Exploring English Monolingual Dictionary Use in Language Learning: A Case Study of Albanian High School Students

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Abstract: *English monolingual dictionaries remain underused tools among high school learners, despite their potential to foster vocabulary growth and learner autonomy. This study explores how Albanian students engage with these dictionaries, examining usage frequency, learning outcomes, and the obstacles they face. Through a questionnaire-based survey conducted across urban and rural schools, the study reveals a strong student preference for bilingual dictionaries due to familiarity and ease. However, those who utilize monolingual dictionaries exhibit richer vocabulary retention and higher linguistic confidence. Challenges such as lack of phonetic knowledge, unfamiliarity with dictionary structure, and low motivation limit effective use. These findings suggest that dictionary literacy needs to be addressed through targeted instruction and better resource accessibility. Overall, the study highlights the importance of embedding dictionary skills in language education to enhance independent learning and deeper language comprehension.*

Keywords: monolingual dictionaries, vocabulary learning, Albanian learners, autonomous learning, EFL education

1. Introduction

One compelling reason to dedicate time and effort to enhancing one's vocabulary is the recognition that words possess the power to influence perceptions of the world. Furthermore, the effective use of vocabulary constitutes one of the primary means, by which individuals communicate and establish meaningful connections with others in their personal and professional lives. Selecting precise words adds clarity and accuracy to both speech and writing. Words are the fundamental tools through which we inform, advise, persuade, and reason [Flanigan, 2015: 12]. Vocabulary development is central to language mastery (Carter & McCarthy, 2014: 5). Consequently, learners' strategies for acquiring vocabulary, including the proficient use of dictionaries, play a pivotal role in the progression of language skills.

Dictionaries serve as indispensable resources for learners seeking to explore and enlarge their vocabulary repertoire. Whether in print or digital formats, dictionaries function as primary lexical references that facilitate understanding of new words. Their effective utilization promotes learner autonomy and confidence. A well-designed dictionary provides accurate definitions, illustrative example sentences, and additional pertinent information that support vocabulary acquisition and language development. The purpose of this study is to examine how Albanian high school students use English monolingual dictionaries in their language learning process, focusing on frequency, perceived benefits, and common obstacles.

Traditionally regarded as authoritative repositories of language, dictionaries are frequently consulted for guidance on proper usage and adherence to linguistic conventions. Samuel Johnson aptly observed, "they that take a dictionary into their hands, have been accustomed to expect from it a solution to almost every difficulty." Dictionaries articulate the vocabulary of a language, playing a foundational role in supporting both language development and literacy. They serve as comprehensive reference tools, offering precise definitions, pronunciation guides, and grammatical information for individual words. The dictionary can be characterized as "a list of socialized linguistic forms," reflecting the language as used within a particular culture.

Moreover, dictionaries are also regarded as cultural phenomena. It is commonplace to regard a dictionary as a cultural product, shaping and being shaped by the society in which it originates. While it is widely accepted that a dictionary embodies the language and culture of its creators, it is equally important to acknowledge that it actively contributes to the cultural development itself [Svensén, 2009, 7].

According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (1998), a dictionary is defined as "a book that deals with the individual words of a language (or certain specified class of them) so as to set forth their orthography, pronunciation, signification, and use, their synonyms, derivation, and history, or at least some of these facts; for convenience of reference, the words are arranged in some stated order, now in most languages, alphabetical, and in larger dictionaries, the information given is illustrated by quotations from literature."

Different dictionaries serve varied purposes. They are produced either to fulfill the individual's informational needs referred to as utility lexicography or to serve the collective interests of a community such as national, political, or scientific communities in preserving information for future reference [Svensén, 2009, 14].

Wang regards dictionaries as akin to maps held in the hand of a tourist, serving as invaluable tools for foreign language learners. He emphasizes that, foremost, these learners must acquire the skills necessary to effectively utilize a dictionary [Wang, 2007, 63].

Dictionaries facilitate vocabulary expansion by introducing new words and elucidating their meanings within contextual frameworks. They also aid users in mastering correct spelling, pronunciation, and comprehension of word components such as prefixes and suffixes, thereby enhancing overall language proficiency. Moreover, dictionaries play an essential role in academic settings, assisting students and researchers in accessing precise terminology, refining their writing, and improving comprehension across various disciplines. Overall, dictionaries are indispensable resources that promote clarity, precision, and confidence in language use.

For any given word, a proficient dictionary elucidates how that word typically contributes to the meaning of an utterance, its typical combinatory patterns with other words, and the types of texts in which it generally appears [Atkins & Rundell, 2008: 65].

A dictionary can be described as a systematic account of the vocabulary employed by members of a speech community such as speakers of English. When effectively utilized, dictionaries represent valuable tools for enhancing vocabulary and language comprehension. There are specific tasks that users, particularly students, are expected to accomplish when consulting a dictionary, including understanding unfamiliar words, comprehending lexical definitions, verifying spellings and pronunciations, translating texts between languages, and preparing written or oral reports or essays in both their native language and the language being learned.

