



The use of synonyms by the Grade 12 First Additional Language learner in Malamulele South Circuit to achieve clarity in essays

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ABSTRACT

Using synonyms in essay writing tasks is one of the skills that improves clarity and precision. In the educational context, learners are expected to employ an extensive lexical repertoire to enhance clarity in their communication. Thus, this study focused on synonyms as a strategy to enhance communication. The study used a descriptive qualitative method. Data were collected using a document analysis instrument. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The participants were fifteen (15) Grade 12 First Additional Language learners from one of the schools in the Malamulele South circuit. The results showed that some First Additional Language learners (EFAL) in the Malamulele South Circuit use synonyms in their English essays to improve clarity and understanding of the text. Furthermore, the study revealed that the causes of incorrect synonym usage include overgeneralisation, limited vocabulary, and poor reading habits. The study recommended more targeted instruction on the nuances of word choice and the importance of context in writing. The study contributes to existing knowledge by highlighting the role of synonym use as a specific lexical strategy in improving clarity and precision in essay writing, particularly among EFAL learners.

Keywords: Cohesion, Effective Communication, Exact Synonyms, Near Synonyms, Vocabulary.

INTRODUCTION

The use of synonyms is one of the strategies employed by successful writers. This approach not only helps enhance the richness of their language but also adds variety to their writing, making it more engaging for the reader.¹ This strategy is particularly beneficial for learners who are required to write essays as part of their assessments, allowing them to avoid repetition and expand their vocabulary. By incorporating synonyms, students can express their ideas more vividly and create a more polished final product. Understanding and using synonyms can improve their overall writing skills, fostering greater confidence and creativity in their assignments.² Through practice and exposure to a range of vocabulary, learners can develop a more nuanced understanding of language, which is essential for effective communication in both academic and professional settings. Synonyms offer more than just

¹ Hiba Mohammed Yaqoob, "Evaluating EFL Learners' Recognition of Near-Synonyms," *Journal of Babylon Center for Humanities Studies* 14, no. 2 (2024).

² Alina Yevchuk, "An Empirical Study of Near-Synonym Choice: A Comparison of Advanced EFL Learners to L1 English Speakers," *Taikomaji Kalbotyra*, no. 17 (2022): 79–94.

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alternative words for the same concept; they add variety and depth to our language. Each synonym carries a unique connotation, allowing us to convey our thoughts with greater precision. For instance, while 'happy,' 'joyful,' and 'elated' are synonyms, each word evokes a different level of emotional intensity.³

In a school context, the Grade 12 First Additional Language (FAL) learners are expected to write essays as part of their formal assessment. Vocabulary or word choices are some of the most important factors in essay writing that teachers consider for mark allocation. A well-chosen word can convey precise meanings and invoke specific emotions, making your arguments more compelling. The use of varied vocabulary helps to keep the reader engaged and improves the overall readability of your essay. Furthermore, employing academic language can lend credibility to your arguments and demonstrate a strong command of the subject matter.

Understanding the nuances between synonyms enables a more effective expression of ideas, and choosing words that fit the context not only clarifies your message but also reflects your analytical capabilities.⁴ Moreover, strong vocabulary enables the writer to avoid repetition, making their writing more sophisticated and enjoyable to read.

Synonyms are helpful because learners may use them when they are unsure of the other word. This encourages vocabulary expansion and provides students with alternatives to express their thoughts more effectively. Additionally, understanding synonyms can enhance reading comprehension, as it enables students to grasp the meaning of texts even when encountering unfamiliar words. Furthermore, the use of synonyms can prevent repetition in the writing, making it more engaging and varied. Overall, integrating synonyms into lessons promotes a richer language experience and boosts students' confidence in their communication skills.

The study, therefore, sets out to investigate the use of synonyms by Grade 12 First Additional Language learners and their associated effects on the semantics of their essays. The following questions underlie the study. How do the Grade 12 FAL learners in the Malamulele South Circuit use synonyms in their English essays to achieve cohesion? What are the causes of incorrect usage of synonyms by the Grade 12 FAL learners in the Malamulele South Circuit?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The writer's ability to write depends on the extent of their vocabulary. Using synonyms is one of the ways writers use to enhance their writing style and avoid repetition. By choosing words with similar meanings, they can convey ideas more vividly and create a more engaging experience for the reader. Mallikamas asserts that a rich vocabulary allows writers to express nuances in meaning and emotion that might otherwise be lost. It is not just about having a large number of words; it is about knowing when and how to use them effectively.⁵ Furthermore, understanding the connotations of different words can significantly impact the tone and mood of a piece. A writer with a diverse vocabulary can tailor their language to suit different contexts, whether it's creating suspense in a thriller or evoking nostalgia in a memoir. In essence, a robust vocabulary is an essential tool that empowers writers to craft more precise, compelling, and meaningful narratives.

