

EFL In-service Teachers and Teachers' Perceptions of Challenges in Teaching Idioms to B1 Learners

Nguyen Duong Nhu Quynh^{1*}, Bui Thi Huyen^{2*}

¹ Faculty of Foreign Languages, Van Lang University, Ho Chi Minh, Viet Nam

*Corresponding author's email: huyenbui1301@gmail.com

*  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9678-8813>

 <https://doi.org/10.54855/ijli.25415>

© Copyright (c) 2025 Nguyen Duong Nhu Quynh, Bui Thi Huyen

Received: 28/07/2024

Revision: 20/02/2025

Accepted: 22/02/2025

Online: 01/03/2025

ABSTRACT

Keywords: teaching idioms, preliminary learners, in-service teachers, teachers' perceptions in teaching idioms

Teaching idioms in English language classrooms has been extensively investigated by researchers around the world. This study examines the difficulties that EFL in-service teachers and teachers face when teaching idioms to B1 learners and their perceptions of the cultural aspects involved. The findings indicate that teachers encounter challenges due to learners' difficulties with understanding the figurative meanings of idioms, limited availability of suitable textbooks, and a lack of opportunities for contextual learning. The findings also highlight the importance of culture in understanding idioms and suggest that integrating cultural insights can improve idiomatic proficiency and communication skills. The study emphasizes the necessity of implementing contextualized teaching strategies to address these challenges.

Introduction

In the globalization epoch, English has been recognized as the most important means of communication. In an attempt to fulfill the needs of modern society, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training has promulgated a new scheme of English teaching for learners from grade 3 to grade 12. The shift from teacher-centered to learning-centered and learner-centered methodologies has caused remarkable challenges and opportunities for teachers and learners (MOET, 2018). According to the new scheme, learners of general institutions are expected to achieve English proficiency of level 3 in “The Vietnam Six-levels of Foreign Language Proficiency Framework” when they graduate high school (MOET, 2018). Therefore, teachers need to meet the new requirements and standards of Vietnamese learners' communicative competence.

Neuman and Dwyer (2009) defined vocabulary as “words we must know to communicate effectively; words in speaking (expressive vocabulary) and words in listening (receptive vocabulary)”. Rizq (2015) asserted that lexical knowledge plays a pivotal role in L2 learners' communicative competence and second language acquisition. In other words, vocabulary has

been highly marked as a primary element in building learners' daily conversation as well as producing their natural sounds (Alqahtani, 2015).

As regards idioms, they are an integral part of language and culture, and their role in the contribution of learners' linguistic competence is just as crucial as vocabulary (Rizq, 2015). Idioms bring vivid and profound expressions to language through their colors and patches, creating images that convey meanings beyond the individual words that compose them (De Caro, 2009). All in all, idioms are considered a crucial key to successful communication among learners by helping them speak better and understand native speakers more easily (Suhodolli, 2019; Inuw & Sule, 2022).

In English-speaking countries, idioms are particularly rich and widely used (Fomenko et al., 2020). Native speakers frequently use idioms in all forms of communication, including daily conversations and written documents. However, when it comes to an L2 classroom context, idioms are considered difficult and hard to convey completely due to their characteristics (Liontas, 2017). Many teachers found teaching idioms especially challenging when they had to translate English idioms to their mother tongues. The teachers and learners mentioned idioms as a source of perplexity even though they are aware of the significance and frequency of idioms in the English language (Gathigia & Njoroge, 2016).

Idioms are said to be "hard nuts to crack" (Ke, 2019), yet they play a tremendous role in language use and communication. According to Cooper (1999), English learners may come across idiomatic expressions in all forms of discourse, from academic to real-life contexts such as books, newspapers, movies, television programs, or daily conversations. Furthermore, Nation and Meara (2020) affirmed the fact that formulaic language (including idioms) contributes to the proficiency and native-like accuracy of target learners. Consequently, mastering idioms apparently results in a thorough understanding of foreign languages, especially English.

Contrary to the new English teaching curriculum, teaching idioms in the Vietnamese classroom context is likely to receive less attention than it is supposed to (Vũ, 2009). Vũ claimed that the lack of idioms in textbook sources is a challenge for local practitioners in teaching such figurative components. He indicated that the current English textbooks only provide L2 learners with a few idiomatic expressions in the form of rote learning accompanied by several exercises. Although many studies have already been conducted on different fields of vocabulary acquisition and utilization, the areas of idiomatic research are quite open to expansion in linguistics. Needless to say, EFL teachers should not ignore any idiomatic provision to their learners in an L2 setting as they play an important role in facilitating learners with knowledgeable input.

Previous studies acknowledge the importance of idioms to language competence of target-language learners and suggest teacher approaches to effectively equip learners with comprehensible input (Chan, 2021; Fomenko et al., 2020; Li, 2010). This study concerns the perceptions of English in-service teachers at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Van Lang University, and Thuc Hanh English Center teachers towards the importance of idiomatic expressions at the Intermediate level (B1) and the contribution of cultural contexts in teaching idioms.

Literature review

Definitions and types of idioms

There are various definitions for the term "idioms" as well as many controversies about the components that form an idiom. Oxford Learner's Dictionaries define idiom as 'a group of words whose meaning is different from the meanings of the individual words' and is 'used by particular people at a particular time or place (Oxford University Press, n.d.)'. Similarly, Baker (2018) defined idioms in her book 'In Other Words' as frozen patterns that regularly resist variation in form and carry a meaning that cannot be predicted by understanding their constituents individually. However, the most well-known definition of idioms belongs to Cooper (1999), in which he emphasized that idioms are multi-word units with non-literal meanings.

Apparently, idiomatic expression is complex and does not follow any logical rules for its semantic features. In the paper regarding teaching idioms, Cooper (1998) presented that idioms are *non-literal* or figurative language frequently appearing in discourse. Such expressions contain metaphors, similes, and proverbs, which makes it challenging to learn and use since each element of an idiom may not mean what it states literally. Cooper demonstrated several cases in which the meaning cannot be predicted from the literal meaning of individual words. For example, suppose English learners hear the expression 'to lead a dog's life' and immediately come up with the meaning by looking at the literal meaning of each word. In that case, the flourishing message of this idiom will never be revealed and comprehended. The paper also recommended some insights about approaches to teaching idioms to learners, especially through metaphorical context.

Idioms have been categorized into three main types according to their syntactic and semantic features. According to Irujo (1986), there are three types of idioms: identical, similar, and different. She hypothesized that identical idioms are the easiest to understand and use since they can be translated word-by-word in learners' first language. Similar idioms are a bit different in the conceptual metaphors, but learners can find the idiomatic equivalents in their native language. Different idioms include patterns and meanings different from the learners' native idiomatic language. The study indicated the difficulties and ease of L2 learners during their transferring and interpreting process of idioms in L1 and L2.

