

The importance of idiomatic competence for future FL teachers

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Annotation. *Idiomatic competence plays an essential role in mastering any language. It not only reflects learners' knowledge on understanding and using idioms in their oral or written speech, but also skill of using natural and correct expressions. However, developing idiomatic competence hasn't gained adequate attention in research and practice despite its vital role in achieving language fluency and effective communication. This article is aimed at defining the value of idiomatic competence in English language learning, focusing on the perceptions and practices of 23 university educators about the necessity, usage and preferred methods of teaching idiomatic expressions. The study emphasizes the need for more successful strategies in teaching idioms.*

Keywords: *idiomatic competence, idiomaticity, survey, instructional strategies, methods, university educators.*

Значимость идиоматической компетенции для будущих учителей ИЯ

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Аннотация. *Идиоматическая компетентность играет важную роль в освоении любого языка. Она не только отражает знания учащихся о понимании и использовании идиом в устной или письменной речи, но и умение использовать естественные и правильные выражения. Однако развитие идиоматической компетентности не получило должного внимания в исследованиях и практике, несмотря на ее важную роль в достижении беглости языка и эффективной коммуникации. Целью этой статьи является определение ценности идиоматической компетентности в изучении английского языка с упором на восприятие и практику 23 преподавателей университетов относительно необходимости, использования и предпочтительных методов обучения идиоматическим выражениям. В исследовании подчеркивается необходимость более успешных стратегий в обучении идиомам.*

Ключевые слова: *идиоматическая компетентность, идиоматичность, опрос, учебные стратегии, методы, преподаватели вузов.*

Bo'lajak chet tili o'qituvchilari uchun idiomatik kompetensiyaning ahamiyati

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Annotatsiya. *Idiomatik kompetensiya har qanday tilni o'zlashtirishda muhim rol o'ynaydi. Bu nafaqat til o'rganuvchilarning og'zaki yoki yozma nutqida idiomalarni tushunish va ishlatish bo'yicha bilimlarini, balki tabiiy va to'g'ri iboralarni qo'llash qobiliyatini ham aks ettiradi. Biroq, idiomatik kompetensiyani rivojlantirish, tilni ravon va samarali muloqot qilishda muhim rol o'ynaganiga qaramay, tadqiqot va amaliyotda etarlicha e'tiborga ega emas. Ushbu maqola ingliz tilini o'rganishda idiomatik kompetensiyaning ahamiyatini aniqlashga qaratilgan bo'lib, 23 ta universitet o'qituvchilarining idiomatik iboralarni o'rgatishdagi zarurat, qay darajada qo'llanilishi va ular afzal ko'rgan metodlari haqidagi fikrlari va amaliyotlariga e'tibor qaratadi hamda idiomalarni o'rgatishda yanada muvaffaqiyatli strategiyalar zarurligini ta'kidlab o'tadi.*

Kalit so'zlar: *idiomatik kompetensiya, idiomatik, so'rovnoma, ta'lim strategiyalari, uslublar, universitet o'qituvchilari.*

Introduction

English has become a global language. English speaking people are in all corners of the world, whether in marketing, business, trade, science, sport and even fashion. In teaching or learning English as a foreign language, one of the key component of language proficiency is idiomatic competence. It is defined as the ability to understand and use idioms appropriately and accurately in a variety of sociocultural contexts, in a manner similar to that of native speakers, and with the least amount of mental effort (Liontas, 1999). These expressions are common in everyday language and are crucial for both native and nonnative speakers. Idioms, proverbs, colloquial expressions are integral to the natural flow of conversation as they convey beyond the literal interpretation of word. Most English learners consider idiomatic competence as 'using idioms in their written or oral speech'. But this competence not only shows the ability of understanding and producing idioms, but also 'containing expressions that are natural to a native speaker of a language. Idiomaticity is a specific form of expression of thought in a particular language, mediated by ethno-cultural and ethno-linguistic factors, as a reflection of the worldview of a given linguistic and cultural community (Tarnaeva, 2021). According to E. A. Dolgina, 'idiomaticity' is a set of characteristics that give speech naturalness and authenticity, from the viewpoint of well-educated native speakers, it at the same time gives originality and uniqueness for foreigners (Dolgina, 1999). Thus, an idiomaticity is a characteristic of a language that is created under the influence of certain factors, characteristic of both words and sentences and possessing features (authenticity) that are not typical for foreigners.

