Arabic Dictionary use and Vocabulary Mastery Among Government-Assisted Religious Schools (SABK) Students

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Abstract
Dictionaries are indispensable for students who are acquiring Arabic as their primary learning instrument. Using dictionaries to help students in secondary school study is one of the most crucial learning tools. Furthermore, dictionaries function as reference resources to facilitate the retrieval of definitions or translations of significant terms in the process of language acquisition. The objective of this study is to identify the strategies employed in utilising Arabic dictionaries and measure the level of Arabic vocabulary proficiency among students at *Government Assisted Religious Schools (SABK)* in the Sepang, Selangor, Malaysia. A survey design is implemented in this study. The sample comprises 148 undergraduates who serve as respondents. The research instruments comprise a vocabulary knowledge test and a questionnaire. The descriptive analysis methods were used to examine the mean values and standard deviations of the data that was collected. The results show that students' knowledge of vocabulary is inadequate. Due to the findings of the study, the teachers and the Ministry of Education Malaysia are capable of devising pedagogical strategies that motivate students to utilise dictionaries.
Keywords: Dictionary, Depth of Arabic Vocabulary, Arabic Language, Government-Assisted Religious Schools

Introduction
Dictionary use is crucial for students learning Arabic in this globalised day as their main learning aid. Arabic has become a subject of increasing interest to students worldwide, who are engaging in its study. To ensure the sustainability and strengthening of Arabic in the Malaysian school system, the curriculum has been formally developed and has undergone multiple stages of revision. A student's proficiency in a language is contingent upon the quantity of vocabulary they possess in that language (Criado & Sanchez, 2009). Dictionaries are a crucial learning strategy that is employed to facilitate the teaching and learning process

(PdP) of secondary school students. Furthermore, dictionaries also function as reference materials to facilitate the search for definitions or translations of significant words in the process of language acquisition.

The acquisition of a foreign language, particularly Arabic, is significantly influenced by the multiplicity of available vocabulary. This is due to the fact that the utilisation of language necessitates a substantial vocabulary, as it encompasses speaking, writing, hearing, and reading (Yusri et al, 2013). Arabic dictionaries serve as the principal reference for comprehending the significance and application of terms. Secondary school students must consult dictionaries to ascertain the meanings of words that they are unable to comprehend in their learning. The study on the mastery of Arabic vocabulary depth is significant due to the fact that the research sample is composed of students who are studying Arabic under the KSSM curriculum and taking *Dini* subjects. Students may not be able to pursue studies overseas or at the *Malaysian Higher Religious Certificate (STAM)* level if they are unable to effectively master Arabic.

A dictionary is defined as a reference book comprising terms from one or more languages, often listed alphabetically, together with definitions, usage guidelines, idioms, and proverbs (Barbara 1984). Tomaszczyk (1987) states that some people don't think using a bilingual dictionary is helpful when learning a foreign language. However, Tomaszczyk contends that dictionaries serve as instructional tools that can facilitate the acquisition of foreign languages. Dictionaries are regarded as a cognitive strategy. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) defined cognitive strategies as ones that immediately work on information that has been received, interpret it, and enhance learning. The impact of dictionary use on vocabulary acquisition has been the subject of numerous studies (Tomaszczyk, 1987; Chadjipapa & Papadopoulou, 2018; Samsuri & Mazlan, 2023), which regard it as a viable approach to acquiring foreign language vocabulary. As defined by Neuman and Dwyer (2009), vocabulary is the collection of words that must be mastered in order to communicate effectively, regardless of whether the message is delivered or received. Proficiency in a language is jeopardised when pupils fail to acquire an adequate number of words for particular circumstances. Consequently, vocabulary is indispensable for the acquisition of a second or foreign language (Samah, 2013).

