

EXPLORING VIETNAMESE ESL LEARNERS' SYNONYM USE IN IELTS WRITING: A SEMANTIC PROSODY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate how Vietnamese ESL students at intermediate and advanced levels perceive the use of synonyms in IELTS Writing Task 2. Drawing on the theoretical framework of semantic prosody, the research examines students' awareness of and their perceived difficulties in using synonyms in their essays, through which further understanding of how synonym substitution affects meaning, tone, and appropriateness in academic writing can be explored. Data for the study were collected through surveys, semi-controlled interviews and writing samples from IELTS learners. Ninety IELTS students were invited to participate in the survey, and among them, twelve students were selected to submit their essays for analysis, and take part in semi-controlled interviews. As revealed by the findings, when it comes to lexical resources, there is a tendency among IELTS students to prioritize lexical variety over semantic accuracy and natural collocation. Additionally, although students are well aware of the role of synonyms in enhancing their lexical resource score, they hold the misconception that greater lexical diversity can lead to higher band scores. This misperception results in imprecise word choices and unnatural collocation. This study therefore highlights the importance of teaching vocabulary in context and emphasizes the role of ESL educators -particularly IELTS instructors- in guiding students towards an understanding of semantic prosody and nuanced word usage.

Keywords: *semantic prosody, synonym use, IELTS Writing Task 2, lexical resource, Vietnamese ESL learners*

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the study

Among the four skills of the IELTS test, Writing in general and Writing Task 2 in specific can be considered the most challenging, particularly in terms of lexical resources. This is an important marking criterion, necessitating learners' ability to exhibit precise and flexible vocabulary use. To achieve this, a commonly employed strategy among Vietnamese ESL students is using synonyms to expand their lexical range. Despite the popularity of using synonyms, most students rely heavily on direct substitution from bilingual dictionaries or translation tools, leading to unnatural or inaccurate word choices (Laufer, 1997; Harvey & Yuill, 1997; Nation, 2001). Moreover, students often ignore the fact that synonyms are not always interchangeable, due to their different semantic prosodies, involving nuances and connotations that may influence meaning in context (Louw, 1993; Partington, 1998; Sinclair, 1991). This lack of awareness often results in synonym exploitation and misuse, leading to unnatural expressions, semantic inaccuracies, and lower lexical scores in Writing Task 2.

1.2. Research gap

Lexical resources have garnered substantial scholarly attention and have been widely examined in previous studies. However, most current studies explore students' awareness of lexical diversity rather than their understanding of lexical connotations, and there has been limited research on Vietnamese IELTS learners' perception of lexical nuances and the semantic prosody associated with using synonyms in Writing Task 2 argumentative writing (Laufer & Goldstein, 2004; Webb, 2008). Furthermore, while beginner learners are often viewed as struggling the most with these issues, intermediate and advanced learners are also faced with substantial difficulties (Schmitt, 2010; Ha, 2020). However, compared to beginner learners, students at intermediate and advanced levels have received relatively little research attention. Therefore, this study aims to investigate Vietnamese ESL students' perceptions, challenges, and the impact of misunderstanding semantic prosody when using synonyms in IELTS Writing Task 2 among intermediate and advanced learners.

1.3. Research objectives

The primary objective of this study is to examine how intermediate-advanced Vietnamese IELTS learners perceive and use synonyms in Writing Task 2. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Assess students' awareness of semantic prosody in synonym selection;
2. Identify common challenges students face when using synonyms in IELTS essays;
3. Examine the common synonym misuse issues of Vietnamese learners in IELTS Writing Task 2.

1.4. Research questions

To meet the objectives as mentioned earlier, the study focuses on addressing the following questions:

1. How aware are Vietnamese ESL students of semantic prosody when selecting synonyms in IELTS Writing Task 2?
2. What challenges do Vietnamese ESL students face when using synonyms in IELTS Writing Task 2?
3. What common issues can be observed in Vietnamese learners' use of synonyms in IELTS Writing Task 2?

1.5. Scope of the study

Within the scope of this study, the focus is on intermediate to advanced students (B1-C1 level) at the IELTS centres where the two authors are teaching. These students display a decent command of English but still report significant difficulties in using synonyms in Writing Task 2. Although they may possess a wide range of vocabulary and synonyms, they are often unaware of the subtle differences between them, particularly in terms of lexical connotations and nuances. The results and findings of this study are therefore intended to apply specifically to these settings and would require further investigation before being generalized to other academic contexts.

1.6. Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value, primarily for IELTS learners and instructors, and more broadly for ESL students and educators. By identifying students' perceptions, challenges, and common issues related to synonym misuse, the study seeks to raise awareness of semantic prosody as an essential element of academic writing. For students, this study encourages the development of a context-sensitive approach to synonym

selection, prompting them to consider the connotations and nuances of near-synonyms rather than excessively relying on the surface-level translation equivalence. For educators, the study results will keep teachers informed of the importance of effective vocabulary teaching strategies, including the integration of lessons on connotation, collocation, and contextually appropriate vocabulary use, to help learners achieve lexical accuracy.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. *Understanding lexical resources in IELTS Writing Task 2*

In the IELTS Writing Task 2, the lexical resource is one of the four marking criteria, which measures both the variety and the accuracy of vocabulary used in an essay. As highlighted in the IELTS Writing Band Descriptors (British Council, 2020), candidates can achieve a higher band score on this criterion if they demonstrate a wider range of vocabulary with higher precision to avoid repetition and create lexical flexibility. These two elements refer to lexical range, meaning the diversity of vocabulary, and accuracy, meaning the correct use of vocabulary within context.

According to Widdowson (2003), being able to use synonyms can enhance lexical range, since writers can produce an essay with greater diversity and flexibility. However, students often mistakenly equate lexical range with lexical accuracy, leading to a tendency to prioritize one at the expense of the other. This is because while students might display the breadth of vocabulary, they neglect the lexical depth, which includes understanding the nuances and collocational patterns of words. Such a lack of nuanced understanding, therefore, results in reduced lexical accuracy and reduced clarity of their argument (Cai, 2015).

In a nutshell, it is notable that using synonyms, despite being as common as it might seem, can cause tremendous difficulties for ESL students, particularly when they fail to grasp the semantic implications of words and their contextual appropriateness (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2001). Misuse of synonyms not only impacts lexical band scores but also decreases both the coherence and task achievement aspects of the IELTS scoring rubric (Xia, 2018).

2.2. *Understanding synonyms*

As defined by the Cambridge Dictionary, synonyms are words or phrases that share the same or nearly the same meaning. According to Lachica and Lydio (2023), the use of synonyms is beneficial in five prominent aspects, namely word replacement, repetition avoidance, sense evocation, register relation, and language embellishment. Therefore, synonyms play a vital role in enhancing the lexical variety, reducing repetition, and enriching the lexical resources in writing. In addition, as claimed by Obata (2023), an effective display of synonyms allows students to comprehend and apply a broader reservoir of vocabulary, which can enhance not only their writing skills but also other aspects of second language acquisition.

Notwithstanding such great benefits, synonyms, if misused, will backfire, resulting in ambiguity, uncertainty, and misinterpretation. This necessitates writers to gain a thorough understanding of synonyms, not just on the surface, but in terms of deeper layers concerning tones, registers, connotations, and nuances (Lachica & Lydio, 2023).