Education, an area characterized by a pronounced need for lexicographic tools, plays a pivotal role in the development of the most prevalent types of dictionaries currently available: monolingual and bilingual general-purpose dictionaries. Learners' strategies for vocabulary acquisition, including the effective use of dictionaries, are fundamental to the development of advanced language skills and overall linguistic competence. This study is significant because it sheds light on students' dictionary habits in under-researched educational contexts, helping educators better understand how to support independent vocabulary acquisition and enhance EFL teaching practices.

2. General Purposes and Monolingual Dictionaries

General-purpose dictionaries are what most of us buy and what we conceive of as **'the' dictionary.** They contain an alphabetical listing of the vocabulary and aim to give a comprehensive coverage of the vocabulary within the limits of their size. They are compiled within a lexicographical tradition that defines lexical information about words as consisting of at least: pronunciation, irregular inflections, part-of-speech (word-class), definitions, etymology, stylistic and dialectal restrictions, and possibly field of use.

Niladri Sekhar Dash states that "A general dictionary aims at covering most, if not all, words of a language. It contains words, which are of general usage, and which represent various spheres of life. A dictionary of any size may be general if it is designed to cover all the regular aspects of words. The goal of a general dictionary is to serve the general linguistic queries of the general users" [Dash, 2007: 14]. Following Dash's perspective, "the term 'monolingual' refers to language only, irrespective of the information provided in the dictionary. Any dictionary that gives the lists of words and their meanings in the same language is a monolingual dictionary. To be wider in application it may give information about different aspects of lexical units related to their orthography, pronunciation, grammar, meaning, etymology, and usage with illustrations. [Dash, 2007: 23].

A monolingual dictionary may encompass words that are also featured in other types of lexical resources. To enhance its functional relevance, such a dictionary often includes language samples drawn from both contemporary and historical sources, thereby providing a diachronic perspective that is essential for understanding the evolution of language. Furthermore, a general dictionary may incorporate entries related to social and stylistic variations, such as different registers, professional jargon, slang, and regional expressions, insofar as possible.

Typically, an entry in a general dictionary comprises the following elements: the headword, spelling, pronunciation, etymology, morphological features, grammatical information, definitions which may be definitional, descriptive, or equational and illustrative examples. The headword is usually immediately followed by its pronunciation. Pronunciation information is often included due to the frequent discrepancies between the orthographic form of words and their spoken realization. Generally, this information is represented using symbols from the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

In addition, dictionaries provide morphological and grammatical details. Morphological information pertains to the formational and structural characteristics of a lexical item, while grammatical details focus on key morphosyntactic features. For example, dictionaries typically specify whether a verb is transitive or intransitive and whether nouns are countable or uncountable, including irregular grammatical features.

Semantics occupies a central role in a general dictionary by offering precise definitions that may include straightforward descriptions, equivalence statements (equating one lexical unit with another of similar meaning), illustrative examples, visual aids such as pictures, glosses, cross-references, etymological information, and labels. In monolingual dictionaries, the core semantic content is primarily conveyed through detailed definitions. The semantic description may also include information about semantically related words, notably synonyms, as well as antonyms, hyponyms, and hyperonyms—collectively referred to as content-paradigmatic information. Illustrative examples are employed to demonstrate typical usage contexts, thereby aiding users in understanding subtle nuances of meaning, especially in the case of polysemous words. The utility of well-crafted examples is multifaceted: they validate the existence of a lexical unit within the language, elucidate its typical contexts, and illustrate distinctions such as collocations, sense differences, and lexical relations.

Effective examples should be self-explanatory and comprehensible independently, without necessitating additional clarification.

2.1 Monolingual vs. Bilingual dictionaries

Battenburg asserts that "no single dictionary can adequately serve all users; therefore, a variety of dictionaries are necessary to accommodate the diverse backgrounds, needs, and expectations of individual language learners" [Battenburg, 2017: 24]. As one of the most frequently utilized resources in language learning, it is common for students and former students of a foreign language to recall having used one or multiple types of dictionaries. Among these, bilingual and monolingual dictionaries dominate the landscape of foreign language education [Jeménez, 2023, 4].

Both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries play valuable roles in the language acquisition process. The most suitable choice depends on the learner's proficiency level, learning objectives, and confidence. Furthermore, these dictionaries differ in their approaches to explaining and defining words. Monolingual dictionaries typically encourage learners to interpret, infer, and comprehend words within their linguistic context. Utilization of monolingual dictionaries promotes an understanding of multiple meanings, connotative nuances, and contextual usage. Conversely, bilingual dictionaries provide translations and definitions in the learner's native language, facilitating quicker and more accessible comprehension of new vocabulary while fostering immediate confidence and understanding.

While monolingual dictionaries are associated with fostering advanced language skills and promoting learner autonomy, bilingual dictionaries may tend to limit exposure to authentic language use and potentially encourage dependence on translation. Despite the widespread belief that monolingual dictionaries are particularly advantageous as language learning tools, survey findings indicate a preference among learners for bilingual dictionaries, as they serve a dual purpose: translation and reference to monolingual entries [Alhaisoni, 2016: 33].

