Article

Examining the Perspectives and Attitudes of ESL Students Toward Idioms in Second Language Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

English is especially challenging for English second language (ESL) learners because of its significant cultural and societal implications. For example, idioms—multiworded expressions with multiple meanings—are problematic for ESL learners because of ambiguity in literal translation and reliance on the societal context. This quantitative survey-based article posits that for advanced/fluent proficient ESL learners to achieve native-like fluency, they must attain proficiency in idioms. Survey data from 85 ESL students at the Center of English Second Language (CESL) at the University of Cincinnati were collected. The survey questions ranged from idiom usage in spoken and written language. The findings suggest a proportional relationship between idiom acquisition and positive attitudes. Confidence in using idioms was a significant predictor of both outcomes. Participants show positive attitudes toward idioms, but they sometimes fail to understand contextual meaning, limiting usage. The article concludes with future pedagogical implications for teaching idioms to ESL students.

English as a second language (ESL) international students encounter language anxiety while pursuing academic knowledge in university courses and simultaneously undergoing identity transformation. Hossain (2024) stated that language and culture are inseparable entities. Beyond language acquisition, ESL students immerse themselves in the culture and society of the target language, fostering multicultural identities. Notably, as reported by the U.S. Department of State (IIE 2024) for the 2023-2024 academic year, over 1.12 million students sought education at American universities. Given the significant insurge of ESL students in American universities, it is imperative that educational policies prioritize ESL students' well-being. Gao & Wesely (2024) explain that stresses such as academic progress, financial burdens and simple survival in a new atmosphere can be daunting. Thus, it is imperative that educational policies and universities work together for the betterment of ESL students. Gultekin (2025) asserts that international policies and international education are not contemporary concepts but rather have profound historical roots. Hence, these policies and universities should work together in developing language classes for ESL students.

The Institute of International Education (IIE) and Open Doors provide public data on the number of international students who enter the United States for education. The number mentioned above, 1.12 million, appears to be growing exponentially each year. Universities like New York University (NYU) had 24,496 international students admitted. Similarly, Northeastern University Boston had 20,637 international students and Columbia University had 19,001. It is imperative to consider the necessity of adapting educational policies to accommodate international students. We must enhance our utilization of technology and pedagogical practices that facilitate ESL students' acquisition of content knowledge rather than hindering their progress due to language barriers.

Acquiring a second language is a challenging endeavor, and the successful implementation of teaching practices demands substantial effort from language educators. The language acquisition process becomes even more intricate and arduous when an adult attempts to learn a new language after their critical period (Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle, 1978). In the context of ESL acquisition, numerous additional factors contribute to this complexity. English's status as a Lingua Franca, the language of the world, confers a sense of intimidation and authority upon its usage (Núñez, 2014). This intimidation is often grounded in the notion that English is deeply ingrained within its society and has profound cultural connotations. One such concept of English, rooted in its societal significance and cultural implications, is idioms.

Idioms represent a unique domain of vocabulary in a language. In the fields of linguistics and second language studies, these vocabulary items are defined as "a group of words that occur in a more or less fixed phrase and whose overall meaning cannot be predicted by analyzing the meanings of its constituent parts" (Simpson & Mendis, 2003, p. 423). Given the understanding of idiom definitions, we must consider the reasons behind teaching idioms to ESL students. Proficiency in idiomatic expressions is indicative of fluent English proficiency (Yunus and

Hmaidan, 2021). Using the concordance procedure of a corpus, Rafatbakhsh and Ahmadi (2020) exported "4986 idioms" (p.211) to prove the frequency. The study highlights the importance of teaching idioms to ESL students and concurs with their assertion in their results. Consequently, the omission of idiom instruction can lead to comprehension difficulties for ESL learners. The literature helps understand the idioms that are abundantly present in the language. Sinclair (2002) is another researcher who marks the occurrence of idioms in English discourse by concatenating a corpus. Hence, idioms are abundantly present in the language. Research should explore their effects on language acquisition. The occurrence of idioms in English discourse suggests that idioms are important for fluently using the language.