2.3. *Understanding semantic prosody, collocates, and word choice*

Indeed, the subtle variations in contextual usage, tone, and connotation of words that sound similar are typically among the most challenging aspects for EFL students. Understanding such linguistic differences is crucial to the successful use of language, something which emphasizes the need for learning semantic prosody. Sinclair, Louw, and Stubbs are some of the most widely recognized researchers in this field. Semantic prosody, as a concept, was first proposed by John McHardy Sinclair (1991), and the term "semantic prosody" itself is first referred to in Louw's article "Irony in the Text or Insincerity in the Writer? Semantic Prosody as a Diagnostic Tool". By definition, semantic prosody is described as the meaning that is established by the frequent collocates in which a word often appears (Louw, 2000). Semantic prosody allows speakers and writers to convey lexically related meanings so that the attitudes of the speakers and writers can be retrieved. It should be mentioned that the vast majority of semantic prosodies are negative, with only a small percentage of positive prosodies. Negative semantic prosody is, in practice, more pervasive because it stems from human cognition and concerns regarding threats, challenges, or warnings for social or survival causes. On the other hand, examples of positive semantic prosodies are less commonly found as good results do not require

such strong verbal stress (Stubbs, 2001). However, the semantic default of a word can be changed on purpose by speakers and writers for rhetorical effect (Louw, 1993), producing irony, insincerity, or humour.

Sinclair (1991) proposed that words have “collocational frameworks” because they are often paired together in certain contexts, which help to determine their semantic value. Building on this view, Bill Louw (1993) was the first to use the term “semantic prosody” in his seminal “Irony in the Text or Insincerity in the Writer? The diagnostic potential of semantic prosody”. Following this formal introduction to semantic prosody, corpus linguists have devoted particular attention to this area, which sheds light on fine-grained lexical differences of seemingly similar words (Louw, 1993; Stubbs, 1996). Stubbs (1996) further extended this idea in his study of semantic prosody and the potential categorization of words, according to whether their collocates are generally positive or negative. Statistically, most words create negative prosody, some positive, and many neutral, as pointed out by Stubbs (1996). Word prosody is the character of a word based on typical collocates. By definition, collocates are individual words that have a tendency to occur together within a specific spoken or written phrase. Collocates play a vital role, as they help define the contextual meaning of a word (Hunston, 2002; Hoey, 2005). For example, a word that often appears next to negative words will produce mostly negative prosody, and those with positive collocates can presumably manifest a positive prosody. When the words are frequent in both positive and negative collocates, it can be closely related to mixed or neutral prosody. To illustrate, the co-occurring words to “set in” are also often negative; for example, the co-occurring words including “rot”, “decay”, “malaise”, “ill-will”, “prejudice”, and “bitterness” are all associated with negative meanings (Louw, 1993). In contrast, the word “career” is commonly associated with words like “great”, “possible”, “pleasurable”, and “achievable”, implying a more favourable prosody in general. Meanwhile, the prosody of the phrase “build up” is neutral, because it carries distinct prosody in different contexts (i.e. “build up” has a negative meaning in the context of “resistance builds up” but it has a positive meaning in the other contexts, such as “build up confidence” (Louw, 1993).

Despite the complexities of synonyms in English, the majority of students tend to assume all synonyms are interchangeable. The problem is, absolute synonyms, which may be used interchangeably in any context, are rare, as mentioned by Lyons (1995) in his book *Linguistic Semantics*. The relative scarcity of absolute synonyms

is well documented due to some phenomena, such as semantic change (Edmonds & Hirst, 2002), and also relates to the fact that if one were to exist in a language, it would lead to redundancy (McCarthy et al., 2010). Consequently, near synonyms attract more attention in lexical semantics (Cruse, 1986), and researchers have broadly analysed these subtle distinctions that characterize them. According to Cruse (2000), the influence of subtle differences in meaning on word choice is greater than most linguists would like to admit, and synonyms often line up on a scale. This aspect makes it frustrating for non-native speakers because the fine shades of sociocultural and emotional connotations involved are not always transparent (Baker, 2018). Likewise, while some synonyms may have similar basic meanings as Xiao and McEnery (2006) indicate, there can be great differences in the collocational and prosodic characteristics between any two words, which underlines an important aspect of lexical choice to ensure clear communication in context.

For example, “poor” and “destitute” are exemplifying cases of small but significant contextual nuances that often result in the intricacies of the near synonyms. Although both terms seem to simply represent a lack of money, it would be a simplification to assume that “poor” and “destitute” can be used interchangeably in all contexts referring to financial lack. This is because their contextual meanings convey two different degrees of financial pressure. Moreover, the word “poor” also means a lack of quality (this fact justifies expressions like “poor health”, “poor attendance”, “poor quality” or “poor decision”), and it is indicative of a low resource condition, as in the expression “a poor family”. On the other hand, “destitute” is a much stricter term, most often associated with more severe deprivation and total lack of necessities. As such, it might be perceivable that even when considering financial hardship, “destitute” significantly differs from its near-synonym in degree. Furthermore, “destitute” does not branch out into other domains of meaning, whereas “poor” can fit into many social contexts. This distinction between “poor” and “destitute” is especially problematic for EFL learners as these terms require contextual interpretation for the appropriate word selection. This highlights a challenge that aligns with Baker’s (2018) and Xiao & McEnery’s (2006) suggestion that near-synonyms are often accompanied by socio-cultural and attitudinal meanings, which may not be apparent to non-native speakers who are rarely aware of the context.

2.4. Exploring challenges in synonyms use among Vietnamese ESL students

As stated by Pham (2008), when it comes to using synonyms in Writing, the majority of Vietnamese students tend to rely on word-by-word translation, using translation tools or bilingual dictionaries without knowledge of contextual differences. These dictionaries often provide students with a list of synonyms on the surface without putting these words in context and showing their semantic prosody. As a result, while some students possess a diversity of synonyms for substitution, they lack proper awareness of semantic prosody, leading to lexical inaccuracy. This necessitates raising students' awareness of semantic prosody via the incorporation of this aspect into ESL vocabulary instruction, especially for students preparing for tests like the IELTS. Rather than merely exposing students to a list of synonyms and requiring students to learn by heart, teachers should encourage students to be aware of contextual usage (Goh, 2011). This can be achieved by contextualized teaching strategies such as teaching vocabulary through literature or using the corpus-based approach, which provides students with words used in different contexts.

Another reason can be attributed to the difficulty faced by Vietnamese students in learning collocation, known as the grouping of certain words to create specific combinations. Nguyen (2014) claimed that it was inadequate exposure to authentic English that led students to take words as separate items rather than collocational patterns. This issue becomes more concerning in academic contexts like Writing Task 2, when students need to demonstrate the ability to use words related to certain collocations to address specific tasks. With this concern, Liu (2015) recommended that there should be more activities for students to get familiar with collocation, such as collocation practice, contextualized synonym exercises, and semantic mapping. These methods not only improve students' understanding of word meanings but also help them become more sensitive to the connotations and contextual uses of words. In IELTS preparation, such strategies can help students avoid common mistakes related to synonym misuse.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study deploys a mixed-research approach, involving both qualitative and quantitative methods. A mixed approach is preferable in this study, since it allows for a comprehensive coverage of both the breadth (quantitative research) and the depth (qualitative research) behind Vietnamese IELTS learners' tendency of synonym use. Due to the complex nature of synonym choice, particularly regarding semantic prosody, collocation, and connotation, a purely statistical analysis is insufficient, so an in-depth exploration of the learner's insights is necessary. For this reason, in addition to quantitative data obtained from a questionnaire, qualitative results from the open-ended question, semi-structured interviews, and writing sample analyses will shed light on the underlying perceptions, behaviors, and challenges of Vietnamese learners. A combination of both approaches enhances both the numerical validity and the richness, facilitating a more thorough understanding of the issue.

3.1.1. Quantitative Component

The quantitative research involved the use of a structured survey designed to measure students' awareness of synonym usage and semantic prosody. The survey included Likert questions and multiple-choice questions that evaluated students' overall consciousness of the importance of using synonyms and students' awareness of semantic prosody, specific reasons why students use synonyms, the correlation between students' band scores and their cited reasons, as well as the impact of IELTS preparation time to students' awareness.

