland (2009) and Lillis and Curry (2010), English has become a truly international language, and that in our interdependent, shrinking, global village there is no escaping English as being the lingua-franca of written and oral communication. Therefore, everyone with ambition is trying to learn English, and naturally, EFL dictionaries come in the picture, because they provide the most explicit description of the meaning and use of words of this language, a tool essential to the linguistic process.

For decades, large native dictionaries have been tailored to the needs of global language students in the form of *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* or *The Cambridge International Dictionary*. These dictionaries are intended for intermediate and advanced learners, and are constantly updated to keep up with the developments in acquisition theories and the user-oriented perspective. Indeed, a dictionary is the first thing an EFL student buys (Baxter, 1980) and learners carry dictionaries around, not grammar books (Wolter, 2012). Hence, for Atkins (1998, p. 3), EFL students have a powerful tool at their disposal with which to gain further understanding of the range of the use of a new language, leading eventually to accurate production and comprehension. Then, a dictionary serves as a means whose purpose is to provide information about language which can be applied to a variety of activities, and a successful dictionary will show students the possibilities of language and is capable of providing a wealth of information. However, being able to use a dictionary is obviously not an end in itself; we use it, according to Stein (2002, p. 11), in order to understand what someone has said, or what we are reading, or to be able to express what we want to say. In short, a dictionary is an aid to understanding. The present study is concerned with the use of monolingual dictionaries as an aid to reading comprehension.

2.5 Studies of EFL Dictionaries Use in Comprehension and Vocabulary Tests

One of the earliest papers to report a test-based investigation into learners' dictionary use for comprehension is that by Benoussan, Sim and Weiss (1984). Conversely, only learners who are capable of making hypotheses, and who can recognize the context of association will benefit from access to dictionary while reading. The experiment of Benoussan was designed primarily to determine to what extent the use of monolingual and/or bilingual affects reading examination performance (i.e., test

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scores). Also, to what extent the use of monolingual and/or bilingual dictionaries affects the amount of time taken to complete the examination. A number of 670 first-year students took part in a two-hour reading test and could choose to consult a monolingual dictionary, a bilingual dictionary, or none at all. Half the students used monolingual dictionaries, while the other did not. There was no significant difference in test scores between the two groups. The authors noted that they found the results surprising and were thus prompted to conduct further studies.

Nesi and Meara (1992) attempted to replicate the conditions of the earlier study on a population of 84 overseas ESP students at Warwick University. Each student took the same test which consisted of two texts both taken unabated from the New Scientist. The 84 students were divided into two groups of 44 and the first group took the test without access to dictionaries. The remaining students were allowed to use their own monolingual dictionaries (e.g., Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, etc.). All subjects took the test in the same examination room and were allotted a maximum of 60 minutes. Test score was compared with the quantity of dictionary use (i.e., the number of words looked up), and noted which words subjects had chosen to look up. Unlike Benoussan's study, there was a moderate difference between non-dictionary and dictionary users in favour of the latter. But like Benoussan's test, Nesi and Meara (1992) found no difference between high and low scorers in the number of words looked up.

Tono (1998) attempted to measure both the role of dictionaries in reading comprehension and the effects of explicit training on students' reference skills. He employed two reading comprehension tests consisting of two passages, each followed by 10 multiple-choice questions. The subjects consisted of 53 high school students who had no access to a dictionary in the first test (RCI), whereas they could use their bilingual English-Japanese dictionary in the second test (RC2). The results of these tests showed that subjects with dictionaries performed better in reading comprehension than those without dictionaries. They made a significantly higher proportion of errors when they did not use dictionaries than when they used them. Tono suggests that the "primary reason" for the difference between these results and those of Benoussan et al., is that his subjects had received special training in dictionary use.