What does it even mean to have native-like fluency? My understanding and research in the field suggest that language is not learned in a vacuum, and to achieve native-like fluency, one must understand the society where the language is used. Idioms are such a socially immersed part of a language that they carry immense cultural implications (Boers and Demecheleer, 2001). To effectively utilize English outside of formal classroom settings, it is crucial to grasp the language's cultural context. Boers and Demecheleer (2001) qualitatively tested the contextual meaning of idioms and their cultural implications. The issue with the literal translation and inconsistent structure of idioms makes it difficult to define and teach idioms in ESL classes. The ESL field has yet to set boundaries for this definition. The literature dating back to the 1950s (Hockette, 1958; Katz & Postal, 1963; Fraser, 1970; Woods, 1981) faced an abundance of struggle to explain this perceived ambiguity of idioms. This ambiguity in the definition of idioms has resulted in a more rigorous quest to define this multiworded unit. Thus, for the purpose of this study, idioms are defined as multiword units that are packed with meaning.

Idiom acquisition is one of the most challenging concepts for ESL students because of its societal and cultural implications. Idioms are best acquired when authentic language examples are used (Fellbaum, 2019; Liu, 2008; Osipova, 2020; Simpson & Mendis, 2003). Nadeem and Almowalad (2022) explain the need to acquire idioms to reach native-like fluency and write that "Studies have revealed that the correct and suitable use of idioms is a distinguishing feature of native-level command of the language and a trusted indicator of foreign learners' proficiency … especially since the prevalence of idioms in classroom language increases as students advance in age and grade" (p. 57). These lines explain the necessity and need to teach idioms. The issue arises when ESL learners lack a positive attitude and motivation toward idioms due to problematic translations.

The attitude toward learning a new language plays an enormous role. If ESL learners do not have a positive attitude toward the language they are learning, then they will not pay attention to the explicit input of the language (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Fakeye, 2010; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Kara, 2009; Oller, 1979). This lack of attention can result in diminished motivation to acquire the language. Al-Houti & Aldaihani (2018) explain, in detail, why students' attitudes are essential in ESL classes. This survey-based research article explains the role of attitudes toward second language acquisition in adult learners. Thus, in this article, I argue

that adult ESL learners in an undergraduate program use more idioms when they have a positive attitude toward these multiworded units. For ESL learners to be fully immersed in their second language and its cultural implications while aiming to achieve native-like fluency, they should have a proficient understanding of idioms.

This research article delves into the attitudes and perspectives of ESL learners regarding the acquisition of idioms. It explores the significance of idioms as culturally and socially embedded units of language and their challenges for ESL learners, mainly due to their nonliteral meanings and cultural implications. Beginning with a literature review examining the role of idioms in language proficiency, cultural insights, and the influence of positive attitudes on second language acquisition, the results are presented via descriptive statistics from the SPSS Crosstab test to identify patterns in learners' attitudes and their usage of idioms. A discussion on the proportional relationship between positive attitudes toward idioms and their increased usage follows. Finally, the article concludes by addressing the pedagogical implications for ESL educators, emphasizing the need for explicit instruction of idioms in authentic and contextualized settings and suggesting the use of corpora as tools to enhance idiom instruction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To conduct an empirical study on L2 acquisition, it is important to understand the theoretical underpinnings of the construct being tested. The constructs tested in my research are motivation and confidence in self-learning and the use of English as a second language and its formulaic expressions, such as idiomatic terms. Early in 2005, Dörnyei's dabbled in L2 motivational concepts. The L2 motivational self-system (L2MSS) model comprises three central concepts: the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and the L2 learning experience (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009a). The L2MSS model suggests that L2 learning should be an ideal learner whose efforts are directly proportional to language acquisition. The L2MSS model also indicates that learning environments play a crucial role in language acquisition (Csizér, 2019). On the basis of the L2MSS model, I propose that language is not learned in a vacuum and is culturally imbedded. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that the motivation to use idiomatic expressions results in better acquisition. The more confidence and motivated positive attitudes ESL students show toward the target language, the better their acquisition. To understand idiom acquisition, it is important to examine some of the factors affecting it. In fact, difficulties in using idioms in second language should also be discussed. Hence, the following section provides a brief literature review of the importance of teaching idioms in ESL classes, the cultural implications of using idioms in a second language, the challenges that ESL students face while using English language idioms, and, finally, students' attitudes toward using idioms in their second language.