3.1.2. Qualitative Component

The qualitative component consisted of two parts:

■ One open-ended question

There was one open-ended survey question, in which participants were asked to mention specific difficulties in using synonyms in IELTS Writing Task 2. At first glance, one open-ended question only might seem insufficient and limited in addressing comprehensive insights. However, if well designed, its effectiveness in collecting detailed responses and examining the depth and richness of data should not be undermined. Furthermore, as noted by Dörnyei (2007), a concisely designed open-ended question allows participants to focus in-depth and pay

sufficient attention, ultimately reducing their fatigue and response unwillingness. This is especially beneficial in a mixed approach, when the open-ended question is complemented by other structured instruments.

For in-depth investigation, thematic analysis was applied to the responses, allowing the researchers to categorize common challenges such as limited vocabulary knowledge, lack of awareness of subtle meaning differences, and uncertainty about formal versus informal usage. After the coding process, the themes were organized into broader categories that reflect the common patterns in students' responses. These themes were then used to interpret the qualitative data and draw connections between the participants' reported challenges and the broader research objectives.

■ IELTS Writing Sample Analysis

To further analyse the thematic errors related to synonym use, twelve IELTS Writing Task 2 essays were selected. All essays were written in response to the same writing prompt. For each proficiency level (Band 5–6, 6.5, and 7–7.5), four essays were chosen. Before analysing synonym misuse, all essays were first corrected for grammar to ensure they were free from grammatical errors. Each essay was then examined as a representative sample of its corresponding band score. This allowed for a comparative analysis of synonym use across different proficiency levels. Through this analysis, both qualitative differences and common patterns in synonym misuse were identified.

■ Semi-structured interviews

For a more insightful and thorough understanding of students' behaviours and their reasoning behind synonym use, twelve students who had submitted the essays for analysis were finally interviewed. The interviews are expected to take a closer look at why and how students arrived at their synonym decisions, which could lead to further implications.

3.2. Participants

The survey link in the form of a Google survey was sent out to ninety participating students, currently enrolling in IELTS courses. In detail, ninety students were equally grouped into three band scores: thirty students of band 5-6, thirty students of band 6.5, and thirty students of band 7-7.5. Among these ninety participants, twelve students volunteered to provide their essays for detailed

analysis. Their demographic information, regarding their age, was collected to enrich the data.

Compared to other studies, this study involves a relatively small sample size. Although it might raise some validity concerns, this sample size is justified within the scope and context of the study. The participants were selected from the English centers where the two authors are currently teaching. Therefore, gaining access to these ninety participants was feasible and practical. Also, ninety participants are diversely chosen across three band scores, allowing the study to capture a range of lexical proficiency levels. As a result, it still ensures the depth and contextual relevance over statistical generalization (Dörnyei, 2007).

3.3. Instrumentation

The main tool for data collection was using both qualitative and quantitative data analysis with a survey questionnaire, involving a question for the candidate's name, seven 5-point Likert scale, multiple-choice questions, and an open-ended question, aimed at evaluating the level of students' awareness in using and the importance of synonyms as well as gain deeper insights into the distinct difficulties each individual is facing. Moreover, an analysis of student essays and semi-structured interviews was also conducted to measure the impact of synonym mistakes, categorized into the three surveyed levels.

3.3.1. Survey questionnaire

There was a structured questionnaire designed to gather quantitative data on participants' awareness of synonym use in IELTS Writing Task 2. The questionnaire involved nine questions in total, with a question for the candidate's name, seven 5-point Likert scale, multiple-choice questions, and an open-ended question. Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions aimed to collect data on these aspects: awareness of synonyms and semantic prosody, perceived importance of using synonyms, and specific reasons for using synonyms. The last open-ended question aimed to investigate students' perceived difficulties in using synonyms in Writing Task 2. These data collection methods are widely supported across linguistics and second language research, making sure data is comprehensively collected to serve as useful input (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009).

3.3.2. Analysis of student essays

Twelve students' essays were collected and analysed for the identification of thematic mistakes in using synonyms. This method aligns with the notion of Creswell (2014), who claimed that the survey data could be reinforced by detailed analysis, enabling triangulation of findings and strengthening the overall validity of the research.

3.3.3. Semi-controlled interviews

Semi-controlled interviews, which included predetermined questions, were conducted with twelve essay-submitting volunteers to gain deeper insights into their synonym choices. During the interview, participants were asked to reflect on their synonyms choices and give their reasons. This approach enabled authors to explore the participants' reasons during their writing, focused on sources of vocabulary knowledge, and awareness of contextual appropriateness. The semi-controlled format ensured consistency across interviews while allowing the emergence of rich, individualized data.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

The process of collecting data was conducted in March 2025, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges Vietnamese IELTS learners face when using synonyms in Writing Task 2. The data collection was carried out in two phases.

In the first phase, the first section of the survey collected demographic data such as the students' names, ages, genders, current IELTS proficiency levels, and the amount of time they had already invested in IELTS learning. The second component aimed to identify the common challenges students encountered when using synonyms for IELTS Writing Task 2. The survey was administered through Google Forms and distributed to ninety IELTS learners across three proficiency levels (with thirty learners in each level). These learners were enrolled in preparatory courses at various English centers where the researchers were teaching. To ensure voluntary participation, all participants were informed of the study's objectives. They were also given the option to complete the survey either online or on paper.

In the second phase, twelve IELTS essays were collected and analysed. Each essay was submitted by a different volunteer student. These essays were collected across three IELTS proficiency bands: 5.0–6.0, 6.5, and 7.0–7.5;

four essays were collected for each band, ensuring a diverse sample. The collected essays were analysed to identify common patterns of synonym misuse, including inappropriate substitutions, collocational inaccuracies, and register mismatches. After the essay analysis, twelve participants were invited to participate in semi-structured follow-up interviews. In these interviews, the participants clarified the reasons behind their synonym choices in their submitted essays. This process allowed the researchers to examine how synonym use differs across proficiency levels.

3.5. Data Analysis

The collected data from the questionnaires were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0.

Focusing on descriptive and inferential analytics for quantitative data, which uses survey responses to identify general trends and relationships among the variables. With descriptive statistics, the measures of frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were computed to identify the overall distribution of students' awareness of synonyms and their understanding of semantic prosody. For broader insights, inferential analytics were applied, which compares independent samples to explore potential differences in synonym awareness across band score categories (5-6, 6.5, 7-7.5) and examines the relationship between students' preparation time, band scores, and their responses regarding synonym usage.

For the qualitative component, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and challenges in using synonyms reported by students in their open-ended survey responses. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), there are many compelling justifications for the incorporation of thematic analysis. Firstly, this method is flexible, accessible, and highly applicable in different theoretical frameworks. Secondly, instead of treating quantitative data as random and separate units, thematic analysis allows researchers to generalize underlying patterns, thereby effectively generating insightful interpretations embedded within the data. This process followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. First, in the familiarization phase, the data were read repeatedly by researchers to identify patterns and recurring difficulties in using synonyms. During initial coding, key phrases and expressions were systematically coded, such as "I am not sure if the word fits, or "I don't know the correct context." These codes were then grouped into distinct broader themes during the third phase,

revealing the main challenges faced by students: “uncertainty”, “limited knowledge” and “other”. In the fourth phase, these themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented students’ experiences, and deeper clarification for “other” theme, presenting other challenges of students, including using dictionaries for reference, the lack of contextual exposure and insufficient instructions from teachers. The fifth phase involved defining each theme to reflect the specific nature of the struggles; for instance, the theme “limited knowledge” described the lack of lexical resources or semantic prosody comprehension in students. The final phase involved producing a coherent report, where representative quotations were selected to illustrate each theme, providing insights into the challenges of choosing synonyms in IELTS writing performance.