It has been observed that learners with lower proficiency levels often feel insecure when using monolingual dictionaries, primarily due to their requirement for extensive knowledge of the target language (L2). Conversely, they find bilingual dictionaries useful because they can readily access meanings or translations in their native language (L1) [Scholfield, 1999; 14]. Lufer and Hadar argue that although majority of learners tend to prefer bilingual dictionaries, this does not imply that bilingual resources are invariably reliable or sufficient [Lufer & Hadar, 1997: 190]. According to Bejoint, "those learners who use monolingual dictionaries are more likely to develop the habit of thinking directly in the target language" [Bejoint, 1981: 207].

Primarily designed for intermediate to advanced learners and native speakers, monolingual dictionaries provide detailed explanations solely in the target language, fostering a deeper understanding and immersive learning experience. These dictionaries often include a variety of example sentences, extensive information on etymology and morphology, and pronunciation guides such as phonetic transcriptions and audio files to support accurate pronunciation and listening skills. The cognitive benefits of using monolingual dictionaries encourage learners to engage in direct thinking in the target language, thereby cultivating greater linguistic independence and fluency.

In contrast, bilingual dictionaries are generally tailored for beginners to intermediate learners, emphasizing concise translations and brief explanatory notes. Entries typically include limited examples often just one or two and seldom feature detailed etymological or morphological information. Pronunciation guides may be included but are less consistently provided. Bilingual dictionaries primarily rely on the learner's native language for meaning, which makes them more accessible for early-stage learners, yet potentially limits opportunities for immersive language acquisition. Overall, while monolingual dictionaries facilitate more profound language engagement, bilingual dictionaries serve as practical tools for initial vocabulary acquisition and quick reference.

2.2 Dictionary users' pre-existing skills. Foundation skills for utilizing a dictionary.

High school students typically possess several pre-existing skills and knowledge that facilitate their use of a dictionary. They should be familiar with the alphabet and the concept of alphabetical order, which helps them locate words quickly. Spelling skills and an understanding of word parts such as prefixes, suffixes, and root words enable them to decipher unfamiliar words. They also generally should know how to interpret dictionary entries, including parts of speech, pronunciation guides, and word definitions. Additionally, students should learn to recognize symbols and abbreviations that help them quickly understand the part of speech and grammatical usage of words, as well as linguistic labels such as "informal" or "derogatory"

Students should also become familiar with basic phonetic symbols and pronunciation guides, which help them read words aloud accurately without prior instruction. Additionally, they should develop the skill of using surrounding words and sentences to infer the meaning of new vocabulary. As their confidence in reading and writing grows, students are more likely to actively explore new words, using a dictionary as a valuable learning tool. Many students already understand basic grammar rules, such as tense changes and plural forms, which assist in interpreting dictionary entries and applying new vocabulary correctly. By effectively using dictionary resources, students can acquire information about a word's semantic content, its role in idiomatic expressions, and various aspects of meaning and usage, including style, register, regional variations, pragmatic force, and frequency.

For foreign language learners, dictionaries often serve as essential tools to bridge gaps in understanding, especially when encountering unfamiliar words and new grammatical structures. These learners view them as valuable resources for both language development and cultural understanding. They may see the dictionary not just as a reference, but as a gateway to mastering pronunciation, idiomatic expressions,

and contextual nuances. However, some learners might initially find dictionaries intimidating due to unfamiliar symbols or complex entries, emphasizing the importance of developing proper strategies for effective use. When they harness dictionary resources fully by exploring semantic content, idiomatic usage, style, register, regional variants, pragmatic force, and word frequency they can strengthen their language acquisition and gain confidence in their communicative abilities.

2.3 Research questions

- What are the primary purposes for which Albanian high school students use monolingual dictionaries?
- How frequently do Albanian high school students consult monolingual dictionaries during their language learning?
- What difficulties do Albanian high school students encounter when using monolingual dictionaries?
- How familiar are Albanian high school students with common dictionary symbols, abbreviations, and pronunciation guides?
- How confident are Albanian high school students in interpreting the information provided by monolingual dictionaries?
- What role do monolingual dictionaries play in students' overall language learning strategies in Albania?
- To what extent do students rely on monolingual dictionaries for understanding idiomatic expressions and semantic nuances?

2.4 Data collection

The study included a total of 111 participants who completed a questionnaire focused on their use of monolingual dictionaries. The questionnaire was distributed to the students via Google Forms, ensuring their anonymity. The age of the students ranged from 15 to 19 years, encompassing key stages of high school education and language acquisition. The participants were recruited from both rural and urban areas, providing a balanced representation of students from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. The findings from this group can shed light on possible disparities in access, familiarity, and overall engagement with lexicographic tools between students from different environments, informing strategies to improve language learning resources and support within Albanian high schools.

2.5 Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to investigate the usage patterns, attitudes, and challenges faced by Albanian high school students when using monolingual dictionaries. Data collection was carried out using a structured questionnaire, which covered aspects of dictionary use such as frequency, purpose, obstacles, preferences, and perceived effectiveness. This survey aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the common behaviours and patterns associated with monolingual dictionary use. The results from these statistics served as the foundation for understanding the typical habits, preferences, and attitudes of Albanian high school students.

