TEACHING IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS TO LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract. The present study underscores the pedagogical significance of teaching idiomatic expressions in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom—an aspect frequently overlooked or undervalued in language instruction. Some educators perceive idioms as excessively challenging for novice learners, while others fail to extend the idiomatic repertoire of intermediate and advanced students in pedagogically meaningful ways. Consequently, this article seeks to encourage English language teachers to integrate idiomatic expressions systematically into their instructional practice by selecting items that correspond to learners' proficiency levels and communicative needs. The paper further aims to elucidate the concept of the idiom by examining diverse taxonomies and exploring how these classifications can inform the development of effective teaching strategies in the EFL context. Mastery of idiomatic language not only facilitates greater fluency and more native-like expression but also enhances learners' understanding of the sociocultural and pragmatic dimensions of English. Furthermore, engagement with idiomatic expressions promotes linguistic awareness and cognitive flexibility, prompting learners to reflect critically on their own language use. Although the acquisition of idioms presents notable challenges, their pedagogical value remains undeniable, as idioms are often regarded as the "soul of the language," enriching communication with cultural depth, expressiveness, and stylistic sophistication.

Keywords: *idiom comprehension, idiom acquisition, learning challenges, fluency, communicative competence.*

Rezumat. Studiul subliniază importanța pedagogică a predării expresiilor idiomatice în cadrul orelor de limba engleză ca limbă străină (EFL) — un aspect adesea neglijat sau subestimat în procesul de instruire lingvistică. Unii educatori percep idiomurile ca fiind prea dificile pentru cursanții începători, în timp ce alții nu reușesc să extindă repertoriul idiomatic al cursanților de nivel intermediar și avansat într-un mod semnificativ din punct de vedere pedagogic. În consecință, acest articol își propune să încurajeze profesorii de limba engleză să integreze expresiile idiomatice în mod sistematic în practica lor didactică, prin selectarea atentă a expresiilor care corespund nivelului de competență și nevoilor de comunicare ale cursanților.

Lucrarea îşi mai propune să clarifice conceptul de „idiom" prin examinarea diverselor sale clasificări şi prin explorarea modului în care aceste tipologii pot contribui la dezvoltarea unor strategii de predare eficiente în contextul EFL. Stăpânirea limbajului idiomatic nu doar facilitează o fluenţă mai ridicată şi o exprimare mai apropiată de cea a vorbitorilor nativi, ci şi aprofundează înţelegerea dimensiunilor socioculturale şi pragmatice ale limbii engleze. Mai mult, angajarea în studiul expresiilor idiomatice stimulează conştiinţa lingvistică şi flexibilitatea cognitivă, determinând cursanţii să reflecteze critic asupra propriului limbaj. Deşi achiziţia idiomurilor prezintă provocări notabile, valoarea lor pedagogică rămâne incontestabilă, deoarece idiomurile sunt adesea considerate „sufletul limbii", îmbogăţind comunicarea prin profunzime culturală, expresivitate şi rafinament stilistic.

Cuvinte-cheie: *înţelegerea idiomului, achiziţia idiomului, provocări în învăţare, fluenţă, competenţa de comunicare.*

1. Introduction

Undoubtedly, idioms mirror the culture and identity of a language, yet they often pose a challenge when introduced to EFL learners. Prodromou highlights the "idiomatic paradox" [1], observing that while native speakers rely extensively on idioms in spoken discourse, even advanced learners often struggle to comprehend or use them naturally. This difficulty frequently arises because idiomatic meanings are non-literal and cannot be easily inferred from context, or due to interference from the learners' first language. Translation activities, explicit attention to form, and a balance of controlled and freer practice are among the pedagogical strategies that can help address these challenges.

The origins of most English idioms are often obscure. Many have emerged through literature, having first appeared in the works of writers such as Shakespeare, Sir Walter Scott, or Lewis Carroll, while others are rooted in biblical, legal, nautical, or military discourse [2]. These diverse sources illustrate how idioms reflect the cultural, historical, and social experiences of English-speaking communities. In this sense, idioms function as linguistic artefacts that encapsulate collective imagination and values, linking language learning to a broader understanding of the culture it represents.

