



RESEARCH PAPER

Assessing English Learners' Attitude towards the use of Synonyms in Communication: A Study Conducted at BS Level

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the attitudes of BS-level English language learners toward the use of synonyms in communication and identify the challenges they face, along with the factors that shape their perceptions and usage. Synonyms are integral to language proficiency, allowing for nuanced expression, clarity, and vocabulary expansion. However, many learners struggle to use synonyms accurately due to context-specific meanings and subtle connotational differences. Understanding students' attitudes is essential for effective teaching strategies and improved communication skills. A mixed-methods research design was employed, involving both quantitative (structured surveys) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews and focus groups) data collection. Participants were purposively selected from BS-level English language programs. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and thematic coding. Preliminary findings suggest that while learners recognize the importance of synonyms, many encounter difficulties in their practical application due to limited vocabulary, contextual confusion, and instructional gaps. Positive attitudes were associated with higher synonym usage and language confidence, influenced significantly by prior exposure and teaching methods. Incorporating context-based vocabulary tasks, corpus-driven tools, and inductive learning approaches can enhance learners' synonym usage. Teachers should provide rich linguistic input and foster a supportive classroom environment to promote confident and accurate use of synonyms in both spoken and written discourse.

KEYWORDS Synonyms, English Language Learners, Vocabulary Acquisition, Language Proficiency, Communication Skills

Introduction

Mercenary Words or phrases that are nearly identical in meaning or that have the same meaning are called synonyms. They are necessary in order to communicate clearly. By using them, presenters and writers can communicate concepts more effectively and imaginatively, as well as more thoroughly and nuancedly. By providing multiple methods to describe the same or related concepts, synonyms boost audience engagement, decrease redundancy, and improve clarity. In both written and oral communication, the careful use of synonyms can significantly affect the reader's or listener's perception and comprehension. A large vocabulary, for instance, can make written writings easier to read and more interesting; in spoken language, it can also improve the speaker's understanding and eloquence. According to Nation (2023), the usage of synonyms not only avoids repetition but also enables speakers to express subtle variations in meaning, which helps in nuanced communication.

Synonyms come in quite convenient in academic and professional contexts. The use of synonyms in academic writing can demonstrate a student's large vocabulary and in-depth subject knowledge. It also maintains the reader's interest and makes the text simpler to read overall. Professional communication often requires a precise and varied language to convey complex concepts successfully and to maintain the respect and attention of clients and colleagues (Schmitt, 2000).

Knowing when and how to use synonyms is an essential part of becoming proficient in a language. It means understanding the subtle differences in meaning and context between words that are related. The adjectives "happy" and "glad" for example, are interchangeable; yet, "happy" usually refers to a more intense, instantaneous experience, while "glad" usually refers to a less intense, extended sense of fulfillment. Understanding these differences can greatly increase communication accuracy and expressiveness (Thornbury, 2002).

However, utilizing synonyms has disadvantages as well, particularly for language learners. Some of these challenges include recognizing and using the minor differences between synonyms, understanding usage in context, and expanding their vocabulary to include a wider range of synonyms. Students' approaches to these challenges can significantly influence how successfully they employ synonyms in their writing. Positive attitudes toward learning and using synonyms can boost linguistic competence and enhance communication, but negative attitudes may inhibit language growth (Ellis, 1994).

Synonyms are important for language learning because of their role in vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. Research indicates a strong relationship between a big vocabulary and reading comprehension skills (Graves, 2006). Synonyms broaden students' vocabulary range, which improves their ability to understand and interpret texts. This can enhance overall academic accomplishment because reading is a critical skill in many academic fields (Nagy & Scott, 2000).

Literature Review

Synonyms in English Language

Synonyms are words that have the same meaning but can be used interchangeably in other circumstances. By providing speakers with a large vocabulary to choose from when expressing their ideas and thoughts, synonyms improve language. Synonyms may be used and phrased very differently even though they have the same meaning in different languages. English is a language that many people speak worldwide, it has a sizable vocabulary and several synonyms for practically every idea.