Ultimately, the essays submitted by volunteer participants were further analysed, focusing on the Lexical Resource criterion to uncover the common mistakes of students in using synonyms, categorized into distinct levels. Moreover, a further interview was conducted with these volunteers to clarify the reasons behind their synonym choices, emphasizing the lack of knowledge and contextual appropriateness.

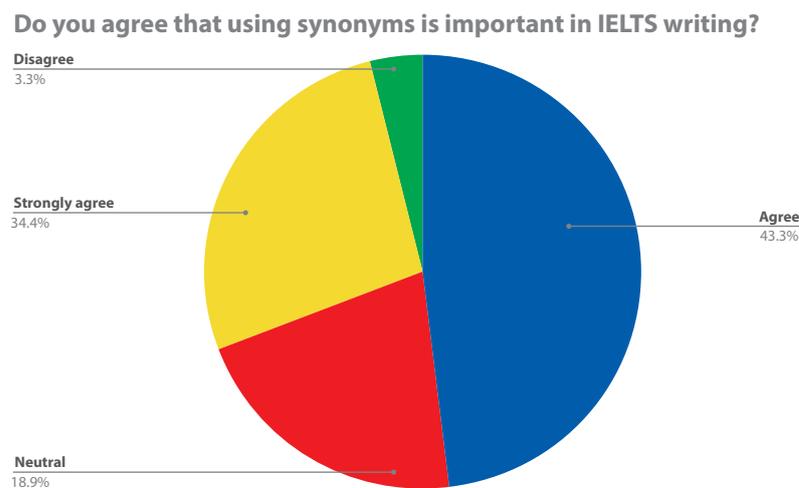
Through the integration of these analytical procedures, the study offered a comprehensive understanding of Vietnamese IELTS learners’ struggles with synonym usage, ultimately aiming to inform pedagogical strategies and improve writing instruction in ESL contexts.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Result

Research Question 1: How aware are Vietnamese ESL students of semantic prosody when selecting synonyms in IELTS Writing Task 2?

As revealed by the data presented in Graph 1, when asked about students’ awareness of the importance of using synonyms in Writing Task 2, a significant majority of respondents either agreed (43.3%) or strongly agreed (34.4%). A total of nearly 90% of participants gave positive responses, highlighting that learners are aware of the general significance of demonstrating lexical variety in writing. Only 18.9% gave neutral responses, showing their uncertainty, and only 3.3% expressed disagreement, suggesting minimal resistance or misunderstanding regarding the relevance of this skill. Particularly, no students mentioned “strongly disagree” in their responses. Generally, as can be seen from the data, students reported a significant overall awareness of using synonyms in Writing Task 2.



Graph 1: General awareness of students toward the importance of using synonyms

To further examine specific reasons behind the importance of using synonyms, the next survey question explored why students perceived it that way (There are four primary reasons identified in the survey, namely: avoiding repetition, displaying a wider range of lexical resources, showing collocation, and acknowledging connotation (Table 1). Notably, surface-level reasons were mostly cited, with 40% mentioning using synonyms to avoid repetition and 38.9% mentioning using synonyms to display a wider range of vocabulary. These responses reflect a common perception in IELTS Writing Task 2, when students have a high tendency to prioritize lexical variation over lexical appropriateness and lexical precision, as well as a common perception of associating lexical variation is associated with a higher band score achievement. Meanwhile, deeper reasons such as aligning with collocation or understanding connotation received less attention, with the former being selected by only 13.3% of participants and the latter being cited by 5.6% of participants. These findings reveal that although participants are aware of the functional significance of synonyms, their awareness of semantic appropriateness and subtle meaning differences, key components of semantic prosody, remains limited.

Table 1: Commonly cited reasons why students use synonyms

Why using synonyms is important?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cummlative Percent
Valid acknowledging connotation	7	7.8	7.8	7.8
avoiding repetition	36	40.0	40.0	47.8
displaying a wider range of lixical resources	31	34.4	34.4	82.2
showing collocation	16	17.8	17.8	100.0
Total	90	100.0	100.0	

The survey also delved into the relationship between different band scores and their impacts on students’ specific reasons for using synonyms (Graph 2). It can be found that students of lower levels showed greater reliance on surface-level reasons, while students of higher band scores tended to show a shift towards reasons related to semantic prosody.

For students of Band 5–6

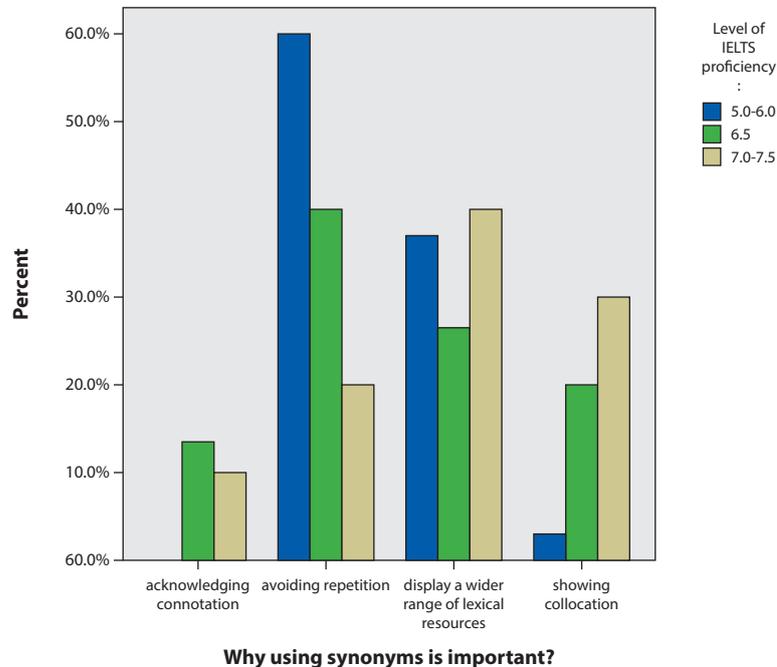
Among students at Band 5–6, 60% reported using synonyms primarily to avoid repetition in their writing. Additionally, 37% of these students indicated that they employed synonyms as a way to vary their vocabulary. However, only a small portion, 3%, demonstrated any awareness of collocation when selecting synonyms. No participants in this band reported awareness of connotation, suggesting limited depth in their understanding of synonym nuances at this proficiency level.

For students of Band 6.5

In the Band 6.5 group, 40% of students believed that using synonyms was an effective strategy to reduce repetition in their writing. An equal percentage (40%) reported that they used synonyms to display a wider range of vocabulary. Compared to the lower band, a slightly higher proportion (20%) demonstrated some awareness of both collocation and connotation. Nevertheless, this level of awareness remains limited, indicating that while students at this proficiency level begin to recognize finer aspects of synonym usage, their understanding is still developing.

For students of Band 7–7.5

For students in the Band 7–7.5 group, only 20% reported that they relied on synonyms mainly to avoid repetition. Instead, 40% stated that they used synonyms to exhibit a broad range of vocabulary and achieve lexical variety. Notably, 30% of these students expressed that they aimed to select synonyms that fit appropriate collocations, and 10% acknowledged their awareness of connotation. Overall, students at this level showed improved understanding of both collocation and connotation, reflecting their efforts to achieve both lexical variety and precision in their writing.