The rationale for focusing on the teaching of idioms lies in their central role in developing communicative competence. Figurative expressions enrich language, providing learners with more expressive and nuanced ways of conveying meaning. As D'Angelo Bromley remarks, "just as idioms are disruptive, ambiguous, and difficult for the language user, so also are they interesting and colorful. Idioms add humor, imagery, and spice to language" [3, p. 274]. Likewise, Ovando and Collier argue that learning idiomatic expressions offers non-native speakers valuable insights into the cultural mindset of the target community [4]. We agree with Ambrose who emphasizes that idioms convey cultural and historical knowledge, broadening learners' linguistic awareness and interpretive skills [5].

Moreover, idioms contribute significantly to fluency and naturalness in communication. Learners who rely solely on literal vocabulary may produce grammatically correct sentences yet still sound unnatural. Teaching idioms therefore enhances not only lexical knowledge but also pragmatic sensitivity and intercultural competence—both essential for effective global communication.

In addition, idioms offer learners a deeper engagement with the sociocultural aspects of language. They often encapsulate the collective worldview, humor, and historical experience of a speech community. Expressions such as *"spill the beans", "bite the bullet"* or

"*hit the books*" do more than convey meaning - they embody the creativity and shared history of English-speaking societies. Understanding such expressions requires learners to think metaphorically and culturally, fostering intercultural awareness and empathy.

Ultimately, the acquisition of idiomatic expressions is indispensable in EFL contexts. Overlooking this dimension would restrict learners' ability to achieve native-like fluency and communicative competence. Certainly, learning idiomatic expressions enables English language learners to become more knowledgeable about and attuned to the culture and customs of English-speaking communities [6]. Therefore, integrating idiom instruction into EFL curricula equips learners with the linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic tools needed for authentic and confident communication. Idioms, far from being peripheral, are an essential component of mastering the English language.

To conclude, this article will define idioms and outline their principal taxonomies. It will then explore effective approaches to teaching idiomatic expressions to EFL learners, emphasizing strategies that enhance both comprehension and acquisition. Furthermore, it will examine how contextualized instruction, metaphorical awareness, and authentic exposure contribute to idiom learning across different proficiency levels. By combining insights from current research with practical classroom applications, the study aims to provide teachers with adaptable, evidence-based techniques for enhancing idiomatic competence in language learners.

2. Definitions of Idiom

The term "idiom" has been defined in multiple ways across linguistic research, reflecting both its complexity and its central role in language. Broadly speaking, an idiom is "a group of words whose meaning considered as a unit is different from the meanings of each word considered separately" [7]. For instance, the expression "to sit on the fence" may be interpreted literally - "I sat on the fence and watched the game" - or idiomatically, as in "The politician sat on the fence and would not give his opinion about the tax issue," where the phrase means "to avoid making a decision".

In linguistic terms, idioms are commonly described as fixed or semi-fixed expressions used in a figurative rather than a literal sense. They often appear to have arbitrary meanings that cannot be easily deduced from their individual components. For example, *to kick the bucket* means "to die", and *to pull someone's leg* means "to tease or deceive someone". These examples show that idioms operate beyond compositional meaning, requiring learners to grasp their figurative or conventional sense.

However, more recent studies suggest that idioms are not entirely arbitrary. Many of them are explainable and exhibit an underlying conceptual motivation grounded in metaphor, culture, or shared experience. This perspective highlights that idioms, while fixed, are not meaningless combinations but reflect conceptual patterns that can be interpreted once understood.

R. J. Alexander defines idioms as "multi-word units which have to be learned as a whole, along with associated sociolinguistic, cultural, and pragmatic rules of use" [8]. Similarly, Grant and Bauer propose the broader term multi-word units to encompass idioms as well as open and restricted collocations, though excluding phrasal verbs [9]. This categorization underlines the continuum between fixed expressions and other formulaic sequences in language use.

John Saeed offers another perspective, viewing idioms as expressions in which "words collocated together happen to become fossilized, becoming fixed over time".

