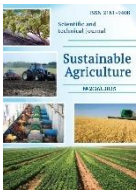
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# Integrating Authentic Materials in Enhancing Idiom Acquisition of EFL Learners

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a r t i c l e i n f o

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a b s t r a c t

Idiomatic competence is an important aspect of learning a foreign language, as it allows students to use fixed expressions and phraseological units that correspond to the norms of live communication. This article examines the impact of authentic materials in the development of idiomatic competence of English language learners. As part of the study, an experiment was conducted among English learners of economy faculty in TIIAME National University to identify how the use of authentic materials affects the acquisition and use of idiomatic expressions. The results of the experiment showed a significant improvement in understanding and using idioms among students who worked with authentic sources.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, researchers in the field of foreign language teaching have increasingly focused on the role of authentic materials in teaching. These materials are created for native speakers and reflect the actual use of the language in everyday life. Idiomatic competence is one of the important aspects of learning a foreign language that is the ability to correctly perceive and use idioms and fixed expressions. In turn, idiomatic language is also can be considered as authentic language. Using authentic materials in developing students' idiomatic competence can supply students with effective vocabulary acquisition, cultural and contextual understandings and natural language use. Idioms are an integral part of learning and using any language (Conklin, 2008), but their study often causes difficulties for students because of their structure (Al-Khadi, 2015) or pragmatic, syntactic and semantic features (Chen & Lai, 2013). Many researchers used various methods and approaches in developing idiomatic competence. For instance, according to Khonbi and Sadeghi role play activity is the most effective while teaching idioms (2017), Ketabi and Tavakkoli advise teaching idioms through the context (2012). Talebinezhad taught idioms with the help of authentic materials while teaching poetry and in this way he improved students' metaphorical competence. In our research we also use authentic materials which are expected to significantly improve the understanding and use of these expressions, as they provide students with a real context in which idioms are used by native speakers. The purpose of this study is to analyze the impact of authentic materials on the development of idiomatic competence among English language learners who are studying at the Faculty of Economy.

## 2. THE THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE RESEARCH

Authentic materials in language teaching can be defined as resources created by native speakers and intended for real-world use in everyday life. Majority of scholars connected the term 'authenticity' to the real spoken or written language in a real community. (Porter & Roberts 1981; Swaffar 1985; Nunan 1989; Benson & Voller 1997). Some researchers related it to the chosen tasks (Breen 1983; Benson & Voller 1997; Lewkowicz 2000; Guariento & Morley 2001), while others linked it with assessment. (Lewkowicz 2000) Thus, authentic materials include texts (news, articles, books), audio-visual materials (films, radio, podcasts), as well as spoken recordings and interviews. Such materials provide students not only with grammatical and lexical structures but also with social and cultural contexts that are important for the correct perception and use of idiomatic expressions (Gilmore, 2007).

Idiomatic competence is the ability to understand and correctly use phraseological units of a language in real communicative situations. According to Liontas, it is 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 (1999). It includes not only knowledge of the meanings of idioms but also the ability to apply them correctly in context. According to Mantyla English is the dominant language in which idioms are used a lot (2004). It is also called as the language of idiomaticity. No doubt that using idiomatic language increases foreign language learners' language proficiency at all levels. Nevertheless, there has been paid lack of attention to the development of EFL learners' idiomatic competence. For any language learner, along with the economy students learning English is highly valued and it can help them to understand the written or spoken language better, avoid misunderstandings, sound more natural and communicate effectively in the global business world.

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As many scholars pointed out, the study of idioms is impossible without taking into account their use in context, since many idiomatic expressions have a meaning different from the literal one (Tucker, 2010). Therefore, they should be taught according to the perspective of the native speakers of the target language. The way how they themselves learned to grasp idioms in different situation can help language learners better memorize these expressions. (Sornig, 1998) In this case, using authentic materials helps students learn to perceive idioms in the context of their actual use, which significantly improves the comprehension of phraseological expressions. For example, in films and news broadcasts, idioms can be found in casual conversation, which allows students not only to know their meanings but also to learn how to use them in appropriate situations.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The experiment involved 30 students who are studying English at TIIAME NRU, in the Faculty of Economy. All participants in the experiment had a B1-B2 proficiency level on the CEFR scale. The experiment was conducted in two stages: at the first stage, students performed a test of knowledge of idiomatic expressions based on traditional educational materials (textbooks, assignments), at the second stage they worked with authentic materials, including fragments of films, news articles and audio recordings using idioms. The experiment included two subgroups:

Group A (control group): Worked with traditional educational materials.

