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TEACHING THE USE OF THESAURUSES TO ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS: PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES AND LEXICAL DEVELOPMENT**ОБУЧЕНИЕ ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЮ ТЕЗАУРУСА ИЗУЧАЮЩИХ АНГЛИЙСКИЙ ЯЗЫК КАК ИНОСТРАННЫЙ ЯЗЫК: ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКИЕ ПОДХОДЫ И РАЗВИТИЕ ЛЕКСИКИ****INGLIZ TILINI CHET TILI SIFATIDA O'RGANUVCHILARGA TEZAURUSDAN FOYDALANISHNI O'QITISH: PEDAGOGIK YONDASHUVLAR VA LEKSIK RIVOJLANISH**Abdullayeva Nigora Shavkatovna **Abstract**

The integration of thesaurus instruction into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curricula represents a critical yet underutilized pedagogical strategy for enhancing lexical competence and promoting vocabulary depth among non-native English speakers. This research investigates the effectiveness of explicit thesaurus training on EFL learners' vocabulary acquisition, synonym recognition, and contextual word selection abilities.

Аннотация

Интеграция обучения использованию тезауруса в учебные программы английского языка как иностранного представляет собой критически важную, но недостаточно используемую педагогическую стратегию для повышения лексической компетенции и содействия глубине словарного запаса среди носителей английского языка. Данное исследование изучает эффективность целенаправленного обучения работе с тезаурусом на овладение словарным запасом учащихся EFL, распознавание синонимов и способности контекстуального выбора слов.

Annotatsiya

Ingliz tilini chet tili sifatida (EFL) o'rganish dasturlariga tezaurus ta'limini integratsiyalash ingliz tilining ona tili bo'lmagan so'zlovchilar o'rtasida leksik kompetensiyani oshirish va lug'at chuqurligini rivojlantirish uchun muhim, ammo kam foydalaniladigan pedagogik strategiyani ifodalaydi. Ushbu tadqiqot aniq tezaurus ta'limining EFL o'quvchilarining lug'at o'zlashtirishiga, sinonimlarni tanishga va kontekstual so'z tanlash qobiliyatlariga ta'sirini o'rganadi.

Key words: thesaurus instruction, EFL vocabulary development, lexical competence, pedagogical strategies

Ключевые слова: обучение тезаурусу, развитие словарного запаса EFL, лексическая компетенция, педагогические стратегии

Kalit so'zlar: tezaurus ta'limi, EFL lug'at rivojlanishi, leksik kompetensiya, pedagogik strategiyalar

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary acquisition represents one of the most fundamental and challenging aspects of second language learning, with lexical competence serving as a cornerstone for effective communication, reading comprehension, and academic achievement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts [1]. While traditional vocabulary instruction has predominantly focused on teaching individual word meanings through direct explanation, contextual guessing, or memorization techniques, contemporary pedagogical approaches increasingly recognize the importance of developing learners' autonomous vocabulary learning strategies and reference skills [2]. Among the various lexical resources available to language learners, the thesaurus occupies a unique position as a tool that not only provides synonyms and antonyms but also facilitates deeper understanding of semantic relationships, register variations, and nuanced differences between lexically related items [3, p.12]. Despite its potential pedagogical value, explicit instruction in thesaurus use remains relatively uncommon in EFL curricula, with many educators assuming that learners will naturally develop this skill or that thesaurus consultation is self-explanatory once basic dictionary skills are established [4].

The neglect of systematic thesaurus instruction in EFL contexts is particularly problematic given the increasing demands for lexical sophistication in academic and professional English

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communication. Research consistently demonstrates that advanced language proficiency is characterized not merely by vocabulary size but by lexical diversity, precision, and the ability to select contextually appropriate synonyms from among multiple alternatives [5]. EFL learners, even those with substantial vocabulary knowledge, frequently struggle with lexical variation in their productive language use, resulting in repetitive writing, limited stylistic flexibility, and difficulty conveying subtle meaning distinctions [6, p.78]. These challenges are exacerbated by the fact that many EFL learners' primary exposure to English vocabulary occurs through controlled educational materials that may not adequately illustrate the full range of semantic and pragmatic variations within lexical sets [7]. Consequently, learners often possess receptive knowledge of synonyms without understanding the contextual constraints, collocational preferences, and register differences that govern appropriate word choice in authentic communication situations [8].