2.5.1 Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative data derived from the questionnaires reveal discernible patterns and trends among the participants. Percentages were calculated for variables such as the frequency of dictionary use, primary motivations for consulting dictionaries, types of information sought, common challenges faced, levels of confidence in dictionary use, and willingness or reluctance to fully utilize these resources. This analysis offered a detailed understanding of students' interaction with dictionaries, emphasizing their usage habits and attitudes towards dictionary utilization. Furthermore, it identified areas for enhancing students' dictionary skills and highlighted factors that affect their motivation and confidence in effectively leveraging these tools.

2.5.2 Qualitative analysis

The qualitative insights gathered from participants reveal a nuanced landscape of experiences and perceptions that influence students' engagement with monolingual dictionaries. Many participants highlighted the vital role of dictionaries in their language learning, viewing them as essential tools for expanding vocabulary and understanding subtle meanings. However, a significant proportion perceived dictionaries as secondary or optional resources, which diminished their motivation to explore or utilize them to their full potential.

Moreover, a considerable number of students reported feelings of frustration or intimidation when attempting to use dictionaries. This often stemmed from a lack of confidence or familiarity with the tools, leading to infrequent or sporadic usage. Some students expressed uncertainty about navigation or questioned the usefulness of the resources, citing complexity and structure as barriers. These perceptions contribute to beliefs that dictionary use is time-consuming or unnecessary for routine language tasks.

The findings also indicate that many students rarely engage with phonetic transcriptions, often overlooking or remaining unaware of their significance. This lack of familiarity with phonetic symbols reflects a tendency to view phonetic information as irrelevant. Additionally, students tend to pay minimal attention to grammatical information provided in dictionaries, focusing primarily on quick vocabulary retrieval rather than a deeper understanding of grammatical structures. Consequently, dictionary use is predominantly limited to basic meanings, with little consideration of grammatical context.

A survey on English Vocabulary Acquisition and Dictionary Usage Among Albanian High School Students
This case study explores how Albanian high school students use dictionaries to support their English language learning. The students provided their responses as follows:

Do you have a monolingual dictionary (English only)
111 responses
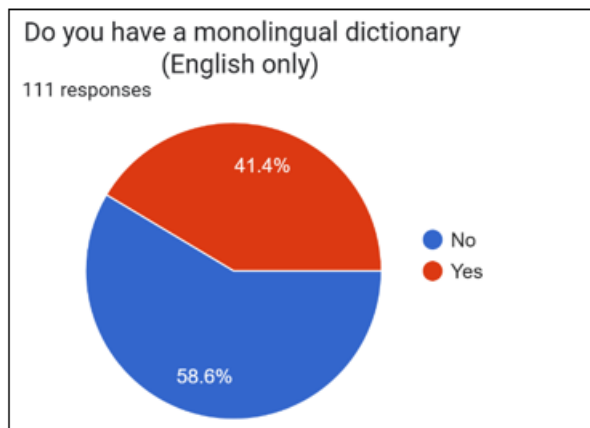
Majority of students, 58.6%, answered "No", indicating they do not currently have a monolingual English dictionary. Conversely, 41.4% of students reported "Yes". This data suggests that while a significant portion of students possess a monolingual dictionary, more than half do not, which could impact their ability to independently explore vocabulary and improve foreign language learning skills. The findings highlight the need to increase awareness, and to encourage and facilitate access to monolingual dictionaries as a valuable resource for language learning aiming at enhancing their English language proficiency.

If yes, how often do you use it
58 responses
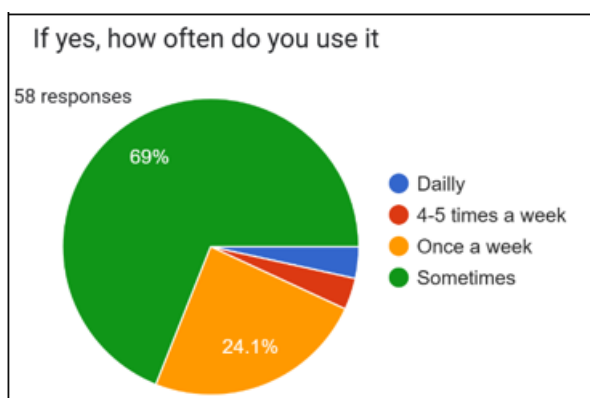
The majority, 69%, of students use their dictionary sometimes. About 24.1% of students use their dictionary once a week. A small portion, 4.3%, use their dictionary 4-5 times a week. An even smaller percentage, 2.6%, use the dictionary daily. The fact that 69% of students use their dictionary sometimes indicates that while they recognize its usefulness, they do not rely on it frequently or habitually. This sporadic usage may reflect barriers such as lack of confidence or limited understanding of when and how to use the dictionary effectively. The 24.1% of students who use the dictionary once a week show a moderate engagement level, suggesting that some learners integrate dictionary use into their routine but not consistently. This pattern might be influenced by the frequency of new vocabulary encountered or the perceived necessity of consulting the dictionary. Only a small fraction of students 4.3% use their dictionaries 4-5 times a week, which points to a segment of learners who utilize this resource relatively regularly. These students may be more motivated, have higher linguistic awareness, or be more accustomed to consulting dictionaries as part of their learning process. Surprisingly, the 2.6% of students who use

their dictionary daily indicates very low daily reliance, which could either suggest limited vocabulary expansion needs or a lack of confidence in their dictionary skills.