Types of synonyms

Synonyms can be divided into two primary categories: strict synonyms and loose synonyms. Strict synonyms are words that can replace each other in all situations without altering the meaning, style, or connotation of the message.⁶ These synonyms, often found in thesauruses, maintain the same grammatical function and fit seamlessly into different contexts, ensuring that the overall message remains intact. For instance, the words "happy" and "joyful" can be used interchangeably in a sentence

³ Yaqoob, "Evaluating EFL Learners' Recognition of Near-Synonyms."

⁴ Tran Thi Yen and Dinh Thu Hoai, "Improve Writing Performance for EFL Learners with the Enhanced Use of Synonyms and Antonyms," *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research* 5, no. 06 (2022): 2037–42.

⁵ Boonrak Jarunwaraphan and Prima Mallikamas, "A Corpus-Based Study of English Synonyms: Chance and Opportunity. REFLECTIONS, 27 (2), 218-245," 2020.

⁶ H. Jackson and E.Z. Amvela, *An Introduction to English Lexicology: Words, Meaning and Vocabulary* (Bloomsbury Publishing., 2021).

without changing the intended sentiment. However, it is essential to recognize that while strict synonyms exist, many words can carry subtle differences that may affect tone or emotional weight.⁷

On the other hand, loose synonyms are words with overlapping meanings but cannot be used interchangeably in every context.⁸ Linguists often refer to this category when discussing synonyms. For example, the words "find" and "discover" are similar in meaning but cannot always replace each other. The word "Find" implies locating something that was lost or overlooked, while "discover" suggests coming across something new or previously unknown. Moreover, the use of loose synonyms often depends on context and connotation. For instance, "cheap" and "inexpensive" may appear synonymous; however, "cheap" often carries a negative connotation, implying lower quality, while "inexpensive" generally conveys a neutral or positive sense.

Previous Studies on Synonyms

Other studies have explored the use of synonyms in English essays. For instance, Hameed and Challob conducted a study identifying the most frequently used synonyms in Iraqi university students' essay writing.⁹ Findings revealed that students used synonymy frequency in their essays, and the most used were near-synonyms. The study also revealed that students had difficulties in selecting the appropriate synonyms in their writing due to a lack of sufficient vocabulary knowledge.

Another study was conducted by Khazaal focusing on synonym errors committed by the ESP college students from the College of Political Sciences at Al-Nahrain University, in the academic year 2018–2019.¹⁰ The study showed that the students experienced challenges in the use of synonyms. The study further found that the most common cause of errors was due to their limited knowledge of vocabulary.

Additionally, Dieu et al. conducted a study investigating the usage of synonyms among Sophomores and Seniors at Can Tho University.¹¹ The findings revealed that though the students used different types of synonyms, they often used them incorrectly. These previous studies shared similar results about students' use of synonyms, indicating that students have challenges with the usage of synonyms. These findings require further research on how to improve student writing.

Similarly, Yevchuk conducted a study to find how EFL students use synonyms.¹² The study revealed that EFL students lack the depth of vocabulary knowledge necessary to choose the most suitable word from a pair of near-synonyms. The study further revealed that the insufficient knowledge of target words was the cause of their failure to choose the correct synonyms.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research was fundamentally shaped by Halliday and Hasan's influential Cohesion Theory, which highlights the critical role of cohesive devices in facilitating clear understanding and effective communication. These devices can be categorised into two main types: grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. This study focused specifically on synonyms, which are a subcategory of lexical cohesion. Al-Jabri asserts that synonymy is a fundamental aspect of linguistics that greatly influences the structure of the lexicon, and it occurs when lexical items are similar and convey the same meaning.¹³

According to Halliday and Hasan, lexical cohesion is achieved by the selection of vocabulary, as it revolves around the notion that the appropriate choice of words can forge meaningful connections

⁷ Jackson and Amvela, *An Introduction to English Lexicology: Words, Meaning and Vocabulary*.