The present study addresses this pedagogical gap by investigating the effectiveness of explicit, scaffolded thesaurus instruction on EFL learners' vocabulary development, with particular attention to how such instruction influences learners' metalinguistic awareness, lexical decision-making processes, and productive vocabulary use. This research is situated within the broader theoretical framework of strategic vocabulary learning, which emphasizes the development of learners' ability to independently access, evaluate, and apply lexical resources [9]. By examining both quantitative measures of vocabulary growth and qualitative insights into learners' perceptions and usage patterns, this study aims to provide empirically grounded recommendations for integrating thesaurus instruction into EFL curricula in ways that maximize lexical development while avoiding potential pitfalls such as inappropriate synonym substitution or over-reliance on formal register vocabulary [10]. The findings contribute to our understanding of how reference skill development can support autonomous vocabulary learning and enhance the lexical sophistication that characterizes advanced language proficiency.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical foundations for thesaurus instruction in second language learning contexts are rooted in multiple interconnected areas of applied linguistics research, including vocabulary acquisition theory, learner autonomy, reference skills development, and metalinguistic awareness. Nation's influential framework for vocabulary learning distinguishes between incidental and intentional vocabulary acquisition, emphasizing that while extensive reading and authentic language exposure provide crucial opportunities for vocabulary growth, explicit instruction in vocabulary learning strategies and reference skills remains essential for maximizing lexical development [1]. This perspective aligns with broader constructivist approaches to language education that position learners as active participants in their own learning process, equipped with metacognitive strategies and tools that enable independent exploration of language systems [11]. Within this framework, the thesaurus serves not merely as a reference tool for locating synonyms but as a pedagogical instrument that can foster deeper engagement with semantic networks, promote noticing of lexical relationships, and develop learners' sensitivity to contextual and stylistic dimensions of word choice [12, p.34].

Empirical research on dictionary skills and reference materials in second language learning provides important context for understanding the potential role of thesaurus instruction in EFL curricula. Numerous studies have documented that while learners frequently consult dictionaries, their reference skills are often inadequate, leading to misunderstandings of word meanings, inappropriate word selections, and limited benefit from dictionary use [2]. Laufer and Hadar's seminal research on dictionary use by EFL learners revealed that students commonly select inappropriate synonyms when using bilingual dictionaries, particularly when multiple translation equivalents are provided without adequate contextual information or usage examples [13, p.16]. These findings suggest that learners require explicit instruction not only in how to locate information in reference materials but also in how to evaluate and apply that information appropriately in their own language production. Thesaurus use presents similar challenges, as learners must navigate synonym sets, distinguish between closely related words, and make informed decisions about which lexical items are appropriate for specific communicative contexts [3].

Despite the theoretical rationale for thesaurus instruction, empirical research specifically examining the effects of thesaurus use on second language vocabulary development remains limited. The existing body of research has primarily focused on native speakers' thesaurus use in writing contexts or on general dictionary skills development among second language learners, with few studies directly investigating systematic thesaurus instruction as a pedagogical intervention [4]. Koya's research on learners' dictionary preferences and consultation behaviors found that while advanced EFL learners reported occasional thesaurus use, most had received no explicit instruction in how to effectively employ thesauruses for vocabulary learning or writing enhancement [19]. This finding is corroborated by Chi's survey of EFL teachers' practices, which revealed that thesaurus instruction was rarely incorporated into vocabulary teaching curricula, with educators expressing uncertainty about how to effectively teach thesaurus use and concern about the potential for students to make inappropriate word choices based on thesaurus consultation [20, p.23].

