



STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING IDIOM COMPREHENSION IN EFL LEARNING

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Abstract: *Idiomatic expressions represent an essential component of communicative competence in English. However, many learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) experience difficulties in understanding and using idioms due to their figurative meanings and strong cultural associations. This study investigates effective strategies for improving idiom comprehension among EFL learners. The research employed a mixed-method approach involving classroom observation, questionnaires, and experimental teaching techniques. Forty undergraduate students participated in the study. The findings demonstrate that contextual learning, visual support, and interactive activities significantly improve students' understanding of idiomatic expressions. The results also indicate that students who learn idioms through communicative and contextual methods show better retention and usage compared to those who learn through traditional memorization techniques. The study suggests that integrating idioms into communicative language teaching can enhance learners' linguistic and cultural competence.*

Keywords: *idioms, EFL learning, idiom comprehension, teaching strategies, figurative language*

Introduction

Idiomatic expressions are widely used in everyday communication in English. They play a crucial role in making speech natural, expressive, and culturally rich. Idioms are phrases whose meanings cannot always be understood from the literal meanings of their individual words. For example, expressions such as “spill



the beans” or *“break the ice*” have figurative meanings that differ from their literal interpretation.

For learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), idioms often present significant difficulties. Students may understand the individual words in an idiom but still fail to grasp its intended meaning. This challenge arises because idioms are deeply connected to cultural knowledge and figurative thinking.

Many language learners struggle with idioms because traditional teaching approaches often focus mainly on grammar and basic vocabulary. As a result, idiomatic expressions are sometimes neglected in language instruction. However, mastery of idioms is essential for achieving communicative competence and understanding authentic English discourse.

Researchers have emphasized the importance of teaching idioms in context rather than through memorization. Contextual learning, visual support, and interactive activities can help students understand the figurative meaning of idioms more effectively. In addition, exposure to authentic materials such as movies, stories, and conversations can enhance students’ comprehension.

The purpose of this study is to explore effective strategies for improving idiom comprehension among EFL learners. Specifically, the study aims to identify teaching methods that can facilitate students’ understanding and retention of idiomatic expressions.

The research addresses the following questions:

1. What difficulties do EFL learners face when understanding idioms?
2. Which teaching strategies are most effective in improving idiom comprehension?
3. How do interactive and contextual teaching methods influence students’ ability to understand idioms?

Literature Review

Idioms have been widely studied in the field of applied linguistics and language teaching. Scholars agree that idiomatic competence is an important part of language proficiency.



According to linguists, idioms are fixed expressions whose meanings are not predictable from the meanings of the individual words. This characteristic makes idioms difficult for language learners. Researchers have identified several factors that contribute to these difficulties, including cultural differences, lack of exposure, and limited contextual understanding.

Several studies emphasize the role of context in idiom comprehension. When idioms are presented within meaningful situations, learners are more likely to infer their figurative meanings. Contextual learning allows students to connect idioms with real-life communication.

Another important factor is the use of visual aids. Pictures, videos, and diagrams can help learners understand abstract or figurative meanings. Visual support can make idioms easier to remember and more engaging for students.

Interactive learning techniques also play an important role in teaching idioms. Activities such as role-plays, group discussions, and storytelling encourage students to use idioms in meaningful communication. These methods help learners move beyond memorization and develop practical language skills.

Modern teaching approaches emphasize communicative language teaching (CLT), which focuses on real communication rather than isolated grammar exercises. Integrating idioms into communicative activities allows learners to practice them in authentic contexts.

Despite these findings, idioms remain a challenging aspect of language learning. Many students continue to struggle with figurative language due to limited exposure and lack of appropriate teaching strategies. Therefore, further research is needed to identify effective methods for improving idiom comprehension in EFL classrooms.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a mixed-method research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The aim was to examine the effectiveness of different teaching strategies for improving idiom comprehension among EFL learners.



Participants

The participants were 40 undergraduate students studying English at a university. Their English proficiency level ranged from intermediate to upper-intermediate. The students were divided into two groups:

- Experimental group (20 students)
- Control group (20 students)

Data Collection Instruments

Three main instruments were used to collect data:

1. Questionnaire

A questionnaire was administered to identify students' attitudes toward learning idioms and the difficulties they experience.

2. **Pre-test and Post-test** Tests were designed to measure students' comprehension of idiomatic expressions before and after the teaching intervention.

3. **Classroom Observation** Classroom observations were conducted to analyze students' participation and engagement during idiom learning activities.

Teaching Procedure

The experimental group received instruction using the following strategies:

- Context-based learning
- Visual aids (pictures and videos)
- Interactive activities such as role-plays and discussions

The control group was taught using traditional methods that mainly focused on explanation and memorization.

The teaching intervention lasted for four weeks, during which students were introduced to a set of common English idioms.

Results

The results of the study showed noticeable differences between the experimental and control groups.

In the pre-test, both groups demonstrated similar levels of idiom comprehension. Most students had difficulty understanding idioms without contextual clues.



After the teaching intervention, the post-test results revealed significant improvement in the experimental group. Students who learned idioms through contextual and interactive methods achieved higher scores than those in the control group.

The questionnaire results also indicated that students preferred learning idioms through visual materials and communicative activities. Many participants reported that traditional memorization techniques were less effective and less engaging.

Classroom observations showed that students in the experimental group were more active during lessons. They participated in discussions, asked questions, and used idioms more confidently in speaking activities.

Overall, the findings suggest that interactive and contextual teaching strategies significantly enhance idiom comprehension in EFL learning.

Discussion

The results of this study support previous research emphasizing the importance of context in teaching idioms. When idioms are presented within meaningful situations, students can better understand their figurative meanings.

Visual aids were also found to be effective in facilitating comprehension. Images and videos helped students associate idioms with specific situations, making them easier to remember.

Interactive learning activities encouraged students to use idioms actively rather than passively memorizing them. Role-plays and group discussions allowed learners to practice idioms in communicative contexts.

Another important finding is that students showed greater motivation when idioms were taught through engaging and interactive methods. This suggests that teaching strategies play a crucial role in promoting effective language learning.

However, the study also revealed certain challenges. Some idioms remained difficult for students because of cultural differences and unfamiliar concepts. Therefore, teachers should provide sufficient explanations and examples to help learners understand the cultural background of idiomatic expressions.



Conclusion

Idiomatic expressions are an important aspect of English language proficiency, yet they remain challenging for many EFL learners. This study investigated strategies for improving idiom comprehension through contextual, visual, and interactive teaching methods.

The findings indicate that contextual learning, visual support, and communicative activities significantly improve students' understanding and retention of idioms. These strategies also increase student engagement and motivation in language learning.

Based on the results, teachers are encouraged to integrate idioms into communicative language teaching and provide learners with authentic contexts for practicing idiomatic expressions. Future research may explore the use of technology and digital resources in teaching idioms.

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