Group B (experimental group): Worked with authentic materials.

Both groups passed an initial test of knowledge of idioms and then completed tasks where they had to correctly understand and apply idioms in various contexts. At the end of the study, the participants were again tested for knowledge and use of idiomatic expressions. For authentic sources the articles containing many idioms and expressions about global markets, economics and business, which were taken from The Financial Times, The Economist, BBC Business News were used. Besides that, Video podcasts TED Talks, BBC Business Daily, Planet Money and TV shows such as The Wolf of Wall Street, Moneyball, The Big Short programs were watched and analyzed by students. Selected idioms for checking the language learners idiom comprehension are given in the following table:

**Table 1**

**Selected idioms for checking the language learners idiom comprehension**

| № | Idioms | Definition |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | the bottom line | the total profit or loss of a company at the end of a particular period of time |
| 2 | hit the nail on the head | to describe exactly what is causing a situation or problem |
| 3 | on the verge of collapse/success | if you are on the verge of collapse/success, you are very close to experiencing it |
| 4 | get the ball rolling | To begin something with the goal of supporting and encouraging others |
| 5 | break the ice | to defuse a tense situation, to start a conversation, especially in a situation where people are unfamiliar or feel insecure |
| 6 | to be in the red | a situation when a person or company spends more money than they have in their account |
| 6 | think outside the box | using creative ideas rather than traditional ones |
| 7 | bigger fish to fry | to do the things that are more essential |
| 8 | break even | the point at which cost and income are equal and there is neither profit nor loss |
| 9 | the ball is in your court | when the ball is in someone's court, it means that it is up to this person to make a decision to achieve success |
| 10 | a game changer | something or someone that has a big effect to change the existing situation |
| 11 | raise the stakes | to increase the risks or stakes in a situation, to increase the importance, tension, or cost of a decision, action, or game. |
| 12 | take the bull by the horns | take responsibility for a difficult or risky situation, act boldly and decisively, and not be afraid of difficulties. |
| 13 | cash cow | a source of income that produces a steady and significant income with minimal effort or investment; products, services, or companies that provide a steady cash flow |
| 14 | run a tight ship | to organize and control processes with high efficiency and discipline, to manage something strictly and with attention to detail. |
| 15 | raise the bar | raise standards or requirements, set higher expectations, set the bar higher in order to achieve better results. |
| 16 | sweeten the deal | make an offer more attractive, add additional benefits or conditions to convince the other party to accept the deal. |
| 17 | play hardball | to conduct business harshly, aggressively, with complete determination, without compromise, and to do everything possible to achieve one's goal. |
| 18 | break the bank | spend too much money, spend all your funds, make a purchase that turns out to be financially burdensome. |
| 19 | belt tightening | cutting expenses, saving money. Usually used in the context of financial difficulties or the need to reduce the budget. |
| 20 | big picture | a general idea of the situation, allowing you to see it in a broad context rather than getting hung up on the details. |

## 4. RESULTS:

A comparative analysis of the input and final tests showed the following results:

In order to assess students' idiomatic knowledge there was taken two types of tests. In the first one, learners filled the gaps putting idioms in an appropriate place. Secondly, they played a role play game where they had to use the given idioms naturally by interviewing each other. As a result, in group A, the average score increase was 12% compared to the initial level. In group B, the increase was 25%, which is more than 2 times higher. In the oral role-playing game Group A students used an average of 3.4 idioms per participant. Students of group B — 6,7 idioms. Another thing we should take into consideration is students used 82% of idiomatic expressions correctly and appropriately in a professional context.

## 5. CONCLUSION:

The results of the conducted research show the importance of using authentic materials for the development of students' idiomatic competence. Contextual representation of idioms through live speech, dialogues, economic reviews and business discussions ensures a more solid and functional integration of expressions. Work formats such as role-playing games and simulations activate students' speech activity and stimulate the use of idioms in conditions close to reality. It is also worth noting that students have become more sensitive to the style and case of idioms. They consciously used colloquial expressions in oral speech and more formal ones in written assignments. The data obtained indicate the high impact of authentic materials not only as a teaching tool but also as a means of socio-cultural adaptation of students in a professionally oriented language. Contextual perception, realistic situations and active involvement in communication ensure a deep and informed integration of idiomatic expressions, which is especially important for future specialists in economics and business. In the future, it is recommended to introduce authentic resources more widely into educational programs, as well as to develop methodological recommendations for teachers on the effective inclusion of idioms in classes. Further research may be aimed at studying the effectiveness of certain types of authentic materials on various aspects of language competence.

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