























- My teacher in primary school taught me to use it, she explained me how to search the words.
- Yes, my teacher when I was in the primary school. She explain to us to search the words watching the word that appears in the top and then think if our word stay before or after in alphabetical order.
- My English teacher when I came to Spain and I didn't know how to even talk in Spanish. So, she had to explain to me with a dictionary on her hand.
- My parents when I was a child, each word that I don't understand they oblige me search it in a dictionary. they explain me how do it, i have got know the first letter of a word that I want to find. the dictionary are ordered by abecedary, then i had find the letter that I was searching following the abecedary.
- No one taught me how to use it, I informed myself.
- generally nobody has taught me how to use the dictionary but sometimes in secondary school teachers have given me links to dictionaries

From the students' comments, it was revealed that the explanations received and class practice seem to be very basic for the participants in this study and do not seem to cover any skill beyond locating information. When questioning students on their satisfaction regarding their ability to use dictionaries, however, the majority of students were satisfied and only 1 of them was not happy with his/her dictionary skills and another student stated that he/she would like to improve such skills.

Are you happy with your abilities to use dictionaries?	Responses
Yes, I'm totally satisfied	18 (24.00 %)
Yes, I manage well	43 (57.33 %)
Yes, more or less	10 (13.33 %)
No, not really	1 (1.33 %)
I would like to use it better	1 (1.33 %)
No answer	2 (2.67 %)

**Table 4:** Q4: Students' perception of their skills in dictionary use

As regards the use of online dictionaries (Table 5), it was found out that most students use between two and three online dictionaries instead of sticking to a favourite dictionary, a practice followed by only 16% of the students. Of these, students were questioned on the type of dictionary they selected and for this question they were allowed more than one answer. Results indicated that 80.82%

choose bilingual dictionaries, closely followed by thesauri. Although monolingual, bilingual and bilingualised dictionaries may be both general or specialized, these last two options were included to find out about the students' needs regarding terminology in a particular discipline or the lack of it. The results were as expected of this particular group of students. Since they have just started their degree in Criminology and Security some of them (13.7%) start to consult information on specialised terms while the majority are still looking for general vocabulary.

How many different online dictionaries do you usually look up?		Please tick the dictionary types you use (more than one answer is allowed)	
1	12 (16.00 %)	<b>general</b>	32 (43.84 %)
2	33 (44.00 %)	<b>specialized</b>	10 (13.70 %)
3	20 (26.67 %)	<b>bilingual</b>	59 (80.82 %)
4	4 (5.33 %)	<b>monolingual</b>	30 (41.10 %)
more than 4	2 (2.67 %)	<b>thesaurus (synonyms, antonyms)</b>	34 (46.58 %)
		<b>bilingualised (monolingual and ALSO the translation of the word, sometimes the translation of the examples)</b>	26 (35.62 %)

**Table 5:** Q5 and Q6: Number of different online dictionaries the participants use and types of most frequently used dictionaries

The following question was Q7 "What do you use your dictionaries for NOW? If you use them for different purposes, please explain." There were three recurrent purposes: finding a translation, word meaning and finding synonyms. Some students also highlight a more general purpose: learning a language. While most students explain the purpose of dictionary use in general, a few students specify the type of dictionary they use depending on their needs. Sample answers are shown below:

- Now I use thesaurus dictionary when I not want repeat the same word in a writings all the time. I use the general dictionary to look for the meaning of words when I'm studing. Finally I use the bilingualised dictionary to look for the traduction of words in other languages as English when I write writings or I study it.
- to check vocabulary
- I use them mainly for translate words from spanish to english, but I also use it when I'm not sure of the meaning of a word or an specific sentence.
- I use them to look at specificated words that i don't remember how it were written
- I use the dictionary to translate into Spanish words that I do not understand in English and I also use it for university work
- I use dictionaries to search a word that I didn't understand.
- to be able to complete sentences

Students were also asked if they used those sections in the dictionary that explain how to use it (Table 6). The majority of students did not use that type of information. This is also a question to consider in relation to dictionary training: if students are not taught and do not read any guidance matter, then it is difficult that they come to appreciate dictionaries and their pedagogical innovations. The percentage of students who used the dictionary guidance was even lower (8%) than the findings reported by Lew and Galas (2008) on the same item (four students (14.3%) in the experimental and six (20.7%) in the control group). If we bear in mind that students in the present study were university students and those in Lew and Galas (2008) were primary school students, this can be seen as a major flaw in this particular group of Spanish university students.