Importance of Idioms

Idioms are multiworded units and figurative expressions in the English language. These units are rich with their figurative meanings but cannot be literally translated due to the cultural and societal undertones. A proficient understanding of these formulaic language expressions indicates fluent English skills (Yunus & Hmaidan, 2021) and helps achieve native-like fluency for ESL students. Rafatbakhsh and Ahmadi (2020) explain the importance of teaching idioms to ESL students, and I agree that "lack of knowledge of idioms can cause serious comprehension problems and misunderstandings in many contexts even if they are rich in clues" (p. 207). The lack of teaching idioms can lead to comprehension issues for ESL learners.

English is a very formulaic language with abundant idioms, collocations, and metaphors, and an ESL learner cannot have sufficient proficiency in the language without acquiring expressions such as idioms, metaphors, collocations, etc. Al-Houti and Aldaihani (2018) also prove that idioms add to native-like fluency and should be taught explicitly in language classes. Al-Houti and Aldaihani say, "Many researchers consider mastering a wide range of idioms to be an indication of native-like command of the language. Therefore, idiomatic expressions are used to assess the learners' language proficiency" (p. 141). The literature in the field emphasizes the fact that idiom acquisition is important for learning and being proficient. Idioms are such a socially immersed part of a language that they carry immense cultural and societal implications, adding to the importance and emergence of acquiring them.

Cultural Implications

Another factor that makes idioms important for acquisition is cultural implications. Idiomatic expressions in any language mirror society. The same is true for English idioms. Idioms allow ESL students to focus on the trends of society. Using the L2MSS model of Dörnyei (2005), it can be said that language is best learned by authentic language exposure and that ESL students should be motivated to learn from this authenticity. Boers and Demecheleer (2001) explain the image brought up by cultural implications in an idiom and say, "Conventions differ across cultures, so that straightforward images in one culture need not be self-evident in another. The imageable idioms of a given language may not call up the same conventional scenes in the minds of learners of that language" (p. 256). These lines explain that the imagery of an idiom can be quite difficult to understand. Especially more if idioms are in your second language. Thus, expecting ESL learners to understand idioms without being out of society is difficult.

Cultural implications make the acquisition of idioms challenging, and the lack of literal translation of the constituent parts of an idiom adds to the challenge. The root cause of this lack of translation and difficulty lies in the deep embeddedness of the cultural and societal norms of the target society. Therefore,

it is crucial that concepts such as idioms be taught via authentic language exposure and real-world examples. Students should comprehend the cultural implications associated with the meanings of idioms.

Challenges

The arbitrariness of idioms makes it incomprehensible for ESL learners to use idioms. According to Alhaysony (2017), "The difficulty of learning idioms comes from the fact that idioms are arbitrary and nonliteral. The arbitrariness of idioms makes them incomprehensible on the basis of the meaning of their constituents, and hence they cannot be taught systematically" (p. 72). These lines explain how idioms require an authentic teaching approach in language classes. Idioms being multiworded, meaning loaded units that they are, cannot be translated into their constituent parts and make meaning. This lack or absence of literal translations makes idioms more difficult for ESL students to acquire, adding to the pedagogical challenges in language classes. The literature in the field points to the solution of teaching language by doing. Yeh (2024) noted, "Conventional EFL methods, often reliant on rote learning for standardized tests, struggle to impart practical language skills relevant to real-world scenarios" (p. 335). Thus, when the L2MSS model is learned and the literature is reviewed, idioms should be taught through real-world exposure to language, and the learning environment clearly plays a large role.

The need for authentic teaching material comes from the fact that idioms are embedded into culture. As the argument of the article explains, for ESL learners to be fully immersed in their second language and its cultural implications while aiming to achieve native-like fluency, they must have a proficient understanding of idioms; it becomes essential that teachers do not expect students to cram idioms but instead learn to use them within the context. Academic writing uses idioms more than we expect. Simpson & Mendis's (2003) article discussed how idioms are abundantly present in academic writing. The article noted, "As further evidence that idioms are distributed across a wide range of academic speech events, even after a not quite exhaustive search, as described above, we found that 11 transcripts of a variety of speech events contained 10 or more idioms" (p. 426). Thus, there is a need to understand ESL students' usage and attitudes toward using idioms.