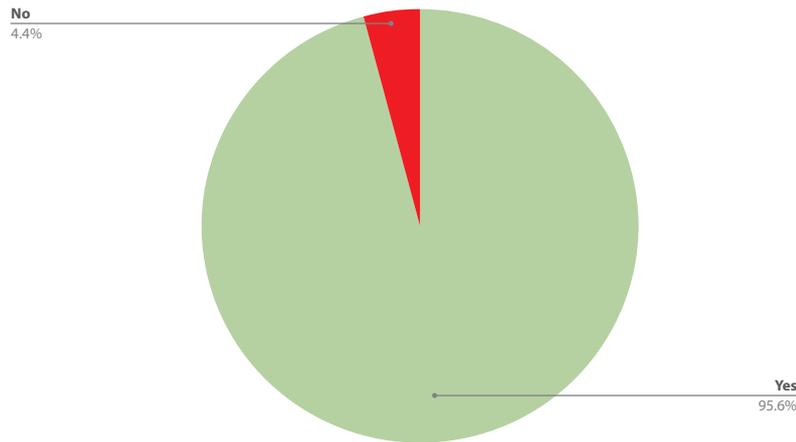
Graph 2: The relationship between different band scores and their impacts on students' specific reasons for using synonyms

Surprisingly, according to the survey, there was no pronounced correlation between the amount of time spent preparing for IELTS with students' awareness of semantic prosody. Participants who had studied for fewer than three months ($n = 24$) displayed varying levels of this awareness. To illustrate, some Band 7+ students with under 3 months of study still demonstrated high sensitivity to prosody, while others at Band 5–6 with longer preparation periods lacked awareness. These findings suggest that time is of less significance when it comes to enhancing students' awareness of word choice precision since there are more important factors to take into consideration, regarding exposure quality and individual learner differences (prior English experience, critical thinking skills).

Research Question 2: What challenges do Vietnamese ESL students face when using synonyms in IELTS Writing Task 2?

According to the survey, Picture 4 revealed that out of ninety participants (band 5.0-7.5), an overwhelming 95.6 % of them reported meeting significant difficulties in using synonyms in Writing Task 2, leaving a mere 4.4 % reporting no challenges (Graph 3). This overwhelming prevalence suggests that using synonyms poses a major challenge even for students who have achieved intermediate to advanced proficiency levels.

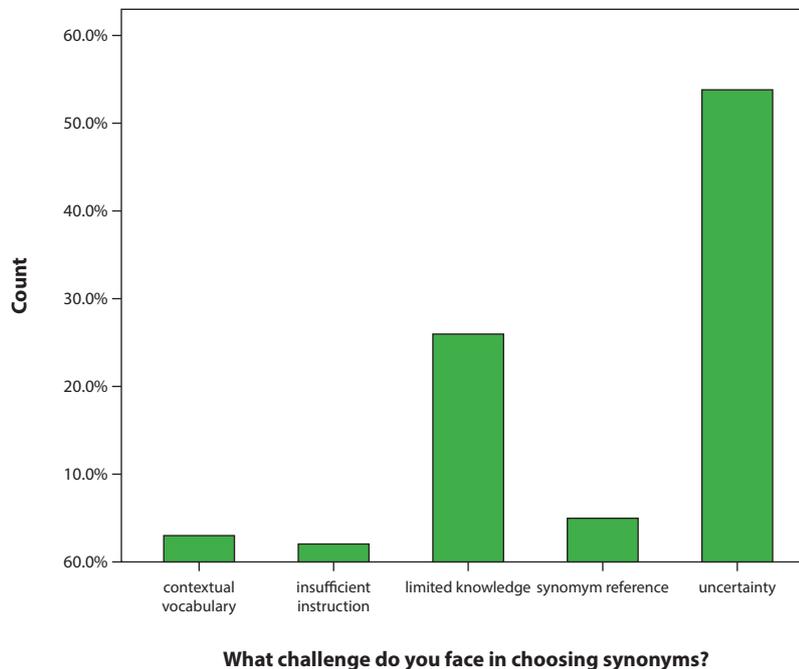
Have you ever faced difficulties in choose synonyms?



Graph 3: Perceived difficulties in using synonyms

After participants admitted their difficulties in using synonyms, the final open question explored specific challenges faced by students (Graph 4). Ninety responses received from the open question were computed to analyze common thematic challenges. It was revealed that among various results, “uncertainty” and “limited knowledge” were the most cited variables that caused difficulties to students, with “uncertainty” emerging as the most prominent one.

“Uncertainty” was mentioned with fifty-four times of occurrences in a total of ninety responses, such as “uncertain about the right substitution”, “uncertain about the context”, or “uncertain about the formality”. Meanwhile, “limited knowledge” was reported with twenty-five times, evident in expressions like “limited knowledge of collocation”, “limited knowledge of connotation”, or “limited knowledge of nuances”. There were only 11 occurrences of “others”. Specifically, “others” included reported difficulties in having the appropriate choice of dictionaries to consult for synonym reference (five times), lack of exposure to vocabulary in its context (three times), or insufficient instruction of teachers (two times).



Graph 4: The most common challenges

Research Question 3: What common issues can be observed in Vietnamese learners' use of synonyms in IELTS Writing Task 2?

For a closer look at the common issues in Vietnamese learners' use of synonyms in IELTS Writing Task 2, the twelve submitted essays from different proficiency levels (Band 5–6, 6.5, and 7–7.5) were analysed, with four students representing each level. Each student responded to the same writing prompt: "Some people think governments should invest more in public transportation, while others believe more money should be spent on roads. Discuss both views and give your opinion". These essays were first grammatically corrected to isolate errors related specifically to synonym misuse.

Following the essay analysis, these twelve writing samples were used as the stimulus for further in-depth interviews. This section revealed distinct patterns of lexical problems across proficiency levels, which were then categorized into recurring themes:

- Band 5.0–6.0: Translation-based writing and word-by-word synonym substitution
- Band 6.5: Inaccurate collocations and connotative mismatch
- Band 7.0–7.5: Lexical overcomplication

The thematic grouping of these synonym-related errors highlights the most frequent and problematic areas Vietnamese learners encounter, providing deeper insight into the lexical challenges they face in academic writing (See Appendix for full student samples).

Mistakes of the band 5-6 essay

In terms of essay analysis, the writing samples from this level show that the most common problems exist in surface-level understanding of synonymy; students translate and substitute synonyms without contextual awareness. They rely heavily on bilingual dictionaries or translation tools, selecting synonyms solely based on surface-level equivalence without evaluating their appropriateness within the sentence or broader discourse. This confirms earlier survey results indicating that lower-proficiency students prioritize avoiding repetition over achieving lexical precision. Their use is often mechanical rather than meaning-driven, leading to expressions that are grammatically correct but semantically flawed.

Some responses recorded in the interviews with the students of this level include:

- Student 1 (band 5.5): "I translated the single word to avoid repetition, such as I used 'make street' to replace 'build road'."
- Student 2 (band 5.5): "I did not want to repeat 'reduce traffic', so I tried 'cut down the vehicles' to make it sound different."
- Student 3 (band 6.0): "I noticed that I used 'public transportation' too many times, so I tried 'commute vehicle', but I was not sure if it was correct."
- Student 4 (band 6.0): "While writing, I was afraid I had used 'develop the city' too often, so I changed it to 'enhance the urban area' because I searched online and saw that develop and enhance are synonyms."

Drawn from the four responses, it is clear that these learners equate repetition with low quality, leading them to replace key lexical items without considering syntax or typical usage. There are three key interview insights from this. Firstly, students are struggling with word class compatibility (e.g., replacing *public transportation* with *commute vehicle*). Secondly, they were unaware of collocational restrictions (e.g., *make street* instead of *build roads*), and the last is that their lexical choices were made mostly by referring to the synonym list from online dictionaries (e.g., *enhance vs develop*)

Direct translation/ substitution	Lack of collocation awareness
“make more street” to substitute “build more roads” “public vehicles” to substitute “public transport” “sound dirty” to substitute “noise pollution” “moving systems” to substitute “transport modes” “commute vehicle” to substitute “public transport” “delivery machine” to substitute “delivery vehicle” “natural condition” to substitute “natural environment”	“put money on public transport” to substitute “invest in public transport” “cut down the vehicles” to substitute “reduce traffic” “upgrade the urban” to substitute “develop the city”

Note. This table presents common synonym misuse in the Band 5–6 sample, including literal translations and inappropriate one-to-one substitutions. It also highlights incorrect collocations that, while grammatically acceptable, result in unnatural or semantically inaccurate academic expressions.