Vocabulary depth is a crucial factor in assessing a student's language competency level (Maskor, 2020). Palmberg (1987) posits that vocabulary depth is a progressive level of knowledge that is utilised in the acquisition of vocabulary. Vocabulary depth, as defined by Qian (2002), is the degree to which a learner comprehends the meaning of a word, including its pronunciation, spelling, meaning, morphology, frequency, syntax, and collocations in relation to the text. Nation (2001) classified vocabulary depth as the number of aspects and constructs of vocabulary knowledge that must be taken into account when investigating the meaning of words. The initial structures examined in terms of meaning are the constructs of meaning and form, which are subsequently followed by the constructs of relationships, reference words, and concepts. Additionally, Alderson (2005) classified meaning into four constructs: denotative meaning, semantic relationships, word combinations, and word formation, in accordance with Nation's (2001) perspective.

Arabic vocabulary proficiency among students is reported to be inadequate at all levels of instruction. The skills of an individual, including writing, are influenced by their inadequate

vocabulary (Aluwi & Ghani 2023). The acquisition of a comprehensive understanding of Arabic vocabulary is essential, particularly in the context of teaching foreign languages to non-native speakers as a second language. The vocabulary size and depth of secondary school students are relatively low (Maskor, 2020).

Additionally, prior studies have identified a decrease in the utilisation of dictionaries by students in their comprehension of Arabic vocabulary components. The utilisation of dictionaries by students is exceedingly disappointing, resulting in their inadequate proficiency and proficiency in Arabic, as per Sejo (2012). Deficient exposure and emphasis have been placed on the use of dictionaries in educational strategies by teachers. The study conducted by Hambali et al. (2023) has demonstrated this. Teachers rarely employ teaching methods during translation assignments to students, such as requesting that students translate words by supplying antonyms and requesting that they translate words using dictionaries. Irfan and Rizal (2023) discovered that students' primary challenge is discerning the correct meaning of words in their study examining the use of dictionaries in the learning of Arabic vocabulary. This is due to the fact that the majority of dictionaries present vocabulary in its fundamental form. Accordingly, this suggests that students possess inadequate vocabulary proficiency in Arabic.

The researcher's study attempts to comprehend the methods students employ when utilising Arabic dictionaries to acquire the language as well as the depth of their vocabulary mastery. Furthermore, the results of this investigation are advantageous to the *Ministry of Education Malaysia,* as they facilitate the enhancement and refinement of the curriculum to align with the academic abilities of students. The *Ministry of Education Malaysia* can also benefit from this study by using the data to develop and implement relevant methods to improve students' vocabulary knowledge and usage of Arabic dictionaries. Additionally, the objective of this investigation is to furnish Arabic teachers with reference materials and information that will facilitate their comprehension of the correlation between the utilisation of Arabic dictionaries and the profundity of Arabic vocabulary among students. Pdpc (Teaching and Learning) presents teachers with opportunities to acquire a deeper understanding of the challenges and deficiencies.

The purpose of this study is to identify the quality of proficiency in Arabic vocabulary depth and the strategies for utilising Arabic dictionaries within the context of constructs such as denotative meaning, semantic relationships, word combinations, and word formation among secondary school students. This study focusses on the utilisation of Arabic dictionaries and investigates the scope of the Arabic vocabulary. This study does not include any additional languages or disciplines that are taken by students at the *Government-Assisted Religious Secondary School (SABK)* in Sepang, Selangor, Malaysia.

Literature Review
Language is crucial for articulating emotions and aspirations, satisfying requirements, and moulding cognition and comprehension. Each individual possesses a minimum of one language that they acquired throughout their early years, commonly referred to as their native language. A second language is any language that an individual learns after obtaining their native language (Kamus Dewan, 4th Edition, 2005:107). Additionally, it can be described

as the initial non-native language acquired by an individual and extensively utilised within a particular nation (Daud et al., 2003).

When adopting a second language, there are two primary processes at play: acquisition and learning. Second language acquisition is the process of developing language skills by being exposed to natural situations (Daud et al., 2003). This entails the process of acquiring language in a natural manner through extensive communication encounters. Learning, however, pertains to a deliberate process that takes place inside a structured educational environment (Krashen, 1981). In the context of learning Arabic as a second language in Malaysia, this particular feature is also given significant emphasis. Arabic is now learnt not only for religious purposes but also due to other aspects, particularly interest and employment opportunities (Zaini, 2015).