Do you read the "how to use the dictionary" sections?	Responses
yes	6 (8.00 %)
no	52 (69.33 %)
sometimes	13 (17.33 %)
no answer	4 (5.33 %)

**Table 6:** Q8: Using "how to use the dictionary" sections in dictionaries

## 5.2 Training sessions

During the first session, one micro-writing task was assigned. This task was used to generate the first two active dictionary rubrics. In the following train-

ing session, one active dictionary rubric was explained with examples on how to use it, and the students were given another active dictionary rubric for homework. In the following sessions, one micro-writing task was assigned, the last active dictionary rubric was revised and a new active dictionary rubric was given. Revision of active dictionary rubrics entailed that students had to present their corrected sentences after following the rubric, as well as the notes they took as instructed in each rubric. During the training sessions, it was essential to solve any question regarding dictionary use for that particular task. Projecting the teacher's screen to show the specific entries that were consulted for the task aided in task comprehension and as part of the process of dictionary skills training.

### 5.3 Post-training questionnaire

After the training period, students were asked to complete a second questionnaire with five questions, three quantitative and two qualitative questions. The main aim of this questionnaire was to analyse the effect of dictionary training on the students.

The first question asked students whether they managed to find information in the dictionaries. This was an important question because it provides feedback on whether the rubric could be understood and whether it easily took the learner to the right places. Positive results confirm the usefulness of this type of rubric: 49.33% of the students said they found the information, as well as another 24% who stated that they nearly always found what they were looking for. The percentage of students with difficulties was very low.

Did you manage to find the information in the dictionaries?	Responses
yes	37 (49.33 %)
nearly always	18 (24.00 %)
sometimes	12 (16.00 %)
it was difficult but I found it	7 (9.33 %)
no	1 (1.33 %)

**Table 7:** Post-training Q1 for ease of information finding

The second question was about the usefulness of rubrics. The answers to this question indicated that participants found the practice either useful or more or less useful. Only three students did not find the rubric particularly useful.

Was the dictionary rubric useful for you?	Responses
yes	35 (46.67 %)
more or less useful	35 (46.67 %)
I do not know	2 (2.67 %)
no	3 (4.00 %)

**Table 8:** Post-training Q2 Rubric usefulness

Question 3 is related to the previous question, but was posed differently. While question 2 is general, question 3 is a little bit more specific in the usefulness of the rubric by asking students whether locating information in the dictionaries is now easier than before the training.

Do you now find more information in dictionaries than before the rubric exercises? (more than one answer is allowed)	Responses
Yes, now I find many more things that I didn't know before	29 (38.67 %)
Yes, now I know how to learn more things about the words I am looking for	37 (49.33 %)
Yes, now I can do things with the dictionaries that I had never done before	5 (6.67 %)
Maybe I find more things than before this experience	20 (26.67 %)
Now I find one new type of information, I didn't know it existed before the rubric exercises	9 (12.00 %)
No, I do not find more information than before	2 (2.67 %)

**Table 9:** Post-training Q3: finding information in dictionaries

Answers in table 9 indicated that the majority of students found it easier to both locate different types of information that they would not find or use prior to this study, and that they are now able to teach themselves new aspects of the words they might be interested in their future situations of dictionary usage.

The fourth question, (Q4) "Do you think your abilities to use dictionaries are now better? Why?" is related to the perception students had of their own dictionary skills after the training experience. Only five students gave a negative answer to this question, while the remaining seventy students affirmed that their dictionary skills had improved. Participants' answers point to the improvement in their ability to find different information types in a more effective way. Many of the answers also stated that they did not use dictionary-

ies very much before the training and that now they see the point in using them. Other aspects of dictionary use that appeared in the answers to this question were the students' ability to make a better word choice, paying attention to the context of examples, the value of creating a habit or familiarizing themselves with these tools. Some sample answers from students are shown below:

- Yes, because now I can find more things that before I don't see or that I don't give value, and now I'm faster to find the information.
- Yes, I think my abilities to use dictionaries is now better, because I can find new useful information for improve my redactions\* such as, synonyms or the correct word depending the context. (\*a mistranslation from Spanish "redacción", meaning "essay")
- I think that they had improved a little bit more than before because now I search in a more specific way to look for what I want more quickly.
- Yes, because I've learned a lot with the rubrics and now I've discovered lots of dictionaries I never used before and how to find the information in them.
- Yes, I think that my capacities have improved because before it was not using very much the dictionaries, however, now my vocabulary is richer and varied.
- I think that my abilities are better now but not too much.
- yes, because I used them so many times and I familiarized with them.
- Yes, I think my abilities to use dictionaries are better because now I have the habit of doing it, before I almost didn't do it.
- No, but I know which dictionaries I can use now.
- Yes, now I am able to contrast information in order to know which word is better for each situation
- In my opinion I believe that my skills with dictionaries are better, before I only looked for what the word meant, but now I look for if the word has some particle, or how to put the following verbs ...
- Yes, because when you had the indications to find the information you got some skills to search in the dictionaries.

The last question of the second questionnaire was Q5 "Tell me the things you can now do with dictionaries that you never did before". Answers to this question revealed how the majority of students are now more aware of the value of dictionaries as part of their language learning process. While most students said that they used dictionaries for two specific purposes, looking up the meaning of a word and translating the word, and for the general purpose of learning a language, they reported a number of newly gained insights and purposes in their post-training answers to Q5. Among these are the usefulness of example sentences for guidance on word usage, locating and learning about phraseology and idioms related to a word, distinguishing between different word senses, or choosing the right word among several options. Some students

also pointed to the fact that their dictionary use was now less time-consuming. Interestingly, dictionary training also proved to be a good instrument in raising students' awareness on the added values of using dictionaries in contrast to the use of Google translator, because they realised that dictionaries enable them to make informed decisions on their word choice and use.

- Use the examples to put in a better way the words inside a sentence and to use the prepositions that go before.
- For example, now I can find expressions in dictionaries and before I didn't know that it was possible
- Now, I have learned that some dictionaries like Cambridge or Macmillan are more useful than Google traductor.
- Before, I didn't search information in English dictionaries. Now, I can look words and meanings without needing the translator.
- For example, in the Cambridge dictionary you can see the grammar of words.
- Contrast information, know which preposition follows each word, read many examples...
- I have discovered the different meanings of a word
- When I'm reading a definition in a dictionary, now I can distinguish the type of word and possible expressions with the word.
- I can know if it is better to use another verb than the one I had chosen. I can know if that word is followed by a particle in particular.
- Before I read the definition of the words in English, I only looked for the meaning in Spanish and associated it with what I thought in Spanish. Now I also read in what situations the word can be used.
- I can find the words more quickly
- Now I can find phrases with the words I'm looking for for a better understanding of their meanings, expressions with those words and the most successful synonyms

## 6. Discussion

The comparison of students' skills and beliefs in their own dictionary use revealed important changes between pre- and post-training opinions. As reported in the pre-training questionnaire results, most students received very basic instructions on how to use dictionaries and these instructions are provided at a very early age (8–10 years old) for the participants' mother tongue dictionaries or the official languages spoken in the area. It seems that after that, no additional training is given other than suggesting suitable dictionaries to use in a foreign language. This is a situation which could be improved by implementing different dictionary skills training progressively from basic to more difficult abilities in the different educational levels. In spite of the little training, students believed themselves to be proficient dictionary users and 61.33% claimed

to be satisfied or manage well with dictionaries. This perception, however, changed after the training sessions. In the second questionnaire students stated that the active dictionary rubrics were useful (70 out of 75 students answered that they were useful or more or less useful), thus indicating that there was room for improvement, which can be achieved by instruction and training. This idea was further supported by the answers provided to the question "Do you now find more information in dictionaries now than before the rubric experience?" For this question, the majority of students either found more things that they did not know before or had learnt how to learn more things about words. Moreover, students reported that their abilities to use dictionaries was better after the training period.

Questionnaire results also indicated that the students' skills now go beyond the three typical dictionary use options (translation, definition (word meaning), and a general sense that dictionaries may aid in language learning). Dictionary use and training better acquaint students with dictionaries, offering a wider range of linguistic information that may help and make the students more confident in their language learning process.

## **7. Conclusions and pedagogical implications**

This study is in line with previous research (literature review, this article) on the value of dictionary skills for the enhancement of language learners' linguistic competence. Conclusive results in this and previous studies on the improvement of learners' linguistic competence after dictionary instruction suggest that dictionary skills training is an objective that should be pursued by language teachers if they want to provide their learners with useful, adequate language tools that can also become life-long learning companions.