Within the framework of the methodology of teaching a foreign language, researchers Z.K. Gutnova, N.I. Filatova (Gutnova 2000, Filatova 2002) stress that teachers need to bring idiomaticity to a new level means the idiomaticity of speech. Because the native speakers' speech is usually characterized by such qualities as imagery and expressiveness the achievement of which is possible through the use of phraseological units, idiomatic expressions, proverbs and sayings in speech, which, in turn, are an indicator of high culture" (Burger, 1973).

For future English teachers mastering idiomatic expressions is not just a matter of linguistic expertise but also a bridge to cultural fluency, empowering them to demonstrate real, dynamic communication for their learners. But in language teaching, main focus is often on language subskills and skills, where idiomatic expressions are mostly underemphasized. This is particularly problematic, as idioms are widespread in both everyday conversation and written forms, such as literature, media and academic tests. Idioms reflect rich historical experience of the people, everyday life and culture of people. Use of authentic and appropriate idiomatic expressions gives speech a unique originality and special expressiveness. So, the article explores the necessity of idiomatic competence for productive foreign language teachers, arguing that such knowledge elevates their ability to create more engaging and contextually appropriate language learning experiences. Promoting idiomatic competence in future FL teachers is essential for preparing them to meet the different linguistic and cultural challenges faced by their students in a progressively globalized world.

Potential of idioms in the English classes

The integration of idiomatic expressions in English language teaching holds essential potential for enhancing both linguistic and cultural competence. While idioms are often considered as advanced elements of language, their integration into language teaching offers several pedagogical benefits that go beyond vocabulary acquisition. For future foreign language teachers, incorporating idiomatic expressions into their teaching process provides a unique opportunity to stimulate students' language skills while fostering a deeper understanding of the cultural particularities that shape communication in English. First, teaching idioms helps students navigate the complexities of meaning that extend beyond literal translations. Idiomatic expressions often convey cultural references, historical contexts, and social practices that are not always immediately accessible to learners (Gibbs, 2008). By engaging with idioms students develop the ability to interpret language in its full, culturally embedded context, which is crucial for effective communication.

According to J. Ambrose (2008), idioms convey cultural and historical insights, helping individuals expand their understanding and use of language. The primary users of idiomatic expressions are native speakers who are familiar with culture and traditions of their country. However, native speakers also can learn about a country's culture by studying idioms. As learners familiarize themselves with idiomatic expressions, they often try to use them in daily conversations. When they incorporate idioms into their vocabulary, they not only become proficient speakers, but also gain a deeper appreciation for the traditions and histories that shape the language.

In view of some scholars idiomatic knowledge correlates with cognitive process and abstract concepts, which present certain difficulties (Al-khada, 2015). Idioms are said to mirror the culture of the language. As it happens with most culturally-determined language aspects, idioms pose great difficulties for learners (Prodromou, 2003). This emphasizes the challenge of learning idioms as they are more complicated than just knowing the meanings of the individual words in a phrase. The brain works harder to understand idiomatic expressions because their meanings are not literal. Learners often have difficulties because idioms may not have direct translations in their native language, or the cultural context can be unfamiliar. For instance, "*be in hot water*" doesn't have anything to do with water. According to Cambridge dictionary this idiom means to be in a difficult situation in which he or she is in danger of being criticized or punished. One more example is "*add insult to injury*" which means adding fuel to the fire. Said when you feel that someone has made a bad situation worse by doing something else to upset you. Research shows that learners sometimes translate idioms literally or guess their meanings, which can lead to misunderstandings.