Idioms remain challenging for ESL/EFL students because of the need for more literal translations. For example, an idiom such as *Kick the Bucket* will not make any sense to an ESL student if they try to translate it literally. The figurativeness and arbitrariness of the expression. Nadeem and Almowalad (2022) explained the challenges of literal translation quantitatively and proved that students need more knowledge about English idiomatic expressions. This aligns with Ta'amneh's (2021) findings, which showed that EFL students find learning idioms challenging. Another reason for the difficulty is the difference in meaning between individual words and the overall meaning, as reported by 46.9% of respondents (p. 62) in Ta'amneh's (2021) findings. It is evident that idioms are challenging and difficult to understand in L2. However, it is imperative that

students acquire this figurative part of speech to immerse themselves fully in their L2 experience. Students' motivation and attitudes play a large role in their ability to acquire a new language.

Student Attitude

A student depicting less motivation or who is not interested in language acquisition is not their ideal L2 self (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009a) and will struggle in the acquisition of idioms or the language itself. They also fail to recognize idiom usage in academic writing or in conversations with native speakers. Self-confidence and learning attitudes toward using idioms are crucial in enhancing language acquisition. As Gardner (1968) emphasized, motivation plays a significant role in language acquisition. Gardner said, "It appears evident that attitudinal motivational characteristics of the student are pivotal in acquiring a second language" (p. 149). Research on the motivation and attitudes of L2 students has been conducted for an extended period. These findings suggest that motivation facilitates students' explicit language learning. Research on motivation affecting second language acquisition has been conducted for decades. Dörnyei (1998) reported that motivation is an important factor affecting how students learn a new language and at what pace. Students' attitudes play a massive role in their academic performance. Dörnyei (1998) mentioned that some student attitudes and values, such as attitudes toward L2 speakers, L2 courses, L2 teachers, and some interest in foreign languages, tend to affect language acquisition. A similar positive attitude could also affect idiom acquisition in the English language. This is the guiding hypothesis of the current article.

The hypothesis posits that idioms are context-dependent components of speech that facilitate the attainment of native-like fluency for ESL learners. A positive attitude among learners leads to increased comfort and confidence in the usage of idioms. Consequently, when learning idioms in authentic utterances, students should possess confidence and exhibit a positive attitude. The following are some research questions that guide this hypothesis and study.
1. Investigating whether learners with more positive attitudes toward idioms employ more idiom learning strategies.
2. Exploring learners' attitudes toward idioms.

METHOD

Participants

The participants of the article were 85 undergraduate international students studying at the University of Cincinnati (UC) and were enrolled in Center of English as a Second Language (CESL) classes. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the participants. Their ages ranged from 15--26 years: 15--18 (10.6%), 19--22 (43.5%), and 23--26 (7.1%). According to the self-report survey data, students in the CESL classes were at an advanced level (25.9%) of English proficiency. In addition to proficiency, the students self-reported as male (32.9%)

or female (28.2%). The demographics show that ESL students were a mix of proficient students who understood idioms. This sample of participants was voluntary. The survey was distributed via a university email server. Students who were interested in participating scanned the QR code attached to the email. This took students to the survey, which was developed via Qualtrics software. According to the IRB (internal review board), no consent signature was required from participants, as the article did not provide any participant identifying information. This study was exempt from IRB status. However, no signed consent was needed, informing participants about any future harm and effect of study and their choice of participation. To do so, the email had a consent information document—detailing all the information about the research—attached to it. Table 1 below shows the descriptive and demographic information of the participants.

