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Non-native English Speakers' Strategies for Learning Idiomatic Expressions

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Resumen

Esta síntesis examina la efectividad de diferentes métodos para la enseñanza de expresiones idiomáticas en un contexto de inglés como Lengua Extranjera (EFL), basándose en evidencia empírica. Se seleccionaron un total de veinte artículos revisados y publicados desde el año 2005 en adelante, siguiendo criterios específicos de inclusión y exclusión. Estos estudios variaron en enfoques, grupos de participantes y marcos disciplinares asociados. Los hallazgos de esta síntesis muestran que las expresiones idiomáticas son importantes para la adquisición de la competencia comunicativa; sin embargo, los elementos abstractos o metáforas culturalmente no específicas dificultan en gran medida su aprendizaje por parte de los estudiantes. A partir de los datos, se evidencia que la elaboración etimológica, el mapeo metafórico, los recursos visuales complementarios, los aportes en redes sociales por parte de compañeros y otros medios dinámicos mejoran significativamente la comprensión y la retención de los conceptos. Además, estos estudios sugieren mejores resultados de aprendizaje cuando se enseña integrando conocimientos culturales dentro de una planificación contextualizada de clases, con instrucción diferenciada y andamiaje adaptado a los diferentes niveles y necesidades de los estudiantes. Esta investigación resalta la importancia del diseño curricular en EFL, al tiempo que aboga por marcos pedagógicos interdisciplinarios e integradores, orientados hacia paradigmas rigurosos basados en la investigación.

Palabras clave del autor: expresiones idiomáticas, EFL, estrategias de aprendizaje, mapeo metafórico, materiales audiovisuales, instrucción multimodal



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Abstract

This synthesis examines the effectiveness of different methods for teaching idiomatic expressions within an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting based on empirical evidence. A total twenty reviewed published articles from 2005 onwards were selected based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. They varied in approaches, participant groups, and associated framework disciplines. The findings of this synthesis illustrate that idioms are important for communicative competence acquisition; however, abstract culturally non-specific elements or metaphors make idioms exceedingly difficult for learners to acquire. From the data, it is apparent that etymological elaboration, metaphorical mapping, complementary visuals, social media inputs from peers, and other dynamic means greatly enhance understanding and memory retention of concepts. In addition to this, these studies suggest improved learner outcomes with teaching that combines cultural background knowledge integrated contextually within lessons planning differentiated instruction scaffolding tailored to varying levels of students' needs. This research underscores the importance of EFL curriculum design whilst advocating interdisciplinary integrative pedagogy frameworks shift toward rigorous research-based paradigms.

Author Keywords: idiomatic expressions, EFL, learning strategies, metaphorical mapping, audiovisual materials, multimodal instruction



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Introduction

The acquisition of English idioms in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes becomes troublesome for foreign learners. This is mainly because the meaning of figurative phrases composed of words with culturally specific interpretations differs significantly from their literal translations, making them impossible to understand without a cultural context. Furthermore, terms taught during formal lessons or found in textbooks are presented separately from the colloquial features and spontaneity associated with real-life speech patterns. Therefore, most students do not understand how to use idiomatic expressions accurately during conversations.

To address this issue, researchers have tried developing methods to foster a better understanding of idioms among students. Strategies that incorporate rote learning alongside visual aids such as social media have proven beneficial toward comprehension and production of idioms, phrases, and expressions in any language. These approaches not only ensure retention but also promote understanding of culture and fluency in English.

This research synthesis seeks to explore and compare the most effective strategies for learning idiomatic expressions, based on the analysis of 20 empirical studies conducted in diverse educational and cultural settings. By identifying patterns in strategy use and effectiveness, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how idioms can be taught and learned successfully in an EFL environment. The structure of this thesis is as follows:

Chapter I introduces the topic and presents the background, problem statement, rationale, research question, and objectives.

Chapter II shows the theoretical framework, defining key concepts such as idiomatic expressions, learning strategies, and current EFL approaches.

Chapter III offers a comprehensive literature review of the empirical studies included in this synthesis.

Chapter IV details the methodology used to select, categorize, and analyze the studies.

Chapter V presents the analysis and findings, highlighting the most effective idiom learning strategies and their impact.

Chapter VI contains the conclusions and recommendations based on the synthesis results, along with suggestions for future research.

Chapter I

1. Background

English idiomatic expressions represent a linguistically fascinating, engaging, and vibrant facet of the English language (Xalilova & Atoyeva, 2023). Moreover, idiomatic expressions are not just colorful, casual expressions but an important part of both oral and written communication (Ambrose, 2008; Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2016). As Liu (2017), Ambrose (2008), and Maisa and Karunakaran (2013) have concluded, idiomatic expressions can be encountered in various situations, such as spoken speech and written media. However, due to the presence of slang and clichés (Ambrose, 2008) and their frequent use to describe aspects such as personality, character, or appearance (Maisa & Karunakaran, 2013), idioms can sometimes be perceived as casual or informal expressions (Ambrose, 2008; Maisa & Karunakaran, 2013). Despite their important role in communication, mastery or at least knowledge of idiomatic expressions is essential for comprehension and proper communication (Secord & Wiig, 1993; Mahmoodi-Shahrehabaki, 2014), yet learning them remains difficult, even for native speakers (Chen, 2013). Much of this difficulty stems from the fact that idioms are expressions with unpredictable meanings (Chen, 2013; Al-kadi, 2015); idioms, furthermore, have no pattern for their formation (Gibbs, 1994). This issue is accentuated in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, where there has never been a consensus regarding the best strategy to teach idiomatic expressions (Liu, 2017).

1.1 Problem statement

Idiomatic expressions are a fundamental aspect of EFL mastery as they enhance communication, promote cultural understanding, and contribute to overall fluency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings (Chen & Lai, 2013; Kan & Murphy, 2020; Rodríguez & Winnberg, 2013; Sadeghi et al., 2010; Thyab, 2016). Recognizing their importance, however, the acquisition of idioms remains particularly challenging for learners because of their cultural connotation and figurative meanings (Alhaysony, 2017; Apridayani et al., 2024; Hayati et al., 2013; Tabatabaei & Gahroei, 2011).

Anjarini and Hatmanto (2021) noted that the last decade has seen the emergence of various strategies focused on aiding learners to master idiomatic expressions within an EFL context. Still, as Liu (2017) and Orfan (2020) pointed out, there remains no agreement on the best method for teaching and learning idioms. Some scholars prioritize understanding, while others focus on production skill (Orfan, 2020). This issue can be traced back to differing teaching

philosophies and cognitive theories. Comprehension-based strategies contextual framework aid comprehension through gradual exposure, whereas productive strategies phonetic rote repetition supports phonetic fluency (Liu, 2017; Orfan, 2020). Such a broad array of practices may hinder learners' mastery of culturally significant idioms which impacts their comprehension of cultures and their appropriation techniques. A balanced blend of both approaches would bolster acquisition (Orfan, 2020).

