Exploring the Use of Online Dictionaries Among Undergraduates in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

It is common knowledge that the digital revolution in the 20th century transformed electronic and mechanical technologies into digital electronics. Online dictionaries, which explain word meanings via the internet, became a part of these digital electronics. Renowned for their convenience, they altered the use of printed volumes to dynamic and interactive digital resources. This study aimed to identify the use of different types of online dictionaries by Sri Lankan undergraduates, based on their purposes, and how much they help them more than printed volumes. An investigation was conducted into the problem, "How frequently do Sri Lankan undergraduates use online dictionaries?", answering the research question, "Do they prefer online dictionaries over printed ones, and what are those types?". To examine this premise, a quantitative research approach was applied by selecting a sample of 150 undergraduates from seven state and two private universities in Sri Lanka, using an online survey through a structured questionnaire. Its reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha, and it was pilot-tested by an English teacher, a journalist, and a native English speaker. Everett Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) theory, which explains how and why new ideas or technologies spread through a population, was applicable to this adoption of online dictionaries by the students, even over printed volumes, due to the relative benefits and compatibility. Hence, the findings revealed that 69% of undergraduates use e-dictionaries daily and several times a week, mostly for their academic work (80%). 84% have positively responded to the statement that "Online dictionaries help to improve language skills," and 138 of them agree that they provide accurate definitions. 79.3% preferred online dictionaries over printed ones. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) and Google built-in dictionary are the most used dictionaries, at 29.3% and 24.2%, respectively. Ultimately, combining native language with the text and speech data, providing examples from different contexts, and adding games to practice language were recommended as plausible developments.

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