According to Simpson and Mendis, an idiom is "a group of words that occur in a more or less fixed phrase whose overall meaning cannot be predicted by analyzing the meaning of its constituent parts" [10]. This widely accepted definition captures the essence of idiomaticity—non-compositionality combined with fixedness.

The variety of existing definitions underscores the difficulty of providing a single, precise description of what constitutes an idiom. Some definitions emphasize form and fixedness, while others highlight meaning, cultural context, or usage. Given this diversity, the present study seeks to offer a clearer understanding of idioms by analyzing their main classifications and discussing how these can guide more effective teaching practices in the EFL classroom.

3. Classifications of Idioms

Over the years, numerous attempts have been made to classify idioms, reflecting the complexity and richness of these figurative language units. While no single taxonomy has gained universal acceptance, several frameworks stand out as particularly comprehensive. This section presents a synthesis of some of the most influential approaches to idiom classification, each highlighting different linguistic and cognitive aspects of idiomaticity.

Prodromou [11] classifies idioms into 4 types based on a combination of their form and meaning. His taxonomy includes:

A.   **Formulae**, which include prepositional phrases (e.g. *at home*) and transparent bi-/trinominals (e.g. *bed and breakfast*).

B.   **Collocations** (e.g. *sun+rise*).

C.   **Phrasal verbs** (e.g. *to turn around* = radically change one's mind).

D.   **Cultural idioms** which include "colourful binominals" (e.g. *chalk and cheese*) or "trinominals" (e.g. *lock, stock, and barrel* = including all or every part of something), metaphors and figurative expressions (e.g. *fight fire with fire* = to use the same methods as someone else in order to defeat them), similies (e.g. [*to get on*] *like a horse on fire*), proverbs and sayings (e.g. *an apple a day keeps the doctor away*), literary allusions (e.g. quotes from Shakespeare) and a range of similar multi-word units like nursery rhymes, or pop-song lyrics.

Types A-C are considered formulaic while type D is idiomatic. Formulaic idioms are frequent in use, less opaque in meaning, and fixed in form. Idiomatic phraseological expressions, however, are infrequent in use, opaque in meaning, and can be creative when it comes to form [11]. This distinction illustrates how idioms exist on a continuum between literal and figurative meaning rather than forming a homogeneous group.

Similarly, Cacciari and Glucksberg [12] identify three types of idioms according to their transparency: **opaque** (e.g. *kick the bucket*), **transparent** (e.g. *spill the beans* = to divulge a secret) and **quasi-metaphorical** which lie between the two extremes. This model emphasizes the cognitive processing load that idioms impose on language learners, depending on how easily their figurative meaning can be inferred from context.

A slightly different perspective is offered by Nunberg [13], who distinguishes idioms according to the degree of semantic decomposability—that is, whether the literal meanings of the components contribute to the overall interpretation. Building on Nunberg's framework, Gibbs and Nayak [14] further refine and empirically validate this classification. Accordingly, idiomatic expressions are commonly divided into three categories:

1. **Normally decomposable idioms**, where one component is used literally (e.g. *pop the question* = "to propose marriage");

2. **Abnormally decomposable idioms**, where parts can be metaphorically mapped (e.g. *pass the buck* = "to shift responsibility"); and

3. **Non-decomposable idioms**, where the meaning cannot be derived from any of the individual words (e.g. *chew the fat* = "to chat casually").

In addition, another taxonomy distinguishes between pure idioms (e.g. *spill the beans* = to tell people secret information), binomial idioms (e.g. *heart-to-heart* = a candid conversation between two people), partial idioms (e.g. *when in Rome*), and prepositional idioms (e.g. *agree on* = share an opinion with someone) [15]. These classifications reveal the extraordinary formal and semantic diversity of idiomatic language and highlight why idioms are often among the last linguistic elements to be mastered by foreign language learners.

Some English idioms seem to be lexically flexible (e.g. *button your lip* can be changed to *fasten your lips*), others seem to be lexically frozen (e.g. *kick the bucket* cannot be changed to *kick the pail* or *punt the bucket*). Some idiomatic phrases are literally well-formed (e.g. *hit the books*, *ring a bell*), whereas other expressions are literally ill-formed (e.g. *crack a joke*, *swallow one's pride*).