The importance of idioms

Pollio et al. (2023) estimated that an English native speaker would use around 20 million idioms over a lifetime. It is highly possible to see such expressions displayed in daily media such as newspapers, radio broadcasts, television programs, movies, and songs. Defining the structure of idioms and then understanding and translating those idiomatic expressions into the mother language is not easy work, though, as idioms do not say what they mean (Irujo, 1986). Being able to express idioms appropriately causes fluent and natural speech. The idiomatic understandable ability, as known as idiomatic competence, is associated closely with cultural knowledge rather than the original word meanings (Saleh & Zakaria, 2013).

De Caro (2009) examined the learners' use of idioms at Universidad Santo Tomás- Colombia. A group of 11 undergraduates and a teacher were asked about their use of idioms and how idioms are important to them. The teacher also demonstrated a lesson aimed at teaching idioms to learners to improve their speaking skills and vocabulary. The study indicated that the acquisition and utilization of idioms enable learners to improve their knowledge of linguistics and communicative skills.

Suhodolli (2019) conducted a study to investigate the importance of idioms in learning English among Albanian learners. The author proclaimed that learning idioms helps learners communicate better and understand native speakers more easily. Thus, learning idioms is inseparable from learning English, as idioms are part of the culture. The paper also implied that teachers need to support the learners in acquiring idioms and help them know how to use such expressions in real-life contexts. No specific idiom teaching activities are recommended though. Interestingly, idioms are not included extensively enough in the L2 classroom settings. Moreover, Asl (2013) mentioned that EFL teachers tend to ignore idioms but focus more on rules of grammar and sentence patterns, which makes it simpler for learners to understand the language.

Similarly, Hinkel (2017) presented the benefits of idioms in teaching and learning foreign languages at any level of proficiency, comprising beginning or intermediate learners. Thanks to acquiring idiomatic expressions, L2 learners may enhance receptive and productive competencies; otherwise, the absence of these language units can lead to ineffective communication in neither written nor spoken forms. Nonetheless, the paper claimed that idiomatic formulas are still comparatively less established in teaching materials than vocabulary or grammar structures.

In addition, regarding one of the most commonplace English assessment tests – IELTS (International English Language Testing System), idiom highlights its role as a significant criterion associated with learners' English language proficiency (British Council, 2024). Aridasarie and Tabiati (2022) carried out qualitative research with IELTS test-takers in Indonesia to investigate the use of idioms in their Speaking section. The participants were given a mock pretest to assess their use of formulaic phrases under the circumstances when idiomatic expressions are not paid attention to in their classroom. An IELTS simulated post-test is given after the participants are exposed to a three-month training course and put idiomatic language into practice. The authors acknowledged the meaningful contribution of idiomatic expressions in attaining higher IELTS band scores, specializing in Speaking skills. The results indicated considerable differences in the participants' performance before and after they were taught to implement idioms in the Speaking test. Moreover, the study also pointed out some inaccuracies in terms of grammar that the participants have made due to the fact that they struggle with managing subject-verb agreement in the sentence and uttering idiomatic expressions simultaneously during the test. However, the study merely observed the modest number of samples (5 IELTS learners), the findings can be varied in different contexts and populations.

In summary, idioms play a vital role in language proficiency, facilitating fluency and a deeper comprehension of cultural aspects in communication. Native speakers frequently employ idioms, enriching the language with idiomatic expressions. Thus, EFL learners striving for native-like mastery of English must comprehend and utilize idioms effectively on a regular basis. Consequently, previous research acknowledges the importance of idioms and emphasizes the practice of integrating them skillfully into language instruction to enhance learners' overall communication ability and bridge the gap between formal education and real-world language use.

Perspectives in teaching idioms

The greatest concern of teaching and learning formulaic language (collocations, phrasal verbs, idioms, etc.) is the differences between their literal and figurative meanings (Maisa & Karunakaran, 2013). Moreover, teachers surely get in trouble in encouraging learners to use and apply their idiomatic knowledge outside of the schooling since there might be not any conditional expansion for this language comprehension and use (Amin, 2019). This lack of

understanding of idioms can result in communication failure when learners come across idioms in their real-life contexts. Çakır (2011) concluded that the more teachers use idiomatic expressions in English classroom environments, the better learners master them. Accordingly, L2 learners are motivated to use idioms better when they know what and how to apply the comprehensible input, which is a hard goal especially when the meaning of the idioms can not be inferred through individual analysis of each word (Chuang, 2013). As a result, the differences between literal and figurative meanings are the biggest obstacles teachers face when teaching learners to understand the meanings. De Caro (2009) presented that idioms frequently occur in speaking and writing, so educational programs require most teachers' attention as a primary significance in the curriculum.

There are many studies making efforts to answer why idioms are considered the rough rock by both foreign language teachers and learners. Specifically, Vasiljevic (2015) conducted a study highlighting learners' difficulties in comprehending idioms and suggesting instructional strategies for teaching idioms. He stated that the acquisition of idioms and other lexical areas is quite the same through the cognitive processes. The first stage is noticing the input, in which learners must attend to language with the context. The initial input provision needs to be frequent so that learners are able to perceive figurative meanings before knowing exactly what they mean. Once learners have noticed the input, they move on to the second stage of cognitive processes: encoding. To facilitate the figurative idiomatic memorization, learners should be trained to define the speakers' concepts and sources, recognize the words through visual aids, create mental images, and analyze the semantic etymologies. Vasiljevic also inferred that the more various and complex codes invested in processing the input, the better capabilities enhanced in memorization and recall of information. Besides, the feelings and motivation of learners during this stage also impact their storage capacity. However, storing information becomes useless if it cannot be retrieved. Successful retrieval depends on the time since input provision and processing the input, the interrupt of other input, and the frequency of the retrieval. Hence, the findings suggested that learners should practice and review what they have learned to reinforce their understanding.

Idioms paint a colorful picture and turn up the noisy sounds to daily English conversation, but they are complicated for EFL teachers and learners during schooling. Saleh and Zakaria (2013) conducted a study to investigate what factors prevent learners from gaining enough knowledge to use idioms effectively. The data collection was analyzed through SPSS from the responses of forty learners inside and outside the University of Technology Malaysia (UTM) setting. The results mentioned that one of the difficulties of learners comes from the way their teacher begins to deliver idioms, along with striking contrast between those idiomatic meanings figuratively and literally. Another reason is that the teacher might not frequently encourage their learners to practice with the vocabulary they have learned in their daily routine, so they could not easily use those words in idiomatic analysis. Additionally, they agreed with the idea that learners and teachers need to apply more than one strategy to understand the idiomatic meanings, specializing in contextual and conceptual strategies. Finally, the study recommended that the teacher and learners use the guessing strategy and connect the L1 meaning strategy, which might be the most productive.