⁸ Jackson and Amvela, *An Introduction to English Lexicology: Words, Meaning and Vocabulary*.

⁹ Yassir Shaeer Hameed and Ala'a Ismael Challob, "Synonymy as a Cohesive Device in Students' English Essay Writing," *Al-Adab Journal*, no. 140 (2022): 91–110.

¹⁰ Edhah Numan Khazaal, "Investigating and Analyzing ESP College Students' Errors in Using Synonyms," *International Journal of English Linguistics* 9, no. 5 (2019): 328–39.

¹¹ Tran Thao Dieu et al., "Challenges and Solutions in Using Synonyms in Spoken and Written English of Sophomores and Seniors at Can Tho University, Vietnam," *European Journal of Applied Linguistics Studies* 5, no. 2 (2022).

¹² Yevchuk, "An Empirical Study of Near-Synonym Choice: A Comparison of Advanced EFL Learners to L1 English Speakers."

¹³ Samia Muhsen Al-Jabri, "Lexical Synonyms in the Holy Qur'an and Their Translations: A Case Study," *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies* 13, no. 1 (2012): 7–22.

within a text, enabling readers to grasp the underlying messages more readily.¹⁴ Puspita et al. elaborated that this form of cohesion relies primarily on specific vocabulary rather than grammatical ties.¹⁵

The English language offers a rich selection of synonyms that learners can use effectively in their essay writing. This wealth of synonyms stems from English's diverse origins, which include Anglo-Saxon, French, Latin, and Greek.¹⁶

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative case study design. Walliman describes a qualitative case study as a research approach that focuses on understanding human experiences within their unique contexts.¹⁷ Chivanga and Monyai highlight that qualitative research opens doors to incredible discoveries about the lives of the individuals being studied, allowing for richer insights and meaningful connections along the way.¹⁸

Research Instruments And Data Analysis

The study used document analysis. Document analysis is 'any written materials that contain data on the phenomena the researcher wishes to study.'¹⁹ The data were collected from the English essays of Grade 12 FAL learners.

Participants and Setting

The sample for this study was the Grade 12 First Additional Language learners from one of the rural high schools in South Africa. The researchers used simple random sampling to sample fifteen (15) Grade 12 FAL learners. The researchers inscribed numbers between 1 and 50 on small sheets of paper, then folded the papers so that the numbers were concealed from the participants. The researcher placed these folded papers in a box, and the participants were instructed to draw one at random. Those who drew numbers from one (1) to fifteen (15) were allowed to participate in the study.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data were analysed using a thematic framework, which allowed for the identification of key patterns and themes within the information collected. This approach facilitated a structured interpretation, allowing for a deeper understanding of the underlying factors and dynamics of synonym usage. The thematic analysis also ensured that the voices and experiences of participants were adequately represented, highlighting the complexity of the synonyms usage. Overall, this method provided a comprehensive lens through which to view the data, enhancing the overall rigor and validity of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

This study, titled "Exploration of the Use of Grammatical Cohesion in Grade 12 EFAL Learners at Malamulele South Circuit," adhered strictly to established ethical guidelines for conducting research involving human participants. The researcher ensured that the rights, dignity, and well-being of all participants were respected throughout the research process. Before data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants. The students received clear and detailed information about the purpose, procedures, and objectives of the study. Since some Grade 12 learners were under 18, parental or guardian consent was also obtained. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Learners were not coerced, pressured, or influenced in any way to participate. consequences.

¹⁴ M. A. K Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan, "Cohesion in English London: Longman Group Ltd," 1976, 274.

¹⁵ Galih Setia Puspita, F Rizkiyah, and Dasep Suprijadi, "Lexical Cohesion in News Article on the Jakarta Post Entitled Why Full Day School Will Not Work in Indonesia," *Professional Journal of English Education*, II, 2019, 507–13.

¹⁶ Frank Robert Palmer, *Semantics* (Cambridge University Press, 1981).

¹⁷ Nicholas Walliman, *Research Methods: The Basics* (Routledge, 2021).

¹⁸ Shylet Y. Chivanga and P B Monyai, "Back to Basics: Qualitative Research Methodology for Beginners," *Journal of Critical Reviews* 8, no. 2 (2021): 11–17.