Table 1
Participant descriptive information

Independent variable		No.	Percentage(%)
Age	15-18	9	10.6%
	19-22	37	43.5%
	23-26	6	7.1%
Proficiency	Beginner	1	1.2%
	Intermediate	9	10.6%
	Advanced	22	25.9%
	Fluent	20	23.5%
Gender	Male	28	32.9%
	Female	24	28.2%
	Non-Binary	N/A	N/A
	Prefer not to say	N/A	N/A

Instrument

For the article, a survey-based questionnaire was designed and administered to the participants. The survey questionnaire format was chosen as a data collection tool because of its capacity to collect a substantial amount of data efficiently within a relatively brief timeframe (Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2016). A 15-item survey was distributed that was validated by Aziz & Asih (2023). Fricker & Schonlau (2002) discuss the advantages of survey-based research in which arguments such as timelessness, quality and cost effectiveness of survey-based research are discussed. In this study, the choice of survey-based instrument was affected by its speed and advantages. This study uses a widely tested and validated quantitative survey of 15 items to test confidence in language acquisition in ESL students.

Omega was calculated for the reliability of the instrument, and the items measuring the same construct in the survey were highly reliable in measuring confidence and attitudes toward the use of idioms, with an Omega value of 0.889. This is a very good and high value of Omega and thus indicates that the items are strongly related and consistently measure the same underlying construct of confidence and attitude. Finally, this instrument was a valid and reliable way of testing the construct and was successful. The survey questions ranged from students' understanding of idioms in written and spoken speech. For the purpose of this article, I adjusted the questions on Aziz and Asih's (2023) instrument to include a focus on idiom acquisition and tested the participants.

The survey (see Appendix A) was distributed through an email system. The participants answered the questions on a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree). The data were collected via Qualtrics software. The questionnaire contained statements or prompts related to attitudes toward idioms, idiom usage, and confidence in the use of idioms; for example, 'Idioms are important for me to learn because native speakers often use them in real life.' While completing the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to choose response options that best reflected their agreement or disagreement with the statements on a five-point scale.

Data Analysis

The 15-item questionnaire was broadly categorized into three distinct subcategories. The initial category assessed the attitudes of participants toward idiom usage. The subsequent category evaluated the comprehension of idioms and their impact on usage. Finally, the third subcategory gauged the participants' confidence in employing idioms. The composite score ranged from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating the lowest level and 5 indicating the highest. For data analysis, IBM SPSS Statistics 29 was employed to initially conduct a crosstabulation test, followed by a chi-square test and a correlation test. There was no correlation between the questionnaire items. Consequently, the researcher used descriptive statistics to analyze each survey item.

In addition to descriptive analysis, the article also utilized frequency tables to comprehend the participants' demographics. Frequency tables facilitated the consolidation of results from demographic questions such as age, proficiency level, and gender of the students. Notably, the p values of the chi-square test for each individual item were not statistically significant, surpassing 0.05. Therefore, no correlation was detected within the survey items.

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to understand the usage and attitudes of ESL learners toward this usage of idioms. The hypothesis posits that idioms are context-dependent components of speech that facilitate the attainment of native-like fluency for ESL learners. A positive attitude among learners leads to increased comfort and confidence in the use of idioms. Consequently, when

learning idioms in authentic utterances, students should possess confidence and exhibit a positive attitude. The article also aimed to understand how confident ESL learners felt in using these idiomatic terms in their second language. The data were coded via SPSS, and the results are presented below.

Table 2

No.	Question	Percentage Agree	Mean
1	I believe that I am capable of understanding most idioms in written texts.	53.9	2.05
2	I feel that I can understand someone who uses idioms in speech well.	57.9	2.04
3	I know enough English idioms to be able to use them in writing comfortably.	43.4	2.39
4	I believe that I know enough English idioms to use them in speech correctly.	36.8	2.42
5	I believe that my knowledge of English idioms allows me to cope with most situations where I am expected to use them (for example, in essays or oral presentations).	51.3	2.45
6	When I use an idiom in speech, I know I am using it correctly.	55.3	2.26

Percent of Agreeing/Strongly Agreeing Toward Attitude Items

Comprehending the Meaning of Idioms

As presented in Table 2, the results demonstrate that participants exhibited positive attitudes and comfort levels when using idioms in a second-language context. However, Table 2 also underscores the importance of the meaning and comprehension of idioms in this usage. While students may possess confidence in using idioms, their understanding of idiom meanings can influence their usage. As previously discussed, idioms cannot be literally translated, which further complicates their acquisition. Notably, 36.8% of the participants expressed a belief that their idiom vocabulary needed to be improved to achieve native-like fluency. These findings provide valuable insights for researchers, emphasizing the necessity of explicitly incorporating idioms into English as a second language curriculum.