Luppescu and Day (1993) started from the hypothesis established by Benousson and Weiss that dictionaries are ineffective in reading comprehension. Their subjects were 293 first-and second-year Japanese University students. In the first phase of the experiment they were required to read a 1,853 word story, this story was judged to be at an appropriate level, but it contained at least seventeen words previously identified as being unknown or difficult for college-level Japanese EFL students. 145 subjects were randomly assigned to the experimental group and were allowed to use their bilingual dictionaries while reading. The remaining 148 students were assigned to the control group and were not allowed to use their bilingual dictionaries. The mean score of subjects in the group which had access to dictionaries was found to be significantly higher than that of control group [P = < 001]. This result appears to disprove the author's first hypothesis, which relates to earlier views by Benoussan et al. (1984) namely that there would be no significant difference in scores between the two groups.

A study by Ronald (2002) has focused on the vocabulary development of only one language learner, in many respects claims for the results cannot be made beyond that one person. Specifically, the learner's L1 writing system, general L2 ability and vocabulary size, overall L1 and L2 reading proficiency, dictionary use skills, and ability in guessing from context are all factors which will affect various aspects of the research described here. In this respect, the study was largely exploratory; seeking to determine what the model employed may be able to show about vocabulary development through extensive reading and monolingual learner dictionary use. The results confirm that, for this participant, vocabulary growth did result from extensive L2 reading, both with and without the use of a monolingual learner dictionary. It also confirms that for the participant there was a clear benefit in terms of vocabulary growth attributable to dictionary use over and above that attributable to extensive reading alone.

A paper by Hamilton (2012) investigated the use of three types of dictionaries by students while reading to determine the effectiveness of each type for acquiring the meanings of unknown vocabulary in text. The dictionary types used include an Online Bilingual Multimedia English-ASL Dictionary (OBMEAD), a Paper English-ASL Dictionary (PBEAD), and an Online Monolingual English Dictionary (OMED). Results indicate that for immediate recall of target words the OBMEAD was superior to both the PBEAD and the OMED. For later recall, no significant difference appeared between the recall for words learned via use of OBMEAD and PBEAD. Recall for each of these was statistically superior to recall for words learned via OMED.

The final study is a paper by Hamdi (2015) which compared readers' L2 text comprehension and vocabulary retention across two dictionary conditions. Reading time, dictionary usage, degree of comprehension, and recall of words were the dependent measures employed. Forty-four EFL sophomores were assigned two reading tasks under two conditions: using a Printed Dictionary (PD) at one time and an Electronic Dictionary (ED) at another. The presentation mode of the reading tests was on computer screen alone. A paired-samples t-test was then conducted to test the research hypotheses. As for the vocabulary retention tests, we administered a pre-test and post-test to the subjects in both lookup conditions (PD and ED), and an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare memory for words. It was found that the subjects looked up significantly more words in the ED than in the PD. However, the results indicate that the type of dictionary accessed does not significantly influence comprehension.

3. Methodology

3.1 Subjects of the Study

The subjects of this study comprised 50 students evenly distributed among dictionary and non-dictionary users, The sample was taken from 500 English majors studying at the faculty of Arts, university of Al- Neelain, Sudan. The subjects were in the second semester of (2015-2016) academic year. All the subjects have received an average of 7-9 years of formal education in English as a foreign

language, and they were educated under the same curriculum adopted in Sudan, i.e., SPINE, before they were enrolled in university. All of the subjects speak Arabic as a mother tongue. To conclude, the selected sample is homogeneous in educational level, linguistic background and span of pre-university instruction in English language. A stratified random sample design method was used in which English majors (second to fourth year students) were grouped into strata. Thereby randomization is achieved and an equal chance of appearing is enjoyed by the population. Through this method, the particular number of students from the various strata is proportionate to the stratum's share of the population. Furthermore, this method of stratified random sample design, according to Buchmann (1990), achieves generalisability of the results obtained from the whole population as well as representativeness.

3.2 Instrument

The methodology of this study is based on a piloted version of 10 multiple choice questions on a reading text which was meant to be answered by one group using OALD, with the other group having no access to any reference work. The objective of this method is to test knowledge of EFL dictionaries in situ by relating them to reading, an area for which dictionaries are widely used (Battenburg, 1992). Following Ferguson's strategy of miscommunication, a vocabulary comprehension test was administered to 50 students, divided into two groups of those having the aid of OALD and those working unaided. Both groups are to participate in a test which depends on the comprehension of individual lexical items, analysis of language functions, inferring, extraction of factual information and generalization - all of which require an understanding of vocabulary in context. It is arguable the case that using dictionaries will have a positive effect on the performance of the respective group as proved by such experiments as Tono's (1984), Sim, Weiss and Benousson's (1984), Luppescu and Day (1993) and Knight (1994) where the use of dictionaries must have been responsible for the highly significant difference to the credit of using dictionaries.