Do you ever look through a dictionary without looking for a particular word
109 responses
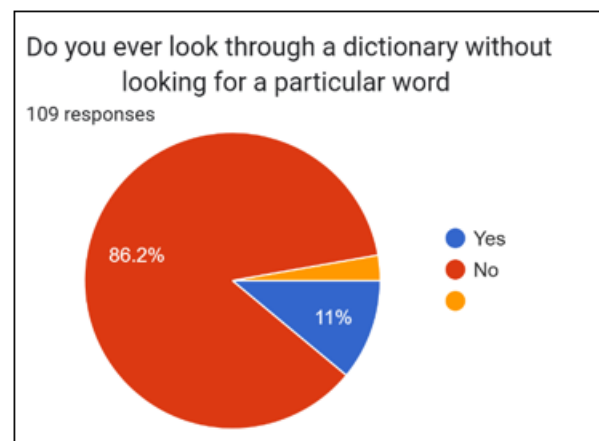
An overwhelming majority, 86.2%, answered "No", indicating that most students tend not to browse or explore dictionaries without a particular word in mind. Conversely, only 11% of students reported "Yes", meaning a small portion do browse dictionaries casually or out of curiosity. The fact that 86.2% of the students answered "No" indicates a predominant tendency to use the dictionary only when seeking clarification for a specific word or meaning. This behaviour reflects a utilitarian approach to dictionaries. Only 11% of students reported "Yes," suggesting that a minority of learners do engage with dictionaries in a more open-ended, exploratory manner without a specific word in mind. This small percentage indicates that some students enjoy browsing or exploring the language casually, which could foster a deeper, more intuitive understanding of vocabulary patterns. The low frequency of casual browsing could be attributed to various factors, such as lack of confidence, lack of experience, indifference, or limited understanding of how to effectively explore dictionaries.


When you find the word you want, how often do you cross-reference with other words used in the definition
111 responses

The largest portion, 61.3%, of students, cross-reference "occasionally". About 18.9% of students "often" cross- reference. A smaller percentage, 12.6%, "sometimes". Only a minimal 1.8% "always" cross-reference. The remaining 5.3% "never" cross-reference. The dominant response "occasionally" at 61.3% indicates that most students do not habitually or systematically engage in cross-

referencing but do so sporadically. This pattern suggests a moderate level of awareness regarding the importance of exploring related vocabulary. A significant portion, 18.9%, "often" cross-reference, highlighting that a subset of learners recognizes the benefits of this practice and incorporates it into their vocabulary learning more regularly. Conversely, 12.6% "sometimes" cross-reference, implying occasional engagement that might fluctuate based on context, motivation, or familiarity with the process. Only 1.8% "always" cross-reference, which reflects a very small group of learners who consistently utilize this strategy. Their habits suggest a high level of lexical curiosity and analytical approach to word meanings. A small minority, 5.3%, "never" cross-reference, which could be due to lack of awareness, confidence, or understanding of the utility of cross-referencing.
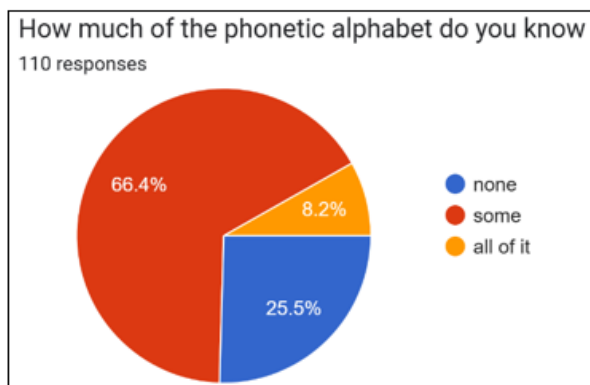
The data reveals that a significant majority, 66.4%, of respondents only know "some" parts of the phonetic alphabet. A quarter of the respondents, 25.5%, "know none" of the phonetic alphabet. A small proportion, 8.2%, "know all of it," demonstrating complete familiarity with the phonetic alphabet. While analysing the chart, it can be noticed that the most notable finding is that 66.4% of participants only "know some" of the phonetic alphabet, indicating that while a majority have at least a basic recognition of certain code words, they lack full familiarity with the entire set. This knowledge suggests that these students may struggle with fully utilizing the phonetic alphabet. Furthermore, 25.5% of respondents "know none" of the phonetic alphabet, highlighting a significant portion of the participants who are entirely unaware or untrained in its use. This lack of knowledge could pose challenges in situations where the phonetic alphabet is necessary to avoid misunderstandings. The smallest group, 8.2%, "know all of it", indicating that only a minority possesses complete mastery of the phonetic code, likely due to targeted training or frequent use.
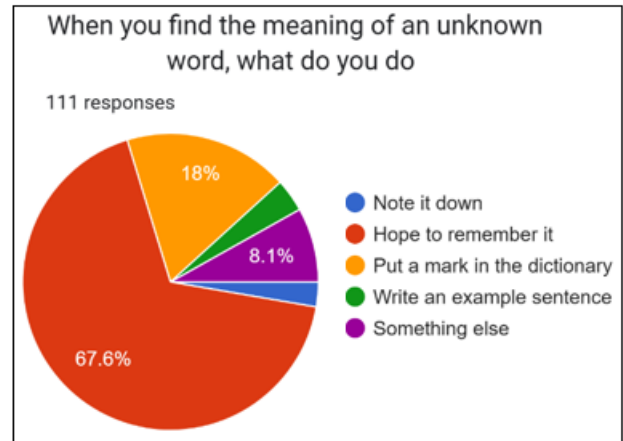