Attitudes Toward Using Idioms

The majority of the participants responded that they comprehended idioms and had a strong positive attitude toward incorporating idioms into their second language. The results indicate that a high percentage of participants strongly agree or agree with the use of idioms and the development of a positive attitude toward this aspect of their second language. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the percentage of participants who agreed or strongly agreed with the positive attitudes and usage questions of the survey.

Table 2, point 4, reveals that the lowest percentage of participants agreed (36.8%), which suggests that students feel positive while using idioms but need to gain some knowledge of idioms. This difficulty in acquiring idioms has been previously highlighted in the research article. Idioms can be challenging due to their lack of literal translation. Regardless of the difficulty of literal translation, ESL students feel comfortable and exhibit a positive attitude toward idioms. The reason for their limited usage—concluded by statement number 4 in Table 2. (36.8%) usage—may be attributed to the pedagogical practices employed in teaching idioms in ESL classes.

Table 3
Percent of Agreeing/Strongly Agreeing Toward Confidence Items

No.	Question	% Agree	Mean
1	I am confident in my ability to use idioms in writing correctly.	42.1	2.46
2	I feel uncomfortable using idioms in speech.	35.5	2.87
3	When I talk to English speakers, I feel comfortable using idioms.	46.1	2.45
4	In English classes, I feel confident when I use idioms.	42.1	2.51
5	When I see an idiom in a text, I know I understand its meaning correctly.	51.3	2.18

Confidence in Using Idioms

Table 3 presents the compilation of survey items assessing participants' confidence in utilizing and comprehending idioms in both spoken and written English. The findings indicate that participants generally exhibited high confidence in employing and understanding idioms in English. Notably, the final

item in Table 3 pertains to correctly understanding idioms in written text, and it garnered the highest percentage of agreement (51.3%). Conversely, item 2, which concerns discomfort while using idioms, recorded the lowest percentage of agreement (35.5%). The results of this item suggest that the participants did not experience discomfort and demonstrated good understanding and confidence in using idioms when conversing with native speakers. Furthermore, the results emphasize the students' proficiency in employing idioms in written text, with an agreement percentage of 42.1%. This finding indicates that students possess the ability to use idioms in written contexts effectively.

DISCUSSION

English is a language that is deeply influenced by society. Its meaning and influence evolve in response to the daily interactions and cultural context of its users. Consequently, it is crucial for ESL students to immerse themselves in society and learn from its idiomatic expressions. Previous studies on idiom acquisition among ESL/EFL learners have focused primarily on traditional learning and teaching approaches such as textbooks, SMSs, and rote memorization. These approaches lack authentic and contextual exposure to the target language. On the basis of the analysis of the results, idioms should be taught using culturally responsive pedagogical practices. Curriculums of language classes should explicitly teach idioms by using authentic language techniques such as the COCA corpus, generative artificial intelligence chatbots, and cultural examples. Two things are clear from the research. First, idioms are difficult for ESL/EFL students to acquire. Second, idioms are best learned when pedagogical practices use authentic as well as contextual examples. These studies typically employ measures that test explicit knowledge rather than authentic, contextualized idiomatic usage. When discussing the acquisition of English-language idioms, it is widely acknowledged that idioms are deeply ingrained in culture and are often challenging to translate literally.