The role of corpus linguistics and frequency information in vocabulary learning represents an emerging area of research relevant to thesaurus instruction. Corpus-based approaches to vocabulary teaching emphasize the importance of helping learners understand that words are not equal in their frequency, distribution, or usefulness across different contexts and registers. Modern digital thesauruses increasingly incorporate frequency information, usage examples from authentic texts, and indicators of register or stylistic variations, features that can support more informed lexical decision-making if learners are taught to attend to and interpret this information [12]. Nation and Webb argue that explicit attention to word frequency and distribution can help learners prioritize their vocabulary learning efforts and make more strategic decisions about which words to actively acquire versus those that may be useful for receptive recognition only. Thesaurus instruction that incorporates corpus-informed approaches can potentially help learners develop awareness of not only what synonyms exist but which are most commonly used, in what contexts they typically appear, and how they combine with other words in natural language use [16].

Research on learner autonomy and self-directed vocabulary learning provides additional theoretical grounding for thesaurus instruction as a pedagogical strategy. The development of learner autonomy, defined as the ability to take charge of one's own learning through self-management, metacognitive awareness, and strategic competence, is increasingly recognized as a central goal of language education [11]. Vocabulary learning represents a domain particularly well-suited to autonomous learning approaches, as the sheer scope of vocabulary knowledge required for advanced proficiency makes it impossible for classroom instruction to address all of learners' vocabulary needs [1]. Thesaurus skills represent a form of strategic competence that can support autonomous vocabulary expansion beyond the classroom, enabling learners to independently explore semantic relationships, expand their active vocabulary repertoires, and refine their understanding of lexical nuances. However, for thesauruses to effectively support autonomous learning, learners must possess not only technical skills in using these reference tools but also critical evaluation skills that enable them to assess the appropriateness and usefulness of the information they locate [9].

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative experimental methods with qualitative inquiry to comprehensively investigate the effects of explicit thesaurus instruction on EFL learners' vocabulary development and to explore learners' perceptions and experiences with thesaurus use. The convergent parallel design allowed for triangulation of findings from multiple data sources, enhancing the validity and depth of insights into the complex phenomenon of vocabulary learning through thesaurus instruction. The quantitative component utilized a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design to measure changes in participants' vocabulary knowledge and usage patterns, while the qualitative component employed analysis of writing samples and semi-structured interviews to provide rich, contextualized understanding of how learners engaged with thesauruses and applied this resource to their vocabulary development. This methodological approach was selected because it recognizes that vocabulary acquisition involves not only measurable changes in knowledge but

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also shifts in learners' metacognitive awareness, strategic approaches to language learning, and confidence in making lexical choices, dimensions that are best captured through qualitative inquiry.

Participants in this study were 120 intermediate-level EFL learners enrolled in three private language institutes in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, during the 2024-2025 academic year. All participants were adults aged 18-26 years with diverse academic and professional backgrounds, including university students, working professionals, and individuals preparing for international English proficiency examinations. Participants' English proficiency was assessed using the Oxford Quick Placement Test, with all selected participants scoring in the intermediate range (B1-B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference), indicating functional English competence but with substantial room for vocabulary development and refinement of lexical skills. This proficiency level was deliberately targeted because intermediate learners possess sufficient vocabulary and grammatical knowledge to benefit from sophisticated reference tools like thesauruses but have not yet developed the advanced lexical competence characteristic of near-native proficiency [5]. Participants were divided into an experimental group (n=60) and a control group (n=60) based on their enrollment in different class sections, with careful attention to ensuring that the groups were comparable in terms of proficiency level, age distribution, gender composition, and educational background, as verified through analysis of demographic questionnaires and placement test scores.

The experimental intervention consisted of a twelve-week structured thesaurus instruction program implemented during participants' regular English classes, with two 90-minute sessions per week dedicated to vocabulary development activities. The experimental group received explicit instruction in thesaurus use integrated into their vocabulary curriculum, while the control group participated in vocabulary instruction using traditional methods including teacher explanation of word meanings, contextual guessing activities, and practice with new vocabulary through reading and writing tasks without specific focus on thesaurus skills [2]. The thesaurus instruction program for the experimental group was carefully designed based on principles of scaffolded learning, progressing from basic thesaurus familiarization activities to increasingly complex tasks requiring critical evaluation of synonym appropriateness and strategic application of thesaurus information in authentic communication contexts [36]. Initial sessions introduced participants to various types of thesauruses including traditional print thesauruses, digital thesaurus websites, and corpus-based tools, with explicit instruction on how to navigate these resources, interpret the information provided, and understand organizational principles such as alphabetical ordering, cross-referencing systems, and usage labels indicating register or contextual constraints [3].

