



Paradigmatic Lexical Relations in EFL Contexts: Theoretical and Pedagogical Approaches to Homonymy

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Abstract

A comprehensive command of vocabulary is fundamental to second language development, as lexical knowledge underpins all receptive and productive skills and is therefore a key predictor of academic performance across age groups. Beyond its communicative value in enabling precise expression of ideas, emotions, and arguments, vocabulary depth supports learners' ability to interpret meaning, negotiate ambiguity, and engage effectively in both oral and written discourse. Within this broader lexical landscape, paradigmatic lexical relations particularly synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, polysemy, and homonymy play a crucial role in structuring the mental lexicon and shaping learners' semantic awareness. This study examines homonymy through the lens of paradigmatic relations in EFL contexts, exploring the theoretical significance of lexical ambiguity as well as the pedagogical challenges it presents in classroom practice. Drawing on survey data from 140 primary and secondary Albanian learners of English, the findings reveal a consistent pattern of difficulty: students encounter homonyms infrequently in their lessons, perceive them as highly challenging, and show limited confidence in distinguishing and using homonymous forms. These patterns reflect a convergence of limited instructional exposure, insufficient use of multimodal teaching aids, and low learner autonomy, all of which hinder the development of deeper lexical understanding and the ability to resolve semantic ambiguity. The results underscore the need for more explicit, systematic, and context rich pedagogical approaches to homonymy within EFL instruction in order to better support learners' lexical growth and overall communicative competence.

1. INTRODUCTION

David Wilkins' observation that "without grammar very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (Wilkins, 1972). has long served as an axiomatic starting point for understanding the centrality of vocabulary in second language development. The idea that lexical knowledge underpins human cognition and communication resonates with earlier philosophical claims such as Herder's (2002) assertion that "the human spirit thinks with words," emphasizing the intimate connection between language, thought, and the human experience. Contemporary linguists similarly stress the foundational role of lexical resources, with Goddard and Wierzbicka (2014) arguing that lexical items shape social relationships, systems of knowledge, and cultural values.

Within applied linguistics, the centrality of vocabulary is widely acknowledged (Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2010). Vocabulary knowledge is a key predictor of success in both receptive and productive skills: it directly affects reading comprehension (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014; Nation, 2013), listening comprehension (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012), and oral fluency (de Jong et al., 2013). In written production, lexical sophistication and diversity strongly correlate with overall writing quality (Crossley & McNamara, 2012; Laufer & Nation, 1995). Teachers frequently observe that communication collapses when learners lack essential lexical items, a point also supported empirically in psycholinguistic models of lexical access (Levelt, 1993).

Vocabulary knowledge entails far more than simple accumulation of word forms; it includes depth of knowledge, semantic networks, and the ability to process lexical relations (Read, 2004; Haastrup & Henriksen, 2000). Paradigmatic lexical relations such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, polysemy, and homonymy constitute the structural backbone of the mental lexicon (Aitchison, 2012; Cruse, 2004). Among these, homonymy presents particular difficulties. English contains numerous word pairs sharing identical phonological and orthographic forms but conveying unrelated meanings. Distinguishing homonymy from polysemy where meanings are distinct yet related is essential for semantic processing (Lyons, 1977; Cruse, 1986).

Lexical ambiguity poses cognitive and pedagogical challenges. Research in psycholinguistics demonstrates that homonyms increase lexical decision times, introduce competing semantic activations, and can hinder comprehension, especially for L2 learners (Swinney, 1979; Rodd, Gaskell & Marslen-Wilson, 2002). For EFL learners with developing lexicons, homonymous forms often cause confusion, misinterpretation, and processing delays, negatively affecting reading comprehension and contextual inference (Schmitt, 2010; Nation, 2013).

Addressing homonymy therefore plays an important role in learners' overall lexical depth. Understanding paradigmatic relations helps learners build robust semantic networks and supports deeper conceptualization of word meaning (Read, 2004; Henriksen, 1999). As Carter and McCarthy (2016) argue, vocabulary teaching must involve exploring not only individual items but also the semantic relationships that link them. Developing awareness of homonymy strengthens learners' ability to deal with ambiguity and improves their inferencing strategies a key component of vocabulary acquisition in naturalistic and instructional settings.

Given the cognitive and pedagogical significance of paradigmatic lexical relations, this paper explores how structured work on homonymy can enhance lexical knowledge in EFL learners. By examining semantic contrasts, contextual cues, and meaning differentiation techniques, the study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of lexical depth and to propose informed pedagogical strategies for handling lexical ambiguity in the language classroom.

1.1. The Importance of Teaching Vocabulary

Teaching vocabulary occupies a central position in the broader process of language learning, and its importance cannot be overstated. While grammar provides the structural framework of a language, vocabulary constitutes the substance without which meaningful communication

cannot occur. No matter how well students master grammatical forms, communication becomes limited and superficial if they lack the words to express ideas, emotions, and intentions. Words are the primary building blocks of meaning, and the ability to choose the right word in the right situation forms the basis of both receptive comprehension and productive communication. As a result, vocabulary learning is far more complex than the simple memorization of definitions; it requires repeated exposure, meaningful use, and deep cognitive processing.

Despite this central role, vocabulary has historically received insufficient attention in many classrooms. Gairns and Redman (1998) highlight a recurring issue: teachers often spend a large portion of class time providing explanations and definitions, while blackboards become cluttered with long lists of vocabulary items that students rarely practice in meaningful contexts. This imbalance results in passive knowledge students may recognize these words but struggle to retrieve and use them spontaneously. Moreover, expanding vocabulary size is only one dimension of lexical development. Equally crucial is improving the *quality* of students' lexical knowledge, including their understanding of word forms, connotations, collocations, morphological variations, and register. When learners' vocabulary lacks depth, they experience slow processing, frequent misunderstandings, and limited expressive capacity. Poor lexical quality can hinder reading comprehension, speaking fluency, and overall proficiency.

The growing scholarly interest in vocabulary studies further supports its significance. Researchers have increasingly turned their attention to the study of word meanings and lexical acquisition processes. Studies have demonstrated that communication breakdowns frequently arise from lexical problems rather than grammatical inaccuracies (Allen, 1983). Often, learners know the structure of a sentence but cannot select the appropriate word, resulting in unintended or unclear messages. As Gairns and Redman (1998) observe, some of the most amusing and sometimes serious errors occur when learners are unaware of the appropriacy or contextual restrictions of certain lexical items. This highlights the importance of teaching not only word meanings but also the pragmatic and situational dimensions of vocabulary.

Vocabulary teaching must therefore move beyond rote memorization to embrace the associative, relational nature of word learning. Research in psycholinguistics and applied linguistics emphasizes that vocabulary is acquired through networks of meaning. Words are not learned in isolation; they gain significance through paradigmatic relations (synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms), syntagmatic relations (collocations), and semantic fields. Morgan and Rinvulcri (2004) compellingly note that "learning words is a relational process... like making friends with the words of a target language." This perspective reminds us that vocabulary development requires repeated encounters in meaningful contexts and emotionally engaging experiences that support long-term retention.

Given the complexity of the language system, Lindsay and Knight (2006) emphasize that teachers must guide learners through the multiple dimensions of knowing a word: what it means, how it is formed, and how it is used. This aligns with the incremental model of vocabulary acquisition, which suggests that learners develop partial knowledge that gradually deepens through exposure and use. Effective vocabulary instruction must therefore integrate

pronunciation, form, meaning, collocation, and usage patterns, ensuring that learners can activate vocabulary both receptively and productively.