English is the universal language and is therefore necessary for international communication in a variety of contexts, such as business, education, and entertainment. Because of its long history and globalization, English has a broad vocabulary (Crystal, 2007). The famous quote from Wilkins (1972) that reads, "Very little can be conveyed without grammar; nothing can be conveyed without vocabulary" highlights how crucial language understanding and expertise are. Even for students who are exceptionally proficient in grammar and sound manipulation, communication in an English language cannot be meaningful without words that convey a range of meanings, according to Carter and McCarthy's (1988) argument regarding vocabulary development.

Importance of Synonyms

Most language learners are unable to differentiate between the various applications and meanings of synonyms, which leads to confusion (Aroonmanakun, 2015). According to Gass and Selinker (2008), English language learners typically have a significant advantage when developing the language when they are fluent in a wide variety of English vocabulary. Learning how to use synonyms correctly will help students comprehend English vocabulary and reduce repetition in their communication and writing.

Role of Synonym in Communication

Synonyms give English language learners more precise and flexible ways to express themselves, which improves their communication skills. Students who are proficient in using synonyms will be able to convey ideas with subtle meaning differences and refrain from overusing language in their writing and speaking. Using synonyms like "excited," "thrilled," and "eager" in different contexts, can help students communicate their goals and emotions more effectively. This ability to select the appropriate synonym encourages a more thorough understanding of the language and allows students to participate in discussions more effectively, both of which improve their overall communicative competence (Nation, 2001).

Learners Attitude

This method views attitude as a multifaceted entity with behavioral, affective, and cognitive components, each of which has a unique impact on language learning. The cognitive component of education refers to the attitudes and assumptions that students have regarding the English language and its relevance to their daily lives. The cognitive component includes students' thoughts and opinions regarding English, such as how helpful, difficult, and pertinent it is to their objectives. Sociocultural and cognitive perspectives are combined to explain how attitudes affect language acquisition. These concepts can have a significant impact on their degree of participation in the process and motivation to learn (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015).

Functions of Synonyms in Spoken and Written Communication

The use of synonyms in verbal and written communication is crucial for increasing the precision, clarity, and diversity of language use, especially for English language learners. Synonyms assist authors and speakers in avoiding repetition and enhancing communication by providing alternative terms that can convey related concepts with only slight modifications. English language learners can communicate ideas more clearly and build a more sophisticated vocabulary by learning synonyms at the BS level. Positive language learners are more likely to be actively involved in their language learning process and recognize the importance of a varied vocabulary for sophisticated and effective communication (Schmitt, 2010).

Perception and Misconceptions about Synonyms

False assumptions and preconceived notions about synonyms can significantly affect how well non-native English speakers employ language. One widespread misunderstanding is that synonyms are always interchangeable. The complex differences and several interpretations that synonyms can convey are overlooked by this concept. For instance, although both "slim" and "skinny" both refer to having

less excess body weight, "slim" typically connotes a more positive attribute, but "skinny" typically suggests an unhealthy or unpleasant characteristic (Aitchison, 2012). This misunderstanding could lead to poor word choices, which could affect the tone and clarity of communication.

The Role of Context in Synonym Selection

Context has a significant impact on synonym selection and effectiveness, particularly for English language learners who are struggling with complex linguistic nuances. Synonyms may differ greatly in meaning and appropriateness depending on the context in which they are used, even when they have similar meanings (Smith & Brown, 2022). For example, "excited" and "enthusiastic" can be used equally in informal contexts, but they might not be as suitable in formal writing or commercial contexts.

Context is significantly more crucial in academic writing. Accuracy is essential when choosing synonyms, and one must fully comprehend the definition of each term as well as the context in which it is used (Miller & Davis, 2019). For example, using "analyze" instead of "examine" in a research piece could be acceptable, but in a less formal discussion, the opposite might be more appropriate. ESL students need to be trained to differentiate between these distinctions in order to avoid misunderstandings and ensure that their writing meets academic standards.