The reading comprehension test is a replication of the text used in an experiment by Nesi and Meara (1992). Its rationale is simple: since reading tests are designed to measure learners' ability to comprehend a text, and since monolingual dictionaries are designed to help reading comprehension, it is reasonable to assume that dictionary users will score significantly better than non-dictionary users. Dictionary users will be asked to tick the words they had looked up and write down their meanings. The meanings selected will be matched with the original context, and judgment will be made as to whether the degree of correctness had affected the scores. The general objective of the test is to ensure whether it is true that the permitted use of dictionaries (monolinguals) would significantly raise scores.

3.3 Pilot Study

The pilot study was conducted as a means of improving the quality of the instruments before final administration to groups similar in type to those forming the bulk of the population of the study. The reading comprehension test was piloted on six students from Al Neelain University; three did the test with OALD and three without. It turned out that the idea of assessing the effects of using the dictionary as an aid to reading test was somewhat confusing, and so clearer instructions were needed in the main

test. Moreover, students objected to the time allotted to answering the original 15 questions in 25 minutes. This was avoided partly by reducing the number of questions to 10 and partly by increasing the time to 30 minutes.

3.4 Validity

Validity is considered as meaning that the instrument is in fact measuring what it is meant to measure (Brown, 1996, p. 231). It consists of content and construct validity. In implementing Brown's statement (1996, p. 102) that "an instrument has content validity if it is designed to measure the specific skills or content of a particular course of study". The items of the Reading Comprehension were related, ultimately, to what they are supposed to assess: EFL Monolingual Dictionary Use by Sudanese students. Hence, knowledge of dictionaries was covered as a receptive skill in decoding activities through measuring the effect of the availability of dictionaries on comprehension levels. The method of testing construct validity was by consulting a panel of four experts from the Department of English, Faculty of Sciences, University of Albaha, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. As regarding the relevance of the instrument to the subject matter and coverage of the entire topic of the study. Their comments on the required length of the text, the proportion of lexicographical and inferential questions as well as the choice of the dictionary and test schedule has helped in improving both the layout and content of the experiment.

3.5 Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent to which data-gathering techniques produce the same results on repeated trials. It is information on whether the instrument is collecting data in a consistent and accurate way, i.e., whether the instrument will give the same or similar results when used by a different researcher under the same assumptions and different conditions. Alternatively, Asika (1991, p. 73) defines it as the consistency between dependable measurements of the same phenomenon. It is, for Bachmann (1990), the stability, dependability, predictability, and accuracy of the measuring instruments. Out of the many methods for calculating reliability, the split-half method, has proved to be the most practical technique. To implement this method, each of the measurement items in the test was randomly assigned to two equal parts, i.e., they were randomly split into similar halves and each half was treated as an alternative form of the same measurement. This yielded 0.76581 for the reading comprehension test, according to Brown (1996), if the coefficient is found to be above 0.75, it can be claimed that there is a high positive reliability. By looking at this data-gathering techniques, it can be safely deduced that the tool has proved to be stable, dependable, and highly reliable.

3.6 Procedures

The initial assumption agrees with the latter group of studies, namely that students prefer to avail themselves of the opportunity to use monolingual dictionaries in tackling comprehension tests, and that the permitted use of such tools would naturally significantly raise students' scores. Employing an advanced text designed by Nesi and Meara (1992), the researcher confined the experiment to 50 multi-levels students in one university. Additional procedures included reducing the number of questions to 10, extending time to 40 minutes, and restricting access to only one type of dictionary, i.e.,

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OALD, the standard EFL dictionary. Also, prior to the test, the fifty students, now equally divided into two groups of twenty-five each, the first having access to OALD and the second deprived of this advantage. The two groups were requested to underline in a wordlist on an additional paper all those words which they were not familiar with. The word list contained all the lexical words in the 500-word text and question paper with the exception of common words (those in Band (1) and Band (2) of Hindmarsh Lexicon, 1980). Moreover, students working with dictionaries were instructed to write down the meanings of words they have looked up and the definitions they have chosen as fitting the context of these words in the text. The ultimate aim was to verify, through the analysis of scores (100; 10 for each question), whether there is a positive correlation between students' use of monolingual dictionaries and their scores in this multiple-choice comprehension test.