Schmitt (2000) reinforces the argument by asserting that vocabulary and lexical units lie at the core of communication. Without vocabulary, no amount of grammatical knowledge can enable meaningful interaction. Conversely, learners can often convey basic meanings with limited grammar if they possess sufficient vocabulary. This reality underscores the foundational role of lexis not only in communication but also in progressing through higher levels of proficiency. A well-developed vocabulary also contributes to learner confidence; when students possess a wide range of words, they participate more actively in discussions, express ideas with clarity, and engage more deeply in academic and social exchanges.

In summary, vocabulary teaching is not merely a supporting component of language education but a decisive factor in learners' communicative competence. It enables accurate expression, fosters comprehension, enriches cognitive engagement, and supports all four language skills. Because vocabulary is learned associatively and develops incrementally, teachers must adopt methods that encourage repeated exposure, contextualized practice, and deep cognitive processing. By doing so, we equip learners not only with more words but with the ability to use those words precisely, confidently, and creatively.

1.2. The Importance of Teaching Homonymy

The importance of teaching homonymy within English language instruction cannot be underestimated, particularly given the complexity and richness of English vocabulary. English contains a substantial number of word pairs or even larger sets that share identical spelling and pronunciation yet differ completely in meaning. These homonymous items occur across a wide variety of contexts, and their semantic divergence can often be subtle or highly context-dependent. Since meaning is the cornerstone of human communication, all other linguistic components phonology, orthography, morphology, and syntax work collectively to convey meaningful messages. As Gairns and Redman (1998) note, understanding homonymy is an essential part of helping learners recognize the boundaries between lexical items and avoid confusion in both comprehension and production. Developing this awareness is crucial because vocabulary is the primary medium through which individuals express thoughts, ideas, emotions, and intentions with clarity and precision.

One of the most persistent challenges faced by language teachers is distinguishing for learners the difference between *homonymy* and *polysemy*. While the two phenomena share surface similarities, their underlying semantic relationships are entirely different. Teachers frequently struggle to explain why two identical word forms may have unrelated meanings (homonymy) or why, in some cases, a single form possesses multiple, yet semantically connected, meanings (polysemy). According to Antrushina (1994), polysemy refers to "the existence of a single word form with two different yet closely related lexical meanings," whereas homonymy involves "two or more words which are identical in sound form and spelling, or at least in one of these aspects, but different in meaning." For learners, recognizing these distinctions is

fundamental to accurate interpretation and effective communication, yet mastering them can be daunting due to the abstract nature of semantic relationships.

Teaching paradigmatic lexical relations particularly those involving identical phonological or graphemic forms paired with different and sometimes historically unrelated meanings can be both fascinating and confusing for students. The linguistic complexity arises not only from the sheer number of homonyms in English, but also from the need to understand the deeper layers of semantics behind each lexical item. Many homonyms have evolved through historical shifts, borrowings, or semantic drift, making their present-day forms deceptively identical despite having distinct origins. This complexity often forces teachers to make difficult pedagogical decisions: whether to explore the deeper semantic structure of these items or to provide brief, surface-level explanations. For beginners, particularly those at elementary levels, a detailed exploration may feel overwhelming, while insufficient explanation can lead to lasting confusion.

Therefore, teaching homonymy effectively requires a carefully balanced approach incorporating creativity, scaffolding, contextualization, and practice. Teachers should implement strategies that foster vocabulary awareness this may include contrastive analysis, visual aids, sentence-level disambiguation, semantic mapping, and communicative practice. Such methods help learners not only recognize homonyms but also understand how meaning shifts in relation to context. When students learn to examine surrounding textual or situational clues, they develop the critical thinking skills required to resolve ambiguities. This, in turn, strengthens overall linguistic proficiency and enhances reading comprehension. Homonymy instruction also encourages learners to explore the nuances of word meaning, deepening their understanding of lexical networks and the structural features of the English language.

Despite its challenges, the process of teaching homonymy can be intellectually rewarding and engaging for both teachers and students. The deliberate introduction of homonymous pairs often sparks curiosity, encourages classroom interaction, and stimulates cognitive engagement as students try to infer or negotiate meaning. Varied methods such as group activities, matching tasks, contextual guessing exercises, and multimedia examples support deeper learning and create an interactive environment conducive to vocabulary development and linguistic awareness.

Furthermore, navigating the complexities of homonymy strengthens students' overall language competence. Given that English, due to its historical evolution and monosyllabic tendencies, contains a particularly high number of homonyms, teaching them becomes essential for building comprehensive vocabulary knowledge. Clear definitions, accompanied by precise examples, help learners grasp core linguistic characteristics of English such as phonetic identity between words, the prevalence of free forms, and the intricacies of the analytic language structure. Homonymy instruction also familiarizes students with paradigmatic relations within the lexicon and helps them understand how words can substitute one another depending on meaning and context.

Since homonymy frequently leads to ambiguity, misunderstanding, and misinterpretation, raising students' awareness of contextual clues becomes especially important. Learners who

develop strong skills in interpreting homonyms become more adept at navigating complex texts and communicative situations. They gain confidence in discerning multiple meanings, selecting appropriate lexical choices, and performing effectively in reading, speaking, and writing tasks. In essence, mastering homonymy equips students with a deeper, more flexible command of English vocabulary and enhances their ability to communicate with precision and creativity.

1.3. General Vocabulary Teaching vs. Homonymy-Specific Teaching

General vocabulary teaching and homonym-specific instruction differ significantly in their aims, cognitive demands, and pedagogical requirements. General vocabulary teaching typically seeks to broaden learners' lexical knowledge by introducing high-frequency words, thematic vocabulary sets, and contextually relevant expressions. This type of instruction emphasizes the development of form–meaning connections, morphological awareness, semantic categorization, and the ability to use new words appropriately in discourse. Activities often focus on recognition, recall, and application of single, stable meanings, enabling learners to gradually build a robust lexicon that supports reading comprehension, oral fluency, and academic language proficiency. In contrast, homonym-specific instruction addresses a more complex domain of vocabulary learning that involves words sharing identical forms but carrying multiple, often unrelated meanings. Because homonyms inherently introduce lexical ambiguity, their acquisition requires learners to engage in higher-order semantic processing, including the ability to discriminate between meanings, interpret contextual cues, and recognize shifts in meaning across discourse settings.

Unlike general vocabulary teaching where contextual support often reinforces a single intended meaning homonym instruction must explicitly foreground the role of contextual inference, syntactic environment, collocations, and pragmatic factors in determining meaning. Learners must therefore develop metalinguistic awareness, particularly regarding how identical lexical forms can alter meaning depending on usage patterns, sentence structure, and communicative purpose. This makes homonymic instruction both more demanding and more essential for advanced language proficiency, as misunderstanding ambiguous lexical items can impede comprehension, cause miscommunication, and affect reading fluency. Additionally, while general vocabulary instruction may rely on repetition, semantic grouping, and exposure through reading, the teaching of homonyms requires targeted strategies such as contrastive examples, semantic mapping, disambiguation exercises, and explicit guidance in decoding contextual signals. As a result, homonym teaching plays a crucial role in helping learners navigate the subtleties of English, refine their interpretive skills, and strengthen their responsiveness to meaning variability competencies that go beyond the foundational goals of general vocabulary development.

2. QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

2.1. Exploring Student Views and experiences with homonymy learning tools

Understanding homonymous words can be challenging for students, especially when a single word carries multiple meanings depending on context. To support learning, teachers often use

various teaching aids such as visual materials, audio resources, digital tools, contextual examples, and interactive activities to help students distinguish between the different meanings of homonyms. This questionnaire aims to gather Albanian students' perceptions, experiences, and challenges regarding the use of different teaching aids in learning homonymous words. It focuses on identifying which types of teaching aids visual, audio, digital, contextual, and interactive students find most effective in helping them understand and distinguish between multiple meanings of homonyms. The questionnaire also examines how frequently these aids are used in language lessons, how they influence students' confidence and learning outcomes, and what difficulties students may encounter when interacting with them. The results will provide insights into students' preferences and needs, supporting more effective instructional practices in teaching homonymy.

2.2. Research questions

Which types of teaching aids (visual, audio, digital, contextual, interactive) do students perceive as most helpful for understanding homonymous words?

How do students evaluate the effectiveness of teaching aids in helping them distinguish between different meanings of homonyms?

How frequently do students report that teaching aids are used in their homonymy lessons, and how does this influence their learning experience?

How do students feel teaching aids support their comprehension of contextual clues needed for interpreting homonyms accurately?

Which teaching aids do students prefer and why, based on their personal learning experiences with homonymy?

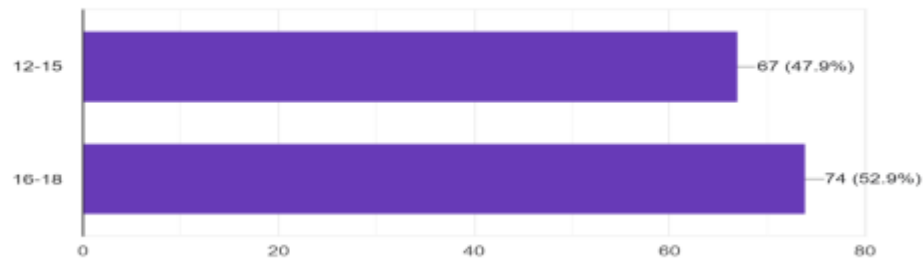
2.3. Quantitative analysis

A questionnaire was administered to 140 students aged 12 to 18 drawn from a range of schools across Albania in order to explore their perceptions and experiences concerning the use of teaching aids in learning homonymous words. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure representation from both rural and urban educational contexts, as well as from schools characterized by diverse socioeconomic and instructional environments. Participants were selected based on their availability and their engagement in English language learning, with particular emphasis on exposure to vocabulary-focused instruction. The instrument was administered in English, enabling learners to interact directly with the linguistic features under investigation.

This balanced and heterogeneous sample offers a comprehensive perspective on student experiences across different developmental stages, academic settings, and geographical environments. Such variation allows the study to identify contrasts in learning needs, cognitive maturity, resource availability, and levels of exposure to English instruction across demographic subgroups. The questionnaire was created and distributed through Google Forms,

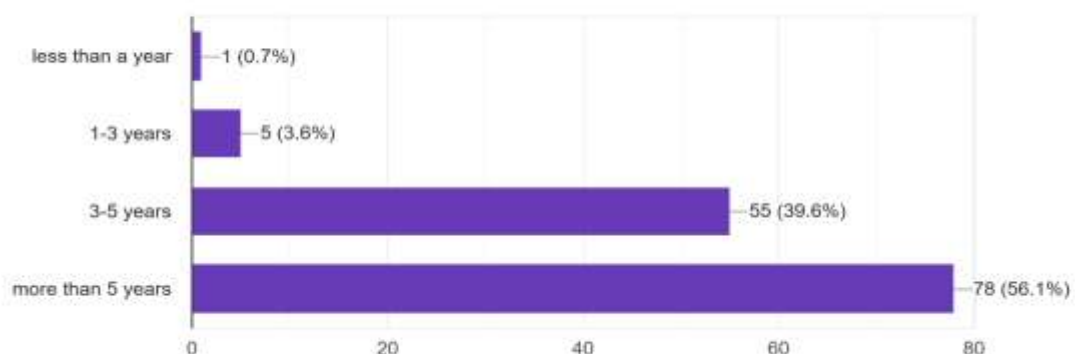
ensuring an efficient, accessible, and user-friendly means of collecting responses from participants across Albania. The exclusive use of English in the instrument further ensured that students engaged authentically with the target language, thereby generating data that more accurately reflects their understanding of homonymy, vocabulary-related teaching aids, and classroom practices in English language instruction.

1. Age
140 responses



The questionnaire was completed by a total of 140 students drawn from both primary and secondary education levels across Albania, ensuring a diverse and representative sample for the study. This broad participation allowed the research to capture a wide range of perspectives from learners at different developmental and academic stages. The age distribution of the respondents reflects this diversity: 67 students (47.9%) were between 12 and 15 years old, representing those attending the final years of primary school and the early stages of lower secondary. Meanwhile, 74 students (52.9%) were aged 16 to 18 and enrolled in upper secondary education. The balanced participation between younger and older students enhances the depth of the findings, enabling comparisons across educational levels and providing a more comprehensive understanding of how different age groups perceive the use of teaching aids in learning homonymous words. This distribution also strengthens the validity of the data by ensuring that the results are not limited to a single age category or schooling level but instead reflect the experiences of a broad spectrum of Albanian students.

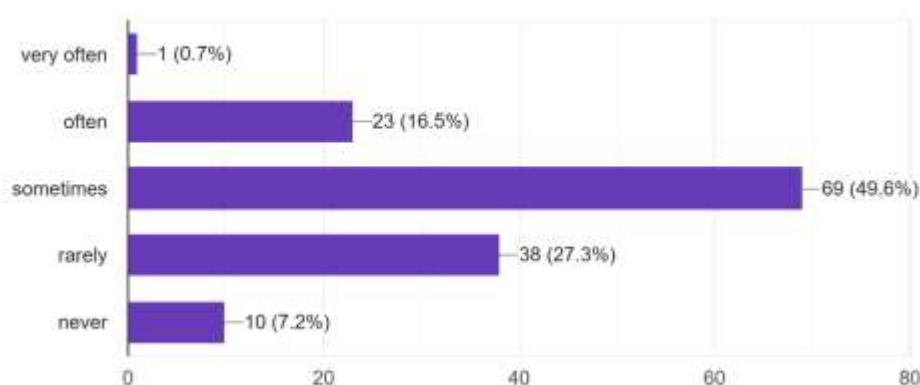
2. How long have you been learning English?
139 responses



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The results show that 139 students responded to the question regarding how long they have been learning English, revealing a learner group with substantial exposure to the language. Only 1 student (0.7%) reported learning English for less than a year, and 5 students (3.6%) indicated 1–3 years of study, suggesting that very few participants were beginners. A significant portion, 55 students (39.6%), had been studying English for 3–5 years, showing that many respondents possess an intermediate level of experience. The largest group, however, consisted of the 78 students (56.1%) who reported learning English for more than five years, indicating that over half of the participants have long-term, sustained exposure to the language. This distribution suggests that majority of students are already familiar with English vocabulary learning practices, making them capable of evaluating the effectiveness of teaching aids especially in understanding more complex lexical phenomena such as homonymy. It also reflects the strong emphasis placed on English language learning across both primary and secondary education in Albania, where extended exposure supports deeper vocabulary acquisition and semantic awareness.