Furthermore, Mueller and Gibbs [16] observe that idioms which are literally well-formed (e.g. *hit the books*, *ring a bell*) are processed faster than ill-formed idioms (e.g. *swallow one's pride*). This finding suggests that the degree of syntactic and semantic transparency directly influences processing speed and comprehension, a factor that carries pedagogical implications for EFL instruction.

From a cognitive-linguistic standpoint, idioms may also be viewed as conceptual metaphors that reflect how speakers structure their understanding of the world. For instance, expressions like *time is money* or *life is a journey* are grounded in metaphorical thinking, bridging the gap between language and cognition. This metaphor-based view, advocated by Lakoff and Johnson, underscores that idioms are not arbitrary but rather culturally motivated reflections of shared conceptual patterns.

Moreover, idioms differ in their pragmatic and stylistic functions. Some are highly colloquial (*to spill the beans*), while others are formal (*to break new ground*). Certain idioms serve as discourse markers (*to make a long story short*), while others fulfill evaluative or humorous purposes. Recognizing these pragmatic distinctions is essential for achieving sociolinguistic competence, as inappropriate idiom choice can lead to misunderstandings or pragmatic failure in intercultural communication.

In light of these diverse classifications, it becomes evident that idioms are far more than decorative linguistic features; they are multi-layered expressions of thought, culture, and identity. Therefore, their systematic inclusion in EFL curricula is not merely desirable but necessary. Idioms permeate both formal and informal registers [17], encapsulating the history, culture, and worldview of native speakers [18]. Mastering them, consequently, represents a milestone in attaining advanced proficiency and authentic communicative competence in English.

4. Challenges in Teaching and Learning Idioms

Despite their undeniable importance in achieving communicative competence, idiomatic expressions remain one of the most challenging aspects of English language acquisition for EFL learners. Their figurative nature, cultural specificity, and syntactic irregularity often render them opaque to non-native speakers. Unlike grammatical rules or lexical items that follow relatively predictable patterns, idioms defy literal interpretation and require learners to infer meaning from context, experience, and cultural knowledge.

A major obstacle in idiom comprehension lies in their semantic opacity. Learners tend to approach new vocabulary analytically, attempting to decode meaning word by word. However, idioms such as *kick the bucket* or *bite the dust* resist compositional interpretation. As a result, students often misinterpret these expressions or avoid them altogether. This challenge is particularly pronounced among learners whose first language lacks equivalent idiomatic constructions, leading to cross-linguistic interference. In many cases, students translate idioms literally into their mother tongue, producing errors that reveal a lack of idiomatic awareness.

Furthermore, idioms are deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of a language. As Fernando and Flavell [19] note, idiomatic competence is not merely linguistic but also cultural, requiring knowledge of historical events, literary references, customs, and humor. Expressions such as *a Trojan horse*, *Pandora's box*, or *the writing on the wall* draw upon specific cultural and mythological references. Without exposure to these cultural frameworks, EFL learners are unable to fully grasp the connotations or pragmatic nuances conveyed by idioms.

Another key difficulty involves contextual and pragmatic appropriateness. Idioms vary in formality, frequency, and situational use. For instance, while *to hit the sack* (go to bed) is common in informal conversation, it would be inappropriate in academic writing or formal speech. EFL learners often struggle to judge when an idiom is suitable, which can result in pragmatic failure or awkward phrasing. In this respect, idiomatic competence extends beyond lexical knowledge—it encompasses stylistic sensitivity and sociolinguistic awareness.

Moreover, the unpredictable frequency and non-systematic distribution of idioms in input make them difficult to acquire incidentally. Unlike grammatical structures, idioms appear sporadically in texts and conversations. Teachers often overlook them in formal instruction, prioritizing grammar and general vocabulary. Consequently, many learners complete advanced levels of English with limited exposure to figurative language, which contributes to a gap between their grammatical proficiency and communicative fluency.