English language learners should be instructed to adjust their synonym selections according to the situational context, which encompasses the speakers' connection and the formality of their speech, in order to make their language more acceptable and intelligible. Words that are suitable in informal contexts could not be suitable in formal or professional ones, for instance (Williams, 2020). Despite the fact that "casual" and "informal" are synonymous, choosing one over the other could change how the message is understood.

Possible Communication Barriers Caused by Synonym Misuse

Inappropriate synonym usage can seriously impair communication, particularly for English language learners who are still learning the nuances of word choice. Misunderstanding or oversimplifying synonym meanings can lead to unclear and confused communication. For instance, using "angry" and "irate" interchangeably may lead to misunderstandings and not adequately convey the intended degree of mood severity (Harris & Richards, 2021).

In academic and professional contexts, synonyms can lose their clarity and credibility when employed improperly. For example, in a corporate presentation, replacing the word "innovation" to "creativity" would not appropriately portray the idea's technical aspect (Taylor & Martin, 2020). These errors may cause readers or listeners to be misled, which lessens the effect of the communication and may have an impact on how professional or academic interactions turn out.

Contextual and cultural differences complicate the use of synonyms and can also impede communication. Similar terms may have different connotations or implications in different cultural situations (Lee & Kim, 2022). For example, the words "persistent" and "stubborn" may indicate different things depending on how endurance is defined in a particular culture. Because they are unaware of these nuances, English language

learners may inadvertently use synonyms in ways that are misleading or culturally inappropriate, which can hinder communication or convey the wrong message.

Overuse of synonyms without a thorough knowledge of their exact meanings can result in misinterpretations and less effective communication. English language learners may employ synonyms without closely analyzing their unique meanings in an effort to reduce repetition. This might lead to messages that are complicated or confusing (Roberts & Green, 2019). Their conversation may become less coherent and effective as a result.

Role of Educational Systems in Teaching Synonyms

The educational systems that English language learners are engaged in have a substantial influence on their knowledge and utilization of synonyms, which in turn affects their potential for effective communication. The inclusion and reinforcement of synonyms in the curriculum can enhance or damage students' knowledge of the intricacies of the English language. According to Richards and Rodgers (2022), educational methods that prioritize vocabulary development—such as teaching synonyms—help children acquire a more diverse and accurate vocabulary. By presenting synonyms in context, these systems usually employ structured methods that enable pupils to pick up on even the smallest word differences.

According to Laufer and Paribakht (2024), students who are exposed to synonyms on a regular basis through reading materials or multimedia tools are likely to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the words. However, in educational institutions where access to these materials is restricted or where synonym training is not prioritized, students may miss out on opportunities to expand their vocabulary.

Brown and Abeywickrama (2023) claim that assessments that require students to demonstrate their ability to choose the appropriate synonyms in a range of contexts can motivate them to pay closer attention to linguistic nuances. However, students may not recognize the need to master synonyms if examinations only cover vocabulary basics or do not assess synonym usage, which could lead to a lack of interest or proficiency in this subject.

Material and Methods

A quantitative strategy is employed in this research to get the controlled responses of the respondents.

Population and Sampling

The study's population consists of ESL students at the graduation level who are enrolled in the English department of educational institutions located in the Rahim Yar Khan district of Punjab, Pakistan. The information was collected from 300 university level male and female students.

Research Instrument

In the subsequent study, a questionnaire is employed as a research tool. Its capacity to methodically collect data from a sizable and varied sample has made it the perfect research instrument for investigating the connection between learners' autonomy and the performance of ESL learners at the graduation level.

Data Collection

To collect data for this study, graduate-level ESL students are given a standardized questionnaire to fill out. The purpose of the questionnaire is to gather information on student's academic performance in English as well as their perception of autonomy in their language learning activities.

Data Analysis

All statistical analyses are undertaken using the applicable software (e.g., SPSS, R). A thematic analysis of qualitative data obtained from open-ended questionnaire responses will be performed to gain a deeper understanding of learners' experiences with autonomy in ESL learning.

