

## Students' Responses to the Use of a Bilingual Pocket Dictionary

**M. Hasby Hasbullah<sup>1\*</sup>, Iin Baroroh Ma'arif<sup>2</sup>, Ulfa Wulan Agustina<sup>3</sup>, Nurul Afidah<sup>4</sup>, A. Kanzul Fikri<sup>5</sup>, Hanifah<sup>6</sup>**

<sup>1,2,3,4,5,6</sup>English Department, KH. A. Wahab Hasbullah University

\*Email: [iinmaarif@unwaha.ac.id](mailto:iinmaarif@unwaha.ac.id)

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores students' responses to the use of a bilingual (Arabic-English) pocket dictionary in learning activities at an Islamic boarding school in Jombang. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, involving students as participants. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations of the students of Al Munawaroh Islamic boarding school at Jombang. The findings indicate that the bilingual pocket dictionary significantly supports vocabulary acquisition, enhances learner autonomy, and increases motivation. However, some limitations include over-reliance on direct translation and limited contextual understanding. The study suggests integrating dictionary use with contextual learning strategies to optimize language acquisition.*

**Keywords:** *Bilingual; Pocket Dictionary; Vocabulary Learning; Student Response*

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### INTRODUCTION

In education, language is essential, especially when studying a second or foreign language. Vocabulary mastery is widely acknowledged as a foundational component of language proficiency, as it directly influences learners' ability to comprehend texts and express ideas effectively (Parmawati et al., 2022). In line with this, Hayat et al. (2024) highlight the importance of vocabulary knowledge as a predictor of communication skills in written and spoken language. Effective vocabulary learning requires repeated exposure, meaningful context, and active learner engagement, rather than mere memorization.

In Indonesian Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), students are often required to learn multiple languages, particularly Arabic and English, within a structured and immersive environment. This multilingual demand presents unique challenges in vocabulary acquisition, especially for learners with varying proficiency levels. In these situations, pupils' vocabulary growth is greatly aided by the requirement for useful and easily accessible learning resources.

One widely used tool in vocabulary learning is the bilingual dictionary. Bilingual dictionaries provide meanings in the learners' first language, making them especially helpful for beginners and lower-intermediate learners (Sanusi et al., 2024). They help with comprehension during reading exercises and give students instant access to word definitions. Furthermore, bilingual dictionaries can reduce cognitive load by simplifying the process of decoding unfamiliar vocabulary (Zhang & Webb, 2019). Due to their usefulness and ease of use, small, portable devices like bilingual pocket dictionaries have drawn attention in recent years, especially in educational settings with few digital resources (Of et al., 2024).

However, the use of bilingual dictionaries is not without criticism. Some studies highlight that excessive reliance on bilingual dictionaries may hinder deeper language processing, as learners tend to focus on direct word-to-word translation rather than understanding meaning in context (Nur, 2023). This concern is also supported by Batia Laufer (2017) as cited in (Ma'arif & Claudia, 2021)(Mazlan et al., 2022), who argues that shallow processing strategies can limit long-term vocabulary retention. As a result, the usefulness of bilingual dictionaries depends not only on their accessibility but also on how students apply them in relevant educational settings.

In addition to supporting vocabulary acquisition, learning tools such as dictionaries play an important role in fostering learner autonomy (Baroroh et al., 2018). Learner autonomy refers to the ability of students to take control of their own learning process. By using dictionaries, students can independently solve vocabulary-related problems without constant reliance on teachers (Baroroh Ma'arif et al., 2020). This is particularly relevant in pesantren settings, where structured discipline is combined with independent study practices, creating opportunities for students to develop self-directed learning habits.

Despite these theoretical and empirical insights, several research gaps remain evident. First, most existing studies on dictionary use have been conducted in general EFL classroom settings, with limited focus on Islamic boarding school (pesantren) contexts, which have distinct linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical characteristics. Second, prior research has largely emphasized quantitative or experimental approaches, often neglecting the exploration of students' subjective experiences, perceptions, and interpretations when using bilingual dictionaries. Third, while recent studies increasingly focus on digital dictionaries and mobile applications, there is still limited attention to low-technology learning tools, such as bilingual pocket dictionaries, which remain highly relevant in contexts with restricted access to technology.

To address these gaps, this study offers several novelties. Conceptually, it situates vocabulary learning and dictionary use within the unique socio-educational context of pesantren. Methodologically, this study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to capture rich, in-depth insights into students' responses, moving beyond surface-level statistical analysis. Practically, it highlights the continued importance of simple, portable learning tools in supporting vocabulary acquisition and learner autonomy, particularly in resource-limited environments. These contributions position the study as both theoretically and pedagogically significant. Based on these considerations, this study aims to investigate how Madrasah Aliyah students respond to the use of a bilingual pocket dictionary in a pesantren-based learning context.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to explore students' perceptions and lived experiences regarding the use of a bilingual pocket dictionary within a pesantren-based learning context. Qualitative research focuses on understanding social phenomena from the participants' perspectives and allows researchers to interpret meanings constructed through experience. In qualitative inquiry, the researcher acts as the primary instrument, enabling in-depth interpretation of participants' perspectives, as highlighted by Sugiyono (2019) as cited in (Mazlan et al., 2022). Through this approach, the researcher can investigate students' authentic responses and gain a richer understanding of how the bilingual pocket dictionary influences their learning process.