¹⁹ Hani Morgan, "Conducting a Qualitative Document Analysis," *The Qualitative Report* 27, no. 1 (2022): 64–77.

The researcher ensured that participants' confidentiality and anonymity were strictly protected. No participant's real name or identifying information was used in the study. Instead, pseudonyms or codes were assigned to all participants.

The study ensured that participants were not exposed to any form of harm, whether physical, psychological, or emotional. The researcher will be particularly sensitive to the fact that the study involves language competence, which may make some learners feel vulnerable or self-conscious. Care was taken to avoid embarrassment, judgment, or negative labeling of learners based on their grammatical abilities.

Before conducting the study, the researcher obtained formal approval from relevant authorities. This includes: The Department of Education (Limpopo Province) and the school principals of the selected schools

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The following are the extracts of the participants analysed to determine how the EFAL learners use synonyms in their essays as a strategic approach to achieve effective communication.

Participant 1

I guess no one on this earth wishes to witness the death of their mother. I woke up feeling dizzy, as if I knew that I was going to experience the worst New Year's Day. I guess I was not as excited as my siblings, as my mom had purchased a new car. I missed my dad a lot. As time went on, I decided to stop bringing negative vibes and showed some excitement about my mother's success in buying her first car.

The data show that participants used synonyms in extract 1. The participant used the words "mother" and "mom" synonymously. The participant wrote: 'I guess no one on this earth wishes to witness the death of their mother', after coming from collecting my mom's new car from Polokwane.' In these sentences, the participant achieves cohesion by using the words "mother" and "mom" synonymously. Furthermore, the participant used the words "purchase" and "buy" synonymously. This variation in vocabulary helps to maintain the reader's interest, preventing repetition and promoting a smoother flow of thoughts. By alternating between formal and informal terms, the writing can convey different nuances of emotion and relationship dynamics, adding depth to the narrative. Overall, the effective use of synonyms contributes to the overall coherence of the text and enhances the reader's engagement with the narrative. This kind of linguistic diversity elevates the quality of writing, transforming simple statements into a more engaging and immersive experience.

These findings are supported by a study conducted by Hameed and Challob, which found that students at the College of Education, University of Anbar, Iraq, used various synonyms and near-synonyms in their essays to achieve logical cohesion, despite having limited knowledge of this type.²⁰ It was also revealed that they have difficulty selecting appropriate synonyms in their writing due to insufficient vocabulary knowledge.

Participant 2

It was a happy family, where we used to share everything. It was me, both parents, my two sisters Lebo and Tebogo and my young brother, Thabo. There was a lot of love and joy.

The data show that the participant used synonyms to achieve cohesion. The participant used synonyms in the sentence, 'It was a happy family: there was a lot of love and joy.' The word 'happy' as used at the beginning of the sentence means the same as love and joy. The participant also uses the words 'love' and 'joy' at the far end of the sentence. The words 'happy', 'love', and 'joy' may mean the same depending on the context in which they are used. The message flows logically from the first part of the sentence to the other part, creating cohesion. This cohesion enables an effective interpretation and understanding of the message. Furthermore, the repetition of positive terms reinforces the overall theme of happiness, leaving the reader with a sense of warmth and connection to the family's experience.

²⁰ Hameed and Challob, "Synonymy as a Cohesive Device in Students' English Essay Writing."

This result contrasts with the findings of a study conducted by Hameed, which revealed that the frequency of synonymy occurrence in the students' essays was higher than that of the near-synonymy type.²¹ It was also indicated that the students used different synonyms and near-synonyms in their essays to achieve the goal of logical cohesion.

Participant 3

Loadshedding is caused by people who are stealing cables. It is caused by people who are using electricity without buying units from Eskom. Some people buy goast electricity because they want it to last for many months. Some are making the more dangerous electricity called IZINYOKA because they do not want to buy electricity.

The data show that the participant wrote, "Some people buy goast electricity because they want it to last for many months. Some are making the most dangerous electricity called izinyoka." The participant used the term 'goast' {ghost} electricity and "izinyoka" synonymously, though "izinyoka" is not an English word. The participant avoided repetition of the term "ghost electricity" by switching to "izinyoka," showing a nuanced understanding of language and its implications. The use of the word "izinyoka," often associated with dangerous or unstable electrical connections, further emphasizes the risks associated with this alternative electricity source.