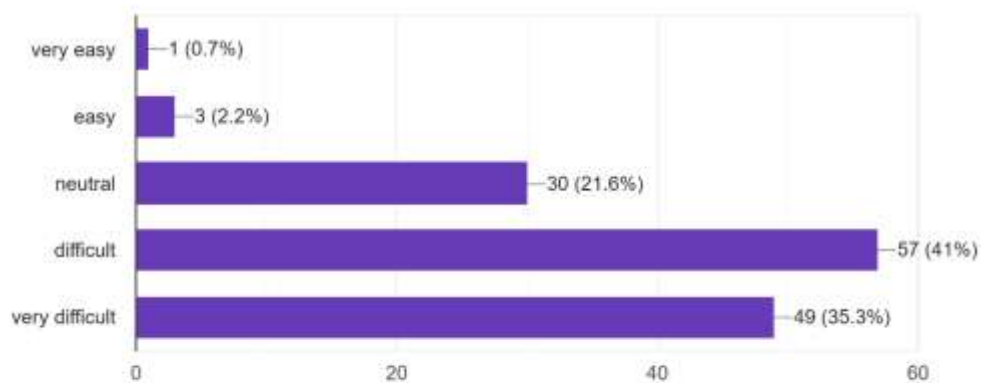
3. How often do you learn about homonyms (words with the same form but different meanings)?
139 responses



The responses show that 139 students answered the question regarding how often they learn about homonyms, revealing that exposure to this lexical topic is relatively limited in their English classes. Nearly half of the students (69 respondents, 49.6%) reported that they sometimes learn about homonyms, suggesting that instruction on this topic is occasional rather than systematic. A smaller group, 23 students (16.5%), stated that they learn about homonyms often, while only 1 student (0.7%) indicated learning about them very often, highlighting that frequent or consistent instruction in homonymy is rare. Meanwhile, a considerable portion of the participants 38 students (27.3%) reported that they rarely encounter this topic, and 10 students (7.2%) indicated that they never learn about homonyms in class. Overall, these results suggest that while homonymy is addressed to some extent across classrooms, it is not a regular focus in most students' learning experiences, which may contribute to challenges in grasping word meaning distinctions and contextual interpretation in English vocabulary learning.

4. How difficult do you find homonyms?

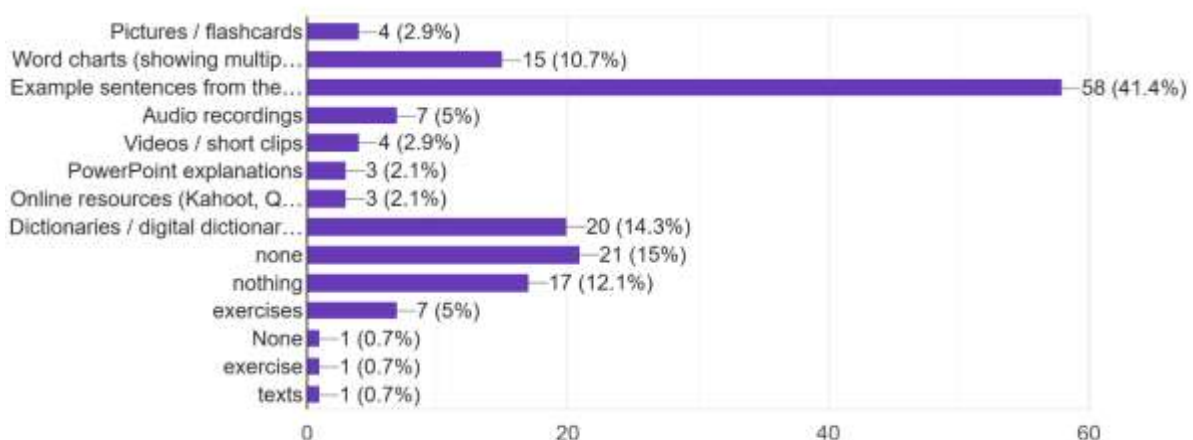
139 responses



The results from the 139 students who responded to this question indicate that the majority perceive homonyms as a challenging aspect of English vocabulary. A substantial proportion 57 students (41%) reported that they find homonyms difficult, while an additional 49 students (35.3%) stated that homonyms are very difficult, showing that more than three-quarters of the participants experience notable difficulty with distinguishing identical word forms that carry different meanings. In contrast, only 30 students (21.6%) described their perception as neutral, suggesting they neither struggle significantly nor find the topic straightforward. Very few students expressed ease with homonyms: only 3 students (2.2%) considered them easy, and just 1 student (0.7%) found them very easy, highlighting how rare it is for learners to feel confident in navigating homonymous words. Overall, these findings show that homonymy presents a major learning obstacle for most students, likely due to its abstract semantic nature and the need for strong contextual inference skills an insight that further underscores the importance of incorporating effective teaching aids to support comprehension and reduce confusion.

5. Which tools has your teacher used to explain homonyms? (Select all that apply)

140 responses



The responses from the 140 participating students reveal a clear pattern in the types of teaching

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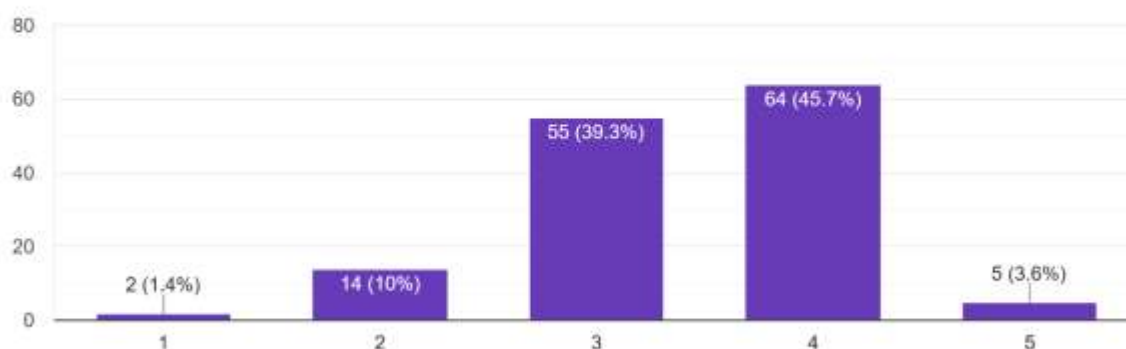
aids used in homonym instruction, with traditional, text-based methods continuing to dominate classroom practice. The most frequently reported tool was example sentences from the textbook, selected by 58 students (41.4%), indicating that written contextual examples remain the primary strategy teachers rely on when explaining homonymous words. Other resources were used far less often: word charts were noted by 15 students (10.7%), while audio recordings and audio-based exercises were each reported by only 7 students (5%). Visual aids such as pictures or flashcards and videos appeared minimally, with just 4 students (2.9%) mentioning each of these tools. Moderately used digital or reference-based aids included dictionaries or digital dictionaries, reported by 20 students (14.3%), and online platforms such as Kahoot or Quizlet, mentioned by 21 students (15%).

A striking finding is the significant number of students who reported no use of teaching aids at all. Specifically, 17 students (12.1%) selected “nothing,” and an additional 21 students (15%) indicated “none,” resulting in a combined 38 students (27.1%) who denied encountering any instructional tools for learning homonyms. A few individual responses such as “none,” “exercise,” and “texts” (each 0.7%) further reflect inconsistencies or gaps in the instructional support provided.

Overall, the data suggests that while some teachers incorporate a range of multimodal resources, homonym instruction in many classrooms remains heavily textbook-centered, with a considerable proportion of students reporting an absence of any supplementary teaching aids. These findings highlight a clear gap in pedagogical practice and point to the need for broader integration of visual, auditory, and digital supports to make homonym learning more engaging, effective, and accessible for EFL learners.