The study was conducted at Al-Munawaroh Islamic Boarding School, Jombang, particularly involving students of Madrasah Aliyah who actively participate in both formal school activities and boarding school programs. The pesantren environment was selected because students are required to engage in intensive language learning activities as part of their daily routines. In this context, the bilingual pocket dictionary serves not only as a learning aid but also as a practical tool that supports students in understanding and acquiring vocabulary in everyday educational interactions.

The participants of this study were Madrasah Aliyah Al-Munawaroh students residing in an Islamic boarding school, selected through purposive sampling based on their direct experience using bilingual pocket dictionaries in their daily learning activities. Purposive sampling was employed because it enables researchers to select participants who possess specific characteristics relevant to the objectives of the study (Creswell, 2018), as cited in (Putri et al., 2021). The participants were chosen based on several criteria: they had used the bilingual pocket dictionary regularly, had sufficient experience with the dictionary during classroom and independent learning activities, and were willing to share their experiences throughout the research process. This sampling technique ensured that the data obtained were rich, meaningful, and relevant to the research objectives.

To obtain comprehensive and triangulated data, the study employed three main data collection techniques. First, open-ended questionnaires were distributed to capture students' general responses and initial perceptions regarding the use of the bilingual pocket dictionary. The questionnaire consisted of questions related to students' opinions about ease of use, perceived benefits, learning motivation, and challenges encountered during dictionary use. Open-ended questions were chosen to allow students to express their thoughts freely without being limited by predetermined response options.

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into students' experiences, allowing for elaboration and clarification of their responses. The interview format provided flexibility for the researcher to ask follow-up questions and explore emerging themes during the conversation. Through these interviews, students were encouraged to explain their experiences, feelings, and opinions in greater detail, particularly regarding how the bilingual pocket dictionary affected their vocabulary learning and learning independence.

Third, classroom observations were carried out to examine students' actual behavior and strategies when using the dictionary in real learning situations. Observations focused on students' participation, frequency of dictionary use, learning interactions, and behavioral patterns during classroom activities. Observation data provided contextual information that complemented questionnaire and interview findings, helping the researcher understand the gap between students' perceptions and actual practices.

The combination of these methods strengthened the credibility of the findings through data triangulation. Data triangulation is important in qualitative research because it enhances trustworthiness by comparing information obtained from multiple sources and methods. In addition, member checking was also employed by asking several participants to review and confirm the interpretation of their responses to ensure the accuracy of the findings.

The collected data were analyzed using an interactive qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of three interconnected stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. During data reduction, the researcher selected, categorized, and organized relevant information obtained from questionnaires, interviews, and observations. The data were then presented systematically through narrative descriptions and thematic categorizations to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn and continuously verified throughout the analysis process to ensure consistency and validity.

Through these procedures, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' responses toward the use of a bilingual pocket dictionary and its role in supporting language learning within the unique educational environment of an Islamic boarding school.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The findings derived from the open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews reveal several recurring themes related to students' responses toward the use of the bilingual pocket dictionary. From the general perception aspect (Items 1–2), most students expressed a positive opinion about the use of the bilingual pocket dictionary in the classroom. They described it as practical, easy to carry, and helpful in supporting their daily learning activities. The majority of participants also stated that the dictionary was easy to use, particularly because the word entries were arranged clearly and could be accessed quickly during lessons.

Regarding perceived benefits (Items 3–4), students stated that the dictionary significantly helped them understand new vocabulary. Many participants explained that they used the dictionary primarily when encountering unfamiliar words while reading English or Arabic texts. Some students noted that the dictionary enabled them to continue reading without waiting for teacher explanations, thereby maintaining their focus and comprehension.

In terms of learner autonomy (Items 5–6), the data indicate that the bilingual pocket dictionary plays an important role in fostering independent learning. Most students stated that they attempted to find word meanings by themselves before asking their teacher or peers. However, a few participants admitted that they still depended on teacher explanations when the dictionary did not provide sufficient clarity or when they were unsure about the correct meaning in context.

The findings also highlight an increase in learning motivation (Items 7–8). Students reported feeling more confident and motivated when they were able to discover word meanings independently. Several participants described a sense of satisfaction and achievement when successfully using the dictionary, which encouraged them to engage more actively in reading activities and language learning tasks.

Despite these positive responses, the data also reveal several challenges (Items 9–10). A common difficulty reported by students was the tendency to translate words directly without fully understanding the context. This often resulted in confusion or misinterpretation of meaning within sentences. Additionally, some students mentioned that certain words were difficult to find or that the dictionary did not provide enough examples to illustrate how words are used in real contexts.