Through mastering idiomatic expressions, a foreign language is fully recognized as a means of communication, a tool for mutual understanding between people, a means of introduction to another national culture, and an important resource for the development of students' intellectual abilities and their linguistic potential. Learning any language involves getting acquainted with the ethnicity, culture, and mentality of its speakers, and idioms, as is well-known, reflect not only the wisdom of a people but also their attitude towards the world, expressed through language and even humor (Denisova, 2011). For example: *to have a frog in your throat* – to have difficulty in speaking because your throat feels dry and you want to cough; *to put the cat among pigeons* –to say or do something that causes trouble or makes a lot of people very angry. Here we can see that these idioms have playful language and unexpected meaning. Involving humorous nuances can add fun to a conversation. Thus, the study of idioms significantly broadens students' horizons and provides them with an emotionally vivid picture of the language being studied.

In this case, several strategies can help teachers. These include teaching idioms explicitly, showing how they're used in context, and using real-life examples to make idioms easier to understand (Kecskes, 2013). Technology, like language learning apps or websites, can also help learners see idioms in authentic settings, such as in movies or conversations. As J.I.Liontas states, one way is to examine whether learners' idiomatic performance changes over time. A second way is to examine idiom samples of learner language collected over a period of time. A third way is to

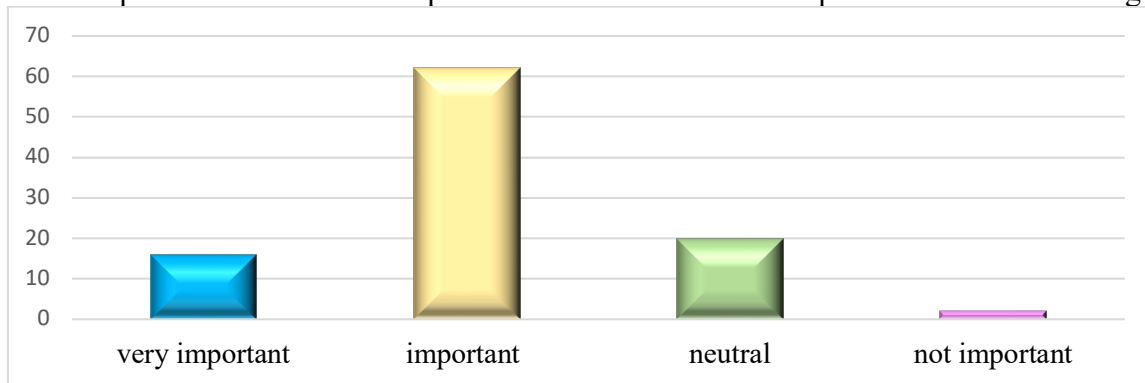
conduct a mixed-methods analysis on the idiomatic data learners produce orally or in writing over a period of many months or even several years (Liontas, 2015)

Methodology

The research methodology includes the data about English teachers’ preferences on teaching idioms and its necessity. The subjects of my research paper are 23 teachers who are working as EL teachers in high educational institutions in different locations. The purpose of the online survey is data-collection of using and teaching idiomatic expression at English classes of universities. Particularly, the questions of survey included teachers’ opinion about the importance of idiomatic competence, how often they use idiomatic expressions in their speech, which strategies are successful to teach and whether idiomatic expressions help to gain deeper understanding of cultures to improve students’ fluency in speech production.