6. Visual aids (pictures, diagrams) help me understand homonyms more clearly. 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree (Scale 1–5)

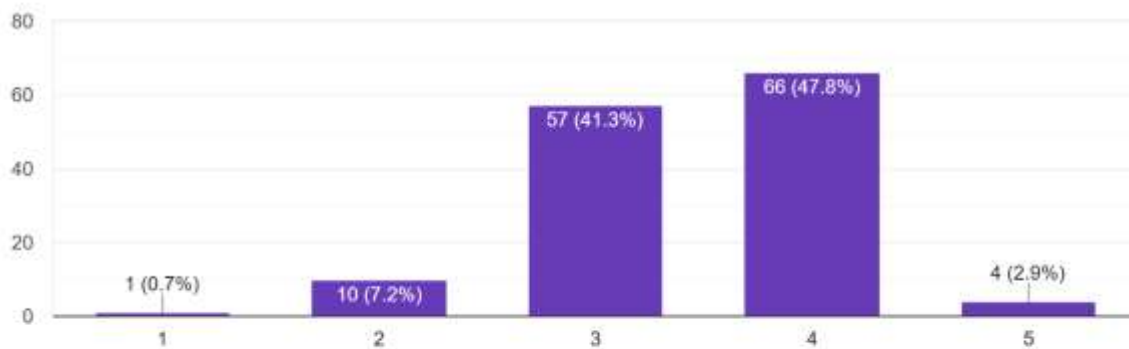
140 responses



The responses from the 140 students indicate an overall positive perception of visual aids such as pictures, diagrams, and other imagery in supporting their understanding of homonyms. A large proportion of students selected ratings on the higher end of the scale, with 64 students (45.7%) agreeing (rating 4) that visual aids help them interpret homonyms more clearly, and

an additional 55 students (39.3%) expressing moderate agreement (rating 3). Only a small number of students showed strong agreement, with 5 students (3.6%) selecting rating 5, suggesting that although visual materials are regarded as helpful, they are not universally considered the single most effective instructional tool. On the lower end of the scale, 14 students (10%) rated visual aids as a 2, and only 2 students (1.4%) strongly disagreed (rating 1), reflecting very limited dissatisfaction. Overall, nearly 85% of respondents placed their answers between 3 and 5, indicating a clear tendency toward positive attitudes. These findings suggest that despite the current scarcity of visual materials in many Albanian classrooms, students believe that if such aids were incorporated more regularly, they would meaningfully enhance clarity in distinguishing identical word forms and strengthen overall comprehension of homonyms.

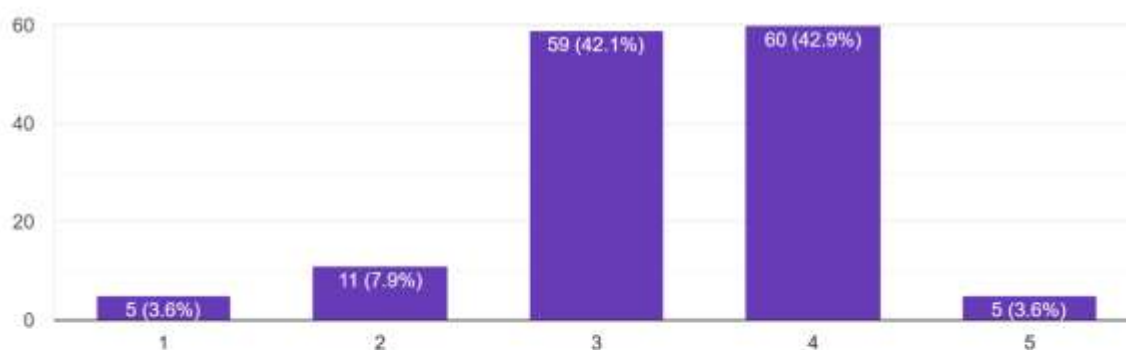
7. Sentences or contextual examples help me differentiate between homonym meanings. (Scale 1–5)
138 responses



The responses from 138 students show that most learners perceive *sentences and contextual examples* as an effective means of differentiating between the meanings of homonyms. Nearly half of the participants, 66 students (47.8%), rated this tool with a 4, indicating strong agreement that context significantly supports their understanding. Another 57 students (41.3%) selected 3, suggesting moderate agreement and reinforcing that the majority find contextual cues helpful, even if not always sufficient on their own. Only a small percentage expressed minimal benefit from contextual examples: 10 students (7.2%) rated this item as a 2, and just 1 student (0.7%) selected 1, reflecting strong disagreement. Meanwhile, 4 students (2.9%) rated contextual examples as 5, indicating very strong agreement and highlighting that a small number of learners rely heavily on context to disambiguate homonym meanings. Overall, these findings clearly suggest that contextualized instruction through example sentences, short texts, or situational frames is widely valued by students and plays a crucial role in helping them interpret identical word forms with different meanings. This aligns with the principle that contextual exposure facilitates deeper semantic processing and supports learners in developing more accurate and independent meaning-making strategies.

8. Audio tools (recordings, pronunciation apps) help me understand homonyms used in speech. (Scale 1–5)

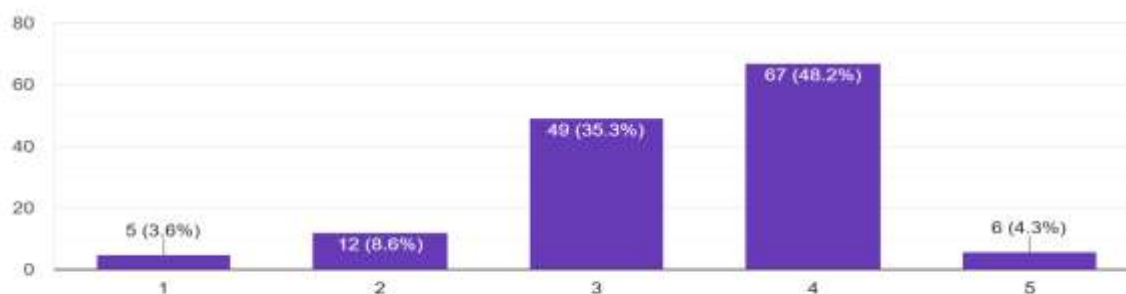
140 responses



The results from the 140 surveyed students indicate that audio tools such as recordings, pronunciation clips, and language-learning apps are generally viewed as helpful for understanding homonyms in spoken language, though slightly less effective compared to visual or contextual aids. Most students selected ratings in the mid-to-high range, with 60 students (42.9%) giving audio tools a rating of 4, suggesting strong agreement that these resources support their comprehension of homonyms in speech. Another 59 students (42.1%) selected a rating of 3, reflecting moderate agreement and showing that a large portion of students recognize at least some value in auditory support. Only a small number expressed dissatisfaction: 11 students (7.9%) rated audio tools as a 2, and 5 students (3.6%) assigned a rating of 1, indicating minimal disapproval or difficulty benefiting from audio-based instruction. Similarly, only 5 students (3.6%) gave the highest rating of 5, showing very strong agreement but suggesting that students rarely consider audio tools the single most effective resource. Overall, these findings indicate that while audio materials are appreciated and regarded as useful, they tend not to function as the most impactful standalone tool for learning homonyms. Instead, students appear to benefit most when audio input is integrated into a broader multimodal instructional approach that combines auditory, visual, and contextual elements to enhance understanding of homonyms within real-world spoken communication.