Therefore, this research synthesis seeks to integrate differing scholarly literature on empirical evidence concerning various teaching strategies alongside reasoning behind the rationale within instruction. Evaluate the instructional strategies for their effectiveness in improving learners' ability to use idiomatic expressions in critical understanding of their meanings.

1.2 Rationale

The purpose of this research synthesis is to address the gaps and misunderstandings within the literature pertaining to the teaching of idiomatic expressions in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (Thyab, 2016). It can be noticed from the literature that there are certain common teaching strategies, along with some specialized approaches developed to teach idiomatic expressions.

These techniques include use of audiovisual digital platforms for teaching sessions (Khoshniyat & Dowlatabadi, 2014; Chávez & Arias, 2019; Pedreros & Nuñez, 2021), rote learning (Rodríguez & Winnberg, 2013; Noroozi & Salehi, 2013; Alhaysony, 2017), group short story discussions (Tabatabaei & Hajzadeh, 2015; Kan & Murphy, 2020), metaphorical mapping (Khoshniyat & Dowlatabadi, 2014; Chen & Lai, 2013), and using social media for learning idiomatic expressions (Rodriguez Medina et al., 2023; Pramono et al., 2020). While idiomatic expression usage is important for effective communication globally (Thyab, 2016), methods supporting retention and application of these concepts by learners remain inconclusive, debating their efficacy overall (Chen & Lai, 2013; Khoshniyat & Dowlatabadi, 2014; Thyab, 2016).

This synthesis aimed to collate and analyze the teaching methodologies employed in the acquisition of idioms with a view of providing an exposition. By analyzing these strategies, this research aims to identify and describe strategies that have been highlighted in the available literature (see above) as not only enhancing learners' understanding and retention of idiomatic expressions but also improving their ability to use these expressions in real-life communication. In doing so, it is hoped to aid in addressing a gap in academic knowledge by contributing to the ongoing efforts to improve the teaching and learning of idiomatic

expressions. Consequently, this research aims to make a meaningful contribution to the existing body of literature on the teaching of idiomatic expressions in English as a foreign language context.

1.3 Research question

- As reported by empirical evidence, what are the most effective learning strategies for non-native English speakers to learn idiomatic expressions in EFL contexts?

Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective:

- To describe the most effective strategies for learning idiomatic expressions in EFL contexts, as reported by empirical evidence.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives:

1. To identify the most commonly reported strategies used by English non-native speakers for learning idiomatic expressions across all age levels.
2. To compare the reported efficacy of the identified strategies to learn idiomatic expressions in EFL contexts.

Chapter II

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Definition and Importance of Idiomatic Expressions

Idiomatic expressions are linguistic constructions whose meanings cannot be understood by simply interpreting the literal meaning of each word that constitutes them (Maisa & Karunakaran, 2013; Shojaei, 2012). Bobrow and Bell (1973) and Asl (2013) argue that these expressions should be considered complex semantic units, as the overall meaning cannot be derived from the individual meanings of their components. Both authors emphasize that idioms are fixed phrases that pose a challenge for those trying to understand them based solely on the meanings of their constituent words. In addition, Moirón and Tiedemann (2006) highlight that the lack of agreement in the literature makes it difficult to define an “idiom”, suggesting that the diversity of approaches reflects the complexity of these expressions.

From a more technical perspective, Keizer (2016) and Moirón and Tiedemann (2006) look at idiomatic complexity in terms of the structural problems involved both within grammatical theory as well as with Natural Language Processing (NLP) applications. Most of these authors conclude that idiomatic expressions are a linguistic phenomenon that transcends the individual meanings of words, necessitating an integrated approach to semantics and syntax. As noted by Hajiyeva (2024) and Thyab (2016), idiomatic expressions, despite their intricate nature, serve as essential building blocks for mastering advanced language skills, deepening understanding of the language’s culture, and broadening one’s linguistic competencies. According to Asl (2013), it is important to consider that idioms overwhelmingly characterize the daily interactions among native speakers, thus underlining the need for second or foreign language learners to grasp how to recognize and utilize them proficiently.

2.2 Linguistic Analysis of Idiomatic Expressions

Owens (2016) points out that the deeply entrenched non-compositional meanings, along with fixed structural constraints, make idiomatic expressions extremely problematic for traditional syntactic analysis. In this framework, Brinton & Brinton (2010) classify idioms into two fundamental types: Idiomatically combining expression and idiomatically fixed expression; this distinction showcases a blend between semantic opacity and structure rigidity variability.

Idiomatic combinations are still multi-word expressions that can have some degree of syntactic change. While these phrases can undergo modification in tense, number, or arrangement, their idiomatic essence will not be completely lost. Take, for instance, the phrase “spill the

beans". It has forms like "he spilled the beans" or even "they are spilling the beans" while still keeping its meaning and figurative connotation (Owens, 2016).

On the other hand, idiomatically fixed expressions are structurally rigid and behave like lexical chunks. These expressions do not permit internal modification without altering or destroying their meaning. A typical example is "Kicked the bucket" without losing its idiomatic sense of "to die" (Brinton & Brinton, 2010).

This classification has led researchers to reconsider the boundaries between syntax and the lexicon, especially in how idioms blur the line between grammatical structure and stored lexical knowledge (Brinton & Brinton, 2010). While syntax typically governs rules for combining words, idiomatic expressions often defy these rules, behaving more like lexical entries in the mental lexicon (Owens, 2016; Keizer, 2016). Keizer (2016) argues that idioms have a "hybrid" space: they are syntactically analyzable but also require holistic storage due to their fixed meaning.

Moreover, idioms present a direct challenge to the principle of compositionality, which holds that the meaning of a sentence should be derivable from the meanings of its individual components and their syntactic arrangement (Brinton & Brinton, 2010). In idioms, however, this principle often fails to apply. For instance, in the expression "let the cat out of the bag", the literal meaning of "cat", "bag", or "let out" offers no clues to its actual meaning (to reveal a secret). Therefore, idiomatic expressions might be understood as semantic units, not as the sum of their parts. This characteristic is precisely what makes idioms so difficult for learners: they must be learned contextually or through specialized instruction rather than deduced from their form (Chen & Lai, 2013; Noroozi & Salehi, 2013).

2.3 Learning Strategies and Techniques: Definition and Relationship

The term "learning strategy" is defined as a set of organized and deliberate actions that students use to facilitate the acquisition, retention, and application of knowledge (Coyle & Valcárcel, 2005; Fanani, 2014). Coyle and Valcárcel (2005) and Fanani (2014) argue that a learning strategy can be understood as a set of tactics aimed at achieving a unified learning outcome, where techniques represent specific actions within that process. However, there is no universal consensus in the academic literature regarding the conceptualization and delimitation of the term. This circumstance has led to a conceptual overlap with other related concepts, particularly *technique* (Coyle & Valcárcel, 2005; Fanani, 2014). This lack of precision has resulted in the interchangeable use of both terms, especially in the fields of second language acquisition and learning, as well as formal education (Fanani, 2014).