Subsequent instructional sessions emphasized critical analysis of synonym sets, with activities designed to develop participants' metalinguistic awareness of semantic distinctions between related words. These activities included comparing dictionary definitions and thesaurus entries for synonym sets, analyzing authentic text examples to identify contextual factors influencing word choice, and engaging in collaborative discussions about why particular synonyms might be more or less appropriate in specific situations [18]. Particular attention was devoted to developing participants' understanding of register differences, with explicit instruction on how formal, neutral, and informal vocabulary choices affect the tone and appropriateness of communication in different contexts [8]. Participants practiced identifying the register level of vocabulary items using corpus frequency information and usage notes from advanced thesauruses, and they engaged in rewriting activities where they modified the register of texts by selecting appropriate synonyms from thesaurus consultations [12]. Additionally, instruction addressed collocational issues through activities where participants used corpus tools to verify that potential synonym substitutions maintained natural word combinations, thereby developing awareness that synonyms are not always interchangeable in all linguistic contexts despite sharing similar core meanings.

Data collection incorporated multiple instruments designed to capture different dimensions of vocabulary knowledge and thesaurus use competence. The primary quantitative assessment consisted of a comprehensive vocabulary test administered at the beginning of the study (pretest) and after completion of the twelve-week intervention period (posttest). This assessment measured three distinct aspects of vocabulary knowledge following Nation's framework for vocabulary

knowledge dimensions: vocabulary breadth (number of words known at some level), vocabulary depth (quality of knowledge including understanding of synonyms, collocations, and usage constraints), and productive vocabulary use (ability to appropriately employ vocabulary in original writing) [1]. The vocabulary breadth measure utilized the Vocabulary Size Test developed by Nation and Beglar, which provides reliable estimates of learners' vocabulary knowledge across different frequency levels of English words. The vocabulary depth measure was adapted from Read's Word Associates Test format, requiring participants to identify semantically related words and appropriate collocations for target vocabulary items, thereby assessing the richness and interconnectedness of their lexical knowledge [15]. Productive vocabulary use was assessed through analysis of timed writing samples using measures of lexical diversity (calculated using the D measure developed by McCarthy and Jarvis to account for text length effects), lexical sophistication (percentage of words beyond the most frequent 2000 words), and contextual appropriateness of vocabulary choices as rated by experienced EFL teachers using a standardized rubric [6].