Proficiency in Arabic Vocabulary

Vocabulary is commonly defined as the collection of words utilised in a certain language. Linguistically, lexicon refers to a compilation of terms employed by speakers of a certain language or organised into a dictionary, as stated in the Dictionary of Lexicography (2002). Acquiring vocabulary is essential for language learners as it allows them to form phrases and expressions to effectively communicate ideas and thoughts (Majid &Yusoff, 2023). Students possess a moderate to low level of knowledge of collocations and Arabic vocabulary (Wahab et al., 2021).

This observation is corroborated by Maskor (2020), who discovered that numerous students encounter difficulty in determining the meaning of vocabulary and retaining it for extended periods due to their lack of comprehension of the words' meanings. Furthermore, students have a moderately good level of vocabulary mastering in Arabic (Razin & Baharudin, 2021). Majid and Yusoff (2023) also identified a variety of challenges that students encounter when learning Arabic, such as a lack of vocabulary, a failure to comprehend the meanings of words, incorrect pronunciation, and errors in word formation.The user's text is empty.

The use of Dictionary

Dictionarys are not only regarded as books that contain a variety of words and their respective meanings, but they also function as portals to systematic, rapid, and precise information, as evidenced by reviews of previous studies on dictionaries. Dictionary usage is one of the six categories into which Gu and Johnson (1996) classified vocabulary acquisition strategies for Arabic. Schmitt also agrees with this perspective, identifying dictionary use as a method that users employ to ascertain the meanings of words without requiring assistance from others.

The Dictionary Use Strategy (DUS) is a novel approach to effective dictionary use that Gavriilidou (2013) has proposed, as opposed to referencing abilities. DUS is defined as the strategies employed by proficient dictionary users to conduct fruitful dictionary searches in this preliminary study, which focusses on the user's capacity to utilise a dictionary directly. According to Gavriilidou (2013), DUS is classified into four categories:

i. **Awareness Strategy**, which leads to the decision to use a dictionary to solve problems encountered in or outside the classroom.
ii. **Selection Strategy**, which allows users to choose the appropriate type of dictionary depending on the problem to be solved and ensures familiarity with the dictionary itself.
iii. **Lemmatization Strategy**, which helps in finding the word forms present in the text. Users should be able to use the morphological index (root words, prefixes, suffixes,

affixes) of unknown words encountered in the text to provide initial guidance on searching for those words or should become familiar with alphabetical sequencing.

iv. **Search Strategy**, which controls and facilitates finding the correct entry section where meanings differ in the same word form are included.

Dictionary utilisation is contingent upon the user's strategies for employing the dictionary, their referencing abilities, and the dictionary's contents. Atkins and Varantola (1998) emphasise the necessity of increasing the quality of dictionaries and providing users with training. Nevertheless, instructing users on how to acquire referencing abilities or DUS (Dictionary Use abilities) may hold paramount significance, given the ongoing enhancements in dictionaries, resulting in enhanced organisation and user-friendliness (Gavriilidou, 2013). In addition, the availability of online dictionaries allows users to conduct queries more efficiently.

Methodology
This study employs a survey research design. The survey method was chosen due to its ability to measure opinions, attitudes, and behaviors (Cohen et al., 2018), involving a total of 148 respondents who are Form 4 students taking Arabic as a foreign language.

In this study, a set of questionnaires was adapted and modified by the researcher based on previous studies (Gavriilidou, 2013; Maskor, 2020). The items selected and used by the researcher were adjusted according to the research questions. The researcher divided the questionnaire into three main sections: A, B, and C, to gather study data. Section A pertains to the respondents' demographics and contains questions related to the respondents' background. Section B concerns the strategies for using Arabic dictionaries. Section C is adapted from the study by Maskor (2020), which focused on Arabic vocabulary knowledge in writing skills. The test set developed by Maskor aims to identify and measure the level of Arabic vocabulary mastery and knowledge, including aspects of vocabulary size and depth.