9. Videos make it easier to understand the different meanings of homonyms. (Scale 1–5)

139 responses

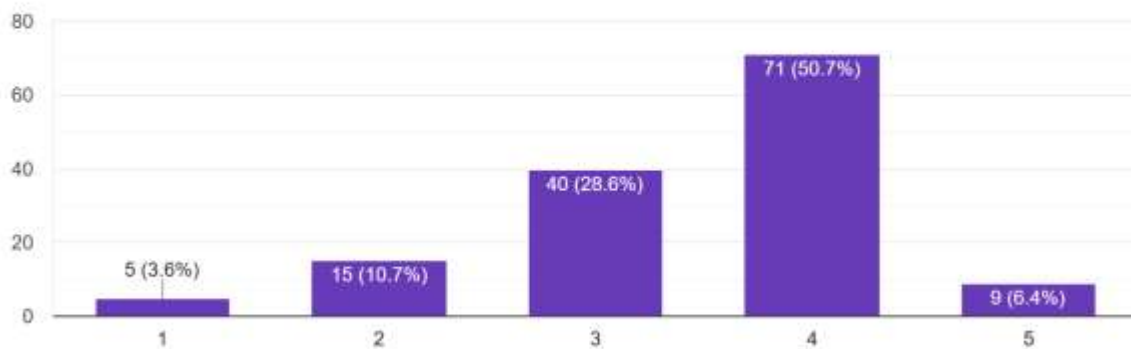


The 139 student responses indicate that videos are generally perceived as a helpful tool for

understanding the different meanings of homonyms, with most learners expressing moderate to strong agreement. The largest group, 67 students (48.2%), rated videos with a 4, suggesting that almost half of the respondents feel that multimodal visual–auditory input significantly aids their comprehension. Another 49 students (35.3%) selected 3, indicating that they find videos somewhat useful but not overwhelmingly so. At the highest end of the scale, 6 students (4.3%) chose 5, demonstrating very strong agreement that videos enhance clarity in distinguishing homonymous meanings. However, a small portion of students expressed lower levels of support, with 12 students (8.6%) rating videos as 2 and 5 students (3.6%) giving a rating of 1, showing disagreement with the usefulness of video-based explanations. Overall, these results suggest that videos are widely appreciated for providing contextualized, dynamic examples that make semantic contrasts more accessible, though they may not be universally effective for all learners. The findings highlight the value of integrating videos as part of a multimodal instructional approach, as their combination of imagery, narration, and situational context appears to support deeper understanding of homonymy for the majority of students.

10. Digital tools (apps, online quizzes, interactive games) help me remember homonyms better. (Scale 1–5)

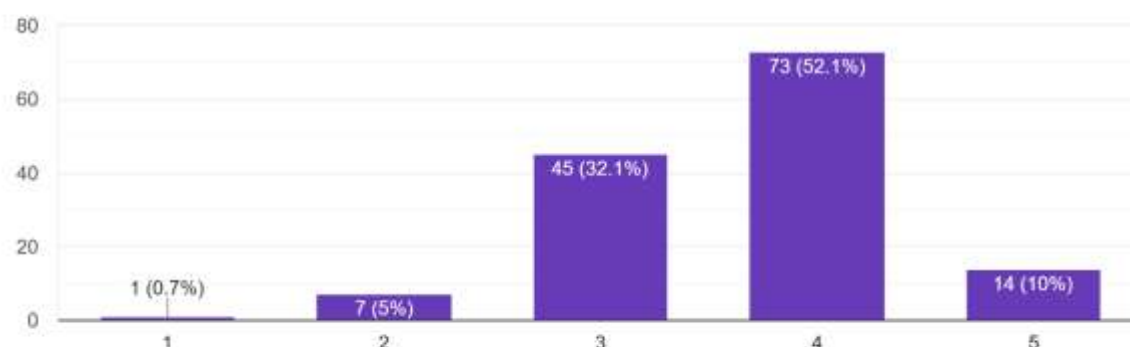
140 responses



The survey results show that students have a strongly positive perception of digital tools—such as educational apps, online quizzes, and interactive games in helping them remember homonyms. Among the 140 respondents, more than half (50.7%) rated the usefulness of digital tools as a 4 on a 5-point scale, indicating solid agreement that these resources support their learning. An additional 28.6% selected a rating of 3, reflecting moderate agreement and further confirming the general effectiveness of digital materials in reinforcing homonym knowledge. Only a small minority viewed digital tools as less helpful, with 3.6% choosing a rating of 1 and 10.7% selecting 2, suggesting that very few students consider them ineffective. Meanwhile, 6.4% awarded the highest rating of 5, demonstrating strong enthusiasm among a subset of learners. Overall, these results clearly indicate that most students regard digital tools as beneficial and engaging supports for learning homonyms, emphasizing their potential to enhance retention, motivation, and overall instructional effectiveness in language classrooms.

11. Using different teaching aids makes learning homonymy more enjoyable. (Scale 1–5)

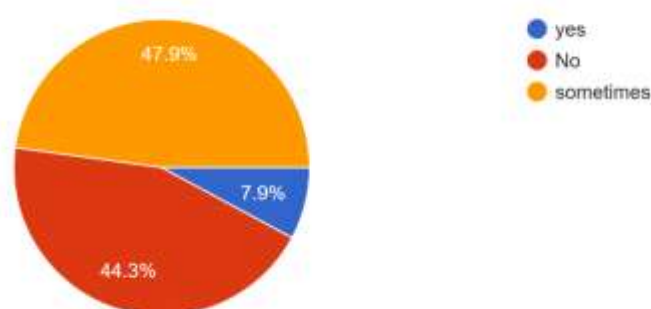
140 responses



The data shows that most students find the use of different teaching aids makes learning homonymy more enjoyable. Out of 140 respondents, the majority 52.1% (73 students) rated their enjoyment at 4 on the 5-point scale, indicating a strong positive perception. Another 32.1% (45 students) selected 3, suggesting moderate enjoyment and further reinforcing the overall positive trend. A smaller percentage, 10% (14 students), gave the highest rating of 5, showing that some learners find teaching aids extremely enjoyable. Only 5% (7 students) rated the item as 2, and a negligible 0.7% (1 student) rated it as 1, meaning very few respondents did not enjoy learning homonyms through varied teaching aids. Overall, the responses clearly indicate that incorporating diverse teaching materials significantly enhances students' enjoyment and engagement in learning homonymy.

12. I can correctly identify homonyms when I see them in sentences.

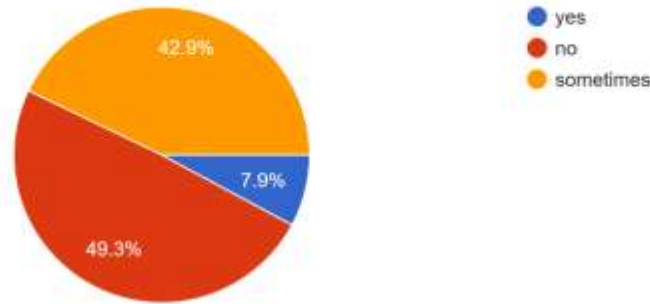
140 responses



The results indicate that students vary in their confidence when identifying homonyms in sentences, with the largest proportion selecting “sometimes.” Out of 140 respondents, 47.9% reported that they can sometimes correctly identify homonyms, suggesting that many students have partial understanding but may still struggle in certain contexts. Meanwhile, 44.3% of participants answered “No,” indicating that nearly half of the learners do not feel confident in identifying homonyms at all, which highlights a significant learning gap. Only 7.9% responded “Yes,” showing that a small minority can consistently recognize homonyms in sentences. Overall, the data suggests that while some students have developing skills, a considerable number require additional support and practice to accurately identify homonyms in context.

