

DIFFICULTIES IN TEACHING PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS TO ESL/EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract. This paper explores the major challenges encountered in teaching phraseological units (idioms) to ESL/EFL learners. Phraseological expressions are an essential part of natural communication, yet they remain one of the most difficult aspects of language learning due to their figurative meanings and cultural specificity. The study focuses on learner's difficulties, instructional gaps, and effective teaching strategies. It highlights that students often struggle with comprehension, contextual usage, and cultural interpretation of idioms. Additionally, the research emphasizes the importance of interactive teaching methods in overcoming these barriers and improving communicative competence.

Key words: phraseological units, idioms, EFL learners, teaching difficulties, cultural context, language acquisition, interactive methods.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada ingliz tilini chet tili sifatida o'rganuvchilar (ESL/EFL) uchun frazeologik birliklar (idiomalar)ni o'qitishda uchraydigan asosiy muammolar tahlil qilinadi. Frazeologik ifodalar tabiiy muloqotning ajralmas qismi hisoblanadi, biroq ularning ko'chma ma'nosi va madaniy xosligi sababli til o'rganishning eng murakkab jihatlaridan biri bo'lib qolmoqda. Tadqiqot o'quvchilarning qiyinchiliklari, o'qitishdagi kamchiliklar hamda samarali o'qitish strategiyalariga qaratilgan. Unda o'quvchilar ko'pincha idiomalarni tushunish, ularni kontekstda qo'llash va madaniy jihatdan talqin qilishda qiynalishlari ta'kidlanadi. Shuningdek, ushbu to'siqlarni bartaraf etish va kommunikativ kompetensiyani rivojlantirishda interaktiv o'qitish metodlarining ahamiyati alohida yoritiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: frazeologik birliklar, idiomalar, ingliz tilini chet tili sifatida o'rganuvchilar, o'qitishdagi qiyinchiliklar, madaniy kontekst, til o'zlashtirish, interaktiv metodlar.

INTRODUCTION

To date, a lot of research has been carried out in the field of phraseology, which has already formed and developed as an independent discipline in world linguistics [3]. Phraseological units, commonly referred to as idioms, represent a complex and culturally embedded component of the English language. Unlike regular vocabulary, their meanings are often not directly derived from individual words, which makes them particularly challenging for learners of English as a second or foreign language [2].

In real-life communication, idioms are widely used in both spoken and written discourse. However, ESL/EFL learners frequently face difficulties in understanding and

applying them appropriately. This creates a gap between classroom learning and authentic language use.

Teaching phraseological units requires not only linguistic explanation but also cultural awareness and interactive practice. Despite their importance, idioms are often insufficiently addressed in formal curricula, leading to limited exposure for learners [6].

METHODS

This study adopts a mixed-method approach, combining both theoretical analysis and practical observation in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The use of multiple methods allows the study to explore the issue from different perspectives and ensures a more reliable interpretation of the findings.

First of all, an analysis of authentic English materials was carried out. These materials included various written texts, everyday dialogues, as well as examples taken from media sources such as articles, films, and online content. Through this analysis, the study examined how idiomatic expressions are used in real-life communication, how their meanings change depending on context, and how cultural background influences their interpretation. Particular attention was given to the figurative nature of idioms and their role in natural speech.

Secondly, surveys were conducted among intermediate and upper-intermediate EFL students. The purpose of these surveys was to identify the main difficulties learners face when studying idiomatic expressions. Students were asked about their understanding of idioms, the strategies they use to learn them, and the types of classroom activities that help them most effectively. The responses provided valuable insight into learners' needs, preferences, and common challenges in the learning process.

In addition, classroom observations were carried out to examine how idioms are taught in real educational settings. During these observations, attention was focused on teaching techniques, types of exercises used by teachers, and students' reactions to idiom instruction. This helped to reveal the gap between theoretical teaching approaches and actual classroom practice.