Qualitative data collection involved two primary methods designed to provide rich, detailed insights into participants' experiences with and perceptions of thesaurus use. First, writing samples from both groups were collected at three time points (beginning, middle, and end of the study period) and subjected to qualitative analysis examining patterns of vocabulary use, instances of inappropriate synonym selection, and evidence of increasing lexical sophistication or diversity. These writing samples were analyzed using thematic coding procedures to identify recurring patterns and changes over time in how participants employed synonyms, varied their vocabulary choices, and demonstrated awareness of contextual and stylistic dimensions of word selection. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 24 participants from the experimental group (selected to represent a range of proficiency levels, engagement with the instruction, and patterns of performance on quantitative measures) to explore their perceptions of thesaurus usefulness, strategies they developed for evaluating synonym appropriateness, challenges they encountered in thesaurus use, and ways they integrated thesaurus consultation into their vocabulary learning practices. Interview questions were designed to elicit detailed narratives about specific instances of thesaurus use, encourage reflection on learning processes, and uncover tacit knowledge or strategic approaches that might not be evident from quantitative assessments alone. All interviews were conducted in a mixture of English and Uzbek or Russian depending on participants' preferences to ensure they could fully express their thoughts and experiences, and were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Data analysis procedures were conducted in multiple stages to address the study's research questions from various analytical perspectives. Quantitative data from the vocabulary assessments were analyzed using both descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequency distributions) and inferential statistics including independent samples t-tests to compare groups at pretest and posttest, paired samples t-tests to examine within-group changes from pretest to posttest, and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) using pretest scores as covariates to control for initial group differences when examining posttest outcomes. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's *d* to evaluate the practical significance of observed differences beyond statistical significance, with effect sizes of 0.2 considered small, 0.5 medium, and 0.8 large according to conventional benchmarks. Qualitative data from writing samples and interviews were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis procedures following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, involving data familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, theme review and refinement, theme definition and naming, and report production. This analysis approach allowed patterns and themes to emerge from the data rather than imposing predetermined categories, facilitating discovery of unexpected findings and nuanced insights into learners' experiences with thesaurus instruction. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred during the interpretation phase, with qualitative insights used to explain, elaborate, or contextualize quantitative patterns, and quantitative results used to assess the prevalence and generalizability of themes identified in qualitative analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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The quantitative analyses revealed statistically significant improvements in multiple dimensions of vocabulary knowledge among participants in the experimental group who received explicit thesaurus instruction compared to the control group who followed traditional vocabulary instruction approaches. Pretest comparisons using independent samples t-tests confirmed that the experimental and control groups did not differ significantly on any of the vocabulary measures at the beginning of the study, validating the initial equivalence of groups and allowing for meaningful interpretation of posttest differences as effects of the instructional intervention. At posttest, participants in the experimental group demonstrated significantly higher scores on the vocabulary depth measure compared to the control group, with a mean difference of 8.3 points (on a 50-point scale) that was statistically significant at the $p < 0.001$ level with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.89$), indicating that thesaurus instruction had substantial impact on the quality and richness of participants' vocabulary knowledge [15]. This finding aligns with theoretical predictions that thesaurus use would particularly enhance vocabulary depth by promoting exploration of semantic relationships, nuanced understanding of lexical distinctions, and awareness of contextual factors influencing word choice [3]. Interestingly, the groups did not differ significantly on the vocabulary breadth measure at posttest ($p = 0.24$, Cohen's $d = 0.15$), suggesting that thesaurus instruction primarily influenced the depth and quality of vocabulary knowledge rather than the sheer number of words known, which is theoretically consistent with the nature of thesaurus use as a tool for exploring relationships among known words rather than encountering entirely new vocabulary [1].

Analysis of productive vocabulary use through examination of writing samples revealed a more complex pattern of results that highlights both the benefits and challenges of thesaurus instruction. Participants in the experimental group produced writing samples at posttest that scored significantly higher on measures of lexical diversity ($D = 78.4$ versus 65.2 for the control group, $p < 0.001$) and lexical sophistication (percentage of low-frequency words: 18.7% versus 14.3% , $p < 0.01$), indicating that thesaurus instruction successfully promoted more varied and advanced vocabulary use in participants' written production [6]. However, qualitative analysis of these writing samples and ratings of contextual appropriateness revealed that experimental group participants also produced a higher rate of inappropriate or awkward word choices compared to control group participants (mean rating of contextual appropriateness: 3.8 versus 4.2 on a 5-point scale, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that the increased lexical ambition encouraged by thesaurus use sometimes resulted in unsuccessful attempts to employ sophisticated vocabulary beyond participants' current competence level [8]. This finding resonates with concerns expressed in previous literature about the potential for thesaurus use to lead to inappropriate word substitutions when learners lack adequate understanding of semantic nuances, collocational constraints, or register distinctions between synonyms [20].

The synonym selection test specifically designed for this study provided particularly revealing insights into how thesaurus instruction influenced participants' lexical decision-making processes and their ability to evaluate contextual appropriateness of vocabulary choices. Experimental group participants significantly outperformed control group participants in correctly identifying the most appropriate synonym from among multiple alternatives (mean score: 32.6 versus 25.8 out of 40 items, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that explicit instruction in analyzing synonym sets and considering contextual factors translated into improved performance on tasks requiring principled lexical selection. Detailed item-level analysis revealed that experimental group participants were particularly successful at recognizing and avoiding synonyms with inappropriate register (correctly rejecting overly formal or informal alternatives 82% of the time versus 64% for the control group) and synonyms with collocational incompatibilities (correctly rejecting alternatives that did not fit the collocational frame 75% versus 58%), suggesting that the instructional emphasis on register awareness and collocational verification was effective in developing these specific competencies. However, both groups showed relatively poor performance (below 50% accuracy) on items requiring discrimination between synonyms with subtle connotative differences or pragmatic implications that were not explicitly marked in thesaurus entries or corpus frequency information, indicating that some dimensions of lexical knowledge develop more readily through explicit instruction while others may require more extensive authentic language exposure [7].