While strategies generally refer to broader approaches to learning, techniques are more concrete and applied manifestations of these strategies (Coyle & Valcárcel, 2005; Fanani, 2014). Nevertheless, from a practical perspective, researchers have pointed out that the distinction between these terms is not always clear in teaching, as many specific techniques directly stem from broader learning strategies (Coyle & Valcárcel, 2005; Fanani, 2014). Consequently, for the purposes of this study, the terms "*strategy*" and "*technique*" will be used interchangeably due to their interdependence and diffuse delimitation within the learning process.

2.4 Current Approaches to Teaching English as a Foreign or Second Language

The teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) has evolved significantly, adapting to contemporary educational needs. Balanced approaches seem to focus more on teaching techniques of verbal articulation due to the use of hands-on related practice (Abid, 2019). One of these is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) with an emphasis on interaction through role plays and other activities, enhancing understanding with fluency-gaining frameworks and a confidence-building environment (Abid, 2019). Moreover, Larsen-Freeman (2000, pp.121-137) elaborated four principles of CLT, which aim to address effective communicative language teaching, and formulated primary strategies for language teaching. To begin with, learning a language involves more than just its grammatical components. Learning should focus on actual conversation. In addition, debates, role plays, and other problem-solving tasks that mimic real-life interactions are also very useful. Moreover, students are free to make mistakes during the learning process and still develop their speaking skills because order fluency in speech is equally important as achieving accuracy. Finally, language acquisition encourages interaction, which fosters pair and group work as strategies stimulating communicative competence. These principles help create an environmental school in which students actively participate in constructing their knowledge of the given language; they become fluent and confident learners while being able to express themselves in the target language.

Furthermore, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) focuses on both content area education and English proficiency (Abid, 2019). CLT or Communicative Language Teaching Method focuses more on learner participation through real-life interactions like role-plays or problem-solving activities (Abid, 2019; Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Unlike CLT, CLIL pays attention to providing learners with cognitively challenging input within authentic contexts for better linguistic development as well as deeper understanding of concepts (Hussin & Aziz, 2022). This approach helps gain special vocabulary and forms of discourse that are usually

not included in the language classes' lessons. Further, CLIL supports the multimodal and content-based paradigms of language teaching because it allows for idioms to be acquired through exposure to language in various disciplines (Abid, 2019). In this regard, the works of Rodriguez Medina et al. (2023) and Pramono et al. (2020) advocating the use of realia, especially audiovisual materials and social media, show how CLIL can be adapted to informal settings with rich cultural idioms and authentic language use to support learners' understanding.

Moreover, Problem Based Learning (PBL), centers on active collaboration and critical thinking as well. In contrast to conventional approaches, Project-Based Learning links tasks students need to perform with language skills they have to acquire, harnessing imagination so learners work in teams, while Problem-Based Learning encourages learners to examine problems, fostering independence as well as contemplation (Hussin & Aziz, 2022). Along the same lines, Task-Based Learning (TBL) centers around tasks which are meaningful and practical in nature while mimicking authentic situations in order to develop fluency and accuracy (Abid, 2019). The above approaches work regarding essential principles of students, which are teaching self-reliance, active engagement and participation from the student body, context-based learning, integrated language instruction including contexts and tasks-along with its practical application, and enabling learners to master English for real-life scenarios (Abid 2019).

These methods aid in cultivating responsiveness and interactivity for self-directed EFL and ESL learning shaped by global interaction. The implementation of CLT, CLIL, PBL, and TBL not only enhances the linguistic competence of learners but also their actual participation by empowering them with real-world communicative skills. In conjunction with these approaches, language mastery at the optimal effective level is attained while critical thinking and problem-solving skills are cultivated (Abid, 2019; Hussin & Aziz, 2022).

2.5 Challenges in Learning Idiomatic Expressions in EFL

The study of phraseological units, especially English idioms, presents enormous difficulties to learners of English as a Foreign and Second Language due to several interconnected reasons. Firstly, these expressions are metaphorical in nature, which relates to culture, making them extremely difficult to interpret word for word. One must comprehend the context surrounding that culture (Apridayani et al., 2024; Ali & Al-Rushaidi, 2016).

The absence of precise equivalents in students' first languages frequently leads to misunderstanding or literal translation (Ali & Al-Rushaidi, 2016). This issue is made worse by learners' limited exposure to idioms due to their infrequent inclusion in teaching plans and the overall lack of a cohesive curriculum framework. As a result, insufficient scaffolding is provided

for these students to help them navigate such challenging expressions (Apridayani et al., 2024). On the other hand, some English idioms and phrases which bear contrasting resemblance with learners' native languages confuse them; thus, merging those ideas results in misinterpretation (Ali & Al-Rushaidi, 2016).

Acquisition of a second or foreign language entails many challenges, one of the most difficult being mastering idiomatic expressions. Idioms, with their figurative meanings and cultural nuances, often pose significant obstacles for learners' attempts to improve their fluency and cultural competence (Khoshniyat & Dowlatabadi, 2014; Noroozi & Salehi, 2013). As languages evolve within their unique cultural contexts, idiomatic expressions become deeply embedded in the everyday communication of native speakers, making them essential for learners aiming to master authentic language use (Iranmanesh & Darani, 2018; Rodríguez & Winnberg, 2013).

Nevertheless, due to the previously mentioned challenges, teachers might deliberately avoid teaching idiomatic expressions in order to simplify language learning, but that decision can limit the development of students' linguistic skills (Asl, 2013). These situations point out the need for more contextualized and culturally informed pedagogical frameworks aimed at facilitating idiom acquisition.

3. Literature review

Different researchers acknowledge the significance of idioms, devising differing methods for effective teaching and learning. As an illustration, the employment of audiovisual resources such as television programs fulfills a crucial function during instruction by providing images that strengthen verbal description and assist in retention through imagery (Khoshniyat & Dowlatabadi, 2014; Chávez & Arias, 2019). Apart from idiom learning, other methods like discussion groups of short stories, metaphorical mapping or even straightforward memorization strategies have proven effective too (Tabatabaei & Hajizadeh, 2015; Chen & Lai, 2013). Rodríguez Medina et al. (2023) and Pramono et al. (2020) researched the role of social media in learning and demonstrated that these media greatly help learners to be exposed to idioms dramatically and contextually rich culturally.

3.1 The Use of Movies and Series to Enhance the Learning of Idiomatic Expressions

The meaning behind idiomatic expressions, alongside their cultural aspects, makes them quite difficult for learners at any level (Khoshniyat & Dowlatabadi, 2014). To address this particular challenge, researchers try different approaches, such as including multiple forms of

audiovisual content. Khoshniyat and Dowlatabadi (2014), for example, conducted a study that employed Disney movies to teach English idioms to their Iranian students. The results underscored the incorporation of metaphors with images during learning, which aided comprehensibility among students. Chávez and Arias (2019) researched the effect on translation students in Peru by American TV series on idiomatic expression teaching methods. They discovered that these audiovisual instruments not only enhance students' understanding of the use of idioms but also equip them with practical cases where the language is used. This helps learners grasp deeper appreciation of the cultural aspects of the language.