A study was conducted in the setting of English faculty at the Vietnam University of Commerce to examine the teaching of English idioms as a foreign language and its impact on first-year learners' speaking skills (Linh, 2021). The study employed a quantitative and qualitative approach and collected data from two different groups, (1) a hundred first-year participants with a pre-intermediate level of English aiming to reach a C1 level for their graduate certification, and (2) ten instructors with a Master's degree in teaching English who were working at the same

faculty. The perspectives of these two groups were compared through the two stages of data collection: a questionnaire for all of the hundred learners and ten teachers, and an in-depth interview with ten learners and five to gather more extensive and interesting information. The findings revealed that the barrier to learning idioms comes from the unequal contribution to the four skills, which mainly focus on reading but very little on speaking. Although all respondents agreed that learners show a positive attitude and effective performance during idiom-related classroom activities, these achievements primarily stem from reading-designed tasks that neglect the development of speaking skills. The study confirmed the overlooked significance of idioms and emphasized the complexity and difficulty of teaching them. It is recommended that EFL schools pay appropriate attention to idioms and other future research to determine the integration of idiom learning with national cultures to enhance learners' speaking proficiency.

Accordingly, to examine the reality of teaching and learning English idioms as a foreign language in the Vietnamese undergraduate context, Tran (2012) proved that both teachers and learners gain sufficient intake during the process of learning idioms. The study involved nine teachers from the English faculty at Hanoi National University of Education and fifty-six student-teachers who are almost done with the pedagogical training in the final semester to become an English teacher. The participants were selected for the case study using three mixed methods: questionnaires, interviews, and guided-reflective written products posted via email. After fifteen weeks of observation and evaluation, the study revealed that, firstly, the effectiveness of learning idioms takes place when the learners regularly contribute to classroom activities with great motivation and confidence. Secondly, learners not only achieved idiomatic knowledge but also were able to demonstrate their knowledge through writing reflective products. The study concluded that what and how to use teaching activities relating to idioms is the key to success in learning. Also, the study suggested that the process of idiom learning should begin with receptive skills through a clear context and have learners practice with productive skills. In spite of many positives in learners' idiomatic achievements, the conceptual metaphors in idiom-related classroom activities are undoubtedly absent. Those missing metaphors might lead to the glass ceiling in the utilization of idiomatic expressions. Finally, the findings claimed that learners would use idioms in daily conversation better if they had more chances to practice with more close-reality activities.

A more noticeable study combined an empirical and a doctoral study to emphasize teachers' perspectives in teaching idioms at English university levels in Kosovo. Suhodolli (2022) set the research context in three popular schools, AAB College, Fehmi Agani Public Uni, and Universum College, and gained support from their national neighbor findings - Albania. The findings concluded that it is crucial and compulsory for teachers to allow their learners to receive the idiomatic expressions in the context at the beginning of the lessons. Data also explained that using idioms is the key to success in English competence and performance, for they can communicate naturally and native-like as well as understand what the locals write in the typical texts. Additionally, the author highlighted the need to teach idioms in the university curriculum (Bachelor's level) as a specific subject or mixed with other subjects as well.

Teachers refer to idioms as "cultural products" and "reflections of culture" (Rizq, 2015). Rizq conducted a study with 10 teachers (ranging between 21 and 45 years old) to explore their perspectives on teaching idioms to L2 learners. The findings of the study reveal that all participants recognize the significance of idioms in teaching the English language due to their frequent use. While some teachers tend to avoid idioms in order not to prevent confusion among learners, they proclaimed that the use of idioms was inevitable. The author explores ESL teachers' views on the challenges of teaching idioms, their cultural connections, effective instructional methods, and the obvious challenge of finding equivalents in learners' first

language. Participants were encouraged to elaborate on their experiences and methods in teaching idioms, providing a broader understanding of the obstacles and effective practices in idiom instruction. Regarding teaching methods, the study divided the teachers into three groups based on their approach to teaching idioms: explicit, implicit, and hybrid. One-fifth of the teachers who applied the traditional explicit method expressed concerns that idioms are already vague and that guessing their meaning could result in misinterpreted misunderstandings. In contrast, two teachers preferred the implicit teaching method by having learners exposed to a story or movie in order to make them acquire the idioms more effectively, while others stated that they combined both methods in their classrooms.

Jiang (2000) proved that the relationship between language and culture is inseparable. The words relating to daily speech and activities in English and Chinese were highlighted through a survey combining metaphors and conceptual context. The research stimulated the ten words and required all participants to add on about six other words to make a complete meaningful phrase. There were 28 paper items for native English speakers valid among forty handouts in total, and twenty-eight items for native Chinese speakers were also valid among thirty ones. The results revealed that language remains meaningful when it is closely associated with culture, and the two national responses show their own cultural features. Those expressions are the entities towards social and cultural existence, even though their form is words or phrases. In short, this relation is interactive and corresponds to indispensable support from each other.

Research gap

A large number of studies pay attention to the characteristics of idioms, such as their literal and figurative meanings and their syntactic rules and structures (Wray, 2000; Wang & Li, 2014; Siyanova-Chanturia & Martinez, 2015). Other research focuses on definitions of idioms as well as the teaching strategies that should be applied in the classroom to teach the idiomatic definitions (Tran, 2012; Vasiljevic, 2015). However, one of the most remarkable barriers to teaching idioms is the national cultural differences instead of the meanings only (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999; Benson, 2003). As a result, there is limited research from authors exploring English idioms in Vietnam, where idioms are regarded as a new insight. The next significant barrier is the English level of learners when learning idioms. MOET (2018) required that high-school learners gain the expected language outcomes (ELOs) at level 3 in equivalence with pre-intermediate level (B1), but researchers take very short notice of how those B1 levels learn English idioms through their cognitive ability in the foreign language setting (Suhodolli, 2022). This study aims to address these gaps by investigating the practical challenges education practitioners encounter and their perceptions of cultural aspects in teaching idioms to B1 learners, providing insights to inform more effective pedagogical strategies.

Research Questions

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the survey was seeking to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges that in-service teachers and teachers often encounter when teaching idioms to B1 learners?
2. How do in-service teachers and teachers perceive the cultural aspects when teaching idioms?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

We conducted a survey involving a total of 32 participants, comprising 16 in-service English teachers enrolled in the Master's program at the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Van Lang University and 16 teachers from the E.S.C Language Center. The participants' ages range from 21 to 40 years. A shared feature among all participants is their background in teaching English, specifically at the B1 Preliminary level and higher, along with experience in incorporating idioms into their classroom instructions.

Design of the Study

Our study is a quantitative research. The questionnaire items were primarily adopted from relevant literature, drawing from the questionnaires used by Orfan (2020) and Rizq (2015). The survey is structured into two sections. The former section, comprising three questions, focuses on gathering background information about participants' English teaching background. The latter section contains eight multiple-choice questions that look deeper into participants' viewpoints on the challenges of teaching idioms and their perspectives of combining cultural factors in teaching idioms. The survey questions can be found in Appendix A.