Finally, in the suggestion aspect (Item 11), students recommended several improvements to enhance the effectiveness of the bilingual pocket dictionary. These included adding example sentences, improving the clarity of definitions, including more vocabulary items, and organizing entries more systematically. Some students also suggested integrating simple contextual explanations to help them better understand word usage.

The semi-structured interview data further supported these findings by providing deeper insights into students' experiences. Participants confirmed that the dictionary was most frequently used during reading activities and independent study sessions. They also emphasized that while the dictionary was highly useful for quick reference, it sometimes required additional explanation from teachers to fully understand word meanings in context. Overall, the combined data from questionnaires and interviews demonstrate that the bilingual pocket dictionary is perceived as a valuable learning tool, although its effectiveness depends on how it is used and supported within the learning process.

**Table 1** The result of students' questionnaires

Number	Question	Responds
Items 1–2	general perception aspect	Most students expressed a positive opinion about the use of the bilingual pocket dictionary in the classroom.
Items 3–4	perceived benefits	Students reported that the dictionary significantly helped them understand new vocabulary.
Items 5–6	learner autonomy	The data indicate that the bilingual pocket dictionary plays an important role in fostering independent learning.
Items 7–8	learning motivation	The data indicate that the bilingual pocket dictionary plays an important role in fostering independent learning.
Items 9–10	several challenges	A common difficulty reported by students was the tendency to translate words directly without fully understanding the context.
Items 11	suggestion aspect	Students recommended several improvements to enhance the effectiveness of the bilingual pocket dictionary.

## Discussion

The findings of this study provide strong evidence that the bilingual pocket dictionary serves as an effective support tool in vocabulary learning, particularly in facilitating quick comprehension and maintaining reading flow. Students' positive perceptions regarding ease of use and practicality indicate that such dictionaries function as accessible learning aids in resource-limited environments. Furthermore, the findings related to learner autonomy suggest that the bilingual pocket dictionary contributes significantly to the development of independent learning behaviors. Students' tendency to consult the dictionary before seeking help reflects a shift toward self-directed learning. This indicates that the dictionary is not merely a reference tool but also a facilitator of autonomy, allowing learners to take greater responsibility for their own vocabulary development. Such autonomy is particularly relevant in pesantren settings, where structured routines coexist with expectations of independent study.

In addition, the increase in students' motivation highlights the psychological benefits of having immediate access to learning support. The sense of achievement reported by students when successfully identifying word meanings independently suggests that the dictionary contributes to positive learning experiences. This finding reinforces the idea that perceived competence can enhance learner engagement and motivation, especially when students feel capable of overcoming language barriers without constant teacher intervention.

However, the study also reveals important limitations associated with dictionary use. The tendency of students to rely on direct translation without considering context reflects a surface-level processing strategy, which may hinder deeper comprehension and long-term retention. Additionally, the lack of contextual examples in the dictionary entries further exacerbates this issue, as students struggle to apply vocabulary appropriately in real communicative situations.

These findings imply that while bilingual pocket dictionaries are valuable tools, their effectiveness is closely tied to how they are integrated into pedagogical practices. Teachers play a crucial role in guiding students to use dictionaries more strategically, emphasizing contextual understanding rather than mere word-to-word translation. Incorporating activities that encourage students to use new vocabulary in sentences or communicative contexts may help mitigate the identified limitations. Therefore, the discussion suggests that the optimal use of bilingual pocket dictionaries lies not only in their availability but also in the development of effective usage strategies that promote deeper language learning.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the use of a bilingual pocket dictionary plays a significant role in supporting vocabulary learning among Madrasah Aliyah students in Al Munawaroh Islamic boarding school. The findings demonstrate that students generally respond positively to the dictionary, perceiving it as a practical, accessible, and helpful tool for understanding unfamiliar vocabulary. Its portability and ease of use enable students to engage more actively in reading activities, both inside and outside the classroom.

In addition, the study reveals that the bilingual pocket dictionary contributes to the development of learner autonomy. Students tend to rely less on teachers and become more independent in solving vocabulary-related problems. This shift toward self-directed learning is particularly valuable in the pesantren environment, where independent study is an integral part of the learning culture. Furthermore, the dictionary enhances students' motivation by providing immediate support, reducing frustration, and fostering a sense of achievement when learners successfully discover word meanings on their own.

However, the study also identifies several limitations. The tendency of students to rely on direct translation without considering context may lead to superficial understanding and misinterpretation. Moreover, the lack of contextual examples in some dictionary entries limits students' ability to apply vocabulary accurately in real communication. These findings indicate that while the bilingual pocket dictionary is beneficial, its effectiveness depends on how it is used within the learning process.

Therefore, it is recommended that teachers provide guidance on effective dictionary use, particularly by encouraging contextual understanding and integrating dictionary use with communicative learning activities. Future research may explore the integration of bilingual dictionaries with digital or augmented reality-based tools to further enhance vocabulary learning. Overall, this study highlights the continued relevance of simple, low-technology learning tools in supporting language development, especially in specific educational contexts such as Islamic boarding schools.

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