Participant 4

When you are facing a problem or a challenge in your life, your true friend will be there to rescue you and bring a solution to your problems, but a mere friend will judge you, and later he/she will tell her/his true friends your problem, and you will be their meal for the day.

The data show that the participant used the words 'challenge' and 'problem' synonymously in the sentence: "When you are facing a problem or a challenge in your life, your true friend will be there to rescue you and bring solutions to your problem." The participant used these terms interchangeably to avoid unnecessary repetition, ensuring the conversation flowed smoothly and remained engaging. By varying the terminology, the participant maintained the audience's interest while effectively communicating their key points.

According to Sigar and Saeed, this approach not only improved clarity but also made the discussion more dynamic, allowing for a richer exploration of the topics at hand. In addition, using synonyms helped the participant convey subtle nuances in meaning.²² While both 'challenge' and 'problem' imply some form of difficulty, 'challenge' may evoke a sense of opportunity or growth, whereas 'problem' tends to focus more on adversity. This distinction can encourage listeners to view their own situations in a more positive light. Furthermore, this strategy can foster a deeper connection with the audience, as they may relate more personally to the concept of challenges in their own lives. Ultimately, the participant's choice of language not only enriched the dialogue but also invited the audience to reflect on their own experiences and perceptions of challenges and problems, reinforcing the overall impact of the discussion.

Participant 5

Those who own companies must employ the poor and stop corruption in the government. Politicians give jobs to their relatives, leaving us with nothing. It is wrong because we end up committing crimes in South Africa.

The data show that the participant did not use either a strict or a loose synonym in the entire essay. This lack of variation in vocabulary suggests a reliance on familiar terms and possibly highlights a missed opportunity for deeper expression and nuance in their writing. Synonyms can enhance the richness of an essay, allowing for a more engaging and dynamic reading experience. By not incorporating synonyms, the participant may have constrained their ability to convey subtle differences

²¹ Hameed and Challob, "Synonymy as a Cohesive Device in Students' English Essay Writing."

²² Ahmed Hayder Sigar and Baydaa Muhammed Saeed, "The Role of Lexical Repetition in English Written Texts," *International Journal of Health Sciences* 6, no. S8 (2022): 3446–57.

in meaning, which could have strengthened their arguments and overall presentation. Sidabutar encourages the use of varied language, which could provide a more compelling narrative and demonstrate a broader understanding of the topic at hand.²³

Participant 6

That's why if a person has more money, I mean if the person is rich, some people go away from their families and stay far away from home because they do not want them to eat her/he money.

The data show that the participant used the words 'rich' and 'more money' synonymously. Furthermore, the participant used the words 'rob' and 'scam' interchangeably. The usage of these synonyms helps to illustrate a common perception where financial status and wealth are closely linked, reinforcing the idea that having more money equates to being affluent. Similarly, the conflation of 'rob' and 'scam' suggests a perspective where deceitful actions aimed at financial gain are viewed as fundamentally similar, regardless of the specific methods employed. These findings are in contrast with the results from a study by Rumman, which found that Jordanian EFL Learners encounter serious difficulties in using synonyms on both receptive and productive levels due to their limited knowledge of English in general and the semantic differences and collocation restrictions of synonyms.²⁴ Besides, the main findings showed that the major sources of errors at the receptive level are training transfer, negative transfer, and overgeneralisation.

Participant 7

Teachers should be paid more because they are the ones who produce doctors and lawyers. The government should put more money into education to help them or pay them the same way as doctors and lawyers.

The data show that the participant did not use any synonyms in their essays. The participant relied on a limited set of vocabulary, which impacted the richness and depth of their writing. For instance, the participant repeated the words 'many people' several times instead of using synonyms. This repetitive use of the phrase not only made the communication less engaging but also limited the opportunity to explore the richness of language. By incorporating synonyms or varied expressions, the participant could have conveyed the same idea more effectively and maintained the audience's interest. Relying on a broader vocabulary often enhances clarity and prevents the listener from feeling bored or disengaged. Dieu et al. assert that it's essential to encourage the use of diverse languages in discussions to enrich interactions and provide a more stimulating conversational experience.²⁵ The participant's reliance on repetition could indicate a lack of familiarity with different English words or an intentional stylistic choice. Expanding vocabulary can significantly contribute to the overall quality of an essay and the sophistication of its argumentation.