Data collection & analysis

Printed survey questionnaires were distributed to in-service teachers enrolled in the Master's program at Van Lang University and teachers from the E.S.C Language Center. Participants were briefed on the research objectives, asked to complete the survey, and instructed to return the completed forms within a specified timeframe. Out of the 50 copies given out, 32 respondents met the research criteria, specifically targeting teachers with experience teaching at the B1 Preliminary level. Following this, the data was manually imported and analyzed using Microsoft Excel software, with the findings presented through various forms of figures.

Results/Findings

Figure 1.

Do you think idioms are difficult for your learners?

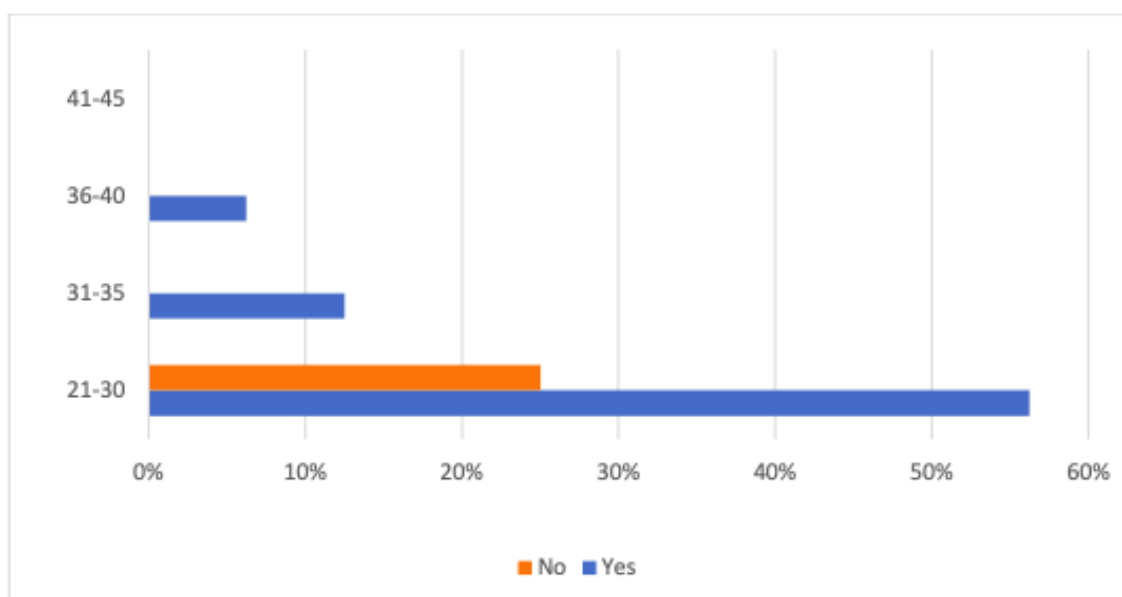


Figure 1 examines teachers' perceptions of the difficulty their B1-level learners face with idioms. It is indicated from the chart that a significant portion of surveyed teachers, particularly in the 21-30 age group, believe idioms are challenging for their learners, with nearly 60% indicating "Yes". This age group also has a smaller, yet remarkable, percentage of people (around 25%) who believe idioms are not difficult for their learners. Similarly, smaller percentages of teachers in the 31-35 and 36-40 age groups— 13% and 6% respectively—also think idioms are challenging, but no teachers aged 31 and above responded no. Overall, the findings highlight a prevalent belief among teachers of all age groups that idioms pose a considerable challenge for B1 level learners and reveal the confidence in the learners' language competence among younger teachers.

Figure 2.

What difficulties do you encounter when teaching idioms to B1-level learners?

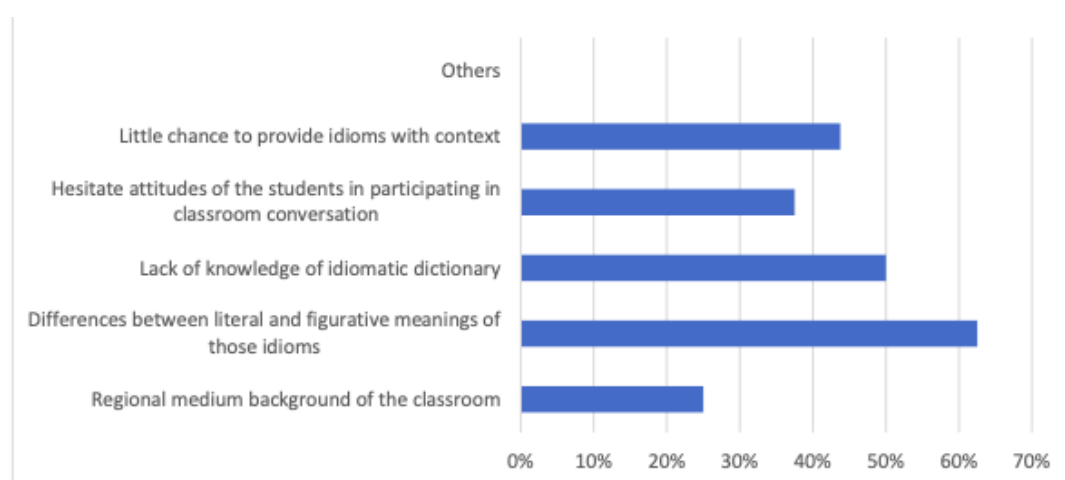


Figure 2 illustrates teachers' various difficulties when instructing B1-level learners on idioms. The most significant challenge, accounting for over 60 % of the answers, is helping learners understand the differences between literal and figurative meanings. This indicates a significant obstacle in learners' ability to understand idioms beyond their direct meanings. Around half of the surveyed people face issues due to a lack of knowledge of idioms and little chance to provide idioms with context, underscoring the perspective of educational practitioners toward the importance of meaningful context in learning idioms. About 30% of respondents note that they encounter the barrier of learners holding hesitant attitudes towards participation, which may stem from a lack of confidence or fear of making mistakes, thereby hindering active engagement and practice. The regional medium background of learners is a challenge for about 15% of teachers, indicating that regional linguistic variations can complicate the teaching and understanding of idiomatic expressions. The findings suggest a need for improving meaningful teaching context, diversifying the learning resource, and strategies to boost student confidence in learning idioms.

Figure 3.

How do you usually teach new idiomatic expressions?