13. I can use homonyms correctly in my own speaking or writing.

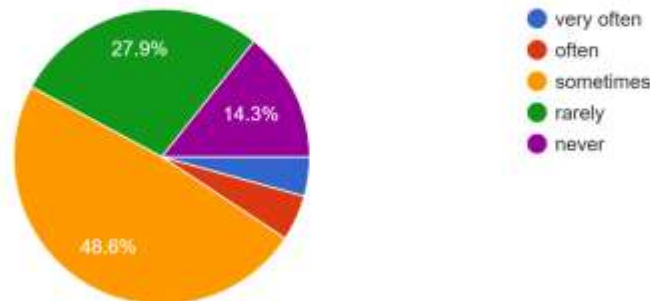
140 responses



The results show that many students struggle to use homonyms correctly in their own speaking or writing. Out of 140 respondents, nearly half 49.3% answered “No,” indicating that they do not feel confident using homonyms accurately in their communication. Another 42.9% selected “sometimes,” suggesting partial understanding but inconsistent application of homonyms in real contexts. Only 7.9% of learners responded “Yes,” demonstrating that a very small minority can reliably use homonyms correctly. Overall, the distribution reveals a significant need for targeted instruction and practice, as the majority of students either lack confidence or are only occasionally able to apply homonyms appropriately in their language production.

14. How often does your teacher teach you about homonyms in English class?

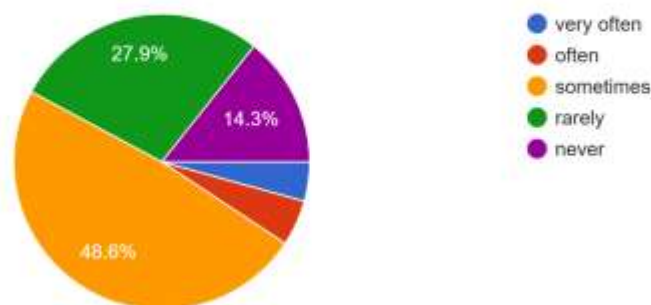
140 responses



The results indicate that students receive varying levels of instruction on homonyms in their English classes, with the majority experiencing only occasional exposure. Out of 140 respondents, 48.6% reported that their teacher teaches them about homonyms “sometimes,” making it the most common response. Another 27.9% said “rarely,” suggesting that for many students, homonyms are not a frequent part of the curriculum. Meanwhile, 14.3% selected “never,” indicating that a notable portion of students receive no instruction on homonyms at all. Only 5% said “often” and 4.3% said “very often,” revealing that consistent, regular teaching on homonyms is limited to a small minority of classes. Overall, the data suggests that homonym instruction is not prioritized in many English classrooms, potentially contributing to the difficulties students reported in identifying and correctly using homonyms in previous survey items.

14. How often does your teacher teach you about homonyms in English class?

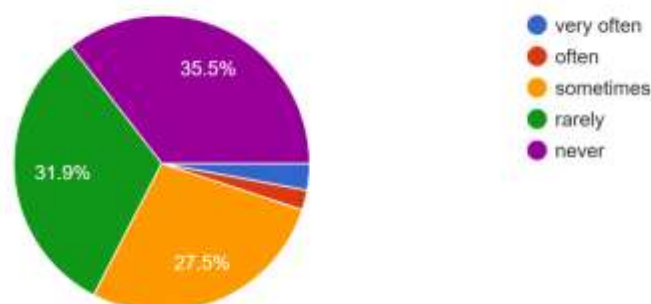
140 responses



The chart shows that students receive instruction on homonyms at varying but generally infrequent levels in their English classes. Out of 140 respondents, almost half 48.6% reported that their teacher teaches them about homonyms “sometimes,” making it the most common response. A further 27.9% indicated that homonyms are taught “rarely,” while 14.3% said they are “never” taught, revealing that for many students, homonym instruction is minimal or absent. Only 5% selected “often” and just 4.3% chose “very often,” indicating that consistent, frequent coverage of homonyms occurs in only a small number of classes. Overall, the results suggest that homonyms are not a regular focus in many English classrooms, which may help explain why a significant number of students reported difficulty identifying and using homonyms in earlier survey items.

15. How often do you use these tools yourself to learn homonyms?

138 responses



The responses indicate that students themselves use homonym-learning tools infrequently, despite earlier results showing that they find such tools helpful and enjoyable. Out of 138 respondents, the largest portion 35.5% reported “never” using these tools on their own, showing a significant lack of independent engagement. Another 31.9% indicated they use them “rarely,” suggesting that most students do not regularly take advantage of available digital or instructional resources outside of class. Meanwhile, 27.5% answered “sometimes,” showing occasional use, while very few students use them consistently, with only a small percentage selecting “often” or “very often.” Overall, the results suggest a major gap between students’ recognition of the value of digital tools and their actual personal use of them, highlighting a

need for increased motivation, guidance, or structured practice to encourage independent learning of homonyms.

3. DISCUSSION

The Albanian national English curriculum places a strong emphasis on vocabulary as an essential component of communicative competence. It aligns with CEFR descriptors and promotes the integration of authentic texts, contextualized learning tasks, and multimodal instructional input as key strategies for vocabulary development. Recent analyses of curriculum renewal in Albania further indicate a pedagogical shift toward communicative, learner-centered methodologies, positioning vocabulary learning within broader, functional language use rather than isolated word-level instruction. [acce.al]

Interpretation of the study's findings must also be situated within the significant resource disparities that distinguish rural from urban educational contexts in Albania. Rural schools frequently face poor infrastructure, shortages of instructional materials, and limited access to technological resources, while their urban counterparts generally benefit from better facilities and more consistent resource provision. The digital divide is particularly notable: only 47% of computers in rural schools are connected to the internet, significantly constraining students' access to multimedia vocabulary tools that support homonym learning. Transportation challenges and broader socioeconomic constraints further impede regular attendance for many rural students, diminishing their exposure to structured language instruction. These disparities produce measurable educational outcome gaps, with urban students completing, on average, two additional years of schooling and achieving higher national examination scores than their rural peers. [borgenproject.org] [brokenchalk.org]

Several linguistic and sociolinguistic characteristics of Albania also shape learners' acquisition of English homonyms, functioning alongside broader infrastructural and socioeconomic factors. Albanian differs markedly from English in its grammatical, phonological, and syntactic structures, and these structural contrasts can impede learners' ability to interpret English homonyms, which rely heavily on phonological similarity and contextual meaning. Albanian's distinct Indo-European features such as its complex vowel system and notable dialectal variation further influence how learners perceive and produce English homophones, thereby affecting homonym recognition. This internal variation is reinforced by the presence of two major dialects, Gheg and Tosk, which differ in key phonetic and phonological features. Research on Albanian dialect attitudes indicates ongoing shifts in how these features are evaluated and used across regions, potentially shaping learners' sensitivity to subtle sound contrasts required for distinguishing English homonyms. Additionally, negative language transfer from Albanian has been widely documented as a source of learner errors in English vocabulary and grammar. Because homonym comprehension requires flexible, context-dependent interpretation rather than fixed lexical equivalence, such transfer effects can lead to misinterpretation when Albanian semantic structures do not align with English ambiguity. Cultural and educational variables also play a role: studies of Albanian learners in international contexts emphasize that cultural familiarity, pedagogical sensitivity, and exposure to English-rich environments facilitate more effective vocabulary learning, while limited

exposure can constrain it. Within Albania itself, ongoing but uneven transitions toward communicative and culturally responsive teaching practices may support homonym acquisition; however, regional variation in the implementation of these approaches means that not all learners benefit equally from such pedagogical developments.

The difficulties learners reported in this study can be more fully interpreted through psycholinguistic models of lexical access, particularly those proposed by Swinney (1979) and Rodd, Gaskell, and Marslen-Wilson (2002). Swinney's findings demonstrate that, upon encountering a homonymous form, students automatically and exhaustively activate all lexical meanings, regardless of contextual bias. This model of autonomous, context-insensitive early access helps account for the survey's high perceived difficulty ratings: when learners lack systematic instructional exposure or well-developed inferencing strategies, the simultaneous activation of multiple meanings imposes a considerable cognitive burden. The fact that majority of students reported infrequent instruction in homonymy and a strong perception of difficulty is consistent with the notion that learners struggle to suppress irrelevant meanings without explicit guidance and sustained practice.