Through Netflix, Pedreros and Nuñez (2021) offered an English idiom course to Colombian university students. They employed action research methodology to examine learner subtitled audiovisual material interactions. The results of this study underscored that students learned idioms as a result of this method in a motivated state and active engagement with learning. Students articulated satisfaction with the incorporation of films and television into lessons because it made learning more enjoyable and personally relevant. This was supported through qualitative data from participant observation and focus group discussion methodologies which were employed in these studies. Both Shahanaz Khoshniyat and Fakhri Dowlatabadi (2014) systematically taught idioms employing cognitive strategies based on conceptual metaphor frameworks where marked improvements in student outcomes were observed while Pedreros and Nuñez (2021) co-researched and co-participated analyzing student interactions with the materials provided.

A more recent study by Rodriguez (2024) describes how the TV series “The Simpsons” serves as a resource for Spanish speakers to learn different levels of idioms. The study pointed out that this method fosters motivation and provides comprehensible input, in accordance with Krashen’s (1982) theory wherein language acquisition occurs through understanding pertinent exposure and requires interaction with language slightly above the learner’s current capabilities. In another study, Chávez and Arias (2019) used context to empirically show how TV series enhance the use of idioms, which raises their memorability and motivational impact. In addition, the transition from formal academic English to spoken informal English for learners was facilitated by the slang presented in this lesson. Regardless of their differences, all studies agreed on one point: students learn idiomatic expressions together with culture through audiovisual materials.

The effectiveness of films and series in the teaching of idiomatic expressions has received considerable attention, though different studies approach the issue using varying methodologies. For instance, Khoshniyat and Dowlatabadi (2014) focused on teaching

through the use of concepts and metaphors which aided in understanding within a student's cognitive strategies classroom. Chávez and Arias (2019) along with Pedreros and Núñez (2021), took a more global exposure-immersion approach regarding culture motivated language teaching with a great focus on learner involvement using tailored resources. In addition, Pedreros & Núñez are active participants in their study, while others follow structured instructional approaches.

Despite the differences found in all the past studies, all of them concluded that the use of audio-visuals remains critical in the acquisition of idioms. Learners acquire culture-enhancing video aids as language, apply theoretical concepts foster thoughtful integration during English instruction.

3.2 Memorization

Noroozi and Salehi (2013) studied how rote memorization compared to etymological elaboration in an English class in Iran. Their study shows that etymological elaboration, which is the practice of linking idioms with images or stories from their culture significantly improves retention of idiomatic expressions. This method helps learners form connections as opposed to relying on rote memorization.

The importance of idiomatic expressions stems from their frequent occurrence and a person's proficiency in language. Idioms, as pointed out by Rodríguez and Winnberg (2013), enrich verbal fluency and profoundly advance one's cross-cultural understanding related to the language in use. Likewise, Noroozi and Salehi (2013) point out that such linguistic features are important for understanding culturally delicate matters as well as for advanced communication skills during learner-centered interactions.

Alhaysony (2017) investigated how Saudi students faced problems with remembering idioms. His findings showed that these students tended to overuse contextual guessing within the surrounding text or reasoning based on their native languages' equivalent phrases for the given sayings through borrowing interpretations. Nevertheless, students with lower language skills faced more difficulties in retaining idiomatic phrases, especially when there are no direct equivalents in their native language. These outcomes indicate that methodical and focused teaching alongside the use of mnemonic methods promotes retention, thereby streamlining the memorization process.

Rodríguez and Winnberg (2013) may not have added any new empirical data, but their literature review has furthered understanding concerning the need to consider primary

learners' contexts and individual circumstances as highlighted by other studies within this pedagogical framework.

Many researchers comment about the difficulties of idiom memorization; however, each one of them seems to have a different approach. For example, Noroozi and Salehi (2013) claim etymological elaboration bolsters retention because it forges an association between idioms and cultural references. On the other hand, Alhaysony (2017) emphasizes contextual inference together with cross-linguistic comparisons, pointing out how basic-level students tend to struggle more with lower-tier idioms lacking direct counterparts in their language. Rodríguez and Winnberg (2013) provide a rationale for why teaching methodologies should consider the sociolinguistic profile of students. Understanding differences in teaching requires all educators to appreciate that rote memorization is not enough; meaningful interactions, purposeful learning, context-rich surroundings, and strategic techniques are essential for effective idiom acquisition.

3.3 Strategies related to reading comprehension

The figurative and metaphorical nature of idioms makes them difficult to teach in second language acquisition (Tabatabaei & Hajizadeh, 2015). Different educational strategies, such as using short stories or etymological elaboration, have been helpful in fostering idiomatic proficiency. Following a quantitative approach, Tabatabaei and Hajizadeh (2015) conducted a study with pre- and post-tests alongside statistical assessment to determine the effectiveness of these strategies. Their work with 60 intermediate Iranian EFL students demonstrated that short stories combined with etymological explanations greatly enhanced learners' grasp of idioms compared to traditional approaches.

Integrating literature into language classes has helped create authentic scenarios and enriched language input. Students sometimes reach an impressive level of fluency when they discover the undercurrents of idiomatic language in a brief story cycle. Tabatabaei and Hajizadeh (2015) noted that a sprinkle of historical background turned what could have been rote memorization into an engaging cultural tour. The learners ended the semester with greater cognitive control over the units than most instructors had anticipated.

For research reliability the same lesson sequence doubled as the ordinary data-gathering phase for the quarterly diagnostic that tests deep reading and idiomatic understanding. The schedule was cramped, yet the overlap proved useful because the results were available immediately. Tabatabaei and Hajizadeh (2015) exemplify this kind of study by employing pre-test/post-test measures alongside ANOVA analysis to evaluate the effect of instruction from a

purely quantitative viewpoint. Etymological tidbits, woven into the fabric of the narratives, pushed vocabulary retention far past anything typical drill-and-kill exercises had managed for mid-range Iranian EFL students. Observers jotted remarks about a spike in curiosity that defied the original hypotheses.

Even the quietest children began cataloging new phrases on their own, hinting that a tiered, staged plan to teach multi-word units had begun working almost automatically. Designing those steps around increasing layers of difficulty thus appears vital for any young person facing English as an additional language.

Similar questions appeared on the desks of Kan and Murphy (2020); they focused, however, on British children who spoke no other tongues at home. Their classroom trials confirmed that swelling numbers of idioms-and the sheer complexity of those idioms-create notable strain for all pupils, even native speakers. It blended a quantitative approach with reading comprehension tests and group difference analyses alongside measuring the impact of multi-word expressions on understanding.