The most prominent response is **"Hope to remember it,"** which accounts for 67.6% of the 111 responses. This suggests that majority of learners rely on their memory or familiarity to recall and retain new vocabulary, potentially indicating limited use of active learning strategies during the process. The second most frequent approach is "Put a mark in the dictionary," representing 18% of the responses. This indicates that some learners prefer marking or noting the unfamiliar word for future reference, reflecting an awareness of the importance of revisiting, and consolidating new vocabulary. Only a small percentage, 8.1%, "Write an example sentence," use this method, suggesting that few learners actively engage in contextualizing the new word through sentence construction. This is a valuable strategy, as it promotes deeper understanding and retention. Lastly, "Note it down" is the least chosen strategy, with 2.7%, which indicates that very few respondents rely on writing the word to reinforce learning or organize their vocabulary. The data shows learners mainly rely on hoping to remember unknown words, rather than using active strategies like writing sentences or marking in dictionaries. This passive approach may hinder long-term retention.
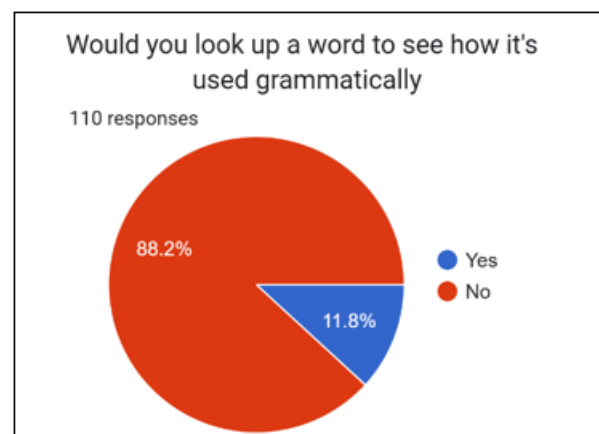

The majority, 88.2%, answered "No," indicating that most respondents do not consider or prioritize checking grammatical usage when encountering new words. Conversely, only 11.8% of respondents chose "Yes," suggesting that a small portion of learners actively seek to understand the grammatical context of words. The data reveals a tendency among most learners to overlook grammatical exploration when learning new vocabulary. This could imply that their focus is more on understanding the meaning or simply recognizing the word rather than

integrating it into grammatical structures. It might also suggest limited awareness of the importance of grammar in vocabulary acquisition or a preference for contextual guessing.
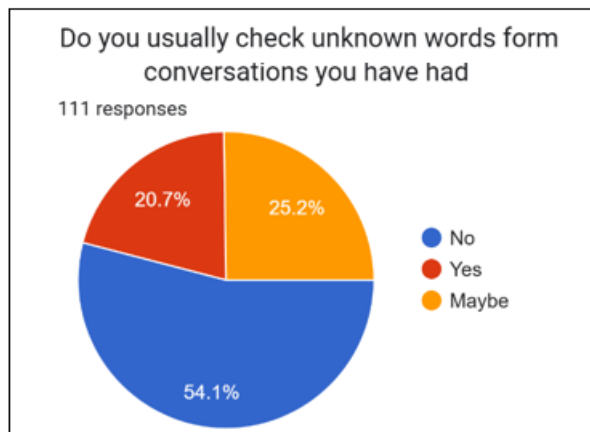
"No" responses, representing 54.1%, indicate that majority of respondents do not typically check unknown words. "Yes" responses comprise 20.7%, showing a smaller portion actively checks or considers checking unknown words. "Maybe" responses account for 25.2%, reflecting uncertainty or occasional checking habits. More than a half of the responders might tolerate or accept unfamiliar words without feeling the need to look them up focusing on overall comprehension usually inferring meaning from context. A significant minority actively check unknown words seeing value in expanding their vocabulary and understanding. They evidently seem to make efforts to learn new words. They possibly reflect better language skills and higher motivation. Around a quarter are uncertain or adopt a flexible approach. This percentage implies that they might check words only in certain contexts lacking consistency in approaching new words. They may prefer waiting for a clarifying context probably deciding if it is worth the effort or lacking tools to check words efficiently.
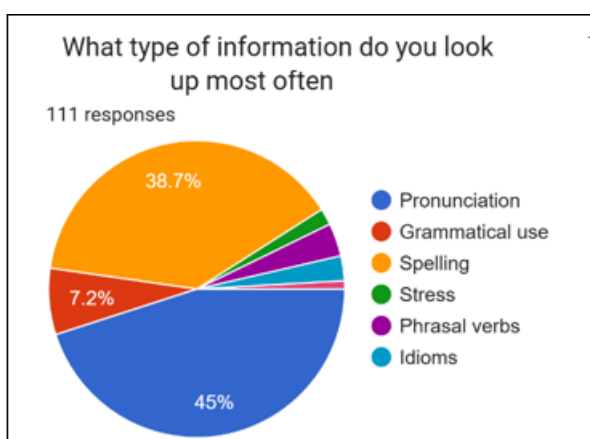