Finally, interviews were conducted with experienced English language teachers. These interviews provided deeper pedagogical insights into the challenges of teaching idiomatic expressions. Teachers shared their experiences regarding common student difficulties, effective instructional strategies, and practical ways of improving idiom comprehension and usage. Overall, the combination of these methods made it possible to identify both learner-related challenges and effective pedagogical approaches for teaching idiomatic expressions more successfully in EFL contexts.

RESULTS

The findings of this study reveal a number of significant difficulties in both teaching and learning phraseological units (idioms) in EFL contexts. These challenges are interconnected and affect learners' overall ability to understand, remember, and actively use idiomatic expressions in communication.

- **Limited Presence in Curriculum**

One of the major issues identified is the insufficient representation of idioms in many ESL/EFL curricula and textbooks. In most cases, idiomatic expressions are not taught in a systematic or structured way. Instead, they appear sporadically, often without clear explanation or sufficient practice. As a result, learners are exposed to idioms mostly outside the classroom environment, such as in movies, songs, or informal

conversations. This lack of structured instruction leads to fragmented understanding and prevents students from developing a solid foundation in phraseological competence [7].

- **Comprehension Difficulties**

Another important finding is that students experience considerable difficulty in understanding idiomatic expressions due to their non-literal meanings. Unlike ordinary vocabulary, idioms cannot be interpreted word by word. Learners often attempt to translate idioms directly into their native language, which results in misunderstanding or incorrect interpretation. This problem becomes even more serious when idioms contain unfamiliar cultural references or metaphorical meanings that are not immediately obvious to learners [4].

- **Cultural Barriers**

The study also highlights the strong connection between idioms and cultural context. Many idiomatic expressions originate from historical events, traditions, or everyday life in English-speaking societies. Without sufficient cultural knowledge, learners find it challenging to grasp the intended meaning. Even when the literal structure of an idiom is understood, its figurative or cultural meaning may remain unclear. This cultural gap significantly limits learners' ability to use idioms appropriately in real communication [3].

- **Lack of Confidence in Usage**

In addition to comprehension problems, affective factors such as lack of confidence also play an important role. Although many students show interest and motivation in learning idioms, they are often reluctant to use them in speaking or writing. The fear of making mistakes, using idioms incorrectly, or sounding unnatural discourages active usage. This results in a gap between passive knowledge (recognition) and active knowledge (production), which is crucial for communicative competence.

- **Ineffective Traditional Teaching Methods**

The findings further indicate that traditional teaching approaches, especially those based on rote memorization and mechanical repetition, are not effective for learning idiomatic expressions. Students tend to forget idioms quickly when they are presented in isolation without meaningful context. Memorizing long lists of idioms does not help learners understand how and when to use them appropriately. In contrast, idioms learned through context-based and communicative activities are retained more effectively and are more likely to be used in real-life situations. (Satimova,2025).

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that the primary difficulties in teaching phraseological units are both linguistic and cultural. Idioms require learners to go beyond literal meaning and develop interpretive skills.

One major issue is the mismatch between classroom instruction and real-life language use. While learners are taught grammar and basic vocabulary, idiomatic expressions are often neglected. This limits their ability to communicate naturally.

Another important factor is cultural knowledge [5]. Idioms frequently reflect traditions, history, and social practices, making them harder to understand for foreign learners. Without contextual support, comprehension becomes challenging.

The use of interactive teaching methods significantly improves idiom acquisition. Techniques such as role-play, storytelling, visual aids, and group discussions allow learners to engage with idioms in meaningful contexts. Similarly, integrating

phraseological units into communicative activities enhances both understanding and retention [1].

CONCLUSION

Teaching phraseological units to ESL/EFL learners presents multiple challenges, including semantic complexity, cultural differences, and insufficient exposure in formal education. However, these challenges can be addressed through effective teaching strategies.

The study concludes that:

1. Idioms should be systematically integrated into language curricula
2. Cultural context must be emphasized during instruction
3. Interactive and communicative methods are more effective than rote memorization
4. Continuous exposure and practice are essential for mastery

By improving teaching approaches, educators can help learners develop more natural, fluent, and culturally appropriate language skills.

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