While explicit instructions for idiom acquisition may not be provided in ESL classes, idioms are prevalent in academic writing for second language learners. Therefore, after understanding the importance of acquiring idioms, ESL teachers can use communicative practices, collaborative writing, AI conversations, and different cultural communication practices to teach figurative idioms. This quantitative study identified three primary themes related to idiom acquisition. Themes include comprehending the meaning of idioms, ESL students' attitudes toward using idioms, and ESL students' confidence in using idioms in their target language. This study examined the comprehension of idioms in second-language usage among ESL students. Idioms, as discussed throughout the article, are multiword units that cannot be literally translated and are deeply rooted in the cultural context of society. Idioms are a unique vocabulary expression present in English, and these expressions are not literally translated from their constituent parts, adding to the challenges of acquisition. The challenges faced by ESL students in acquiring idioms are well documented in the article, and literal

translation proves to be a significant obstacle in their acquisition. The results revealed that the comprehension of idiom meanings also significantly influences idiom usage. Consequently, comprehending the meanings of idioms and enhancing their usage heavily rely on students' ability to decipher the underlying meanings of these idioms.

In accordance with the findings of Al-Houti and Aldaihani (2018), the current study revealed a direct correlation between positive attitudes toward idioms and their increased usage among ESL students. The positive attitudes of ESL students toward idioms emerged as a significant factor contributing to their increased usage. Several factors, including cultural connotations, the intimidation of idioms, and varying levels of English proficiency, were identified as influencing idiom acquisition. However, the lack of literal translations of idioms and their cultural significance played a pivotal role in the acquisition of idioms by ESL students. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that ESL students gained confidence in using idioms in their daily conversations. Nevertheless, with respect to writing and idiomatic terms, students exhibited uncertainty regarding the definition of idioms in writing. Consequently, this aspect warrants explicit attention and consideration in language classes.

IMPLICATIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL LINKS

Notably, the ESL curriculum does not explicitly teach idioms in language classes. Idioms can be particularly daunting for new language learners, as they provide insights into the societal and cultural norms of the target language. These multiworded units serve as mirrors of society. A review of the literature revealed that idioms should be explicitly taught in language classes while they are in the curriculum. ESL teachers acknowledge that teaching idioms can be particularly challenging. During the process of conducting this research study, it was ambiguous to explain idioms with an unyielding definition rooted in the field's literature. I suggest that it is challenging to define what constitutes an idiom precisely. The field lacks a comprehensive definition of these multiworded units. Clarifying the definition of idioms can help students better understand and use them effectively. The lack of definition and difficulty in literal translation necessitate ESL teachers to focus explicitly on idioms. Idioms should be taught within their contextual meanings. Hence, some practical pedagogical implications are warranted.

With respect to future implications, ESL teachers should use tools such as corpora, generative AI, lesson plans based on communicative language teaching or culturally responsible teaching. These teaching practices and tools can help in identifying idioms within their context usage. The study yielded a primary finding: the inability of ESL students to comprehend the meanings of idioms within their vocabulary. The study's implications suggest that if the tools mentioned above are employed to teach idioms within context, students will retain the idioms' meanings more effectively. This approach facilitates better comprehension of idioms. It is crucial to teach idioms within their contextual meanings because without this context, students may not grasp their intended

meanings. The pedagogical practices should aim to incorporate a critical and innovative use of Gen AI to learn the language. The effectiveness of Gen AI is based on how well it can be integrated into the L2 curriculum. Students should be well informed about plagiarism practices. ESL teachers should also be aware of the cultural implications of the target language. They should aim to prepare ESL students for real-world language usage scenarios. The current review of the literature on ESL pedagogical practices highlights artificial intelligence in education. It is projected that this tool could be an advantage to the language acquisition field.

This study has presented evidence that idioms should be taught explicitly so that ESL students can comprehend the meaning and proper usage of idioms in their contextual usage. This study also revealed that students' attitudes toward using and learning idioms affect their acquisition of idioms. A more positive attitude toward idioms resulted in better usage of the phrases. Finally, confidence in the use of idioms also affects acquisition. The broader implication of this study is that the ESL curriculum and teachers must implement authentic language exposure for difficult concepts of language learning, such as idioms, and I have presented some pedagogical tools to overcome the challenges of language classes. This study is not without limitations. The dataset used in this study is too small to make any generalizations. Along with small dataset, I would also suggest collecting qualitative data. Knowing students' perceptions through a survey can be difficult, and qualitative data can provide rich interview data and insights for ESL students.

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Data availability statement

The data supporting the study's findings are not publicly available owing to restrictions imposed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality. However, data might be available upon reasonable request from the University of Cincinnati IRB.

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