From a different perspective, the same body of research focused on reading comprehension strategies emphasizes teaching through short stories and etymological elaboration for idiomatic expression instruction, even though studies vary in their particular emphasis as well as participant demographics. Tabatabaei and Hajizadeh (2015) showed that etymological explanation paired with contextualized learning through culture using short stories significantly improved idiom understanding among Iranian EFL learners at the intermediate level. In contrast, Kan and Murphy (2020) studied the effects of multi-word expressions on reading comprehension, both in monolinguals in the UK, where they found that an overabundance of idioms obstructs the understanding of idioms. Though both studies employed quantitative designs with some form of statistics, Tabatabaei and Hajizadeh (2015) sought to improve instructional practices aimed at fostering command over idiomatic expressions, whereas Kan and Murphy (2020) looked at how the frequency of idioms influenced reading comprehension performance. Regardless of the differences, both studies highlight learners' ongoing struggle with idiomatic expressions as well as strategies to teach within authentic contexts accompanied by more critical socio-linguistic views to aid language acquisition and development.

3.4 The Use of Social Media for Learning Idioms

The use of social media in relation to advanced learning and the process of acquiring a new language is an area that is slowly gaining attention. Rodríguez Medina et al. (2023)

investigated university educators' perceptions concerning the employment of TikTok for teaching foreign languages. They utilized surveys and semi-structured interviews with 300 educators, illustrating a mixed-methods design approach. The results emphasized the need to train teachers on the appropriate application of contemporary educational technology in designing pedagogically relevant content on TikTok and its didactic course development.

Perspectives on incorporating TikTok into language teaching are diverse. Some educators consider it a modern and interesting resource that can assist learners, particularly in speaking skills. In contrast, some may be held back from using the tool because teachers have no prior knowledge of the app, its cluttered user interface, tendency towards distraction among its users, or academic irrelevance. Regardless, there is consensus on the need for training focused on its proper exploitation (Rodríguez Medina et al., 2023).

The two studies showcase opposing yet complementary approaches. Research about idiomatic expressions has employed a range of methodologies. The majority have qualitative approaches (Rodríguez Medina et al., 2023), while some practiced quantitative methods (Pramono et al., 2020) or mixed-methods (Rodríguez Medina et al., 2023). Coverage is also diverse, as most research focuses on Asia (Pramono et al., 2020) and only a few studies were conducted in Latin America (Rodríguez Medina et al., 2023). Age of participants spans from young adults to children (Rodríguez Medina et al., 2023; Pramono, 2020). Common tools for data collection include questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as well as comprehension tests, customized for each research context.

While Pramono et al. (2020) underscored the neglect of social media for pedagogical purposes concerning idiomatic expressions, Rodríguez Medina et al. (2023) noted TikTok's remarkable ability to improve students' communication skills.

In alignment with the objectives of this research synthesis, Pramono et al. (2020) examined how university students' social media use impacts their English fixed expressions and idioms acquisition. The quantitative correlational study conducted with 106 participants revealed a moderate yet statistically significant positive correlation between social media usage and mastery of idioms as measured through questionnaires and comprehension tests. Social media contributed 10.8% towards the attainment of these linguistic skills; nevertheless, learners exhibited a poor level of proficiency which suggests that more proficient methods need to be developed on how to use social media for language learning.

Scholarship examining social media as an idiom-learning platform has surfaced both bright prospects and stubborn roadblocks. In a recent mixed-methods investigation, Rodríguez

Medina et al. (2023) polled university instructors about TikToks pedagogical clout and heard a chorus of concern about the lack of tailored professional development and hands-on advisory documents. That local, qualitative snapshot sharply diverges from Pramono et al. (2020) older, numbers-driven study, which charted students' Facebook habits against idiomatic mastery and spotted a moderately robust positive relation. Where the Rodríguez team anchored their work in instructional design theory with fixed engagement targets, Pramono and colleagues let raw post hoc results dictate motivation metrics-an obvious methodological fork in the path. Geographic backdrop also splits the stories: Rodríguez Medina cover mostly Latin American classrooms, while Pramono s case studies are sited across Asia. Despite those contrasts, both research teams circle back to a shared complaint: curricula that braid local cultural references with language teaching linger on the drawing board even as students plead for materials that genuinely resonate with their daily lives.

3.5 Metaphorical Mapping for Developing Idiomatic Expressions

Disney films have a knack for slipping English idioms into exchanges that children understand almost instinctively. Khoshniyat and Dowlatabadi (2014) seized on that convenience and paired the phrases with two familiar conceptual metaphors “HAPPINESS IS UP” and “SADNESS IS DOWN” rather than leaving the expressions in isolation. Clips from Mary Poppins or Aladdin turned an abstract lesson into a small fireworks show for the imagination, so the pupils were amused even as the grammar sank in. The outcome strongly suggests that learners exposed to the metaphor-based approaches had far improved retention in recall compared to learners taught using conventional contextualized texts, ones regurgitated worn-out rote memorization drills methods (Khoshniyat & Dowlatabadi, 2014).

Chen and Lai (2013) explored the metaphorical mapping of teaching idioms within an EFL writing class. The concept “ANGER IS FIRE” was used as a guiding principle to help students comprehend and employ relevant phrases. Focusing on Taiwanese university students, the research highlighted the need to tackle cultural factors involving the students' first language (L1) and second language (L2). Findings indicated that, due to cultural familiarity, students increasingly employed idioms like “ANGER IS FIRE” which exist in both English and Chinese. (Chen & Lai, 2013).

These studies emphasized the effectiveness of cognitive strategies in teaching approaches to idiomatic expressions. Understanding conceptual metaphors not only helped learners grasp their meanings but also improved recall ability over time. Nonetheless, some difficult factors like specific cultures and students' prior knowledge about certain metaphorical ideas were also noted.

Both studies used mixed-methods research, qualitatively and quantitatively. In the controlled experiment conducted by Khoshniyat and Dowlatabadi (2014) with 40 students split into two equal sized groups, the experimental and control groups, their performance was measured with a pre-assessment and post-assessment. Like Khoshniyat and Dowlatabadi, Chen and Lai (2013) also examined students' essays but focused on texts produced after teaching completion which emphasized writing instruction.

Research emphasizing metaphorical mapping in the context of idiom acquisition cognitive strategies, tend to differ in their approaches and foci. Khoshniyat and Dowlatabadi (2014) applied conceptual metaphor theory while teaching idioms through Disney movies to Iranian EFL learners, where students exposed to "metaphor HAPPINESS IS UP" instruction performed more favorably than those taught with traditional Instructional strategies. In the same way, Chen and Lai (2013) focused on metaphor usage in an EFL composition class for Taiwanese students, demonstrating that the use of certain China- English metaphoric expressions "ANGER IS FIRE" were used more often due to culture based affinity. Both studies utilized a mixed-methods framework incorporating qualitative and quantitative components; Khoshniyat and Dowlatabadi (2014) ran a controlled experiment while Chen and Lai (2013) conducted essay evaluations. While both studies underscored the benefits of complex conceptual metaphors as tools for illuminating idiomatic expressions, some critique was offered concerning culture and variation in group learner engagement with metaphor exposure outside of the native context. In any case, both studies continue to markedly illustrate the impacts learners face due to English-centric instructional paradigms with attempts at expressive mastery in foreign language environments stunted by socio-political confines arising from culture-bound contexts.