Qualitative analysis of writing samples provided rich contextual understanding of how participants employed thesaurus-derived vocabulary in their productive language use and the specific patterns of success and difficulty they encountered. Thematic coding of experimental group writing samples identified three distinct patterns of thesaurus influence on vocabulary use: enhanced precision in lexical choices where participants successfully selected synonyms that more accurately conveyed specific shades of meaning than their initial word choices; increased stylistic variation where participants demonstrated repertoires of ways to express similar ideas using different lexical items; and occasional inappropriate formality where participants substituted formal or literary synonyms in contexts where more common or neutral vocabulary would have been more appropriate. One illustrative example from the data involved a participant who initially wrote "The government should make new rules about pollution" and revised this to "The government should establish new regulations concerning pollution," demonstrating improved lexical sophistication and precision through thesaurus-informed vocabulary choices [16]. However, other examples revealed less successful attempts at lexical sophistication, such as a participant who wrote "I was very famished after the lengthy journey" where "hungry" and "long" would have been more natural choices, suggesting that the participant consulted a thesaurus but selected formal register synonyms inappropriate for the relatively informal personal narrative context [8].

Interview data from the 24 experimental group participants who participated in the qualitative component provided valuable insights into learners' metacognitive awareness, strategic approaches to thesaurus use, and subjective perceptions of how thesaurus instruction influenced their vocabulary learning and language confidence. Participants universally reported that thesaurus instruction had increased their awareness of vocabulary as a complex, nuanced dimension of language proficiency rather than simply a matter of knowing word meanings, with many describing how the instruction changed their approach to vocabulary learning from memorizing individual words to exploring networks of related words and understanding contextual factors influencing word choice [9]. One participant eloquently expressed this shift: "Before, I just tried to remember new words. Now I think about the family of words, which ones are similar, which situations to use them. It's like seeing the vocabulary landscape instead of individual trees" . Participants reported that they initially found thesaurus consultation confusing and overwhelming due to the abundance of synonym options and uncertainty about how to choose among alternatives, but that explicit instruction in evaluation strategies, particularly the emphasis on checking corpus frequency information and verifying collocations, provided them with concrete tools for making informed decisions [12].

Despite generally positive perceptions of thesaurus instruction, participants also articulated several challenges and concerns that illuminate important considerations for pedagogical implementation. Multiple participants expressed frustration that consulting a thesaurus during writing interrupted their flow of ideas and slowed their writing process, with some reporting that they avoided thesaurus use during timed writing tasks despite recognizing its potential value for vocabulary development [18]. Others noted that different thesauruses sometimes provided inconsistent or contradictory information about synonyms, creating uncertainty about which source to trust and highlighting the importance of developing critical evaluation skills alongside technical competence in using reference tools [19]. Several participants also shared experiences of receiving negative feedback from teachers or peers on vocabulary choices they had made based on thesaurus consultation, which they found demoralizing and which sometimes led them to become more conservative in their vocabulary use rather than continuing to experiment with new words [10]. These challenges suggest that thesaurus instruction must be accompanied by explicit discussion of appropriate contexts for thesaurus consultation, guidance on evaluating and integrating information from multiple sources, and creation of supportive learning environments where vocabulary experimentation is encouraged and errors are treated as learning opportunities rather than failures [16].