Psycholinguistic studies also suggest that idiom comprehension relies heavily on familiarity and exposure. Learners process familiar idioms holistically, whereas unfamiliar ones require analytical decoding, increasing cognitive load and slowing comprehension. This supports the view that idiom acquisition is a gradual process dependent on repeated contextual encounters and explicit teaching. As Cieslicka [20] argues, idiomatic meaning activation occurs more efficiently when learners have internalized the figurative sense through meaningful practice rather than rote memorization.

Finally, instructional challenges must also be acknowledged. Many teachers feel uncertain about how to integrate idioms into their lessons systematically. Traditional textbooks may provide lists of idioms without context, discouraging active usage. In addition, assessment of idiomatic competence remains difficult, as it involves both recognition and production skills. Therefore, innovative teaching strategies are required to make idioms accessible, memorable, and relevant to learners' communicative needs.

In summary, the acquisition of idiomatic expressions represents a multifaceted challenge that encompasses semantic, cultural, pragmatic, and pedagogical dimensions. To overcome these barriers, instruction must combine explicit explanation, contextualized practice, and cultural insight. As the following section will demonstrate, various pedagogical approaches can significantly enhance EFL learners' ability to comprehend, internalize, and appropriately use idiomatic expressions in authentic communication.

5. Strategies for Enhancing Learners' Idiom Comprehension and Acquisition

Dialogues provide EFL learners with valuable opportunities to practice oral skills in a safe, controlled setting before applying them in authentic, real-world contexts. In particular, working in pairs or groups through everyday role-plays proves to be an engaging and effective way to develop both fluency and idiomatic competence across different ages and proficiency levels.

Nunan points out that role-plays are excellent activities for enhancing learners' speaking abilities within the relatively safe environment of the classroom before they must perform in real-life contexts [21]. Therefore, dialogue writing and role-playing can serve as both practical and stimulating methods for teaching English idioms.

Recent linguistic research also underscores that idioms are not arbitrary; rather, they are conceptually motivated components of language. Consequently, instead of relying on rote memorization—a method often perceived as tedious and ineffective—teachers can adopt a systematic, meaning-based approach. By grouping idioms according to their metaphorical or thematic origins, learners can more easily grasp, remember, and appropriately use these expressions in communication.

For instance, the idiomatic expressions "*lend someone a hand*", "*try your hand at something*" and "*have your hands tied*" all relate to the concept of performing an action, since the hand symbolizes effort and control in human activity. Similarly, idioms including *stick to your guns* ("refuse to change your opinion"), *fight a losing battle* ("continue an effort that is unlikely to succeed"), and *be in the front line* ("play a leading or exposed role") derive from the semantic field of war and conflict. Understanding the conceptual connection between an idiom's literal image and its figurative meaning helps learners form stronger mental associations, thereby enhancing retention and use.

Moreover, many idiomatic expressions emerge from everyday experiences and natural phenomena. For example, idioms such as *under the weather* ("feeling unwell"), *break the ice* ("to start a friendly conversation"), and *spill the beans* ("to reveal a secret") are metaphorical yet rooted in familiar imagery. Introducing idioms through visual aids, short videos, or situational dialogues enables learners to infer meaning from context rather than rely solely on translation or rote memorization.

Chen and Lai [22] emphasize that exposure to authentic language input plays a vital role in idiom acquisition. They encourage learners to listen to the news, watch television programs, and read various materials that naturally incorporate idiomatic language. Additionally, integrating idioms into interactive classroom activities—such as matching exercises, storytelling, and creative dialogue writing—can further support both comprehension and production. For instance, students may create a short conversation using idioms related to emotions (*over the moon*, *down in the dumps*, *keep your cool*) or complete a short narrative incorporating newly learned expressions.

In addition to these comprehension strategies, Cooper [23] proposes sixteen practical teaching techniques that make idiom learning interactive and memorable. These include:

1) ***Choosing Idioms*** - It is essential to find those that are frequently encountered in everyday situations.
2) ***Discussing Idioms*** to activate prior knowledge and spark curiosity.
3) ***Defining Idioms*** - After the initial discussion, the teacher should "present the new idiom within the larger context of a short paragraph or a dialogue" [23, p. 262].