Participants 8

Education is a powerful tool that shapes individuals and societies. It equips learners with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to succeed in life. Through education, people develop critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Education also promotes personal growth and social responsibility. Therefore, education plays a key role in building a better and more sustainable future.

The data indicate that the participant did not use any synonyms throughout the essay, resulting in a lack of linguistic variety and a somewhat repetitive style. The passage effectively communicates its message, but it contains frequent repetition of the word "education", which affects the overall quality of the writing. The term appears in several sentences instead of being replaced by suitable synonyms

²³ Usman Sidabutar, "An Analysis of Lexical Cohesion on the Students' Writing," *JETAL: Journal of English Teaching & Applied Linguistic* 2, no. 2 (2021): 62–67.

²⁴ Ronza Abu Rumman, "Jordanian EFL Learners' Comprehension and Production of Synonyms," *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences* 51, no. 6 (2024): 102–14.

²⁵ Dieu et al., "Challenges and Solutions in Using Synonyms in Spoken and Written English of Sophomores and Seniors at Can Tho University, Vietnam."

or alternative expressions. This repetition makes the paragraph sound redundant and less engaging. Using synonyms such as learning, schooling, academic development, or restructuring sentences could improve the variety and flow. According to Hameed and Challob, using synonyms not only enriches language but also allows for a more precise expression of ideas.²⁶ Additionally, this could indicate a limited vocabulary or a reluctance to explore different ways to articulate thoughts, which ultimately affects the quality of the writing.

Participant 9

Electricity is a vital form of energy that powers homes, industries, and modern technology. It is generated from various sources such as coal, water, wind, and solar energy. Electricity enables the operation of appliances, lighting, and communication systems that improve daily life. Efficient use of electricity helps conserve resources and reduce environmental impact. Therefore, understanding and managing electricity wisely is important for sustainable development.

The data show that the participant did not use any synonyms in the essays. The passage is clear and informative, but it shows noticeable repetition of the word “electricity”, which affects its stylistic quality. The word electricity appears multiple times in close proximity instead of being replaced with appropriate synonyms or alternative expressions. Although repetition can sometimes emphasize a key idea, excessive repetition makes the paragraph sound monotonous and less sophisticated. Using synonyms such as power, energy, electrical energy, or restructuring sentences could improve the flow and lexical variety. Furthermore, using synonyms could enhance the writing's sophistication, making it more interesting and dynamic for the reader.

Participant 10

Life is full of surprises. When you start considering some people to be your friends, they behave badly. Friends are people who stick with you in every corner, showing interest in your life. I do not say they must support us when we do wrong, but to advise us in a friendly manner not to gossip around. Friends must be good people, not bad ones.

The data indicate that the participant did not use synonyms in his or her essays, resulting in a more repetitive use of the word ‘friends’. The participant could have used synonyms of the word 'friends,' expanding their vocabulary to enhance expression. Instead of relying heavily on the term "friends," the participant could explore synonyms such as "companions," "allies," "buddies," or "confidants" to add variety and depth to the writing.

This lack of variety in word choice has also affected the overall quality of their writing, making it less engaging for readers. Furthermore, the absence of synonyms limited their ability to convey nuanced ideas and emotions, potentially reduces the depth and impact of the essay.

Participant 11

My uncle was rich and very influential in the village. People called him Malume Sam because of the motivational lifestyle he lived.

According to the data above, the participant used the words “influential” and “motivational” synonymously. The usage of these synonyms helps to emphasise the impact that certain individuals or experiences can have on one's personal growth and development. Combining these terms highlights the idea that influential figures often motivates others, spurring them to take action or change their perspectives.

Participant 12

Life is full of surprises because even when you go to school, sometimes you suffer. My uncle was a very educated gentleman with a degree, but he was poor and started asking for food from other people who were not educated.

²⁶ Hameed and Challob, “Synonymy as a Cohesive Device in Students’ English Essay Writing.”

The words “suffer” and “poor” are synonyms as used in the extract above. The participants used these words to describe a situation of a poor person as someone who is suffering. Using synonyms helps the writer to produce a richer and more nuanced text, allowing for a greater emotional connection with the reader. By choosing words that carry similar meanings, the writer can convey the depth of the experience more effectively, highlighting not only the conditions of poverty but also the profound emotional and psychological impact it has on individuals.