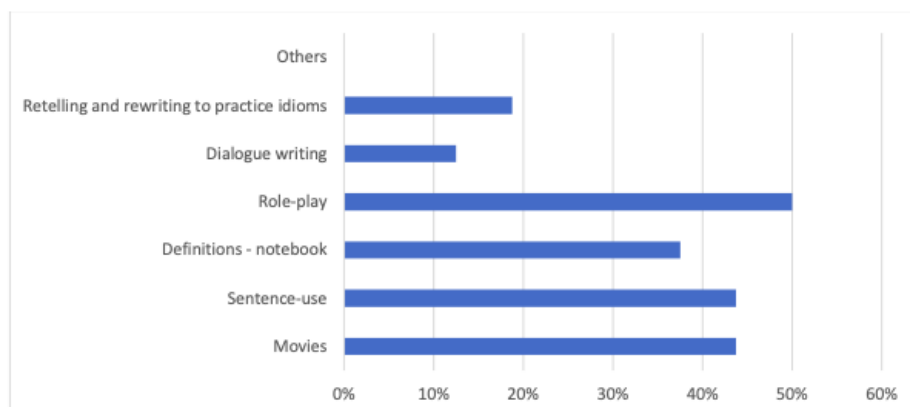


Figure 3 shows the teaching experience of in-service teachers regarding idiom-related lessons in their English classroom. The most popular teaching activity they might apply for teaching idioms in the classroom is role-play, accounting for 50%. The second most frequent teaching activities are sentence use and movies, with a percentage of 44% each. The third highest percentage of conducting teaching activities for idiomatic expressions is the teachers having their learners take notice of definitions in the notebook (38%). The findings suggest that more diverse teaching activities should allow learners to acquire idioms flexibly rather than relying solely on mechanic drills. Because there is a striking contrast between the cultural meanings of idioms in Vietnamese and English, teachers must apply more idiomatic activities to enhance learners' retention.

Figure 4.

How often do you use idioms for learners of the B1 level?

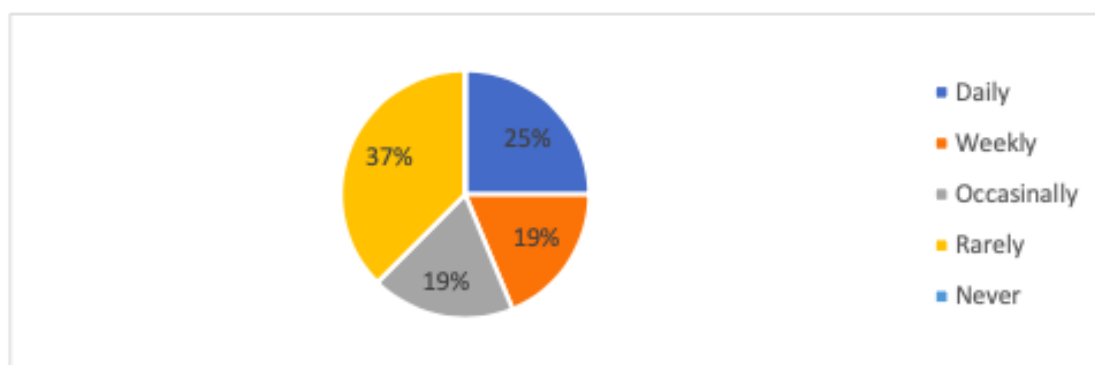


Figure 4 illustrates the frequency with which teachers use idioms when teaching B1-level learners. According to the survey, the majority of the surveyed teachers rarely use idioms in their lessons (37%). A quarter of the respondents (25%) incorporate idioms on a daily basis, suggesting a consistent approach to integrating idiomatic expressions. Over a third of the surveyed teachers reported using idioms weekly and occasionally with equally 19% of each frequency. Notably, no participants selected "Never," indicating that all surveyed teachers employ idioms to some extent. The findings suggest that at the B1 proficiency level, it is inevitable for teachers to use idiomatic expressions in language instruction and teaching

progress.

Figure 5.

How often do you teach idioms to learners of B1 Level?

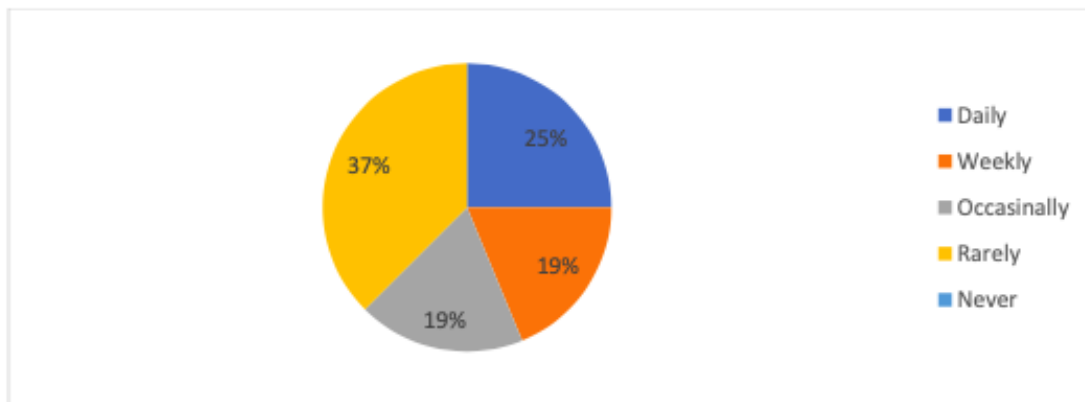


Figure 5 shows the frequency with which the survey takers conduct idiom-related lessons in their B1 level classroom. The highest percentage of responses to the popularity of teaching idioms is rarely (37%). The next highest percentage towards the popularity of teaching idioms is "daily" (25%). Although the percentage of teaching idioms in the classroom that happen occasionally is as low as "weekly" (19%), there were no responses indicating "never" in terms of how often the participants teach English idioms (0%). Regardless of the importance of idioms and how effective frequently using idioms in daily conversation is, most of the in-service teachers have not yet integrated the idiom expressions into the lesson on a regular basis. The English communication skills of learners may improve when idioms are taught more frequently and with greater emphasis. To have learners perform their speech naturally and meaningfully, the teacher needs to deliver idiom-related tasks for his learners in order to familiarize them with new images and conceptual metaphors related to the topics.

Figure 6.

Do you believe that idioms play an important role in teaching and learning English?



Figure 6 indicates the beliefs and perspectives of the participants regarding the importance of idioms teaching and learning in their English classroom. The results demonstrate that idioms' role in the teaching and learning process is important for most respondents. Out of thirty-two in-service teachers surveyed, twenty-four (75%) asserted that idioms are indispensable in teaching and learning, while only eight people (25%) said that idioms have minimal impact on teaching and learning. Moreover, it proves that these education practitioners have positive perspectives on the role of idioms since their English competence and performance also become better when they use English idioms regularly in daily conversation. This knowledge helps them to enhance their teaching and learning proficiency. In contrast, some respondents reported that the role of idioms may not be remarkable, but they might unintentionally incorporate idioms into their pedagogical approach.

Figure 7.

Do you think there is a relationship between idioms and culture?