Mistakes of the band 6.5 essay

At this level, learners exhibit fewer issues with direct translation compared to lower bands, indicating improved control over basic synonym usage. However, their writing reveals challenges related to advanced collocational accuracy and semantic connotation. While these learners demonstrate some awareness of the lexical variety and basic collocation patterns, they often struggle with selecting synonyms that are contextually and semantically appropriate at a more nuanced level. These findings suggest that at the intermediate to upper level, students begin to move beyond surface-level synonym use, yet still lack the semantic sensitivity required for precise lexical choice.

Some responses recorded in the interviews with the students of this level include:

- Student 5: “I learned ‘allocate funds’ from a sample essay, so I used it instead of ‘spend money,’ but I do not know the difference between funds and money in this context.”
- Student 6: “I think ‘infrastructure expenditure’ sounds more professional.”
- Student 7: “I think I should vary my vocabulary to demonstrate lexical resource, even though I am not sure if the other word is correct.”
- Student 8: “I feel like ‘mass transit’ is similar to ‘public transportation,’ so I used it instead, although honestly, I am not very familiar with it.”

From the interview at this level, it is clear that three key themes emerge about the misuse of learners in synonyms. Firstly, learners often memorize synonyms from various sources, such as books, sample essays, or online templates, without being aware of using these words naturally in context. Moreover, the sense of insecurity is another notable reason, as they try to avoid repeating words multiple times, such as “transport” or “government” by finding alternatives at all costs. In this way, their synonym use is frequently driven more by aesthetic preference—choosing words that sound more professional, rather than by considerations of clarity or appropriateness. Lastly, some students admitted being unsure about their synonym choices but felt compelled to use them at the last minute, signifying impulsive decisions, rather than knowledge-drive decisions.

Mistakes	Suggested improvements
“allocate funds on roads” “natural condition”/“natural circumstance” “mass transit”/“public commuting systems” “car overload” “logistic movement” “budget-saving”/“economically suitable” “individual transportations” “economic deliverance”	“spend money on roads” “environment” “public transportation” “traffic congestion” “transportation of goods” “affordable” “private vehicles” “delivery of goods”/“logistics”

Note. This table illustrates synonym misuse in the Band 6.5 samples, where expressions, though grammatically correct, lack lexical precision, collocational appropriateness, or register. The suggested revisions reflect more idiomatic and semantically accurate alternatives, underscoring the need for deeper prosodic and collocational awareness at this level.

Mistakes of the band 7-7.5 essay

In this level, although students generally demonstrate strong lexical diversity, the misuse remains a concern, specifically related to register. Learners tend to overuse elevated or overly lengthy synonyms. Their lexical variety is high, but their precision is compromised by an exaggerated effort to overcomplicate their essays, making them redundant.

Some responses recorded in the interviews with the students of this level include:

- Student 9: "I looked up synonyms for 'government' in the dictionary and used 'the governing body' because it's longer."
- Student 10: "I think 'private conveyances' sounds longer, so it feels more academic to me."
- Student 11: "I often read sample essays online that are said to be band 9, then underline all the vocabulary and try to use as many of those words as possible in my own essays."
- Student 12: "I read in the scoring criteria that using less common words gets a higher score, so I think using words that sound a bit unusual will make a good impression."

The interview reveals that students in this level acknowledged that they did not thoroughly understand some synonyms they used in model IELTS essays, but chose them because they came across these lexical resources in the so-called "band 9 essays". Aiming for band 9, they equate the ability to use less common words with the exhibition of "strange" or "seemingly complicated and lengthy vocabularies", trying hard to achieve what they perceive as lexical sophistication.

Mistakes	Suggested improvements
"thoroughfares"	"road networks"
"governing bodies"	"government"
"economic transportation"	"transportation of goods"
"economic transportation logistics"/"economic distribution"	"logistics"
"urban progression"	"urban development"
"private conveyances"	"private vehicles"
"busways"	"bus services"
"traffic gridlock"	"traffic congestion"
"economically suitable"	"cost-effective"

Note. This table highlights synonym misuse in the Band 7–7.5 samples, characterized by overly formal or low-frequency lexical choices. While grammatically correct, these expressions deviate in tone or naturalness, emphasizing the importance of semantic prosody, collocation, and register at advanced levels.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Challenges in synonym use

As the survey results suggest, an overwhelming proportion of students reported difficulties in using synonyms, due to their limited perceptions of semantic prosody. The open-ended questionnaire further reinforced this result by revealing the two most notable challenges faced by learners in using synonyms: uncertainty and limited knowledge. Among these given reasons, uncertainty was the most cited, with different related aspects regarding the accuracy of synonym use, the register, and the suitability of word choice in context. This finding supports the notion made by Nation (2001) and Schmitt (2010) that the use of synonyms for substitution is far from a straightforward procedure, but rather a demanding process requiring nuanced semantic evaluation and critical thinking.

Lower-band students are recognized as those who are most vulnerable to these difficulties. As reported, they have a rooted habit of direct word-for-word substitution without recognizing collocational or contextual appropriateness, largely influenced by L1 translation. To illustrate, phrases such as “commit a decision” instead of “make a decision” suggest a lack of collocational awareness, a prevalent problem among EFL learners (Nesselhauf, 2005; Laufer & Waldman, 2011). Another contributor to synonym selection difficulties was students’ over-reliance on bilingual dictionaries that simply list words but fail to provide these words in contexts and highlight their nuanced distinctions. This aligns with Tseng and Schmitt’s argument (2008) that learners often lack lexical depth, referring to an understanding of word usage across multiple disciplines such as frequency, collocation, register, and connotation. These mistakes not only cause word-level impacts to the naturalness of expressions, but more importantly, confuse readers with ambiguous meaning or disrupt the clarity of the argument.

In comparison, students in higher band scores (above 6.5) struggle less with surface-level lexical errors, but their major challenges lie in the recognition of connotation and register. For example, in an essay discussing education policies, one student used “offspring” rather than “children”. This substitution, while technically correct, was contextually insensitive, due to the embedded tone that was overly formal and awkward. This example demonstrates that advanced learners often face challenges related to pragmatic and stylistic appropriateness, rather than basic word meaning (Peters, 2016; Crossley & McNamara, 2010).

4.2.2. *Negative consequences of synonym misuse*

Undeniably, synonyms, when used inappropriately in Writing Task 2, can have twofold consequences: firstly, on the criterion of lexical resources and secondly, on the criterion of coherence/ cohesion.

Regarding lexical resources, students’ lexical resource score is assessed based on their ability to exhibit both lexical variety and lexical accuracy. Although this recognition is significantly common among students, those of lower band scores often prioritize using synonyms to avoid repetition, making them end up using synonyms at all costs. This comes at the expense of inappropriate word choice, showing insufficient control over lexical choices. This finding aligns with the IELTS public band descriptors of a band 6 candidate who is categorized with “some awareness of style and collocation,” but

“inappropriate word choice and collocation” (IELTS, 2023). Our aforementioned analysis of band 6 essay students reinforces this by highlighting common lexical mistakes in the formality, collocation, and contextual awareness.

In terms of coherence and cohesion, this criterion also suffers from synonym misuse. This is because in some essays, when students technically substitute one word with another, such a direct substitution without nuanced lexical awareness can distort the clarity of ideas and cause confusion, which compromises cohesion. Research by Witte and Faigley (1981) emphasizes that lexical cohesion, which can be achieved through accurate synonym use, repetition, and paraphrasing, is critical for establishing topic continuity in academic discourse.

Moreover, it is notable that an incomplete understanding of synonyms is detrimental, as students might be misled to use words that seem technically correct but are semantically incongruent. This tendency is, as put by Gillett and Wray (2006), lexical inflation, referring to the use of synonyms at the surface level only. Lacking proper guidance from educators, therefore, poses a severe risk to students, lowering both their lexical resource and coherence/ cohesion band scores, even when grammatical accuracy is high.