Table 1
Constructs Content and Details of the Research Instrument

Section	Dimension Constructs	Items	Number of Items	Source
Section A	Demographics of Respondents	A1-A4	4	
Section B	Awareness Strategies	B1-B13	13	Modified and adapted from Zoe Gavriilidou (2013 & 2019)
	Dictionary Selection Strategies	B14-B22	9	
	Lemmatization Strategies	B23-B29	7	
	Word Search Strategies	B30-B35	6	
Section C	Arabic vocabulary Mastery Test	C1-C37	37	Modified and adapted from Zunita (2020)

The pilot study was conducted with 30 Arabic language students at a religious secondary school located in Hulu Langat, Selangor, which achieved a confidence level of 94% for performing stable statistical analysis (Cooper & Emory, 2018). The data collection process

began after conditional approval for conducting the study was obtained from the *Policy Planning and Research Division (BPPDP)* of the Ministry of Education Malaysia. Once permission to conduct the study in selected schools was granted, the head of the Arabic Language Department at the school was contacted to arrange a suitable time for the study with Form 4 students studying Arabic at the school. The research instruments were distributed to students face-to-face. Data collection from the 148 respondents took place over two weeks, and all distributed instruments were returned with no deficiencies. In this study, the researcher used systematic random sampling to select respondents.

Before the pilot study and the actual study could be carried out, the validity and reliability of the instrument were verified. This element of validity involves three experts who examined the items' content validity. The expert review resulted in the removal of 2 items as they were deemed unsuitable for testing the strategies for using Arabic dictionaries. According to the analysis's findings, the Cronbach's Alpha value for the overall item of DUS questionaire is 0.94. Approval was obtained from all three expert panels to review the content validity of the items in the questionnaire. Reliability refers to the extent to which research results can be replicated to yield the same outcomes (Othman, 2007; Romzi, 2013). Researchers in the social sciences typically use the internal consistency approach to determine the reliability of research instruments. To achieve a high level of reliability, the researcher used instruments previously used by other researchers and obtained high reliability values in their studies.

Finding
Strategies for Using Arabic Dictionaries Among SABK Students
Descriptive analysis was conducted to identify the strategies for using Arabic dictionaries among students. This analysis involves frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The results of the descriptive analysis are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Strategies fo Using Arabic Dictionaries

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Awareness Strategy	2.94	0.75	Moderate
Dictionary Selection Strategy	3.28	0.81	Moderate
Lemmatization Strategy	2.95	0.81	Moderate
Word Search Strategy	3.85	0.71	High
Total Strategy	3.26	0.61	Moderate

Table 2 shows that the overall strategy for using Arabic dictionaries among students is at a moderate level (mean = 3.26, SD = 0.61). The word search strategy (mean = 3.85, SD = 0.71) recorded a high mean value. Meanwhile, the awareness strategy showed the lowest mean value among the other dictionary use strategies (mean = 2.94, SD = 0.75). The data in Table 4.4 indicate that the strategies for using Arabic dictionaries among students are at a moderate level with an overall mean of 3.26. The results also show that the mean score for the strategies for using Arabic dictionaries ranges from 2.94 to 3.85. Furthermore, the dictionary selection strategy showed a mean value at a moderate level (mean = 3.28, SD = 0.81). The lemmatization strategy is also at a moderate level (mean = 2.95, SD = 0.81).

Awareness Strategy for Using Dictionaries

A descriptive analysis was conducted to examine the dictionary usage strategy focusing on the awareness aspect of using dictionaries. The results from the analysis for each item in the awareness strategy aspect are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Frequency Distribution, Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation, and Mean Interpretation for Awareness Strategy of Using Dictionaries