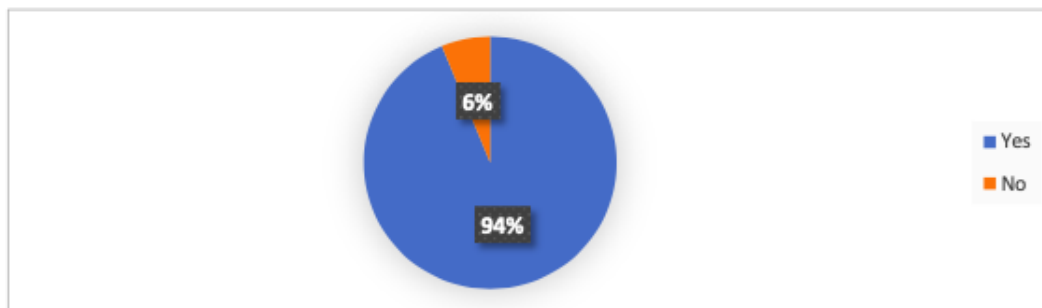
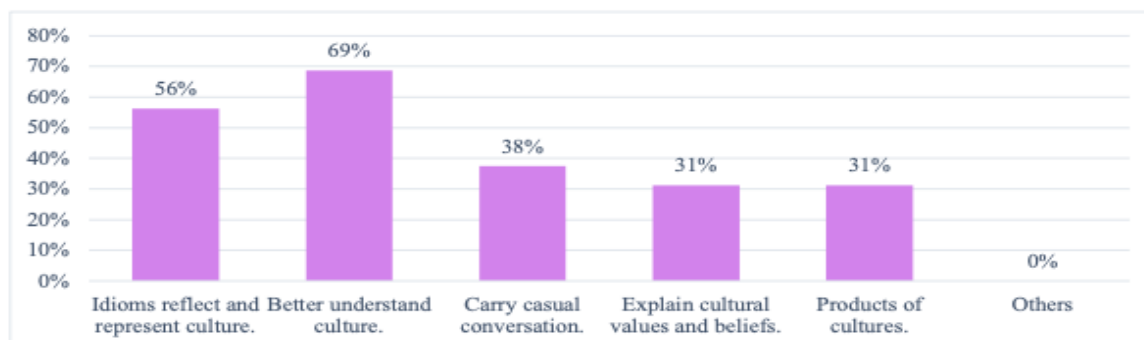


Figure 7 reveals the teachers' opinions on the relationship between idioms and culture. The majority of surveyed teachers perceive a connection between idioms and culture, with 94% affirming this belief and merely 6% denying it. None of the answers responded negatively to the correlation between idioms and culture. The finding displays a strong agreement among teachers that idioms are closely tied to a cultural context, which can result in significant challenges regarding teaching and learning the idiomatic language.

Figure 8.

What is the relationship between culture and idioms, do you think?



According to Figure 8, the survey takers share their perspectives on how culture and idioms positively impact each other. There has been a close association between culture and idioms, from which responses can be multiple choices. Specifically, the percentage of respondents who claimed that idioms deepen their understanding of English culture is the largest, making up to twenty-two approvals (69%). The next largest percentage (56%) supported the idea that idioms reflect and represent culture with eighteen approvals. Twelve people agreed with the idea that idioms are used in casual conversation, comprising the third largest percentage (38%). Thirty-one percent of respondents found that idioms explain cultural values and beliefs and agreed that idioms are products of cultures. Their learners and themselves feel more excited about idiomatic topics because idioms provide cultural knowledge for the learning and teaching process. Therefore, there is no doubt that their mutual cultural understanding will be enhanced with their confidence.

Discussion

The current research investigated (1) the challenges that in-service teachers face when teaching idioms to B1 learners and (2) their perceptions of the cultural aspects involved in idiomatic expressions in learning, teaching, and daily conversation. The findings share common concerns with previous research on the challenges in teaching English idioms to EFL learners at the Pre-intermediate level, particularly in the Vietnamese EFL context.

Challenges in teaching idioms to B1 learners

The teachers' perception of the role of idioms is predominantly positive, which aligns with the studies conducted by De Caro (2009), Suhodolli (2019), and research by Orfan (2020), which claimed that EFL teachers and learners have a high awareness of barriers of learning and understanding idioms. The findings of our study reveal that in-service teachers encounter several key challenges when teaching idioms to B1 learners. With regard to the various sorts of language domains, the most reported difficulty (over 60% of respondents) is helping learners understand the differences between literal and figurative meanings. This aligns with Vasiljevic (2015), who emphasized that idioms require cognitive processing beyond word-for-word translation. Additionally, approximately half of the participants noted a lack of appropriate idiomatic teaching materials and contextual learning opportunities, which echoes Vũ (2009), who found that Vietnamese English textbooks provide limited exposure to idiomatic expressions, and in connection with Orfan's study (2020) which states that the schooling context restricts learners' exposure to English idiomatic language and they rarely have the opportunity to apply idioms. Instead of focusing on designing activities for learners to naturally and effectively communicate with idioms, lessons often focus on grammatical structures and rules (Thach, 2022). There is an evident gap in English competence among most EFL learners, who lack knowledge and information about idiomatic meanings. A number of words and images in English do not usually take place in the Vietnamese context, which might lead to the learners' insufficient knowledge (Tran, 2012). Words that have no equivalent features in their native language can drive learners to problematic learning systems. Another significant issue is learners' hesitation and low confidence in using idioms actively in conversation, a challenge also identified by Saleh and Zakaria (2013), who stressed the importance of encouraging learners to apply idiomatic expressions in real-world communication. These findings suggest that EFL teachers need more structured methodologies and resources to teach idioms effectively.

Teachers' perceptions of culture in teaching idioms

This study also explored teachers' perceptions of the cultural significance of idioms. Boers (2000) described cultural domains as the key to meaningful communication, and they are the fundamental framework of values and beliefs that mainly contribute to and explain the language's meaning verbally and non-verbally. Similarly, Ramlan et al. (2018) shared the common definition of culture and a system of shared values, ideas, and attitudes that form others' perceptions and actions, which considerably impact the teaching and learning process. According to Yağiz and Izadpanah (2013), language has a close association with culture. The overwhelming majority of respondents in our study agreed that idioms are deeply connected to culture and play a crucial role in enhancing learners' understanding of English-speaking communities. This supports Jiang (2000), who claimed that language and culture are inseparable. Furthermore, more than half of the participants (69%) emphasized that idioms provide a better understanding of English culture, reinforcing Boers' (2000) assertion that metaphorical expressions are embedded in cultural frameworks. However, some respondents expressed concerns about the difficulties of bridging the cultural gap, particularly when learners

struggle to relate English idioms to their native Vietnamese context (Nguyen Quyen, 2024). These concerns align with research by Suhodolli (2019), in which the author asserted that idiomatic meaning is often tied to culturally specific metaphors that do not have direct equivalents in other languages. For that reason, there is a need for more culturally integrated teaching strategies to enhance idiomatic comprehension. Jiang (2000) proved that the relationship between language and culture is inseparable. The results revealed that language remains meaningful when it is closely associated with culture, and the two national responses show their own cultural features. Those expressions are the entities towards social and cultural existence, even though their form is words or phrases. In short, this relation is interactive and corresponds to indispensable support from each other.