Analysis of participants' self-reported vocabulary learning strategies revealed interesting patterns in how thesaurus instruction influenced their broader approaches to vocabulary development beyond specific thesaurus use. Experimental group participants reported significantly more frequent use of various vocabulary learning strategies at posttest compared to pretest,

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including deliberately trying to use new vocabulary in speaking and writing, creating personal vocabulary notes organized by semantic fields or themes, and consulting multiple resources to understand words thoroughly before attempting to use them productively [16]. This suggests that thesaurus instruction may have catalytic effects on vocabulary learning motivation and strategic competence that extend beyond the specific skill of thesaurus consultation, potentially by increasing learners' awareness of vocabulary as a learnable system amenable to systematic exploration and strategic development [11]. However, participants also reported increased anxiety about making vocabulary errors and greater tendency to avoid words they were uncertain about, highlighting a tension between enhanced lexical ambition and increased awareness of the complexity of achieving native-like vocabulary use that educators must carefully navigate in implementing thesaurus instruction [17].

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings through convergent analysis reveals a nuanced picture of thesaurus instruction effects that suggests important implications for pedagogical practice. While thesaurus instruction demonstrably enhanced multiple dimensions of vocabulary knowledge and use, including vocabulary depth, lexical diversity, and ability to make contextually appropriate synonym selections, these benefits were accompanied by increased rates of inappropriate word choices in authentic writing contexts, suggesting that thesaurus skills develop gradually and require extensive practice before learners can consistently apply thesaurus-derived knowledge successfully in spontaneous production [13]. This pattern aligns with skill acquisition theories that distinguish between declarative knowledge (knowing about language) and procedural knowledge (ability to use language fluently and appropriately), with thesaurus instruction primarily influencing declarative knowledge that only gradually becomes integrated into procedural competence through extensive practice and feedback [14, p.234]. The qualitative findings further illuminate this process by revealing how learners struggle with the cognitive demands of evaluating synonym appropriateness while simultaneously composing texts, managing the overwhelming abundance of information available in thesaurus resources, and navigating uncertainty about which lexical choices will be considered appropriate by teachers and proficient speakers [18].

Comparison of these findings with previous research on dictionary use and vocabulary learning strategies reveals both consistencies and interesting divergences. Like studies of dictionary consultation behavior, this research found that learners benefited from explicit instruction in reference skills rather than developing these competencies spontaneously, and that effective use of reference materials requires not only technical skills but also strategic and critical evaluation competencies [2,13]. However, while previous research has primarily documented challenges and inappropriate applications of reference materials, this study also reveals substantial potential benefits when thesaurus instruction is carefully designed and scaffolded, suggesting that negative findings in earlier research may partially reflect inadequate instruction rather than inherent limitations of thesaurus use as a vocabulary learning strategy [4,19]. The finding that thesaurus instruction particularly enhanced vocabulary depth rather than breadth is consistent with theoretical predictions about the nature of thesaurus resources, which provide information about relationships among known words rather than introducing entirely new vocabulary, but it also has important implications for how thesaurus instruction should be positioned within comprehensive vocabulary curricula that must address both breadth and depth dimensions [14,15].

CONCLUSION

This comprehensive investigation of thesaurus instruction in EFL contexts demonstrates that explicit, scaffolded instruction in thesaurus use can significantly enhance multiple dimensions of learners' vocabulary knowledge and lexical competence, while also revealing important challenges and limitations that must inform pedagogical implementation. The convergence of quantitative evidence showing substantial improvements in vocabulary depth, lexical diversity, and strategic synonym selection with qualitative insights into learners' experiences, perceptions, and application challenges provides a robust foundation for understanding both the potential benefits and necessary precautions in incorporating thesaurus instruction into EFL curricula. The research conclusively establishes that thesaurus instruction is most effective when implemented not as isolated reference skills training but as an integrated component of comprehensive vocabulary

instruction that emphasizes metalinguistic awareness, critical evaluation of lexical alternatives, attention to contextual and collocational constraints, and extensive practice in applying thesaurus-derived knowledge in authentic communication contexts. The findings directly address the pedagogical gap identified in the introduction, where thesaurus resources remain underutilized in EFL contexts despite their potential to support vocabulary development, by providing empirical evidence for the value of systematic thesaurus instruction alongside practical insights into effective implementation approaches and common pitfalls to avoid.

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