Almost half of the respondents (45%) focus on pronunciation, highlighting its importance in their language learning or communication process. This suggests an emphasis on auditory clarity or correct pronunciation to improve understanding or speaking skills, especially in spoken language or listening exercises. A significant portion (38.7) also looks up spelling, indicating the importance of written accuracy. This might be more relevant for learners or concerned with writing, proofreading, or formal communication where spelling errors can impact understanding. A smaller group (7.2%) focuses on grammatical correctness. While important, grammar might be less of a concern during communication and linguistic experience or perhaps users feel more confident with grammatical structures. A very small percentage (1%) look up stress patterns, possibly because stress is harder to determine or less frequently encountered in written form. Few respondents (1.8%) look up phrasal verbs, possibly because they are more context-dependent or considered more advanced. Phrasal verbs are often idiomatic and can be more complex to understand and use correctly. The largest priorities are pronunciation and spelling, collectively accounting for about 83.7% of the responses, indicating these are the most frequently consulted types of information. Less emphasis is placed on grammar, stress, phrasal verbs, and idioms, which are either more advanced or less critical for basic understanding. This pattern suggests that users are mainly concerned with the foundational aspects of language that directly impact clear communication.


Somewhat confident (57.7%) is the most dominating response indicating that more than half of the respondents feel moderately confident when using a monolingual dictionary. Users may have some familiarity and comfort with the dictionary but still encounter challenges that prevent full confidence. They likely possess basic skills but may occasionally doubt their understanding or correctness. A sizeable portion of users (29.7) are somewhat hesitant or unsure about their ability to use a monolingual dictionary effectively. This might reflect the complexity of monolingual dictionaries or a lack of sufficient practice, leading to cautious engagement. These users may benefit from guided instruction or more user-friendly resources. A small minority (9%) feel fully confident, likely because they are proficient language users or have extensive experience with such dictionaries. These users probably rely heavily on monolingual dictionaries for fine-grained understanding and may be advanced learners or native speakers. Only a few respondents (9%) lack confidence entirely. This group may be beginners or unfamiliar with monolingual resources, possibly requiring foundational training or bilingual options to build confidence.

Do you find the pronunciation guides in monolingual dictionaries helpful?
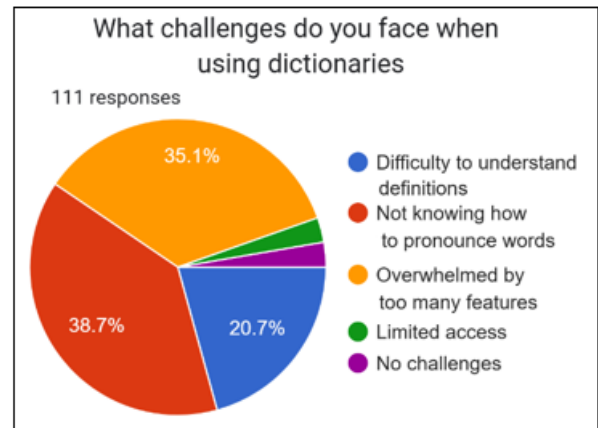109 responses
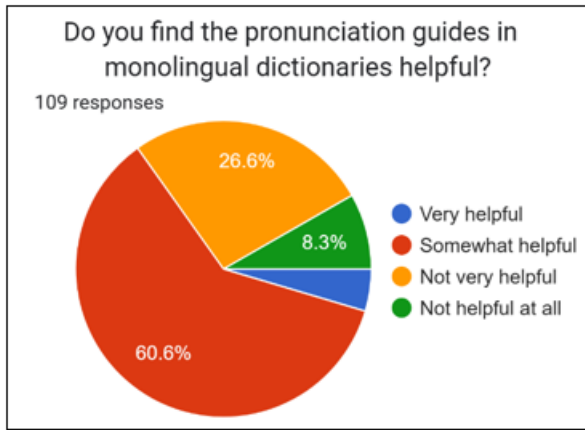
The largest group (60.6%) perceive pronunciation guides as somewhat beneficial. These students might recognize some value but also experience limitations with current guides because phonetic representations may appear to be too technical or complex for average dictionary users. Over a quarter of respondents see pronunciation guides as only marginally useful. They may find difficulties in understanding phonetic symbols. because of lack of confidence in applying the guides effectively or because this group might mostly rely on listening exercises, audio pronunciations, or contextual listening to learn pronunciation. A small percentage of users find pronunciation guides extremely useful. They may be advanced language learners or professionals. They may also be users who supplement dictionary guides with audio tools for pronunciation. A small minority find pronunciation guides to be ineffective or unnecessary. They may possess limited understanding of phonetic symbols or feel frustration with their complexity.