Statement	Frequency & Percentage		
	Low	Moderate	High
I use the dictionary to find the meaning of a word.	11 14.2%	66 44.6%	61 41.2%
I use the dictionary to find out how a word is spelt.	62 41.9%	54 36.5%	32 21.6%
I use the dictionary to find synonyms.	51 34.5%	52 35.1 %	45 30.4%
I use the dictionary to find antonyms.	61 41.2%	43 29.1%	44 29.7%
I use the dictionary to find out how a word is used.	63 42.5%	51 34.5%	34 23%
I use the dictionary to find the root word of a term.	35 23.7%	50 33.8%	63 42.6%
I use the dictionary to help me with translation.	12 8.1%	36 24.3%	100 67.6%
I use the dictionary to find out how a word is used in a sentence.	46 31.1%	52 35.1%	50 33.8%
I use the dictionary to find derivatives of a word	68 45.9%	45 30.4%	35 23.7%
I use the dictionary to find words within the same semantic field.	69 46.6%	47 31.8%	32 21.6%
I use the dictionary to find appropriate words to express feelings or opinions.	93 62.8%	38 25.7%	17 11.5%
I use the dictionary at home.	107 72.3%	26 17.6%	15 10.1%
I use the dictionary in class.	12 8.1%	57 38.5%	79 53.4%

Mean= 2.94   Std. Dev= 0.75   Level= Moderate

The descriptive analysis in Table 3 shows that the awareness strategy for using Arabic ictionaries has a mean value of 2.94 and a standard deviation of 0.75. Among the thirteen items listed in Table 4.6, item B7, "I use the dictionary to help me with translation," has the highest percentage for "frequently" and "always" scales, totaling 67.6%. Specifically, 62 students (41.9%) frequently use the dictionary for translation, while 38 students (25.7%) always use it for this purpose. However, 12 students (8.1%) stated that they rarely use the dictionary for Arabic translation.

Conversely, the item with the lowest frequency and percentage is B12, "I use the dictionary at home." This indicates that students rarely use the dictionary at home. From the frequency and percentage perspective, 5 students (3.4%) always do not use the dictionary at home, while 10 students (6.8%) frequently do not use it at home.

Dictionary Selection Strategy

Table 4
Frequency Distribution, Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation and Mean Interpretation for Dictionary Selection Strategy Aspect

Statement	Frequency & Percentage		
	Low	Moderate	High
I use online dictionaries on a computer.	40 27%	29 19.6%	79 53.4%
I use online dictionaries on a mobile phone or tablet.	23 15.5%	30 20.3%	95 64.2%
I use free online dictionaries.	20 13.5%	30 20.3%	98 66.2%
I choose online dictionaries because of its multimedia features (images, audio, etc.) and are more engaging.	44 29.7%	34 23.0%	70 47.3%
I prefer online dictionaries for faster and easier information retrieval (compared to printed dictionaries).	20 13.5%	31 21%	97 65.5%
I can find the desired online dictionary by typing the website address.	32 21.6%	41 27.7%	75 50.7%
I use Google search to find the dictionary I need.	14 9.5%	25 16.9%	109 73.6%
I explore detailed meanings of words by clicking on links.	52 35.1%	46 31.1%	50 33.8%
I find it easy to access all information in an online dictionary.	27 18.2%	42 28.4%	79 53.4%

Mean = 3.53   Std. Dev= 0.89   Level = Moderate

The descriptive analysis in Table 4 shows that the dictionary selection strategy contributes to the overall use of dictionaries with a mean value of 3.53 and a standard deviation of 0.89. The highest mean value within this aspect is found in item B20, "I use Google search to find the dictionary I need," with a mean of 4.02 and a standard deviation of 1.07. Specifically, 61 students (41.2%) always use Google search to find the dictionary they need when looking up unfamiliar words online, while 48 students (32.4%) frequently use this method, 25 students (16.9%) sometimes use it, 9 students (6.1%) rarely use it, and 5 students (3.4%) never use Google search to find the desired dictionary.