4.2.3. *Pedagogical implications*

Findings from the study have a variety of pedagogical implications for not only IELTS students, IELTS trainers but also ESL students and educators in general.

First and foremost, it would be an oversimplification to assume that using synonyms can guarantee an improvement of lexical resources. As examined by the research, lexical variety and lexical accuracy are independent features, both of which need careful consideration. While lexical variety is more commonly perceived, lexical accuracy in terms of collocation, connotation, and nuances is often neglected, even for intermediate-advanced students. This highlights the importance of ESL educators in drawing students’ attention to both aspects, using appropriate vocabulary teaching strategies to expand not only students’ vocabulary size but also to reinforce students’ thorough understanding of lexical knowledge. This includes teaching common collocations, register awareness, and subtle connotative differences between words (Schmitt, 2010; Webb, 2008). This recognition also aligns with the claim of Laufer (1998), who stated that both the breadth

and the depth of vocabulary is of great significance, and none should come at the expense of the other.

Furthermore, the notion of near-synonyms and semantic prosody should be made clear for students, meaning teachers should emphasize the fact that synonyms are rarely fully interchangeable. Instruction should explicitly address how lexical choices relate to rhetorical purpose and meaning. Emphasizing lexical precision over variety and highlighting cross-linguistic collocational differences can reduce transfer-related errors and support more effective expression. This emphasis helps students to take synonym use with more context sensitivity. In this sense, task-based learning, corpus-based activities, and comparative exercises are helpful in exposing students to subtle differences of near-synonyms, in terms of semantic connotations and nuances. To enhance, integrating corpus tools (e.g., COCA, Sketch Engine) can raise awareness of collocational patterns and semantic prosody. Activities such as guided synonym comparison and collocation mapping help learners identify subtle connotative differences (e.g., negative “set in” vs. positive “build up”), promoting more context-sensitive word choice. Moreover, formative assessment should also be focused on semantic appropriateness through analytic rubrics and portfolio-based tracking of lexical development. Timely feedback on prosodic errors can reinforce learning and promote more accurate vocabulary use over time.

Last but not least, the role of teachers in providing writing feedback is highly acknowledged. Instead of marking it merely as “incorrect synonym use”, teachers should provide students with nuanced explanations and alternative suggestions relating to inappropriate contextual usage, register, and connotation of a word. This encourages learners to reflect on these choices and fosters metalinguistic awareness, which is key for long-term development (Ellis, 2002).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Through a mixed research methodology, this study explored intermediate-advanced students' consciousness of synonym use in Writing Task 2 essays, focusing on their awareness of synonym use, related reasons for synonym use, as well as learners' challenges with collocation, lexical connotation, and contextual appropriateness. As shown from the results, although almost all IELTS students are highly aware of the vital role played by synonym use, their awareness

of more subtle layers of meaning, such as collocation, connotation, and nuances, remains limited.

The data highlights that for students of band 5.0-6.0, they primarily attribute their reliance on synonyms to repetition avoidance, followed by a need to show lexical variety. In contrast, the higher-level students are in, the less reliance they have on synonyms to avoid repetition. In other words, their concerns become more sophisticated, shifting to subtle reasons such as collocation or connotation awareness. Especially, it is worth noting that while students of both the 6.5 level and 7-7.5 level display a similar level of collocation or lexical variety awareness, their variation in connotation awareness is pronounced, implying that only advanced students pay significant attention to this aspect. This aligns with prior research (Lachica & Lydio, 2023) that emphasizes the importance of understanding synonymy not merely as a tool for variety but as a complex linguistic skill requiring semantic sensitivity.

Nonetheless, several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. The scope of this study was in relatively small sample size - ninety participants responding to eight closed-ended and one open-ended survey question, along with twelve writing samples. These limitations could be addressed in future research by involving a larger and more diverse sample, employing more varied research tools (e.g., interviews or classroom observations), and exploring instructional interventions focused on synonymy. Such studies would further illuminate how targeted vocabulary instruction impacts writing performance across different proficiency levels.

In conclusion, using synonyms should not take place at the surface but rather should be regarded as a linguistic competence that is of vital importance in academic writing. Therefore, second language instructors play an active role in helping students become aware of synonym complication by exposing students to contextual learning rather than rote learning of vocabulary. This teaching approach enables students to study vocabulary not as isolated items, but rather as collocations with specific tone, connotation, and implied meaning.

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APPENDIX:

Writing prompt: “Some people think governments should invest more in public transportation, while others believe more money should be spent on roads. Discuss both views and give your opinion.”

Student band 5-6 - IELTS Writing Task 2 Response

Sample 1:

Some people think the government should spend more money to improve public transport, but other people believe

it is better to use money to build more roads. I think public transportation is more useful.

Firstly, building roads helps people move easier, especially in the countryside. Many small towns still don't have enough roads, so if the government make more street, it will help connect places. However, too many roads may cause damage to the nature and increase traffic jams.

On the other hand, public vehicles like buses and trains are cheaper and better for the environment. They can carry many people at once, and it helps to reduce the number of private cars. Also, public transport produces less sound dirty, which makes the city cleaner and quieter.

In conclusion, I think governments should put money on public transportation because it is more helpful for people and protects the environment better than building more roads.

Sample 2:

Nowadays, cities are facing serious traffic problems. Some people believe that governments should invest more in building roads, while others think it is better to improve mass transit. I will discuss both views and share my opinion.

People who support road construction say that more roads help reduce car crowding and allow better movement. In rural areas where public travelling is limited, roads are especially essential. In addition, building highways and flyovers can improve the traffic structure and support economic development.

However, others believe mass transit is the key to solving traffic problems. Trains and buses can carry more people at once and reduce the use of personal cars. It is also better for the natural situation, helping cut down on pollution and fuel use. Moreover, using buses and metros is often cheaper and suitable for all citizens.

In my opinion, I agree with the second view. Governments should allocate more investment into public systems to make travel more efficient and eco-friendly.

Sample 3:

Some people think that improving public transport is the best way to solve traffic problems, while others believe governments should focus on roads. I will discuss both views.

Roads are important for private transport and business. More highways can reduce congestion during peak hours. Also, better roads allow transport service and goods to move faster. Especially in rural areas, improving roads is necessary.

However, public transport also plays an important role. It can carry more people and reduce fuel wasting. When people use commute vehicle like buses or trains, there will be fewer cars on the road. This can reduce traffic jams and help the environment.

I believe public transportation should be prioritized because it is more sustainable and useful for the majority of people. Governments should make long-term investment in moving systems to reduce traffic in the future.

Sample 4:

Nowadays, traffic is a serious issue in big cities. Some people think governments should invest more in public transportation, while others think spending more on road systems is better. Both ideas have reasons of support.

Supporters of roads believe they help traffic flow better. In fast-growing cities, building wider roads is needed to handle the increase of cars. Also, good roads help upgrade the urban and support business activities.

However, public transport is more economic for people who cannot afford a private car. Using moving facilities like the metro or bus also helps the environment and reduces traffic. If the government improves the train system, people will be more likely to use it.

In my opinion, public transport should get more investment because it serves more people and is better for the natural condition.

Student band 6.5 - IELTS Writing Task 2 Response

Sample 5:

In many urban areas, traffic problems are becoming more serious. Some people think that the government should concentrate on developing public transportation, while others argue that building more roads is a better approach. This essay will examine both sides before giving a personal viewpoint.

On the one hand, expanding the road system can help reduce traffic congestion. In crowded regions, constructing highways or broadening the streets can allow smoother

vehicle flow. Roads also play a key role in the transportation of goods, especially for logistics vehicles which move supplies across cities and provinces. Because of this, many believe the government should allocate funds on roads to improve travel efficiency.