By contrast, the competition-based model advanced by Rodd et al. positions lexical access as an interactive process, in which activated meanings compete until contextual constraints gradually strengthen the appropriate interpretation. The survey results especially learners' low confidence in identifying and producing homonyms suggest that students have limited opportunities to develop the semantic networks required to resolve such competition. The predominance of traditional, text-based instructional methods, combined with the underuse of multimodal aids, further restricts the contextual richness needed to facilitate effective meaning selection. Because competition resolution depends on repeated and contextually varied encounters, the absence of such input aligns closely with students' continued difficulty distinguishing homonymous senses.

These findings also align with key principles in second language acquisition research. According to the Noticing Hypothesis, successful acquisition depends on learners' conscious registration of relevant linguistic features. The sporadic and low-salience presentation of homonyms reported in this study provides few opportunities for learners to notice critical form-meaning distinctions, especially those involving identical orthographic or phonological forms paired with divergent semantic content. Similarly, Depth of Processing accounts predict stronger retention when learners engage in effortful, elaborative, and evaluative processing. Yet learners' limited exposure to contextualized tasks, multimodal materials, and autonomous digital practice suggests that most classroom experiences involve shallow processing, with minimal involvement load and few opportunities to compare, evaluate, or generate meaning distinctions. These conditions naturally result in the superficial lexical knowledge reflected in the survey's measures of recognition and production.

Integrating these theoretical perspectives clarifies why homonymy remains a persistent source of difficulty under current instructional conditions. If learners are subject to exhaustive initial activation (Swinney) and must then navigate semantic competition (Rodd et al.), effective instruction must amplify noticing and promote deeper processing through explicit, frequent,

and contextually rich engagement with ambiguous forms. This includes multimodal input, contrastive analysis, guided inference tasks, and structured independent learning strategies. Aligning pedagogy with these principles would enable learners to move beyond partial recognition toward the flexible, context-sensitive mastery required to interpret and use homonyms confidently and accurately.

The overall findings from the survey present a clear picture of the challenges EFL learners face with homonymy, revealing a convergence of limited instructional exposure, high perceived difficulty, insufficient multimodal support, and low learner autonomy. Students reported encountering homonyms only occasionally in class, with many indicating rare or no instruction at all, suggesting that homonymy is not systematically integrated into vocabulary teaching. This irregular exposure correlates strongly with learners' perceptions, as more than three-quarters of respondents described homonyms as difficult or very difficult, reflecting the cognitive demands of distinguishing identical forms with unrelated meanings and the need for strong contextual inference skills. Despite the complexity of the topic, the teaching aids commonly used in classrooms remain traditional and text-based, especially example sentences from the textbook, while far fewer students reported exposure to visual aids, audio tools, videos, or reference-based materials. Yet, when learners evaluated these tools, they overwhelmingly expressed positive attitudes: visuals, contextual examples, audio recordings, and videos were consistently rated as helpful in clarifying meaning distinctions and supporting comprehension. This contrast between what students find effective and what is used in classrooms highlights a significant pedagogical gap. Moreover, students' confidence in applying homonyms remains low, with many reporting difficulties in identifying them in sentences and struggling to use them accurately in speaking or writing, indicating shallow lexical depth and limited opportunities for contextualized practice. Compounding these challenges, most learners rarely or never use digital tools or online resources independently, despite earlier results showing that they find such tools engaging and helpful when used. Taken together, the results suggest that students' difficulties stem not only from the inherent complexity of homonymy but also from a lack of consistent, multimodal, and practice-oriented instruction, pointing to a clear need for more structured teaching strategies, richer input, and stronger support for autonomous learning to help learners build deeper and more confident mastery of homonyms. The findings of this study demonstrate that homonymy remains a significant source of difficulty for EFL learners, largely due to limited instructional consistency, insufficient multimodal support, and low levels of learner autonomy. Although homonyms constitute an essential component of lexical depth and play a crucial role in developing semantic flexibility and contextual interpretation skills, the survey results indicate that students encounter this topic only sporadically in their English classes. Majority of participants reported that homonymy is addressed *sometimes* at best, while many experience rare or no exposure at all. This irregularity in teaching frequency appears to be directly reflected in students' perceptions of difficulty, with more than three-quarters describing homonyms as difficult or very difficult. The findings suggest that learners lack structured opportunities to develop the inferencing, contextual analysis, and semantic differentiation skills required to interpret homonymous forms accurately.

Furthermore, the data highlight a clear disparity between students' needs and the instructional practices commonly employed in classrooms. While the most frequently used approach to teaching homonyms is traditional and text-based typically relying on example sentences from the textbook students consistently expressed strong preferences for multimodal aids such as visuals, audio materials, contextualized examples, and videos. These tools were widely perceived as helpful and engaging, yet they remain underutilized, with a substantial number of students reporting that no teaching aids are used at all. The reliance on limited instructional methods provides learners with insufficient support for processing abstract semantic distinctions, contributing to their ongoing difficulties with identification and production.

Students' struggles with both recognizing and using homonyms in context further emphasize the need for more systematic and practice-oriented approaches. Almost half of the respondents were not confident in identifying homonyms in sentences, and an equally large proportion were unable to use homonyms correctly in their own speaking and writing. Such results indicate that learners often possess only partial or receptive knowledge of homonymous forms, lacking the deeper, more flexible mastery required for accurate and autonomous language use. Compounding these challenges, many students reported minimal independent engagement with digital learning tools or other out-of-class supports, despite earlier findings showing that they find such tools helpful when used in classroom settings.

Overall, the study reveals a clear misalignment between the cognitive demands of homonymy and the instructional conditions under which learners are expected to master it. The limited frequency of instruction, combined with a reliance on narrow teaching methods and low autonomous practice, restricts learners' opportunities to build robust semantic networks and confidently navigate lexical ambiguity. To address these gaps, EFL instruction would benefit from more regular, explicit, and multimodal teaching of homonymy, enriched with contextualized practice, and supported by structured independent learning strategies. By integrating such approaches, educators can better equip learners to interpret and use homonymous forms effectively, ultimately strengthening their overall lexical competence and communicative proficiency.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Taken together, the findings of this study demonstrate that homonymy poses a persistent and multifaceted challenge for EFL learners, driven by limited instructional exposure, insufficient multimodal support, and low levels of learner autonomy. Although homonyms play a crucial role in developing lexical depth and semantic flexibility, students encounter this topic only sporadically, leading to widespread perceptions of difficulty and limited confidence in both identifying and using homonymous forms in context. The dominance of traditional, text-based teaching methods further restricts learners' opportunities to develop the contextual inference and semantic differentiation skills necessary for accurate interpretation, despite students' clear preference for and positive evaluations of multimodal aids such as visuals, audio tools, and videos. At the same time, learners' minimal independent engagement with digital resources suggests that classroom instruction alone is not providing the frequency, variety, or support needed to build robust semantic networks. Overall, the results reveal a clear mismatch between

the cognitive demands of homonymy and the instructional conditions under which learners attempt to master it. Addressing this gap will require more consistent, explicit, and multimodal pedagogical approaches, coupled with structured opportunities for contextualized practice and guided autonomous learning, to enable students to develop deeper, more confident, and more accurate mastery of homonymous words in meaningful communication.

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