4) ***Dividing Idioms into Categories*** – "Dividing idioms into thematic categories will make them easier to learn, for the student can study them as groups composed of elements that have common features rather than as lists of unrelated expressions to be memorized" [23, p. 263].

5) ***Drawing Idioms*** to visualize the relationship between literal and figurative meanings.

6) ***Dramatizing Idioms*** through skits or charades, where students act out literal meanings and guess figurative ones.

7) ***Retelling Exercise***, in which students recreate a story using as many idioms as possible.

8) ***Add-on Story*** – The teacher starts the narrative by using one of the idioms written on the board, after which each student adds a sentence including one of the idioms.

9) ***Discuss Idioms from Newspaper Comic Strips*** – Each student selects a comic strip containing an idiomatic expression. These are then written down on the board and discussed.

10) ***Idioms in Cartoons*** – The teacher collects samples where the literal meaning and the figurative meaning are used to achieve humorous situations and discusses it with the students.

11) ***Idioms from TV Shows or films***, showing authentic usage.

12) ***Paragraph Completion exercises*** using contextual clues to insert the correct idiom.

13) ***Interview Classmates or Native Speakers***, to learn idioms in authentic social contexts.

14) ***Idiom-of-the-Day Mobile*** or displays for continuous exposure.

15) ***Idiom Board Game*** – The suggestion is that students create a game using idiomatic expressions and clues connected to their meaning. For instance, "How do you say you're really happy? Hint: You're high in the air! Answer: I'm in seventh heaven or I'm on cloud nine" [23, p. 264].

16) ***Idiom Jazz Chants*** **and rhythm-based activities** for repetition and memory.

Beyond classroom activities, ongoing exposure to authentic input remains essential. As Ambrose notes, newspapers, magazines, radio programs, television shows, and films provide abundant examples of idiomatic language. Furthermore, understanding the origins and imagery behind idioms enhances learners' retention. For instance, knowing that *spill the beans* originated from an ancient Greek voting system or that *barking up the wrong tree* comes from hunting creates memorable links between literal and figurative meanings.

To summarize, a balanced pedagogical approach that combines contextualized practice, conceptual understanding, and authentic exposure allows learners not only to recognize idioms but also to use them confidently and appropriately in communication. By shifting idiom learning from mere mechanical repetition to meaningful engagement, educators can transform this challenging aspect of language into an enjoyable and highly rewarding component of EFL instruction. Such an approach promotes deeper cognitive processing, enhances retention, and encourages learners to connect linguistic forms with cultural and pragmatic contexts, ultimately fostering both linguistic competence and communicative confidence.

6. Teaching Idioms to Beginners, Intermediate and Advanced Learners

Teaching English idioms effectively requires tailoring strategies to learners' proficiency levels, since beginners, intermediate, and advanced students have distinct needs, prior knowledge, and cognitive skills [24]. Consequently, instruction must be adapted to ensure that idioms are both comprehensible and meaningful for each group.

For beginners, idioms should be introduced thematically. For instance, if the lesson focuses on food, teachers might select a set of food-related idioms such as *You're a peach!*, *Easy as pie*, or *To have bigger fish to fry*. Once a theme is chosen, learners can engage in discovery activities to explore the meanings of these expressions. Pair or group work is particularly effective: students can complete a matching worksheet where idioms are paired with their definitions, using translation if necessary. This encourages learners to compare the idioms with expressions in their own language, facilitating comprehension. Once learners have matched idioms with their meanings, a game-based activity such as charades can reinforce learning. Idioms are written on cards, and students act them out while classmates guess in English. This creates a fun, low-pressure environment that encourages participation and builds confidence.

For intermediate learners, some idioms may already be familiar, but their idiomatic repertoire can still be expanded. At this stage, authentic materials such as songs provide a memorable and engaging context for learning new expressions. For instance, using Adele's *Someone Like You*, teachers can highlight idioms such as *out of the blue* ("unexpectedly") [25]. Music aids memory retention, while guided discussion of the idioms in the lyrics deepens understanding. A recommended sequence is to warm up with a listening activity, followed by a discussion of idioms' meanings and usage, allowing learners to encounter expressions in authentic communicative contexts. This combination of listening, analysis, and contextualization enhances both comprehension and long-term retention.