Participant 13

Electricity is important nowadays, it is used in the schools, hospitals and churches. People do not buy real electricity; they buy from illegal sellers. Eskom is dying because of these people who buy from the wrong sellers.

The data show that the participant did not use any synonyms in the essays. The participant could have used a synonym of the word “buy”, which is “purchase”, to avoid unnecessary repetition. This lack of varied vocabulary may indicate a limited engagement with the topic or a reluctance to explore different expressions.

Participant 14

The wise man once said life is about choice. So I encourage youth to be wise because when they are wise, they can fulfil their dreams.

The data indicate that the participant did not use any synonyms in the entire essay. This may indicate a limited vocabulary. The participant could have used words such as “wise” and “clever” synonymously instead of repeating the word “wise.” Additionally, incorporating a wider range of vocabulary could enhance the overall quality and depth of the writing, making it more engaging for the reader. Using synonyms can also demonstrate a greater command of language and help to express nuanced ideas more effectively.

Participant 15

When you are lucky, use your luck to make money because luck comes once in our lives. People who are lucky do not see it and go to a Sangoma asking for luck; meanwhile, they are lucky.

The data indicate that the participant did not use any synonyms throughout the essay. The participant could have used synonyms for the word ‘luck’ instead of repeating it. The synonymy of the word "luck" includes "fortune," "advantageous," "chance," "prosperity," "serendipity," and "good fortune."

DISCUSSION

The results indicated that the First Additional Language learners (EFAL) in the Malamulele South Circuit temporarily used synonyms in their English essays to achieve cohesion. This strategic use of synonyms reflects their understanding of vocabulary and highlights their ability to convey meaning in various ways.

Additionally, while some learners demonstrated a strong grasp of contextually appropriate synonyms, others struggled to maintain coherence in more complex sentences. As a result, their essays often lack clarity and coherence, making it difficult for the reader to follow their arguments and ideas. The absence of varied vocabulary limits their ability to express themselves fully and affects the overall quality of their writing. Furthermore, the limited use of synonyms leads to repetitive language, which disengages the reader and weakens the message's impact.

The study further revealed that the causes of incorrect synonyms use include overgeneralisation, limited vocabulary, and poor reading habits. Additionally, it was found that many learners lack confidence in their ability to incorporate synonyms effectively, often fearing that their choices may lead to misinterpretation of their intended meaning. This uncertainty stems from inadequate exposure to varied vocabulary in their reading materials, which restricts their familiarity with alternatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that learners read intensively, paying attention to vocabulary. This approach not only enhances comprehension but also helps to retain new words and phrases. When engaging with a variety of texts, learners can encounter vocabulary in different contexts, making it easier to understand and remember. Additionally, incorporating activities such as note-taking, summarizing, and discussing the material can further reinforce learning and encourage deeper engagement with the content. Reading a mix of genres, fiction, non-fiction, and academic texts, can also provide a broader perspective and enrich the learner's language skills.

Furthermore, the essays' analysis revealed that while some students demonstrated an understanding of synonyms, they struggled to employ them effectively in context. This highlights the need for more targeted instruction on the nuances of word choice and the importance of context in writing. Overall, fostering a richer vocabulary could enhance learners' ability to express their ideas with greater depth and sophistication.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate how Grade 12 First Additional Language (EFAL) learners in the Malamulele South Circuit use synonyms as a strategy to enhance clarity and cohesion in essay writing. The findings reveal that although some learners can use synonyms effectively to improve the flow, coherence, and readability of their essays, the overall use of synonymy remains inconsistent and, in many cases, limited. Some learners used synonyms inaccurately due to a misunderstanding of subtle differences in meaning, particularly with near-synonyms.

Furthermore, the study identified key factors influencing the incorrect or limited use of synonyms, including restricted vocabulary, overgeneralisation of word meanings, and poor reading habits. These challenges suggest that learners are not sufficiently exposed to diverse lexical input, hindering their ability to select contextually appropriate words. Overall, the study concludes that synonym use plays a crucial role in achieving clarity, cohesion, and effective communication in essay writing. However, to fully benefit from this lexical strategy, EFAL learners need deliberate instructional support that focuses on vocabulary development and contextual usage.

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