Conclusion

Limitations and Suggestions

One limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size (32 participants), which may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives among EFL teachers across Vietnam. Internal factors such as emotions, classroom conditions, and teaching adversities probably impact the respondents' attitudes and perspectives. Additionally, the study covers and investigates the situations of teaching at the B1 level only, and does not fully look at the problems at other levels. In that case, further research needs to predict variable expansion. Moreover, other researchers may conduct an in-depth interview to explore more objective and specific barriers that those often encounter in teaching idioms, as it is essential to interview teachers to obtain their teaching methods and activities that they may apply in idiom-related lessons.

Based on the collected data, several implications emerge for EFL teaching practices. As many teachers cited difficulty in explaining figurative meanings, incorporating explicit instruction methods, such as visual aids and metaphor-based teaching, may enhance the comprehension of the students. Additionally, EFL lecturers must be responsible for supporting and encouraging learners to use these idioms in real-life communication. What is more, the latest paradigm from MOET (2018) raises the expectation towards the learners to not only obtain accurate forms of the foreign language but also apply these target forms in the real context of communication appropriately and meaningfully. Therefore, education practitioners must develop course materials relating to contextual idioms that can improve learners' intercultural knowledge and communicative competence (Çakır, 2011). Also, as contrastive meanings are coming from the regional medium background of the speakers that lead to idiomatic dissimilarities (Yağız & Izadpanah, 2013), the teacher ought to implicate the appropriate teaching methods and approaches to enhance learners' idiomatic language acquisition.

Conclusion

This study investigated the challenges in-service EFL teachers encounter when teaching idioms to B1 learners and their perceptions of the cultural aspects of idiomatic instruction. The findings indicate that teachers face several key challenges, including the need for learners to grasp the figurative meanings of idioms, a lack of appropriate teaching materials, and students' reluctance to use idioms. Additionally, while teachers recognize the strong connection between idioms and culture, many find it difficult to incorporate cultural insights into their teaching due to differences between English and Vietnamese idiomatic expressions. To achieve effectiveness in idiomatic languages, the teacher should appropriately link the knowledge with certain cultures in the classroom. It brings good to EFL learners' communicative competence when the target culture is combined with the target language. Language teachers must have sufficient

cultural knowledge of the target language as well as create opportunities for learners to comprehend idiomatic expressions in a cultural context. Besides, both EFL teachers and learners need to have a high regard for their native cultures, which impacts the learning and teaching process as well. Mutual understanding of intercultural expressions improves the acquisition of the target language as a foreign language in Vietnam. Consequently, defining the challenges in teaching idioms makes language learning and acquisition productive, eventually fostering English teaching and learning experience.

Acknowledgments

This paper and the research modifications would not have been attainable without the firm support of our professor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Pham Vu Phi Ho. His devotion, expertise, and attention to detail motivated our cohesive work to stay on topic for three months.

References

- Alqahtani, M. (2015). The Importance Of Vocabulary In Language Learning And How To Be Taught. *International Journal of Teaching and Education*, III(3), 21-34. <https://doi.org/10.20472/TE.2015.3.3.002>
- Amin, N. M. (2019). An Assessment of Teaching Idioms at College Level: A Case Study. *Journal of University of Human Development (JUHD)*, 5(3), 79-86. <https://doi.org/10.21928/juhd.v5n3y2019.pp79-8>
- Aridasarie, Z., & Tabiati, S. E. (2022). Behind a Spoken Discourse: Idiomatic Expressions in IELTS Speaking Test. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 11(3), 169-178. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15294/elt.v11i3.57604>
- Asl, F. M. (2013). The Impact of Context on Learning Idioms in EFL Classes. *MEXTESOL Journal*, 37(1), 1-12. Retrieved from: <https://www.mextesol.net/journal/public/files/d12066c8e1a9ea6a456a98b67f75da1b.pdf>
- Baker, M. (2018). *In Other Words - A Coursebook on Translation*. Routledge.
- Benson, B. E. (2003). Framing culture within classroom practice: Culturally relevant teaching. *Action in Teacher Education*, 25(2), 16-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2003.10463301>
- Boers, F. (2000). Metaphor awareness and vocabulary retention. *Applied Linguistics*, 21, 553–71. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/21.4.553>
- Çakır, I. (2011). How do learners perceive idioms in EFL classes? *Ekev Akademi Dergisi Yıl*, 15(47), 378 - 381. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335892947_How_do_learners_perceive_idioms_in_EFL_classes
- Chan, V. (2021). Factors influencing intelligibility and comprehensibility: a critical review of research on second language English speakers. *Journal of English learner education*, 12(1), 6. Retrieved from <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/jele/vol12/iss1/6>
- Cooper, T. C. (1998). Teaching Idioms. *Foreign Language Annals*, 31(2), 255-266.
- Cooper, T. C. (1999). Processing of Idioms by L2 Learners of English. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(2), 233-262.

- British Council (2024). *IELTS*. From How IELTS is assessed:
<https://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/teach-ielts/test-information/assessment>
- Crozet, C., & Liddicoat, A. J. (1999). The challenge of intercultural language teaching: Engaging with culture in the classroom. *Striving for the third place: Intercultural competence through language education*, 113-125.
- De Caro, E. E. (2009). The Advantages and Importance of Learning and Using Idioms in English. *Cuadernos de Lingüística Hispánica*, 14, 132.
Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/229040775_The_Advantages_and_Importance_of_Learning_and_Using_Idioms_in_English
- Fomenko, T., Bilotserkovets, M., Klochkova, T., Statsenko, O., Sbruieva, A., Kozlova, O., & Kozlov, D. (2020). Overcoming barriers in intercultural communication: a case study on agricultural idioms in English, Ukrainian and Chinese. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 9(6), 157-166. <https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2020-0120>
- Gathigia, M. G., & Njoroge, M. C. (2016). The teaching of English idioms in Kenyan secondary schools: Difficulties and effective strategies. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 7(2), 33-40. Retrieved from
<https://journals.aiac.org.au/index.php/all/article/view/2119>
- Hinkel, E. (2017). Teaching Idiomatic Expressions and Phrases: Insights and Techniques. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 5(3), 46-59. Retrieved from
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1156200.pdf>
- Inuw, K. A., & Sule, H. M. (2022). The Role of Idiomatic Expressions in Improving Communicative Competence among Selected Learners of Higher Institutions within Maiduguri. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 11(3), 25-31. Retrieved from <https://www.arcnjournals.org/images/2022-ARCJN-JSSH-11-3-3.pdf>
- Irujo, S. (1986). Don't Put Your Leg in Your Mouth: Transfer in the Acquisition of Idioms in a Second Language. *TESOL Quarterly*, 20(2), 287-326. Retrieved from
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED253114.pdf>
- Jermoskin, S. (2017). The cognitive linguistic approach to teaching idioms: a case study with Estonian secondary school EFL learners. Tartus: University of Tartu.
Retrieved from <https://dspace.ut.ee/server/api/core/bitstreams/79bb94d4-0dcd-4020-88b1-c4a571a48018/content>
- Jiang, W. (2000). The relationship between culture and language. *ELT journal*, 54(4), 328-334.
- Ke, P. (2019). *Contrastive Linguistics (Vol. 1)*. Springer.
- Li, X. (2010). Conceptual metaphor theory and the teaching of English and Chinese idioms. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 1(3), 206-210. Retrieved from
<https://www.academypublication.com/issues/past/jltr/vol01/03/03.pdf>
- Linh, T. T. (2021). Learners' and Lecturers' Perceptions of Idioms Teaching and Learning in Speaking Skill for Freshmen at FOE, Thuongmai University. *International Journal of TESOL & Education*, 1(3), 37 - 50. Retrieved from <https://ijte.org/index.php/journal/article/view/89>