3.6 Visual Aids in EFL Idiom Retention

More recent research has highlighted the importance of using illustrations to aid recall for idiomatic expressions, particularly within the context of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Nasab & Hesabi, 2014; Saffarian et al., 2013; Ghaderi & Afshinfarb, 2014; Mehrpour & Mansourzadeh, 2017; Golaghaei & Kakolian, 2015; Ahmadi & Zarei, 2021; Boers et al., 2009). Saffarian et al. (2013) investigated the effects of visuals on recalling body idioms with described pre-intermediate Iranian learners. Based on their observations, applying pedagogy that incorporates visuals is markedly more effective than traditional teaching techniques. Instructional imagery makes grasping concepts easier (Saffarian et al., 2013). In support of this, Ghaderi and Afshinfarb (2014) conducted an evaluative study in which they

implemented animation as a replacement for static pictures to improve retention of idiomatic expressions.

Nevertheless, Mehrpour and Mansourzadeh (2017) examined the effects of visual storytelling on beginner learners, stating that visuals help in understanding for EFL Iranian learners. This has been corroborated with Golaghaei and Kakolian (2015) work where they contend that figurative representations can greatly enhance the process of learning idioms. That lively approach also underlines a broader point: pedagogy can and probably should bend toward the learner's culture, not the other way around. Ghaderi and Afshinfarb (2014) make a related observation by noting that pictures and moving images cut through cultural thickets that often trip up language students.

Ahmadi and Zarei (2021), Ghaderi and Afshinfar (2014), Golaghaei and Kakolian (2015), Mehrpour and Mansourzadeh (2017), Saffarian et al. (2013), and Boers et al. (2009) have all shown that different mixes of numbers and narratives can help EFL students from many backgrounds pick up idioms. Their findings echo the mixed-methods treatment of idiomatic expression offered by Nasab and Hesabi (2014), who argued that a single lens rarely captures the full picture of figurative language.

Chapter III

4. Methodology

Cooper and Valentine (2019) describe a research synthesis as the scholarly equivalent of stitching together the most relevant patches of evidence on a chosen topic, making disparate studies feel like part of the same fabric. These authors note that, in most cases, a research synthesis concentrates on the pertinent theories associated with a topic along with the evidence supporting them. This source further notes that these thorough investigations are conducted to develop solutions for disputes within literature and highlight primary concerns for subsequent studies. In agreement with these ideas, the analysis of the data for this research synthesis was based on an inductive, qualitative generation of categories that emerged as the analysis developed. To gather relevant information regarding the use of strategies for learning idiomatic expressions for non-native English speakers, specific inclusion criteria were established to guide the selection of the review studies:

- The studies must be published in review journals. Therefore, the results were based on more reliable information.
- The studies must be published before 2005 in order to analyze recent information about the use of different strategies for learning idiomatic expressions in the field of education.
- The research method of the studies must be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods.
- The studies must present findings obtained from empirical studies focused on the use of strategies for learning idiomatic expressions for non-native English speakers in EFL classrooms.

The exclusion criteria for that were considered for this review were the following:

- The studies were not published in non-academic journals.
- The studies were not published before 2005
- The studies were not empirical.
- The studies whose participants were not part of the EFL classroom.

This research synthesis had as its main objective to analyze the strategies employed by English non-native speakers for the internalization of idiomatic expressions. Therefore, to develop this synthesis, different academic digital databases were analyzed, such as *Google Scholar*, *ERIC*, *ResearchGate*, *Scopus*, and *ScienceDirect*. In addition, the information was

looked at in the following specialized journals: *The Internet TESL Journal*, *Mextesol Journal*, *The Internet TESL Journal*, and *Journal of Studies in Education*. For this purpose, the following key terms in the combination were used: “Idiomatic Expressions,” “Learning idioms”, “Strategies to learn Idiomatic expressions,” “EFL students”. Consequently, 20 articles met the established criteria, and a classification process was carried out with the purpose of categorizing them according to different criteria that emerged through the analysis.

Chapter IV

5. Analysis

In order to answer the research question of this synthesis, 20 empirical studies were selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The findings of the analysis of these 20 studies are organized into two main subsections. The first subsection focuses on the research design of the selected studies, including five key aspects: Geographical location, participants' age, year of publication, research methodology, and data collection instruments. Three central categorizations crystallized during the review phase, ultimately chosen for the background detail they provide when analysts sit down to make sense of the reported findings. Specifying the exact location and time period of data collection, along with the age range and competence band of the participating learners, often exposes recurring trends in how different groups handle the learning of idioms. Noting specific measurement methods and tools, in turn, lays the groundwork for an informed judgment about each project's credibility and overall scope.

The second subsection focuses on the central objective of the study: to identify, weigh, and juxtapose the techniques that seem to offer the greatest reward for EFL students struggling with idioms. Reviewed cumulatively, the chosen studies stack their approaches: memorization exercises, cartoon-style visuals, metaphor mapping exercises, streaming media clips, even quick surveys on social media, and record how well each is received by learners. This framework soon highlights recurring motives and begins to outline new trends that cross very different classrooms. By asking which tactic produces the best combination of memory retention, real-world use, and simple enthusiasm, the analysis offers practical guidance for choosing the right method when idiom instruction arises again. Readers find the data in neatly ordered and titled tables, where brief comments are positioned alongside each set of numbers to highlight patterns and clarify links between studies.

5.1 Analysis of the research design of the selected studies

5.1.1 Location

Table 1

Geographical Location

Location	N	%
Afghanistan	1	5%
Belgium	1	5%
Indonesia	1	5%
Iran	10	50%
Oman	1	5%
Peru	1	5%
Saudi Arabia	1	5%
Spain	1	5%
Taiwan	1	5%
Thailand	1	5%
Yemen	1	5%
Total:	20	

Table 1 shows the geographical distribution of the studies selected for this research synthesis. As shown, a considerable proportion of the studies (50%) were conducted in Iran. This notable concentration of research in Iran appears to be a strategic response to the country's low English proficiency. According to the EF English Proficiency Index (EPI) for 2024, Iran is ranked 62nd out of 116 countries, falling into the "Low Proficiency" band with a score of 499. This suggests that an academic focus on research regarding EFL learning, including the acquisition of idiomatic expressions, is a conscious and intentional effort to address poor English language outcomes. In particular, idiomatic expressions are often ignored in standard curricula and may become a challenge for English learners (Khoshniyat & Dowlatabadi, 2014). Studies such as those by Noroozi and Salehi (2013) and Ghaderi and Afshinfarb (2014) focus on empirical research about the effectiveness of strategies such as etymological elaboration and the use of animated visuals to enhance learners' retention and comprehension of idioms to fill the gaps in this teaching context. These studies exemplify the types of approaches that Iranian researchers are adopting in response to the insufficient attention idioms receive.