Advanced learners often already know many common idioms, so instruction can focus on lexical enrichment and cultural awareness. Activities such as idiom research projects, comparative studies of idiomatic equivalents in students' native languages, or investigations into the etymology of expressions help learners develop nuanced understanding and precise usage. In addition, advanced students benefit from analyzing subtle distinctions in meaning, connotation, and context, which strengthen both their receptive and productive skills. Such activities not only consolidate idiomatic knowledge but also cultivate critical thinking and cultural insight.

Regardless of proficiency level, several overarching strategies enhance idiom learning effectively.

Firstly, teaching idioms in categories based on topics, themes, or linguistic structures helps organize vocabulary meaningfully. Secondly, visual aids such as pictures, drawings, and flashcards can reinforce meaning, while body language, facial expressions, and gestures convey tone and nuance. Thirdly, presenting idioms in context—through authentic dialogues, stories, songs, or videos [26] – allows learners to encounter expressions as they naturally occur. Moreover, providing ample practice and feedback, for instance by asking students to create sentences, stories, or dialogues using idioms, supports both comprehension and production. Finally, ensuring exposure to idioms across diverse sources and genres, including newspapers, magazines, books, TV shows, podcasts, movies, and online materials appropriate for learners' levels and interests, fosters familiarity and real-world applicability.

By integrating thematic presentation, interactive practice, and authentic exposure, teachers can facilitate not only understanding but also confident usage of idioms. When these strategies are applied consistently, idiom learning becomes not only effective but also engaging and meaningful, transforming it from a rote memorization task into a dynamic part of language development.

7. Conclusions

To summarize, teaching idiomatic expressions to EFL learners is an essential component of English language instruction. Indeed, it is not sufficient to teach only the literal meanings of idioms; learners must also understand how to use them appropriately and effectively in context. Idioms form a crucial aspect of every language's lexicon, reflecting the history, culture, and shared experiences of its speakers. Therefore, fostering idiom comprehension helps students develop a deeper appreciation for the nuances of English and promotes more authentic, native-like communication.

Moreover, idiom acquisition requires learners to move beyond word-by-word translation and integrate figurative meaning into their understanding. This process encourages cognitive flexibility and strengthens inferencing skills, as students learn to recognize metaphors, analogies, and cultural references embedded in idiomatic expressions. Consequently, incorporating idioms into classroom instruction not only improves linguistic competence but also enhances learners' critical thinking and interpretive abilities.

Furthermore, a solid command of idioms significantly contributes to fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary expansion. By engaging with idioms in context—through dialogues, songs, literature, and multimedia—students can internalize expressions naturally, making their speech more dynamic and expressive. Contextualized exposure also enables learners to interpret idiomatic language when it appears in real-world materials such as films, podcasts, and newspapers, thereby bridging the gap between classroom learning and authentic communication.

In addition, developing idiomatic competence promotes intercultural understanding. Many idiomatic expressions carry cultural, historical, or social connotations unique to English-speaking communities. By understanding these subtleties, learners not only improve their communicative accuracy but also gain insight into the values, beliefs, and social norms of native speakers. This cultural dimension of idiom learning enhances students' overall pragmatic competence and prepares them for meaningful interactions in diverse contexts.

Finally, idioms are more than mere linguistic ornaments—they are markers of fluency, sophistication, and communicative confidence. For EFL learners, a strong knowledge of idiomatic expressions is a gateway to achieving higher proficiency levels and authentic, nuanced communication. In short, mastering idioms is indispensable: it completes the journey from linguistic competence to true communicative mastery.

Moreover, it is important to emphasize that idiom instruction should be continuous and integrated across all language skills. Repeated exposure, varied practice, and the use of authentic materials ensure that learners not only recognize idioms passively but can also use them actively in speaking and writing. By combining comprehension, production, and cultural insight, educators can transform idiom learning from a challenging task into an engaging, meaningful, and highly rewarding aspect of language acquisition.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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