4. Findings

The objective of this study is to discover whether Sudanese English majors make an effective use of their dictionaries in academic activities. In fact, a number of Sudanese scholars such as Ahmed (1994), Abdullah (1996) and Ali and Siddiek (2015) have indicated that students use monolingual dictionaries for decoding purposes, particularly reading (whether for pleasure or academic necessity). Alongside this pattern, these students were found to be chiefly interested in definition of words, with the view of the dictionary as a repository of meanings to be used in times of need. By having one group in this study make a conscious use of dictionaries while reading, it was possible to measure the effect of this frequently utilized resource both vocabulary size and levels of comprehension against the other group denied this opportunity. The overall initial statistics for the two groups are presented below:

Table 1. Frequencies of Students' Scores

	With Dictionaries	Without Dictionaries
N Valid	25	25
Missing	0	0
Mean	40.00	38.40
Median	40.40	40.00
Mode	30.00	30.00
St. Deviation	17.43560	16.75310
Minimum	20.00	10.00
Maximum	70.00	80.00

Table 2. Frequencies of Students' Scores with the Use of Dictionaries

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20	4	16.0	16.0	16.0
	30	8	32.0	32.0	48.0
	40	6	24.0	24.0	72.0
	50	2	8.0	8.0	80.0
	60	1	4.0	4.0	84.0
	70	3	12.0	12.0	96.0
	80	1	4.0	4.0	100.0
Total		25	100.0	100.0	100.0

To test our hypothesis, the results of group (A) having the aid of the dictionaries and those of group (B) (working unaided) are shown through the mean and standard deviation. The mean displays the percentage of the two groups, while the rate of differences in the results obtained is measured through standard deviation. Table 1 indicates there are no significant differences in the mean scores: 40 for group (A) and 38.40 for group (B), the difference being merely 1.60. Hence, the mean scores for the group working under dictionary conditions are only slightly greater and so is the standard deviation (17.435 for the former and 16.753 for the latter). Therefore, it is apparent that the mean scores are not evidently affected by the presence of monolingual dictionaries.

Table 3. Frequencies of Students' Scores without the Use of Dictionaries

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	10	2	8.0	8.0	8.0
	20	2	8.0	8.0	16.0
	30	8	32.0	32.0	48.0
	40	6	24.0	24.0	72.0
	50	3	12.0	12.0	84.0
	60	1	4.0	4.0	88.0
	70	3	12.0	12.0	100.0
Total		25	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 4. T-test: Students' Paired Sample Statistics

		Mean	N	Standard Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair1	With Dictionaries	40. 00	25	17.43560	3.48712
	Without Dictionaries	38.40	25	16.75310	3.35062

Table 5. Students' Paired Sample Correlations

		N	Correlation	Sig
Pair1	With/Without Dictionaries	25	-.183	.381

By employing the T-test, it seems that there is no significant correlation between scores of students using the dictionaries and those not. In refuting this hypothesis, the scores of both tests are discussed on the basis of statistics using Spearman's Correlation Coefficient Procedures. Troila (1989), for example, suggests that these procedures are effective in testing the significance probability of a hypothesis, as it provides evident relationship between different variables. As correlation can range between 0.0 and 0.1 and the greater the better, it can be shown that the weak correlation value (-.183) between the two variables and its parallel significance value of .381 between the two samples indicate an insignificant relationship.