The significant number of Iranian studies may also be interpreted as a response to shortages in idiom instruction. Although there is no direct evidence of institutional policy promoting idiom instruction, the diversity and volume of individual research suggest that this trend may be driven by independent entities. Besides, the diversity of methodological approaches within these studies, ranging from quantitative to mixed-method approaches, suggests that Iranian scholars have adopted both experimental and contextual frameworks to examine idiom learning in depth. Researchers began to understand that culture, language choice, and the rules of the learning institution do not operate in isolation; rather, they overlap and shape practice in intricate ways.

Half of the work samples came from Iran, while the other half came from a mosaic of ten countries, each contributing only one study. Peru, Spain, Taiwan, Indonesia, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Yemen, Belgium and Thailand are the corners of the globe represented. These studies have limited delineation and scope but offer invaluable insights from diverse regions for comparative teaching methodologies. Recent fieldwork in Peru by Rodríguez Medina et al. (2023) suggests that scrolling through TikTok-and pausing on its punchy visuals-may accelerate idiom learning more than old-fashioned handouts ever could. Indonesian teachers Pramono et al. (2020) reached a similar conclusion, noting that habitual social-media use correlates with greater command of native-like expressions.

These two cases reflect a surprising fact: idiomatic expressions enjoy global visibility, yet familiarity with them varies sharply from one city-or even one classroom-to the next. That uneven pattern reminds teachers that while creative visual inputs have proven helpful in many locales, any intervention still needs to be re-tuned for the cultural soundscape of the learners at hand. The study conducted by Pramono et al. (2020) and Rodríguez Medina et al. (2023) illustrates the flexibility of teaching strategies aimed at idiom acquisition, showing how they can be tailored to diverse educational and cultural settings. That uneven reach, paired with the latitude of lesson formats already tested around the world, makes a compelling case for customizing instruction to cultural and technological localities while still borrowing proven strategies.

The geographic spread of the reviewed studies offers a window into where and how idiomatic expressions are taught and learned. Much of the scholarship originates in Iran, a detail that hints at a local awareness of idioms' role in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) communicative competence. Noroozi and Salehi (2013) testify to this trend, noting that Iranian linguists frequently address the figurative and cultural density of idioms by breaking down their etymology or embedding them in richly contextualized input. On the other hand, research conducted in Latin America, for instance Rodríguez Medina et al. (2023); or Southeast Asia with Pramono et al. (2020) regard the growing tendency to use technology and social media to provide learners with authentic exposure to idiomatic expressions. These differences demonstrate that although the problems involved in, as well as the challenges posed by, idiom acquisition are common worldwide, different regions respond instructionally based on local access to digital infrastructure, educational practices, culturally rooted familiarity with figurative language, and custom-pedagogic frameworks. Thus appreciating geographical context is vital not only as regards interpreting every study's particular findings but also when devising strategies on teaching idioms tailored to students' actual contexts and environments.

5.1.2 Participants' Age

Table 2:

Participants' Age

Participants' Age	N	%
12 - 15	4	20%
16 - 22	15	75%
25 - 45	1	5%
Total:	20	100%

As demonstrated, Table 2 illustrates the distribution of age groups among participants in relation to the twenty studies that have been reviewed. The data indicates that a significant number of studies, approximately 75%, concentrated on participants within the age range of 16 to 22 years old. This demographic primarily includes high school and college students and corresponds with the CEFR framework, which classifies B1-B2 intermediate to upper-intermediate levels as typically achieved during this developmental period (Liu, 2017). At this stage of development, learners usually have the requisite cognitive and linguistic skills to navigate idiomatic expressions which are often abstract and figurative in nature. The works of Keizer (2016) and Noroozi and Salehi (2013) suggest that the ability to understand idioms involves metaphorical reasoning coupled with cultural inference-abilities readily available to older teenagers and young adults.

The focus of research from this particular age range may be associated with the attainment of curriculum objectives that emphasize all communicative competence and cultural fluency-two areas where idiomatic expressions are especially important (Liu, 2017; Chen & Lai, 2013). Middle-schoolers today can swipe through a smartphone, open a streaming service, or stroll into a library, and genuine Spanish texts are suddenly within reach. The immediacy of songs, movie clips, and weathered paperbacks helps them stumble across idioms in the wild before a teacher ever mentions the word, a point Chávez and Arias (2019) as well as Rodríguez Medina et al. (2023) note. Authenticity, in that sense, lives in the pocket.

Research does not treat thirteen-year-olds the same way it treats fifteen-year-olds, and the gap is wide: roughly one paper in five so far has recruited participants from the 12-to-15 bracket, that is the 20% of the studies. Piaget's stage of concrete operations is fading, but true formal reasoning will not arrive for a year or two yet. Kan and Murphy (2020) insist, however, that well-crafted reading tasks and eye-catching visuals can land a figurative boss at even the youngest end of the spectrum. So why the silence? It probably has less to do with student

capability than with syllabi that chase straightforward vocabulary sets before they chase imagery, a pattern the Council of Europe (2020) and Liu (2017) both criticize

A single study, barely 5% of the total, engaged respondents between twenty-five and forty-five years of age and thus underlines an extraordinary void in the literature on adult learners in English as a foreign language course. This underrepresentation may illustrate the bias towards idiom acquisition studies conducted within secondary schools and universities-educational institutions primarily populated by younger individuals (Liu, 2017). Subsequent research situated in offices or community centers would be valuable if it examined how instruction on idiomatic expressions must be tailored to fit the distinct rhythms and priorities of adult students.

The study results related to learners' ages contribute to the pedagogical practices regarding idioms in EFL contexts. Most researchers focus on learners aged 16 to 22, and teaching methods developed for this group include steadfast attention to cognitive learning techniques like metaphorical reasoning (Chen & Lai, 2013) and immersion through audio-visual media (Chávez & Arias, 2019). These approaches take advantage of the students' familiar understanding of enriched media/rich learning environments as well as their cognitive development. On the other hand, studies done with younger children show that curricula featuring age relevant adaptations like visuals or contextualized simple idioms are mandatory due to developmental limitations in abstract thinking-using more sophisticated language than what a student is capable of processing (Kan & Murphy, 2020). The limited focus on adult learners reveals a missed opportunity to explore idiom learning beyond academic settings, where idioms often play a vital role in professional communication and cultural integration.

5.1.3 Year of Publication

Table 3:

Years of Publication

Years of Publication	N	%
2005 - 2009	2	10%
2010 - 2019	13	65%
2020 - 2024	5	25%
Total:	20	

As Table 3 shows, most studies (65%) were published between 2010 and 2019, indicating that the last decade was a significant expansion of research on idioms in EFL education, exploring innovative strategies. For instance, studies like Noroozi and Salehi (2013) introduced etymological elaboration as a method to enhance idiom retention, while Chávez and Arias (2019) explored the use of audiovisual input, especially American TV series, to teach idioms in contextualized settings.