Limitation/Delimitation

The research is limited to a particular context and does not apply to other ESL environments or learner demographics.

Ethical Consideration

To avoid the moral and moral hardships, each key region was thoroughly inspected. Before the review, moral contemplations were not dismissed as members were addressed on the off chance that they concurred with their support in the review. The assent of members was acquired before the spread of the polls to the members. The members were made sense of the examination and they were instructed by the specialist concerning the filling of the survey. The specialist made a declaration asking the understudies who were uninvolved in partaking in the exploration to leave the survey clear since their heedless reactions and absence of handle of the inquiries could hurt the review's decisions. None of the members was pressured to partake in the overview. The scientist confirmed the privacy of the individual information. Respondents were offered the choice of not sharing their personality to hold their namelessness. The members connected to a great extent because their certainty was reinforced by the scientist's consolation during the examination.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Variety of words and synonyms

Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	147	50.3	50.3	50.3
Agree	125	42.8	42.8	93.2
Undecided	8	2.7	2.7	95.9
Disagree	11	3.8	3.8	99.7
Strongly Disagree	1	.3	.3	100.0
Total	292	100.0	100.0	

Table 1: Out of 292 participants, 50.3% strongly agreed, 42.8% agreed, 2.7% were undecided, while 3.8% disagreed. A minimal 0.3% strongly disagreed. This shows a strong consensus on teachers emphasizing vocabulary development.

Table 2
Appropriate synonyms helps to refine all the four skills

Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	95	32.5	32.5	32.5

Agree	131	44.9	44.9	77.4
Undecided	52	17.8	17.8	95.2
Disagree	13	4.5	4.5	99.7
Strongly Disagree	1	.3	.3	100.0
Total	292	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Of the 292 respondents, 32.5% strongly agreed, 44.9% agreed, 17.8% were undecided, 4.5% disagreed, and only 0.3% strongly disagreed. This data indicates a predominant belief in the value of synonyms for enhancing language proficiency.

Table 3
Synonyms acceptable for various situations

Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	74	25.3	25.3	25.3
Agree	107	36.6	36.6	62.0
Undecided	67	22.9	22.9	84.9
Disagree	30	10.3	10.3	95.2
Strongly Disagree	14	4.8	4.8	100.0
Total	292	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Out of 292 respondents, 25.3% strongly agreed, 36.6% agreed, 22.9% were undecided, 10.3% disagreed, and 4.8% strongly disagreed. This suggests that while a majority feel confident, a notable portion remain uncertain or face difficulties.

Table 4
Addition of new synonyms to my vocabulary

Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	140	47.9	47.9	47.9
Agree	115	39.4	39.4	87.3
Undecided	16	5.5	5.5	92.8
Disagree	16	5.5	5.5	98.3
Strongly Disagree	5	1.7	1.7	100.0
Total	292	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: Of the 292 respondents, 47.9% strongly agreed, 39.4% agreed, 5.5% were undecided, another 5.5% disagreed, and 1.7% strongly disagreed. This reflects a strong inclination among the majority to enrich their vocabulary for better language proficiency.

Table 5
Alternatives to precisely convey my ideas

Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	75	25.7	25.7	25.7
Agree	136	46.6	46.6	72.3
Undecided	55	18.8	18.8	91.1
Disagree	19	6.5	6.5	97.6
Strongly Disagree	7	2.4	2.4	100.0
Total	292	100.0	100.0	

Table 5: Out of 292 participants, 25.7% strongly agreed, 46.6% agreed, 18.8% were undecided, 6.5% disagreed, and 2.4% strongly disagreed. This suggests that while most respondents feel confident in their range of expression, a notable portion remains uncertain or disagrees.

Table 6
Face trouble selecting the appropriate synonym, that causes miscommunication

Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	71	24.3	24.3	24.3
Agree	97	33.2	33.2	57.5
Undecided	57	19.5	19.5	77.1
Disagree	52	17.8	17.8	94.9
Strongly Disagree	15	5.1	5.1	100.0

Total	292	100.0	100.0
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Table 6: Out of 292 respondents, 24.3% strongly agreed, 33.2% agreed, 19.5% were undecided, 17.8% disagreed, and 5.1% strongly disagreed. This highlights that while a majority report struggles with synonym selection, a significant portion does not believe it results in miscommunication.

