

PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY: CHALLENGES IN TEACHING NATIVE IDIOMS

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Abstract. This article explores challenges in teaching phraseological units, especially native idioms, in language education. Using a qualitative approach, it identifies learner difficulties, curriculum gaps, and teaching issues, and suggests context-based methods to improve idiomatic competence.

Key words: phraseological units, native idioms, language education, learner difficulties, curriculum gaps, teaching issues, idiomatic competence.

Phraseological units, particularly idioms, represent an essential component of natural language use and communicative competence. They reflect cultural meanings and play a significant role in achieving fluency in a foreign language. However, despite their importance, idioms are often insufficiently addressed in language education and teaching practice. In modern educational policy, the focus is frequently placed on grammar accuracy and basic vocabulary acquisition, while phraseological competence remains underdeveloped. This creates a gap between classroom learning and real-life communication, where idiomatic expressions are widely used. The purpose of this study is to explore the main challenges in teaching native idioms in educational contexts. It also aims to analyze how current teaching practices, materials, and learner factors influence the understanding and use of phraseological units.

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore the challenges of teaching phraseological units, especially native idioms, in language education. The main goal is to understand how idioms are taught in practice, what difficulties students face, and how educational materials and teaching methods influence learning outcomes. A descriptive qualitative design was chosen because it helps to examine teaching and learning processes in detail. Since idioms involve meaning, context, and culture, they cannot be fully understood through numbers alone. This approach makes it possible to look closely at classroom practices, teacher experiences, and student understanding in a more natural way. To get a clear picture of the situation, data were collected from several sources.

First, language textbooks and curriculum documents were analyzed. This helped to see how often idioms appear in teaching materials, how they are explained, and whether they are taught step by step or only occasionally.

Second, teachers were involved through short interviews and informal conversations. They shared their experiences about teaching idioms, the problems they face, and the methods they use in class. They also explained whether they feel supported by the current curriculum.

Third, students were observed during lessons. Their answers, participation, and performance in tasks were reviewed to understand how well they recognize and use idioms. Informal feedback from students was also taken into account to identify

common misunderstandings. The participants of the study included English language teachers and students from secondary schools and higher education institutions. They were chosen intentionally because they already had experience with learning or teaching English. This helped ensure that the information collected was relevant to the topic of idiom teaching. All collected information was analyzed by grouping similar ideas together. This process helped to identify common problems such as difficulty in understanding meaning, overuse of literal translation, lack of context, and limited teaching of idioms in classrooms. These patterns were then organized into broader themes related to teaching methods, curriculum issues, and learner difficulties. To make the findings more reliable, information from different sources was compared. For example, what teachers said was checked against what was observed in classrooms and what students experienced. This helped to make the results more balanced and realistic. This study is based on qualitative data, so it does not include statistical analysis or large-scale surveys. The results mainly describe general patterns rather than exact measurements.

The results of this study show that teaching phraseological units, especially native idioms, is more challenging than it may initially seem. One of the main issues observed is that many students struggle to understand idioms because their meanings are not literal. Even when learners know the individual words, they often fail to grasp the overall meaning of the expression. Another noticeable finding is that idioms do not receive enough attention in the current curriculum. In most cases, teaching focuses heavily on grammar and basic vocabulary, while phraseological units are either briefly mentioned or completely overlooked. Because of this, students may recognize some idioms but rarely feel confident using them in real communication.

The study also suggests that the way idioms are taught plays a significant role. Students responded better to lessons where idioms were introduced through real-life contexts, such as conversations, stories, or media examples. In contrast, memorizing lists of idioms without context seemed less effective and less engaging for learners. In addition, several teachers pointed out that they lack sufficient materials and practical guidance for teaching idioms. This makes it difficult for them to include phraseological units regularly in their lessons, even when they understand their importance. Finally, cultural understanding appears to be closely connected to students' success in learning idioms. Learners who are more familiar with the culture behind the language tend to understand and use idiomatic expressions more accurately.

The findings of this study show that teaching phraseological units, particularly native idioms, remains a challenging aspect of language education. Although modern educational policies emphasize communicative competence, idiomatic language is still not given enough attention in classroom practice. This creates a gap between formal instruction and real-life communication, where idioms play an essential role in achieving fluency and natural expression [5]. One of the main difficulties in teaching idioms is their strong connection to culture and context. Unlike individual words, phraseological units cannot be understood through direct translation, as their meanings are often figurative and culturally specific. According to Alison Wray formulaic language, including idioms, is a key component of natural language use, yet it is often neglected in structured learning environments [7]. As a result, students may understand idioms when they encounter them but struggle to use them appropriately. Another important issue is related to educational policy and assessment systems. Many curricula

prioritize measurable outcomes such as grammar accuracy and vocabulary knowledge, which are easier to test. However, idiomatic competence is more complex and context-dependent, making it difficult to assess through standardized methods. As noted by Norbert Schmitt vocabulary knowledge includes not only individual words but also multi-word units, which are crucial for effective communication [5]. Despite this, phraseological units are often underrepresented in teaching materials and assessments. The study also highlights the importance of exposure to authentic language input. Learners who engage with real-life materials, such as films, literature, and conversations, tend to develop a better understanding of idiomatic expressions. This supports the idea proposed by Michael Lewis who emphasized that language consists largely of lexical chunks rather than isolated words [6]. Therefore, incorporating authentic materials into teaching can significantly improve students' ability to recognize and use idioms. Additionally, the influence of the learner's first language plays a significant role. Students often transfer idiomatic expressions from their native language into the target language, which can lead to misunderstandings. However, this transfer can also be used as a teaching tool. As Paul Nation suggests, making connections between known and new language forms can support vocabulary development when guided properly [2].

In summary, the findings of this research indicate that the teaching of phraseological units, particularly idioms, is a demanding and frequently undervalued component of language instruction. The results suggest that learners often encounter serious difficulties when dealing with idioms, mainly because their meanings are figurative and closely tied to cultural background. As a result, knowing the individual words does not guarantee full understanding of the expression as a whole. The study further reveals an imbalance in current teaching priorities. While grammar and basic vocabulary are strongly emphasized, idiomatic expressions are often insufficiently addressed. This leads to a situation where students may be able to identify certain idioms but are not prepared to use them confidently in authentic communication. The effectiveness of teaching strategies also appears to be a key factor. Approaches that present idioms in meaningful, real-world contexts are far more beneficial than those based on memorization without context. Another important issue highlighted in the research is the limited availability of teaching resources and methodological support. This makes it challenging for teachers to consistently include idioms in their lessons. At the same time, cultural familiarity plays a significant role in learning success, as students with better cultural awareness tend to interpret and apply idiomatic expressions more accurately.

The study points to the necessity of re-evaluating how idioms are treated in language education. Greater integration of phraseological units into curricula, along with the use of interactive and context-rich teaching methods, is essential. Providing teachers with appropriate materials and guidance can also improve classroom practice. Addressing these areas will help learners develop more fluent, natural, and culturally appropriate communication skills.

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