On the other hand, public transit is considered a more long-term and eco-friendly solution. Public transport systems such as buses and trains help reduce the number of private cars, which leads to less congestion and lower air pollution. Furthermore, these systems are more accessible and affordable for most citizens. They can also help improve the natural condition by cutting down fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.

In conclusion, while road construction has its own importance, I believe that governments should allocate more funds to public transportation. It provides greater benefits for both individuals and the environmental situation in the long term.

Sample 6:

In modern society, traffic congestion has become a major concern, especially in big cities. While some people believe that governments should allocate more funds to mass transit, others argue that improving the road system is more important. This essay will discuss both sides before presenting my view.

Supporters of road investment argue that roads are essential for daily movement. Many people rely on personal cars or private commuting to get to work or school. Improving highways and building new roads can help reduce car overload and make travelling more convenient. In addition, better road systems can support logistic movement, especially for delivery trucks that need to travel long distances.

On the other hand, many people think that governments should spend money on mass transit such as buses, trains, and metros. Public transport is more efficient, reduces the number of private vehicles on the street, and helps protect the natural environment. Furthermore, public systems are more budget-saving for people who cannot afford cars or taxis. It is also a long-term solution to air pollution and traffic problems.

In my opinion, while roads are important for some areas, investing in public transportation is more sustainable. It helps solve multiple problems at once and benefits a wider group of people.

Sample 7:

There is ongoing debate about whether governments should improve road infrastructure or focus more on developing public commuting systems. Both options have visible advantages, and this essay will discuss both views before presenting a personal viewpoint.

Those who support road development argue that roads are essential for daily movement, especially for people who use individual transportations. In rural or distant areas, public commuting like buses or metros is often not available, so maintaining road quality becomes crucial. Roads also assist in economic deliverance, helping trucks and shipping vehicles carry goods between provinces.

On the other hand, public transportation can solve many urban difficulties. It reduces the number of private cars, which results in fewer traffic jams and a healthier environment. Moreover, it is more cost-effective and convenient for citizens. If the public transport network is reliable, on time, and well-connected, more people are likely to choose it over personal vehicles.

In conclusion, although roads play a key role in some areas, I believe that governments should allocate more resources to public transportation. It offers long-term benefits for the people and improves overall city mobility and environmental health.

Sample 8:

Some people believe that the government should spend more money on public transportation, while others think that investing in roads is more necessary. This essay will discuss both views and explain why I support the first opinion.

Supporters of road development argue that expanding highways and improving existing roads can help reduce traffic congestion. Roads are important for individuals who use private cars for daily travel. In addition, well-maintained roads are essential for traffic transition, such as trucks transporting products between cities, and for emergency vehicles like ambulances and fire trucks.

On the other hand, investing in public transportation systems like buses, subways, and trains can reduce the use of private vehicles. This helps improve the natural circumstance by cutting down on emissions and reducing air pollution. Moreover, public transport is more economically suitable for many people, especially in urban areas where owning a car

can be expensive. A reliable and safe public transport system can also save time and make commuting more convenient.

In my view, the government should allocate more funds to public transportation because it provides long-term benefits for both the environment and city dwellers. Although roads are necessary, relying too much on private vehicles will only cause more congestion and pollution in the future

Student band 7-7.5 - IELTS Writing Task 2 Response**Sample 9:**

There is a debate about whether governments should allocate more investment toward public transportation or whether priority should be given to developing road infrastructure. Both options offer significant advantages, and this essay will discuss each before presenting my own view.

Advocates for road development argue that well-maintained highways and thoroughfares are indispensable for the efficient movement of private vehicles and freight logistics. Roads facilitate not only daily commuting but also the delivery of goods and emergency services. Many also believe that improving the existing road network will enhance connectivity between urban and rural areas, thereby promoting regional development. Therefore, governments should direct adequate financial resources toward road construction and maintenance.

On the other hand, investment in public transportation systems such as buses, trains, and trams offers a more sustainable and long-term solution to urban mobility challenges. Efficient public transit can significantly alleviate traffic congestion by decreasing the reliance on personal vehicles. Furthermore, it helps mitigate environmental degradation by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution. Public transport is often a more cost-efficient option for many citizens, especially those in lower-income brackets. In addition, well-planned transit networks improve accessibility and social inclusion.

In conclusion, while road infrastructure plays a vital role in transportation, I contend that governments should prioritize funding public transportation due to its broader environmental and social benefits. However, this should not come at the complete expense of road development.

Sample 10:

There is ongoing discourse regarding whether governing bodies should allocate more finances to urban commuting modalities or focus primarily on thoroughfare advancement. Both alternatives possess significant advantages, and this essay will explore both perspectives before articulating my own stance.

Proponents of road infrastructure argue that optimal arterial conditions are indispensable for daily transit by private automobiles. In numerous suburban and rural zones, mass transit systems such as railways or subways are unavailable, rendering roads the sole means for daily conveyance. Moreover, roads facilitate economic transportation logistics, with freight trucks delivering commodities across territories. Well-engineered highways and expanded roads can alleviate traffic congestion and ensure smoother vehicular movement.

Conversely, advocates for public transport contend that options like buses, trains, and metros offer a more sustainable resolution. By decreasing the quantity of personal vehicles on roadways, public transport can enhance the natural milieu by lowering emissions and pollution. Public transportation is also more cost-efficient for many individuals who cannot afford private cars, making it a more equitable alternative. Additionally, efficient and reliable mass transit networks can incentivize people to favor it over driving, thus reducing overall traffic issues.

In conclusion, although roads hold their intrinsic importance, I believe that governing bodies should allocate more funds to public transportation. This strategy offers long-term environmental benefits and serves a wider segment of the population.

Sample 11

Deciding whether governments should invest more in road infrastructure or public commuting networks is a crucial matter for urban progression. This essay will analyze both perspectives and provide my own standpoint.

Proponents of road enhancement argue that thoroughfares are fundamental for daily transit, especially for individuals relying on private conveyances like cars. In rural or isolated regions, public commuting such as busways or metro lines is frequently scarce, so preserving roadways is essential. Roads also facilitate economic distribution by enabling freight carriers and logistics trucks to transport commodities efficiently between areas. Expanding highways and

constructing additional roads can diminish congestion and increase travel convenience.

Conversely, many advocate that funding should be funneled into public conveyance systems such as buses, trains, and subways. These systems can substantially decrease the quantity of personal automobiles, resulting in less traffic gridlock and an improved ecological state. Public transit is also more economically viable and practical for citizens, particularly those who cannot afford private vehicles. If mass transit is dependable and secure, it incentivizes higher usage, benefiting both environmental sustainability and urban movement.

From my perspective, while roads are indispensable in certain locations, governments ought to dedicate more capital to public transportation. This approach offers numerous enduring advantages, including environmental preservation and enhanced accessibility for a wider population.

Sample 12:

Some people believe that governments should allocate more funding to public transportation, while others think investing in roads is more necessary. This essay will discuss both views and explain why I support the first opinion.

Supporters of road investment argue that expanding highways and improving current roads can help decrease traffic congestion. Roads are important for individuals who use private cars for daily travel. In addition, well-maintained roads are essential for traffic transition, such as trucks transporting products between cities, and emergency vehicles like ambulances and fire trucks.

On the other hand, investing in public transportation systems such as buses, subways, and trains can reduce the use of private vehicles. This helps improve the natural circumstance by cutting down on emissions and reducing air pollution. Moreover, public transport is more economically suitable for many people, especially in urban areas where owning a car can be expensive. A reliable and safe public transport system can also save time and make commuting more convenient.

In my view, governments should allocate more funds to public transportation because it provides long-term benefits for both the environment and city dwellers. Although roads are necessary, relying too much on private vehicles will only cause more congestion and pollution in the future.

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