Table 7
Using of synonyms for every word I speak

Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	76	26.0	26.0	26.0
Agree	106	36.3	36.3	62.3
Undecided	40	13.7	13.7	76.0
Disagree	54	18.5	18.5	94.5
Strongly Disagree	16	5.5	5.5	100.0
Total	292	100.0	100.0	

Table 7: Among the 292 participants, 26.0% strongly agreed, 36.3% agreed, 13.7% were undecided, 18.5% disagreed, and 5.5% strongly disagreed. This suggests that while many respondents avoid overusing synonyms, a significant portion either does not or is unsure about this approach.

Table 8
Difference in meaning often confuses the speech

Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	76	26.0	26.0	26.0
Agree	137	46.9	46.9	72.9
Undecided	36	12.3	12.3	85.3
Disagree	34	11.6	11.6	96.9
Strongly Disagree	9	3.1	3.1	100.0
Total	292	100.0	100.0	

Table 8: Out of 292 respondents, 26.0% strongly agreed, 46.9% agreed, 12.3% were undecided, 11.6% disagreed, and 3.1% strongly disagreed. This indicates that a majority of participants feel that subtle differences in meaning can lead to confusion during communication.

Table 9
The listeners get bored when I use difficult synonyms for common words

Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	102	34.9	34.9	34.9
Agree	85	29.1	29.1	64.0
Undecided	48	16.4	16.4	80.5
Disagree	46	15.8	15.8	96.2
Strongly Disagree	11	3.8	3.8	100.0
Total	292	100.0	100.0	

Table 9: Among the 292 respondents, 34.9% strongly agreed, 29.1% agreed, 16.4% were undecided, 15.8% disagreed, and 3.8% strongly disagreed. This suggests that a significant portion of participants believes using complex synonyms can lead to listener disengagement.

Table 10
Struggle to know when to use synonyms correctly in various situations

Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	85	29.1	29.1	29.1
Agree	125	42.8	42.8	71.9
Undecided	31	10.6	10.6	82.5
Disagree	33	11.3	11.3	93.8
Strongly Disagree	18	6.2	6.2	100.0

Total	292	100.0	100.0
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Table 10: Out of 292 respondents, 29.1% strongly agreed, 42.8% agreed, 10.6% were undecided, 11.3% disagreed, and 6.2% strongly disagreed. This shows that a majority of participants face difficulties in selecting the appropriate synonym at the right time.

Open Questions

Responses:

Synonyms as Tools for Skill Refinement

A significant majority of respondents believe that appropriate synonym usage refines all four language skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This suggests that learners view synonyms as essential tools in enhancing academic proficiency and overall language mastery in diverse communicative settings.

Vocabulary Enrichment Boosts Expression

Most learners express a strong desire to expand their synonym knowledge, believing it improves their ability to express ideas more precisely. This reflects a perception that vocabulary variety directly contributes to clearer, richer, and more sophisticated academic and social interactions.

Challenges in Contextual Appropriateness

Despite valuing synonyms, many participants struggle with selecting contextually suitable alternatives, which sometimes leads to miscommunication. This reveals learners' awareness of the nuanced nature of synonym use, especially when trying to convey intended meanings in specific academic or everyday contexts.

Listener Engagement and Word Simplicity

A notable number of students feel that using complex or uncommon synonyms may confuse or bore listeners. This highlights the social concern that overly formal or rare vocabulary might hinder effective peer communication, making learners cautious in casual conversations.

Confusion from Subtle Semantic Differences

Respondents frequently noted that minor meaning differences between synonyms often cause speech confusion. This implies that learners are conscious of the delicate distinctions between words and the potential for these subtleties to negatively impact clarity in both academic discourse and daily dialogue.