Table 6. Students' Paired Samples Test (A)

	Paired Differences					t
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Differences		
				Lower	Upper	
Pair1						
With/Without Dictionaries	2.00000	26.29956	5.25991	-8.85592	12.85592	.380

Table 7. Students' Paired Samples Test (B)

	dF	Sig. (Sig 2-tailed)
Pair1 With/Without Dictionaries	24	.707

Moreover, the researcher has used standard significance values of 0.05 and 0.01 to represent the significance levels of the dictionary variable. Accordingly, if the hypothesis p-value, i.e., the observed significance is less than these two values, significant differences can be observed in the means of the two groups, but if the p-value is greater than the noted values, no significance differences can be found. By analyzing the T-test, it is apparent that it is only .380 while the p-value is .707, which is much higher than the recommended one.

In conclusion, no significant differences are found between the scores of the group employing monolingual dictionaries and those not. Therefore, the current research, like those of Benousson et al. (1984) and Nesi and Meara (1992), and unlike later studies, can be presented as providing evidence that for the students in question, the use of monolingual dictionaries will make little difference as far as reading comprehension tests are concerned. However, as monolingual dictionaries are designed to help readers read more effectively, and reading tests are designed to test reading efficiency, the students'

failure to use dictionaries is rather surprising and needs to be accounted for. This is urgent because of the reliance of students on dictionaries for decoding texts. Additionally, there is an almost a complete consensus over the last two decades (e.g., Luppescu & Day, 1993; Tono, 1998; Nesi & Haill, 2002; Ronald & Hamilton, 2012; Hamdi, 2015) that monolingual dictionaries are indeed beneficial in comprehension and lexical tests which replicate the actual process of vocabulary acquisition. It seems that there is a breakdown in the present experiment to explain the fact that dictionaries could not significantly affect scores.

5. Discussion

The extensive literature on EFL students' reference skills (Bejoin, 1981; Diab, 1990; Battenburg, 1992; Stein, 1992; Hatmann, 2005; Al-Owimer, 2010) has established the global tendency to associate dictionaries with reading and determination of lexeme definitions. In one sense, the findings of these surveys are proved by the second half of research linking use of dictionaries to enhanced vocabulary size and retention. In contrast to this overwhelming evidence, the ineffectual employment of dictionaries by the present sample needs clarification. One explanation for the discrepancy in the scores may have to do with the type of the text has been employed in the test. Like most communicative reading tests, such texts are primarily concerned with testing reading skills rather than language knowledge that calls for dictionary skills. On the whole, the student is tested on the meaning of the test rather than on what he knows about the language (Nesi & Meara, 1992). Questions which require the reader to recognize the function of grammatical structures may be included, but questions depending on the understanding of individual lexical items are generally avoided, because they do not enable the tester to generalize about learners' overall reading ability. In other words, the specific lexical item may be one of a tiny number that one learner knows, yet it might be excluded from another learner's vast mental lexicon (ibid). Similarly, such tests are designed in the knowledge that subjects will not have access to a dictionary (unless it is the case for specifically-constructed tests like those of Tono (1998)), and, therefore, tend not to be hinged on the understanding of a single lexical item and so they do not favor dictionary use (Atkins, 1998).

Generally speaking, the above guidelines were observed in the test, an adaptation of one by Nesi and Meara (1992), having ten questions, the first five of which ask students to assign topic sentences to their respective paragraphs. Questions 6, 7 and 10 are inference type questions that require generalization, and in which the use of the dictionary is only indirectly related. Only in questions (8) and (9) is there any occasion for a specific use of dictionary. These two questions are reprinted here below:

(8) **"Mere"** in paragraph (3) means:

(A) Rather.

(B) Just.

(C) Small.

(D) Ago.

(9) **"Still"** in paragraph (4) can be replaced by:

(A) Not ready.

(B) Unmoving.

(C) Not yet.

(D) Unfinished.

Except for these two questions, the generalized nature of the text itself becomes apparent; the next goal, however, is to summaries the text.