- Liontas, J. I. (2017). Why Teach Idioms? A Challenge to the Profession. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 5(3), 5-25. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1156198.pdf>
- Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). (2018). Chương trình giáo dục phổ thông - Chương trình môn tiếng Anh [General education curriculum - English curriculum]. Retrieved 11 April, 2024, from <http://tieuhocauco.pgdrachgia.edu.vn/upload/18281/fck/files/Chuong-trinh- giao-duc-pho-thong-mon-tieng-anh.pdf>
- Maisa, S., & Karunakaran, T. (2013). Idioms and importance of teaching idioms to ESL learners: A study on teacher beliefs. *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (AJHSS)*, 1(1), 110-122. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/3431943/Idioms_and_Importance_of_Teaching_Idioms_to_ESL_Learners_A_Study_on_Teacher_Beliefs_Volume_1_Issue_1_Ma_y_2013
- Nation, P., & Meara, P. (2020). Vocabulary. In *An Introduction to Applied Linguistics* (p. 35). Routledge.
- Neuman, S. B., & Dwyer, J. (2009). Missing in Action: Vocabulary Instruction in Pre- K. *The reading teacher*, 62(5), 384 - 392. Retrieved from <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/88009/RT.62.5.2.pdf;sequence=1>
- Nguyen, D. M. Q. (2024). The Effects of Culture Shock on The Cultural Adaptation of Overseas Students in Thailand at King Mongkut's University. *International Journal of Language Instruction*, 3(4), 93-109. <https://doi.org/10.54855/ijli.24345>
- Orfan, S. N. (2020). Afghan EFL learners' difficulties and strategies in learning and understanding English idioms. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 7(1), 1796228 <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2020.1796228>
- Oxford University Press. (2024). Oxford Learner's Dictionaries. In *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*. Retrieved April 24, 2024, from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/idiom?q=idiom>
- Pollio, H. R., Barlow, J. M., Fine, H. J., & Pollio, M. R. (2023, October 1). *Psychology and the Poetics of Growth*. Routledge.
- Ramlan, S., Abashah, A., Samah, I., Rashid, I., & Radzi, W. N. W. M. (2018). The impact of language barrier and communication style in organizational culture on expatriate's working performance. *Management Science Letters*, 8(6), 659- 666. <https://doi.org/10.5267/j.msl.2018.4.025>
- Rizq, W. M. (2015). Teaching English Idioms to L2 Learners: ESL Teachers' Perspective. Retrieved from https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/engl_etds/19
- Saleh, N., & Zakaria, N. (2013). Investigating the difficulties faced in understanding, and strategies used in processing, English idioms by the Libyan learners. *International Journal of English Language and Translation Studies*, 1(2), 69- 90. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/4481493/Investigating_the_Difficulties_Faced_in_Understanding_and_Strategies_Used_in_Processing_English_Idioms_by_the_Libyan_Learners_by_Noura_Winis_Ibrahim_Saleh_and_Dr_Mohammed_Hassan_Zakaria_Malaysia

- Siyanova-Chanturia, A., & Martinez, R. (2015). The idiom principle revisited. *Applied Linguistics*, 36(5), 549-569.
- Suhodolli, M. (2019). The Importance Of Idioms In Learning English Language By The Albanian Learners In EFL Classrooms. *International Journal of Advanced Research (IJAR)*, 7(1), 508 - 510. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/8355>
- Suhodolli, M. (2022). Importance Of Teaching And Learning Idioms At University Level In Kosovo-A New Perspective. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(8), 2559-2585. Retrieved from <https://journalppw.com/index.php/jpsp/article/view/10265>
- Thach, T. D. L. (2022). Teachers' perceptions of comprehensible input on English vocabulary acquisition. *International Journal of Language Instruction*, 1(1), 120-131. <https://doi.org/10.54855/ijli.221110>
- Tran, H. Q. (2012). An Explorative Study of Idiom Teaching for Pre-service Teachers of English. *English Language Teaching*, 5(12), 76 - 86. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1080172.pdf>
- Vasiljevic, Z. (2015). Teaching and Learning Idioms in L2: From Theory to Practice. *MEXTESOL Journal*, 39(4), 1 -20. Retrieved from https://www.mextesol.net/journal/public/files/b97a7cef9cf17f841d8f8a0008a6_2c18.pdf
- Vũ, N. N. (2009). Ứng dụng Lý thuyết Âm Dự Ý Niệm trong Ngôn ngữ học Tri nhận vào việc Giảng dạy Thành ngữ Tiếng Anh. *Tạp chí Khoa học Đhsp Tp.HCM*, 17, 53-54. Retrieved from <https://journal.hcmue.edu.vn/index.php/hcmuejos/article/viewFile/1220/1211>
- Wang, X. Y., & Li, Z. Z. (2014). Translating idioms based on the principle of equivalence. *US-China Foreign Language*, 12(2), 171-175. Retrieved from <https://www.davidpublisher.com/Public/uploads/Contribute/5519fe46c21f5.pdf>
- Wray, A. (2000). Formulaic sequences in second language teaching: Principle and practice. *Applied linguistics*, 21(4), 463-489.
- Yağiz, O., & Izadpanah, S. (2013). Language, Culture, Idioms, and Their Relationship with the Foreign Language. *Journal of Language Teaching & Research*, 4(5), 953-957. <https://doi.org/10.4304/jltr.4.5.953-957>

Biodata

Nguyen Duong Nhu Quynh is a postgraduate of Van Lang University's Faculty of Foreign Languages in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, discusses Tesol-majored teachers' challenges in teaching idioms to EFL B1 students, as well as those teachers' strategies to teach idioms effectively. The Faculty of Foreign Languages at Van Lang University is where she is currently conducting her research.

Email: nguyenquynh17799@gmail.com

Bui Thi Huyen is a postgraduate of Van Lang University's Faculty of Foreign Languages in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, discusses Tesol-majored teachers' challenges in teaching idioms to EFL B1 students, as well as those teachers' strategies to teach idioms effectively. The Faculty of Foreign Languages at Van Lang University is where she is currently conducting her research.