Word Search Strategy

Table 5

Frequency Distribution, Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation and Mean Interpretation for Word Search Strategy

Statement	Frequency & Percentage		
	Low	**Moderate**	**High**
When I look up a word starting with the letter "alif," I search the front pages of the printed dictionary.	8 5.4%	26 17.6%	114 77%
When searching for a word starting with the letter "ص," I look in the middle pages of the printed dictionary.	20 13.5%	32 21.6%	96 64.9%
When searching for a word, I first ensure the initial letter and start looking in the dictionary.	3 2%	21 14.2%	124 83.8%
When I search for a word, I immediately open the printed dictionary and check if the initial letter is close to the word I am looking for.	7 4.7%	43 29.1%	98 66.2%
When I find the word I'm looking for and it has multiple meanings, I continue reading each meaning with the help of provided sentence examples.	18 12.2%	45 30.4%	85 57.4%
When I find the word, I go back and check if its meaning fits the context of the sentence in the textbook.	22 14.9%	45 30.4%	81 54.7%

Mean=2.93   Std. dev=0.77   Level=Moderate

Table 5 shows that each item in the word search strategy aspect of dictionary use in Arabic language learning is at a high level, with means ranging from 3.80 to 4.36. Among the items, B32, "When searching for a word, I first ensure the initial letter and start looking in the dictionary," has the highest mean (4.36) with a standard deviation of 0.82. A total of 81 students (54.7%) always ensure the initial letter when looking up a word in an Arabic dictionary, though one student (0.7%) never does this.

Another high-interpretation item is B30, "When I look up a word starting with the letter 'alif,' I search the front pages of the printed dictionary," with a mean of 4.20 and a standard deviation of 0.98. This indicates that 74 students (50%) always search for words starting with "alif" in the front pages of printed dictionaries, demonstrating their awareness of where "alif" is positioned in the Arabic alphabet.

Item B33, "When I search for a word, I immediately open the printed dictionary and check if the initial letter is close to the word I am looking for," also has a high interpretation value (mean = 3.96, SD = 0.93). Finally, item B31, "When searching for a word starting with the letter 'ص,' I look in the middle pages of the printed dictionary," has a mean of 3.80 and a

standard deviation of 1.10. A total of 48 students (32.4%) always or frequently search for words starting with "ص" in the middle pages of printed dictionaries.

Overall, the results suggest that students in the SABK Sepang district have a good understanding of effective word search strategies when using an Arabic dictionary during their Arabic language studies.

Lemmatization Strategy

Table 6
Frequency Distribution, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation for Overall Score of Arabic Vocabulary Depth

Statement	Frequency & Percentage		
	Low	Moderate	High
When I hear a word I don't know, I try to imagine various possible spellings of the word and immediately refer to a dictionary.	31 20.9%	54 36.5%	63 42.6%
When I can't find the meaning of a word in the dictionary that I think should be there, I continue my search until I find it.	29 19.6%	64 43.2%	55 37.2%
Synonyms and antonyms provided in the dictionary help me understand a word better.	39 26.3%	38 25.7%	71 48%
Before using an online dictionary, I first read the abbreviations used in the dictionary.	65 43.9%	43 29.1%	40 27%
Before using an online dictionary, I read the information explaining the dictionary's structure and the format of word entries.	88 59.5%	40 27%	20 13.5%
Before using an online dictionary, I first explore how each word is organized in the dictionary.	65 43.9%	45 30.4%	38 25.7%
I can recognize links in online dictionaries to get more information about a word.	63 42.6%	45 30.4%	40 27%

Mean=3.93   Std. Dev 0.73   Level=High

The descriptive analysis in Table 6 shows that the lemmatization strategy aspect contributes to the use of dictionaries with a mean value of 3.93 and a standard deviation of 0.73. The study findings indicate that one item, B25, "Synonyms and antonyms provided in the dictionary help me understand a word better," had the highest percentage for the "often" and "always" scales, with a total of 48%. This suggests that students believe using dictionaries can help them understand and learn synonyms and antonyms in Arabic. Furthermore, students frequently use dictionaries for finding synonyms and antonyms in Arabic.

However, item B27, "Before using an online dictionary, I read the information explaining the dictionary's structure and the format of word entries," had the lowest percentage for the

"often" and "always" scales, with a percentage of 13.6%. This indicates that students are less likely to use online dictionaries and are less inclined to read the information provided in online dictionaries before using them.