The text deals with the birth of the cinema and its early impact on spectators who were awe-struck by this invention. In many ways, this six-paragraph history attempts to capture the magical sensation felt by early cinema-goers. Though the text does not explicitly require the, intervention of a dictionary, it is of such a nature as to have well-delineated transitions in paragraphs to highlight certain keywords in each paragraph. It is our belief that by looking up these significant words, the student using the dictionary will have a better chance of understanding the text, the matter that makes their scores the more puzzling. Our attempt to foreground certain words might be provisional but sheds light on this text based on parallelisms and contrasts. To take examples, paragraph (1) sets the scene by describing how the Lumiere brothers opened the first film ever, and the spectators were described as "thrilled" and "stunned" by this event. These magical words are contrasted in the second paragraph with the same conventional view with which we take them now. Hence, the text contrasts our opinion of the cinema now as "routine" and "ordinary" with its "initial shock", "extraordinary power", and "hypnotic quality".

If the first two paragraphs are generalized, paragraph (3) gives details of the cinema's first performance by describing the "panic" and "confusion" with which the very first cinema spectators in 1895 viewed "a mere picture" of a train moving on a flat screen. Paragraph (4) tries to account for the magic experienced by the early film goers by counterpointing the "dynamism" of film as an "objective flow" of time that resembles reality, and has the power to "transport" (note the magical connotations of the word) people to a unique wonderland. Paragraph (5) is more mundane, dealing as it does with the effect of the cinema on people's enlarged knowledge of the world. It takes the example of America, which is much more well-known as Hollywood has "dominated" the film industry and carried American values around the "globe". The text ends with paragraph (6) which points out the most dramatic effect of the cinema by stressing that the 20th century will be known more "intimately" and in more "massive" and "encyclopaedic" details than any other century. It is the researcher's opinion that by looking up some of the words enclosed in parentheses that sum up the gist of the text, those students favored by using dictionaries are in a better position to know the text better, more so as the text clusters around thematic bonds and key points of transitions. That dictionary users did not utilize their advantages has to be accounted for.

One possible plausible explanation is the level of difficulty of the text which may affect the efficiency

of the dictionary. For example, if the text contains a large number of unknown words (estimated by Johns (1980) as 50 per every 1000 words), the "threshold effect" might not be obtained, and students may not be able to work out the meanings of single individual vocabulary items by guesswork or dictionary use. Benousson et al. (1984, p. 217) hypothesize that without the threshold effect, a working knowledge of unknown words cannot be guessed, even with the use of the dictionary, and indeed, the failure of their students may be put down to the large number of words in their text (61 words in the 700-word text). However, the threshold effect "*beyond which the perception of the overall structure may be blocked*" (Nesi & Meara, 1992), does not hold true for the present sample. By studying the working sheets of their students, it was calculated that they indicated an average of 18.2 unknown words (Group A) and 19.3 (Group B) which is less than the threshold effect of 25 words for our 500-word text. This confirms that the text was not so difficult as to be beyond the linguistic competence of the students. Another explanation has to be sought for the failure of dictionaries to make a marked difference in the scores of the two groups (A) and (B). One such justification comes in the form of the dictionary skills of the advantageous group, as is evident below.

As noted earlier, our text was not impossibly complicated and, hence, those with the dictionaries were expected to score better than their counterparts without dictionaries. That they did not significantly do so may be attributable to their poor dictionary skills (a theory much supported by the limited use they make of the dictionary entries, according to Ali and Siddiek (2015)). It can be hypothesized that students could not locate certain definitions due to their ignorance of the macro-structure of the dictionary. According to Landau (2001) students might not recognize the standard use of the infinitive form in EFL dictionaries. More difficulty can occur in locating the particular lexeme when it is the custom of these dictionaries to group together all the senses in all their parts of speech together. This, according to Battenburg (1992) can create long entries which combine the different functions of polysemy and homonymy, where only the infinitive form is given the main entry. But the complexities of finding definitions go beyond this. This task entails, according to Luppescu and Day (1993, p. 272), looking for a suitable headword, comprehending the entry, locating the appropriate part of the definition, connecting the right sense to the part of the definition, and putting the word within the context of difficult or unknown word. It can be argued that students in general, have problems with all of these processes. One example is enough to show how these problems apply. Of the ten students we informally interviewed about the meaning of "yet" in paragraph (3), none decided on the adverbial meaning of "in spite of' which is more warranted by the context, and all chose the conventional meaning of the word as a conjunction as "which is expected to happen so". The effect of such confusion on the understanding of the text is fairly obvious. The consultation depended on correctly deciding on these word classes using the syntactic rules of English. When successful, the crucial challenge is of which definition to choose. The majority of the students were content with the first definition in their inability to use determination vocabulary learning strategies (Schmitt, 1997), in the belief it is the most important and glossing over all the rest (the kidrule evident in the studies by