Findings

Based on a survey of 292 English learners, the responses revealed varied yet insightful perspectives on the role of synonyms in communication.

- 93.1% of learners agreed that their teachers emphasize vocabulary development, showing strong institutional support for synonym learning in academics.

- 77.4% of students believe that using synonyms refines all four language skills, enhancing both written and spoken communication effectiveness.
- Only 61.9% confidently choose suitable synonyms for various situations, indicating difficulties in real-time or context-specific synonym application.
- A significant 72.9% agreed that subtle meaning differences often confuse speech, demonstrating synonyms can sometimes hinder clear communication.
- 64% felt that using complex synonyms can bore listeners, especially in casual talks, suggesting simpler word choices may aid engagement.

Synonyms are seen by English language learners as instruments for improving communication and strengthening expression in social and academic settings. However, issues like listener disengagement, contextual usage, and confusion from tiny variances point to the necessity of strategic training. Understanding context and audience in addition to language is essential for mastery.

Responses:

Rich Vocabulary Broadens Expressive Range

The respondents agreed that they had more choices for effectively conveying ideas. According to this, pupils who are aware of synonyms are better able to express themselves deeply, choose words that fit the situation, and communicate more effectively both orally and in writing.

Miscommunication Risks Undermine Proficiency

Many participants claimed that using the incorrect synonyms led to confusion. This demonstrates that effective communication and clarity are directly impacted by language competency, which is dependent on appropriate, situational use to avoid misunderstandings. It goes beyond simply being familiar with synonyms.

Learners Recognize Semantic Nuance Challenges

The confusion caused by minor differences in synonym meanings demonstrates learners' awareness of semantic nuances. Accuracy and advanced language proficiency depend on linguistic sensitivity, which is demonstrated by this knowledge, despite its difficulty.

Learners Value Synonyms for Academic Growth

Students' favorable opinions about synonym usage demonstrate their understanding of its significance in both academic and professional communication. This awareness fosters deliberate vocabulary increase, which is required for advanced language use, professional writing, and presentations.

Confidence in Synonym Selection Signals Progress

While not universal, the significant portion of learners who expressed confidence in choosing synonyms reflects growth in vocabulary competence. This growing mastery

supports more fluent expression and reduced reliance on repetitive vocabulary in both written and spoken tasks.

Vocabulary Challenges Impact Confidence

Struggles with synonym selection can negatively affect learners' confidence in communication. When vocabulary competence is uncertain, learners may hesitate to speak or write, which can limit their participation and overall language development if not addressed constructively.

Findings

1. 93.1% (272 students) agree teachers focus on enriching vocabulary, which positively impacts speaking skills and fluency.
2. 72.0% (181 students) feel that knowing different synonyms helps them express ideas more accurately, improving their speaking proficiency.
3. 61.9% (181 students) are confident in choosing appropriate synonyms, while 15.1% (44 students) face challenges, suggesting the need for more practice in synonym selection.
4. 62.3% (183 students) avoid overusing synonyms in speech, suggesting that balance and clarity are valued in communication.
5. 71.9% (210 students) struggle with when to use synonyms correctly, pointing to the importance of context in language teaching.
6. A significant portion of students (93.1%) values teachers' efforts to teach a variety of words, which impacts speaking confidence.
7. 57.5% face difficulties with synonym selection, incorporating practical exercises and real-life scenarios into lessons could enhance synonym mastery.

Conclusion

The survey shows that most students value teachers' focus on vocabulary development, but challenges with synonym selection persist. Effective pedagogical practices should emphasize contextual usage of synonyms and balance between clarity and sophistication in speech, ensuring students can communicate confidently without overcomplicating their language.

Recommendations

Educators emphasize teaching synonyms to ESL learners by focusing on both vocabulary variety and appropriate application. Teachers should provide ample practice with synonyms in varied contexts to help students improve their selection and usage. Moreover, incorporating interactive activities that encourage real-time synonym choice can help learners refine their skills, reducing confusion and enhancing effective communication in both speaking and writing.

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