Depth of Arabic Vocabulary Knowldege Among SABK Students

The descriptive analysis conducted in this section aims to answer the second research question, which is to determine the depth of Arabic vocabulary knowledge among SABK students. The results of the descriptive analysis on the overall depth of Arabic vocabulary knowledge are presented in Table 7.

Table 7
Frequency Distribution, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation for Overall Score of Arabic Vocabulary Depth

Interpretation	Score (%)	Frequency	Percentage
Knows more than ¾ of word meanings	75-100	0	0%
Knows more than ½ or nearly ¾ of the word meanings	50-74	39	26.4%
Knows less than ½ or nearly ¾ of the word meanings	25-49	71	48%
Knows less than ¾ of the word meanings	0-24	38	25.7%
Total		**148**	**100%**

Table 7 shows that the highest frequency and percentage of Arabic vocabulary depth are at the weak level, with 71 students (48%). The number of students who reached a moderate level of Arabic vocabulary knowledge is 39 (26.4%), which is 21.6% lower than the weak level. The study also found that no students achieved a good level (75-100 marks). The lowest level is very weak (0-24 marks), with a frequency of 38 students (25.7%).

Depth of Knowledge in Denotative Meaning, Semantic Relationships, Word Combination, and Word Formation Among SABK Students

The overall depth of vocabulary knowledge, encompassing aspects of denotative meaning, semantic relationships, word formation, and word combination, has been analyzed descriptively. Among these four constructs, the analysis reveals that the construct of semantic relationships has the highest mean score and standard deviation (mean = 2.36, SD = 0.72), followed by word combination (mean = 2.29, SD = 0.84), denotative meaning (mean = 2.05, SD = 0.95), and word formation (mean = 2.03, SD = 0.89).

The semantic relationships construct (mean = 2.36) shows the highest level of mastery compared to the other constructs. In this construct, six students (4.1%) achieved a good mastery level, 56 students (37.8%) were at a moderate level, 71 students (48%) were at a weak level, and 15 students (10.1%) were at a very weak level.

For the word combination construct, ten students (6.8%) demonstrated good mastery, 49 students (33.1%) were at a moderate level, 62 students (41.9%) were at a weak level, and 27 students (18.2%) were at a very weak level.

In the denotative meaning construct, eleven students (7.4%) had good mastery, 38 students (25.7%) were at a moderate level, 47 students (31.8%) were at a weak level, and 52 students (35.1%) were at a very weak level.

The word formation construct had the lowest mean score compared to the other three constructs. Only four students (2.7%) showed good mastery in word formation, while 48 students (32.4%) were at a moderate level, 44 students (29.7%) were at a weak level, and 52 students (35.1%) were at a very weak level.

Table 8

Depth of Arabic Vocabulary Knowledge Among SABK Students in Aspects of Meaning (Denotative Meaning, Semantic Relationships, Word Formation, and Word Combination)

Constructs in Meaning Aspects	Good (75-100)	Moderate (50-74)	Weak (25-49)	Very Weak (0-24)	Mean	Std Dev.
Denotative Meaning	11 (7.4%)	38 (25.7%)	47 (31.8%)	52 (35.1%)	2.05	0.95
Semantic Relationships	6 (4.1%)	56 (37.8%)	71 (48.0%)	15 (10.1%)	2.36	0.72
Word Formation	4 (2.7%)	48 (32.4%)	44 (29.7%)	52 (35.1%)	2.03	0.89
Word Combination	10 (6.8%)	49 (33.1%)	62 (41.9%)	27 (18.2%)	2.29	0.84

Discussion

The strategy of using Arabic dictionaries among students is a key focus, significantly impacting the process of learning Arabic vocabulary. The primary objective of this study was to observe the strategies employed by students in SABK schools in the Sepang, Selangor, Malaysia when using Arabic dictionaries. This strategy is based on a new approach of effective dictionary use strategies as suggested by Gavriilidou (2013). Additionally, the study aimed to identify the depth of Arabic vocabulary knowledge among these students. The strategy utilized a new approach, focusing on effective dictionary use strategies, as proposed by Gavriilidou (2013), known as Dictionary Use Strategy (DUS), rather than merely reference skills. Gavriilidou categorized DUS into four strategies: awareness, selection, lemmatization, and look-up.