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Harvey and Yuill (1997) and Wingate (2004)). Hence, students have shown an ignorance of both the polysemous nature of the English lexicon (e.g., *still* as meaning passive) and the metaphorical sense of lexemes (e.g., the figurative meaning of the deep experience indicated by *transport*) The fact that the Sudanese students have so evidently failed in their dictionary consultation process is an indicator of poor reference skills.

The students looked up an average of 8.7 words but wished to have done more searches on other words, and time constraints (40 minutes) may have prevented them from doing so. However, it is noteworthy that many of the words looked up are insignificant, and the hypothesis-making ability of our students was apparently low. Thus, eleven students looked up the Italian word "cappuccino" and reported not finding it, though the word is irrelevant to the understanding of the text. Equally, four students concentrated on the French word "cinematographer" whose meaning is closely allied to the English word, and here, too, they were disappointed. One student looked up "panic" which is important and we suspect it is unknown to the student. Only two looked up "hypnotic" and reported not finding it (as it was included as a subentry as the nominal form "hypnosis"). Two looked up "Trovosky"—the Russian director. This is indication of a general knowledge of English orthography and which words that have been Anglicized in English usage due to their universal cultural significance (The Russian word *Lolita* is a famous example). On the other hand, looked up key words like "encyclopedic" and "massive". Moreover, 90% of the words looked up belong to the first three paragraphs.

The nature of this test rather favored the use of dictionaries. The inability to do so on the part of our students, as on the part of Benousson's (1984) and Nesi and Meara's (1992), could certainly point to a lack of training, this issue previously established by the curious lack of any attention to lexicography in the syllabuses taught Sudanese universities. A plausible explanation for the poor results is the fact the students were asked to utilize Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary in its 8th edition (2010). It is a standard dictionary with immense capabilities that are being increased all the time. However, scholars (e.g., Bejoint, 1981; Kipfer, 1987; Battenburg, 1992; Atkins, 1998; Nesi, 2002) have observed the huge gap between the increasing complexity of learners' dictionaries and the little evidence there is that learners have acquired these lexicographical skills. The pedagogical considerations are given relevance when the three studies with their disappointing results, including Benousson, Nesi and Meara and mine, are compared to Tono's (1998) and Nesi and Haill's (2002). In the latter experiments the group favored with dictionary use was given prior training in dictionary use. Seemingly, this is the reason why their scores are significantly higher than the other group, as their training rendered them more capable of utilizing their dictionaries.

6. Conclusion

Monolingual dictionaries are deemed an integral part of learning the language since they are a repository of information of definition, pronunciation, idiomacy, grammar and spelling of the lexemes. Their role in decoding activities such as reading and, to a lesser extent, productive ones such as writing

has been the focus of a considerable body of research. Within Sudan, lexical studies including lexicography have been rare. A notable recent contribution was by Ali and Siddiek (2015) who used a wide-ranging questionnaire to investigate students' concerns regarding dictionaries. One of their major findings was that dictionaries are almost wholly used to find definitions of lexemes. In the present study, I followed that up by analyzing the rate of success of these look-up attempts. More specifically, the study investigates the degree of mastery of dictionary use by these students for decoding (reading) activities by providing two groups (50 in all) with a reasonably difficult comprehension test. The difference was that one group was favored with the dictionary as an aid, the other group lacking such a tool. The aim was to evaluate the effect of dictionary use on overall scores. The finding that no statistically significant differences were found between the two groups can be relate to the rudimentary reference skills of Sudanese English majors. This study is an indicator of the importance of explicit teaching of dictionary skills, which, as concluded by the recent experiment by Ali (2017), can have a considerable impact on enhancing skills, including the use of dictionaries for reading comprehension.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A

Reading Comprehension Test

Read the text and answer the questions following:

The Lumpier Brothers opened their cinematographie, at 14 Boulevard des cappuccino in Paris, to 100 paying customers over 100 years ago, on December. Before a thrilled audience, photographs came to life and moved across a flat screen.