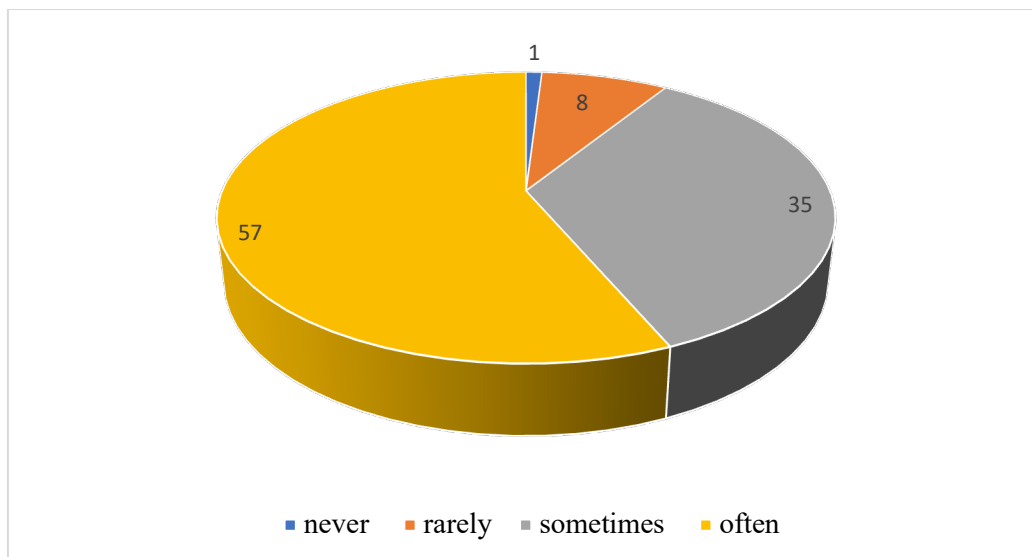
Results

In the following section I present the results of a questionnaire distributed to 23 foreign language (FL) teachers, aimed at exploring their level of idiomatic competence and perceptions regarding the necessity of idiomatic expressions in teaching English. The questionnaire consisted of both quantitative and qualitative questions. 52 % of attendants have over 10 years of teaching experience, while 48 % of them have worked from 3 to 10 years in the sphere of teaching FL. Their answer to the question whether it is important to teach idiomatic competence was as followings:



It can be seen that 62% of teachers considered that it is necessary to teach idiomatic competency, whereas only 2% of them say that it is not important. Neutral preferences were 20% and 16% attenders contemplates idioms as very important teaching resource.

Next result presents the frequency of idiomatic expression usage by teachers:



Regarding pie chart, 57 % of FL teachers often use idioms in their speech, while 35% of them use them sometimes. Only 1% shows that they never apply on idiomatic expressions whereas 8% make use of them sometimes.

Following table illustrates the teaching strategies that FL teachers consider more effective in teaching idioms. They include Presentation -Practice- Production (PPP) methods such as explaining the context, repetition drills, using pictures or technology like videos and apps to introduce idioms and the last one is grouping idioms by their meaning. For example, idioms like *feeling blue* (feeling sad or depressed) or *on cloud nine* (extremely happy) describe people's emotion. *A people person* and *a party animal* means people who like socialize.

<i>Method</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Explanation	33%
Repetition	6%
Using picture/technology	52%
Grouping by theme	9%

This table represents that, majority of FL teachers prefer to use pictures or technology to teach idioms (52%), so that they can present them better and practice through different tasks to produce by learners effectively. Further methods for quality teaching are explanation (33%), grouping by theme (9%) and repetition (6%).

Discussion

The main aim of this study was to investigate the importance of idiomatic competence both for FL teachers and school learners, preferences their usage and applied methods for teaching idioms. These findings reveal that majority of FL teachers recognize the role of idiomatic expressions in the language class. Large number of teachers use idioms in their speech regularly though some avoid them, possibly due to concerns about their complexity or difficulty school students may face while understanding them as previous studies show. In terms of teaching methods, the largest percentage favors using technology and pictures to present idioms (52%) reflects growing importance of multimedia in language learning. The second most popular method – explaining the context (33%) help students to understand idioms in real life situation. This approach is also essential as idioms often have the meaning cannot be inferred from literal word alone. Grouping idioms by theme (9%) and repetition drills (6%) were less favored and considered that it lacks depth while idiom learning.

Conclusion

In conclusion, findings indicate that there is a broader agreement on the value of idiomatic expressions in discourse production. It highlights the importance of idiomatic competence not for only linguistic fluency, but also gaining insights to the culture and worldview of native speakers. While the majority of teachers acknowledge the significance of idioms and use them in their own speech, integrating them into lessons remains a challenge. The challenges students may face because of not having direct translation or cultural context. Thus, most favored teaching methods involves utilizing multimedia tools and providing context-driven explanation, which helps students to grasp in real life contexts. While traditional methods like repetition and grouping idioms by themes are less favored, but they still serve as supplementary tools for reinforcing students. Overall, the results indicate that idiomatic expressions are crucial for language proficiency of future FL teachers, more effective teaching approaches are required to help students to master them. To make a better improvement, additional teacher training, accessible resources are essential to enhance the effectiveness of the instructions for idioms teaching and support language teachers in developing students' idiomatic competence.

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