From the four strategies tested in this study, the findings revealed that respondents were able to adapt to them. This study aligns with the findings of Chadjipapa and Papadopoulou (2018), who tested dictionary use strategies among Greek students and found difficulties in the awareness and lemmatization strategies. The study discovered that while respondents knew how to use a dictionary effectively, they were not aware of the information available within it.

Therefore, the results indicated that students knew how to use a dictionary to find the meaning of words, as shown by the highest mean scores. The study by Chadjipapa (2018) also found that among the four strategies, the word lookup strategy had the highest mean score compared to the others. Furthermore, research by Citrayasa et al., (2022) found that most students use dictionaries and guess word meanings as part of their language learning approach. According to research by Samsuri and Mazlan (2023), the effectiveness of using electronic dictionaries for Arabic language learners helps them understand Arabic vocabulary.

The study also found that the level of mastery of Arabic vocabulary depth aspects was generally weak. The findings indicated that secondary school students did not master nearly three-quarters or half of the meanings of the tested words (Talib, 1996). This suggests that students do not fully grasp the content of the curriculum. The vocabulary used in the instruments for this study consisted of words typically found in Arabic textbooks from the first to fourth forms.

These findings are consistent with Maskor's (2020) study, which found that Form Four students from SMKA schools had a moderate level of mastery in Arabic vocabulary depth. Additionally, Rahman et al. (2023) found that SAM Selangor students' mastery of Arabic vocabulary depth was moderate. Research by Abdullah and Bakar (2022) on university students also found significant difficulties in mastering Arabic vocabulary, hindering their ability to follow the university syllabus.

However, the findings contradict Rizan's (2021) study, which showed that students' vocabulary mastery was at a moderately high level. Students at this level are classified as those who can read and understand Arabic sentence structures well, with fewer noticeable errors.

Chapelle (1994), in her model, found that non-native speakers could know a large number of words but fail to use them effectively due to weaknesses in understanding their meanings and correct usage. Studies by Mezah and Mohamad (2011), Zheng (2012), Schmitt (2014), and Maskor (2020) emphasized that vocabulary depth is a challenging aspect of language mastery, involving form, meaning, function, and purpose. These previous studies reinforce the findings that students need to master vocabulary depth well, as it encourages the accurate use of words in all language skills.

According to Nation (2001), denotative meaning, also known as form and meaning construction, implies that students understand a word's meaning when they can identify both its form and meaning. Nation emphasized that students need to relate form and meaning to understand the actual meaning behind both aspects. The findings showed that students are still weak in recognizing and using denotative meanings, even though the words provided in the test were commonly found in textbooks. This is consistent with Maskor's (2020) study, which also found weak mastery in denotative meaning.

The implications of these findings reveal that strategies for using dictionaries are lacking, and the knowledge of Arabic vocabulary among SABK students is weak. This has some impact on the methods of teaching and learning Arabic in educational settings. Additionally, some information from this survey study can be summarized.

Based on the study's findings, the researcher hopes to provide new insights or information to the Ministry of Education Malaysia (KPM) to review and improve learning processes, particularly in mastering vocabulary and its depth. Furthermore, the ministry should offer courses to teachers to enhance teaching and learning strategies, particularly in Arabic dictionary use.

Arabic language teachers play a crucial role in encouraging students to learn and deepen their Arabic language skills as much as possible. Teachers' encouragement and support can foster students' interest in learning Arabic. Exposing students to dictionary use strategies in classrooms can be beneficial and enhance their Arabic vocabulary.

Conclusion

Overall, it can be concluded that students' failure to achieve a good level of vocabulary depth mastery may be due to external factors affecting the language itself. Wahab et al., (2021) found that limited vocabulary knowledge is a primary reason for students' failure to master reading texts, communicate, and produce good writing. Furthermore, Samah et al., (2023) found that students struggled to translate word meanings, indicating they did not have a good grasp of vocabulary in learning Arabic.

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