So ordinary and routine has this become to us that it takes a determined leap of imagination to grasp the impact of those first moving images. But it is worth trying, for the understand the initial shock of these images is to understand the extraordinary power and magic of cinema, the unique, and hypnotic quality that has made film the most dynamic, effective art form of the 20th century.

One of the Lumpier Brothers, earliest films was a 30-second piece which showed a section of a railway platform flooded with sunshine, a train appears and heads straight for the camera. And that is all that happens. Yet, the Russian director Andrei Tarovsky, one of the greatest of all film artists, described the film as "a work of genius". As the train approached", wrote Tarovsky, "panic started in the theatre: people jumped and ran away. That was the moment when cinema was born. The frightened audience could not accept that they were watching a mere film, pictures were still, only reality moved; this must, therefore, be reality. In their confusion, they feared that a real train was about to crush them".

Early cinema audiences often experienced the same confusion. In time, the idea of film became familiar,

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the magic was accepted, but it never stopped being magic, film has never lost its unique power to embrace its audiences and transport them to a different world. For Tarovsky, the key to that magic was the way in which cinema created a dynamic image of the real flow of reality. A still picture could only imply the existence of time, while time in a novel passes at the whim of the reader. But in cinema, the real, objective flow of time was captured.

One effect of this realism was to educate the world about itself. For cinema makes the world smaller. Long before people traveled to America or anywhere else, they knew what other places looked like; they knew how other people worked and lived. Overwhelmingly the lives recorded in film have been American. From the earliest days of the industry. Hollywood has dominated the world film market. American imagery—the cars, the cities, the cowboys—became the primary imagery of film. Film carried American life and values around the globe.

Thanks to films future generations will know the 20th century more intimately than any other period -we can only imagine what life was in the 14th century or in classical Greece. But the life of the modem world has been recorded on film in massive, encyclopedic detail. We shall be known better than any preceding generation.

Chose the correct letter:

1. The writer refers to the film of the train in order to demonstrate.

a. The simplicity of early films.

b. The impact of early films.

c. How short early films were.

d. How imaginative early films were.

2. In Tarovsky's opinion, the attraction of the cinema is that it.

a. Aims to impress its audience.

b. Tell stories better than books.

c. Illustrates the passing time.

d. Describes familiar events.

3. How would you describe the feeling of early audiences to cinematic action?

a. anger

b. fear

c. wonder

d. imagination

4. How does the writer suggest that the present reaction to films differ from that a hundred years ago?

a. We no longer enjoy the films.

b. Film has lost its charm for us.

c. We no longer confuse cinema and reality.

d. Watching films has become easier.

5. The writer believes that despite different reactions to cinema, the one thing that has never changed was:

a. The way films were made.

b. The great power of films over peoples' view of time.

c. The ability of film, to teach us about other cultures

d. The productions of realistic films.

6. We can conclude that the most important characteristic of cinema is:

a. Its capacity to imitate the movement of time.

b. Its potential to be dynamic.

c. Its capacity to act as an alternative to novel reading.

d. Its power to please its audience.

7. The writer suggests what important 20th century events such as the sinking of the ship Titanic will be better remembered by future generation than the important incidents in Roman history like the murder of Julius Caesar because:

a. The Titanic is more important in human history.

b. The murder of Julius Caesar was a bloody sight.

c. Unlike the murder, the sinking of Titanic was recorded in cinema.

d. The thinking of Titanic is a more resent event.

8. "**Mere**" in paragraph three means:

a. Rather.

b. Just.

c. Small.

d. Ago.

9. "**Still**" in paragraph four can be replaced by:

a. Not ready.

B. Unmoving.

c. Not yet.

d. Unfinished.

10. What is the best title of this text?

a. The rise of the cinema star.

b. Cinema and novel compared.

c. The domination of Hollywood.

d. The power of the big screen.