One of the findings of this and previous studies (particularly, Lew and Galas 2008) is the fact that most learners believe that they know how to use dictionaries and that there is not much that they can learn about them. However, training in dictionary skills shows them that they were missing a considerable amount of information that could help them in their learning process and that goes beyond translating a word or being able to find one definition for a word. Students' answers acknowledge that dictionaries allow them to better find their way with language use, helping them make informed decisions on word choice while learning about word usage. This acknowledgement includes awareness of the difference between obtaining a translation in Google or other online translation tools and deciding which is the best way to say what they want to say. Thus, specific training methods of dictionary users need to be part of the equation when reporting users' abilities to use dictionaries for a specific purpose in a given context.

Some pedagogical implications can be derived from studies in dictionary training. A recurrent conclusion is that consistent and systematic practice is necessary to achieve dictionary skills competences at different levels. Another

aspect that calls for closer attention is that the use and training reported in the literature refers to different dictionaries and types of learners. Further research should systematise these two aspects of research in dictionary skills, since both dictionary complexity and language learner competency level are relevant parts of the analysis. In this line of thought, researchers should consider how practice with different (online) dictionaries and the affordances each may have, could yield different results in the students' performance.

Finally, new methods to approach dictionary skill training and material provision needs to be aligned with language competence frameworks (Campoy-Cubillo 2015) so that dictionary training at different educational stages can be carefully planned out.

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## Appendix

### *Active dictionary rubric*

Active dictionary rubric	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5
(DEF) Definition: check definition for a better understanding/use of word					
(SENS) Check you have chosen the correct sense of the word					
(COL) Check, learn or use correct collocation					
(EX) Check examples for a more natural use of word(s) / expressions (click on "more examples" if you see this link in the dictionary)					
(GRMM) Read the grammar information about this word					
(US) Usage / get it right					
(IDM) Look at the "More meanings" tab to find idioms, phrases and phrasal verbs related to this word to learn new expressions					
(TH) Thesaurus (synonym/antonym)					
(R) (DE) Related words/ expressions / Derived words					
(TRANS) Find a better translation/word choice					

### Pre-training questionnaire

**(Q1) I used my first dictionary when I was ...**

- 8–10 years old
- 11–14 years old
- 15–16 years old
- 16–18 years old
- older than 18

**(Q2) The dictionary was ...**

- A Catalan monolingual dictionary
- A Spanish monolingual dictionary
- A Spanish/Catalan Bilingual dictionary
- An English–Spanish bilingual dictionary
- An English monolingual dictionary

**(Q3) Has anyone ever taught you how to use a dictionary (explanation longer than 10 minutes)? If so, please explain who, how and when.**

**(Q4) Are you happy with your abilities to use dictionaries?**

- Yes, I'm totally satisfied
- Yes, I manage well
- Yes, more or less
- No, not really
- I would like to use it better
- No answer

**(Q5) How many different online dictionaries do you usually look up?**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- More than 4

**(Q6) Please tick the dictionary types you use (more than one answer is allowed).**

- general
- specialized
- bilingual
- monolingual
- thesaurus (synonyms, antonyms)
- bilingualised (monolingual and ALSO the translation of the word, sometimes the translation of the examples)

**(Q7) What do you use your dictionaries for NOW? If you use them for different purposes, please explain.**

**(Q8) Do you read the "how to use the dictionary" sections?**

- yes
- no
- sometimes
- no answer

**Post-training questionnaire**

**(Q1) Did you manage to find the information in the dictionaries?**

- yes
- nearly always
- sometimes
- it was difficult but I found it
- no

**(Q2) Was the dictionary rubric useful for you?**

- Yes
- More or less useful
- I do not know
- No

**(Q3) Do you now find more information in dictionaries now than before the rubric experience? (more than one answer is possible)**

- Yes, now I find many more things that I didn't know before
- Yes, now I know how to learn more things about the words
- I am looking for
- Yes, now I can do things with the dictionaries that I had never done before
- Maybe I find more things than before this experience
- Now I find one new type of information, I didn't know it existed before the rubric exercises
- No, I do not find more information than before

**(Q4) Do you think your abilities to use dictionaries is now better? Why?**

**(Q5) Tell me the things you can now do with dictionaries that you never did before.**