How much time do you usually spend on looking up a single word?
111 responses
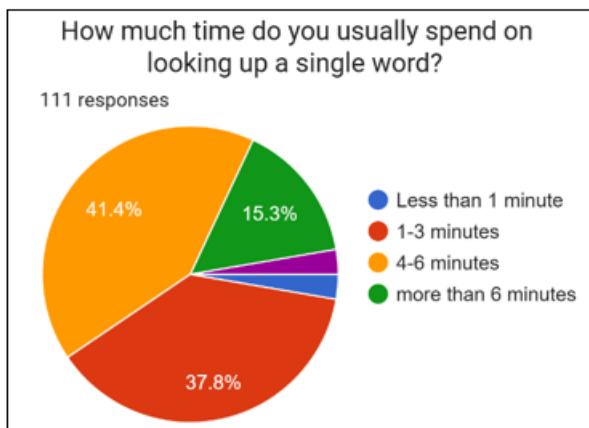
Only a small minority of users (2.7 %) spend less than a minute. For most users, lookups are relatively simple or routine, possibly involving familiar words or quick checking. These users are efficient and possibly experienced, quickly finding the needed information. The largest segment (37.8%) indicate that many users spend 1-3 minutes on average suggesting a moderate level of effort, possibly involving more complex words, multiple sources within the dictionary, or users taking time to understand the nuances of pronunciation, definitions, or usage. The most common response is 4-6 minutes (41.4%) showing that many users spend quite a bit of time. These users might be engaging in thorough research or studying words in-depth. A

notable portion spend an extended amount of time, possibly due to difficulty in understanding complex words, lack of prior familiarity or confidence. They might also look for cross-reference of multiple sources or perhaps using dictionaries for detailed research.

What challenges do you face when using dictionaries
111 responses

The responses indicate that 38.7% of the participants have selected the option "not knowing how to produce a word", implying that the largest challenge faced by them is pronunciation. This reflects that pronunciation remains a significant hurdle, which can hinder effective communication and comprehension. A significant portion (35.1%) finds the abundance of features in dictionaries overwhelming. Users may feel confused or frustrated by complex interfaces or an excess of options. This suggests a need for simplified, user-friendly designs focusing on core features. 20.7% of the responders find difficulties to understand definitions possibly because complexity of language or technical vocabulary might make comprehension difficult, especially for non-native speakers. A small minority of 2.7% experience access restrictions, possibly due to costs, platform limitations, or licensing. Very few respondents report no difficulties, indicating a generally challenged user base.

3. Key Findings

Most Albanian high school students lack private access to monolingual English dictionaries, limiting opportunities for independent vocabulary exploration. While some recognize their value, the majority use them infrequently, often due to lack of confidence, unfamiliarity with effective strategies, or limited vocabulary. Usage tends to be sporadic, mainly driven by immediate needs rather than curiosity or exploration, and only a small fraction browses it casually. Familiarity, with phonetic transcription is partial, with few students understanding the entire phonetic alphabet, underscoring the need for targeted phonetic training to improve pronunciation, and listening skills. Most students rely on passive strategies like hoping to remember vocabulary, with active methods such as writing sentences or noting words being less common. Similarly, few check grammatical usage when encountering new words, reflecting a focus on meaning over grammatical context, which may hinder accurate language use. The most frequently sought information during dictionary use includes pronunciation and spelling, with less emphasis on grammatical details and phrasal verbs. Attitudes toward pronunciation guides vary;

most find them somewhat beneficial, but utility could be improved with more accessible, multimedia resources. Average lookup times suggest detailed review rather than quick checks, indicating potential complexity in entries.

The primary challenges faced include difficulties with pronunciation and interface complexity, which impede effective usage. Enhancing pronunciation support, simplifying dictionary interfaces, and providing clearer definitions could significantly improve learner experience and support more autonomous, effective vocabulary develop. There is a clear need for targeted training to build confidence and familiarity with monolingual dictionaries among Albanian students, particularly for less experienced learners. Implementing user-friendly features and accessible pronunciation resources can foster more effective vocabulary acquisition and language proficiency.

4. Conclusions

Monolingual dictionaries hold considerable potential in fostering vocabulary knowledge and independent learning, yet their usage among Albanian high school students remains limited. This study finds that infrequent use, lack of phonetic understanding, and passive vocabulary strategies hinder effective engagement. To address these gaps, it is essential to provide targeted instruction on dictionary strategies, promote exploration beyond immediate vocabulary needs, and simplify dictionary interfaces. Teachers should encourage consistent usage through engaging activities, gradually building learner confidence and autonomy. Empowering students in this way may significantly enhance their language acquisition and academic success.

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