Besides, 25% of the studies were conducted between 2020 and 2024. This recent increase in publications indicates a surge of interest among scholars regarding the innovative integration of technology for teaching idioms within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Rodriguez Medina et al., 2023; Pramono et al., 2020). Pramono et al. (2020) conducted a quantitative inquiry in which students who spent more time on social networking sites demonstrated a measurable grasp of English idioms. When brick-and-mortar classrooms suddenly closed, instructors leaned heavily on chat groups and videoconferences; many soon recognized that these platforms had pedagogical value that they once brushed aside. An earlier review of idiom scholarship between 2010 and 2019 found that more than 65% percent of the studies published in that span clustered in those nine years, though projections for 2020 to 2024 suggest that the share will fall to just a quarter, signaling how technology is reshaping EFL pedagogy. The prior spike corresponds with an emerging understanding pertaining to the importance of idioms for fluency and cultural appreciation, marking a shift towards communicative task-based approaches in teaching.

Fresh resources also appeared during this stretch, ranging from pre- and post-tests to essay-evaluation programs, which made it simpler to subject idiom-teaching techniques to rigorous measurement. The spike in publications after 2020 almost certainly corresponds to the worldwide pivot to remote instruction triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. As language classrooms moved online, researchers explored new platforms, especially digital and social media tools, for teaching idiomatic language. This technological turn not only expanded the

scope of idiom research but also reflected a growing need to understand how learners acquire figurative language in informal, digital, and hybrid environments.

In other perspective, only 10% of the studies were published between 2005 and 2009, suggesting that idiomatic expressions learning was a less studied area at that period. A possible explanation of this narrow focus could be the imbalance in refining vocabulary alongside mastering grammar which shaped English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Teaching. This largely stemmed from the predominantly structural and behaviorist paradigms of past decades (Liu, 2017). Most learners were considered incapable of grasping idiomatic expressions, as Liu (2017) elucidates. Consequently, EFL teaching centered on rote grammar teaching and vocabulary regurgitation. The absence of authentic resources meant that teachers had no way to meaningfully incorporate figurative language into lessons (Khoshniyat & Dowlatabadi, 2014). Khoshniyat and Dowlatabadi (2014) observe that textbooks provided for teachers during these periods either wholly excluded idioms or presented them devoid of any context or cultural richness.

The timing of the studies supports the motivation and significance for conducting this synthesis. By analyzing recent literature, this review captures contemporary methodologies, learner and educator demographics, and teaching frameworks that shape present-day education. This is important in relation to teaching and learning idiomatic expressions because more recent research employs communicative, digital, and culturally responsive approaches that more effectively aid the acquisition of idioms.

Modern approaches stand in contrast to older models which employed standardized frameworks grounded in rote memorization. Today's strategies prioritize contextualized engagement as well as learner-initiated exploration of idioms outside formal educational settings.

5.1.4 Methodology of the Studies

Table 4:

Methodology of the Studies

Methodology	N	%
Quantitative	9	45%
Qualitative	7	35%
Mixed-Method	4	20%
Total:	20	

As shown in Table 4, 45% of the reviewed studies utilized quantitative methods. This observation supports an increasing focus on evidence-based instructional paradigms in language education. This is inclusive of the pedagogy concerning idiomatic expressions (Noroozi & Salehi, 2013; Tabatabaei & Hajizadeh, 2015). Case in point, Noroozi and Salehi (2013) conducted a study employing pre- and post-tests to measure improvement resulting from rote memorization of idioms versus etymological elaboration comment strategy teaching. With etymological elaboration framed as one of the comparison teaching strategies with short stories or audiovisual materials in her work with Kan and Murphy (2020), she measured outcome of idiom comprehension, reading skills, and retention quantitatively. These approaches are effective when assessing the impact of specific teaching techniques on idiomatic proficiency governed by rigorous comparative evaluation frameworks.

At the same time, 35% of the research used qualitative methodologies. This highlights a notable focus on understanding learners' viewpoints, particularly about the challenges and strategies related to acquiring idioms. Recent studies have begun to reveal how students navigate figurative language, highlighting the cultural and linguistic obstacles that surface alongside their preferred ways of learning. A case in point is the work of Rodriguez Medina et al. (2023), who asked adolescents about the slang and idioms they encounter in real-world TikTok videos. Such qualitative inquiries do more than catalog successful practices; they pull apart the reasons those practices resonate, offering grounded insight for teachers who wish to fine-tune their methods (Rodriguez Medina et al., 2013; Chen & Lai, 2013).

Additionally, mixed methods were utilized in 20% of the studies which signifies that both measurable metrics and descriptive form of data are equally valued. To illustrate this point, Chen and Lai (2013) performed a comprehensive learning and student engagement evaluation using statistical assessment and discourse analysis on the utilization of idioms by students. Such methodology is crucial in the teaching of idioms because it enables

researchers to evaluate how custom teaching strategies such as metaphorical mapping influence students' deeper processing beyond rote writing tasks through internalization and application during numerous levels of idiom use (Chen & Lai, 2013).

This distribution suggests a field that values both empirical rigor and contextual sensibility. While quantitative data can demonstrate the effectiveness of specific instructional strategies, qualitative insights are essential for understanding how students engage with idiomatic expressions, what challenges they face, and how they make sense of figurative language. Together, these approaches offer a deeper understanding of both the outcomes and processes involved in idiom acquisition. Besides, future research may benefit from the broader adoption of mixed-methods designs, as they allow educators and researchers to evaluate not only whether a strategy works, but also how and why it impacts idiomatic learning.

5.1.5 Data Collection Instruments

Table 5:

Data Collection Instruments

Instruments	N	%
Questionnaire/Survey	9	45%
Interviews	3	15%
Pre- and Post-Test	6	30%
Analysis of Students' Essays	5	25%
Observation	1	5%

* Studies are counted in more than one category

Percentages are calculated based on the total of the studies.

The analysis of Table 3 reveals that questionnaires/surveys were the most commonly used instrument in the interviewed studies, appearing in 45% of them. This prevalence suggests a strong reliance on self-reported data, which provides insights into learners' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences specifically related to the strategies they use to learn idiomatic

expressions (Rodríguez Medina et al., 2023). Questionnaires and surveys are particularly effective for reaching a broad sample and gathering quantifiable information about which teaching techniques, such as visual aids, social media, or even memorization, learners perceive as most helpful (Pramono et al., 2020; Rodríguez Medina et al., 2023).

Pre- and post-tests were employed in 30% of the studies; this indicates a significant interest in measuring actual learning gains. This is important in idiom instruction, where it can be difficult to assess whether learners have truly internalized the figurative meanings and can apply them appropriately (Kan & Murphy, 2020). Such studies as those by Noroozi and Salehi (2013) and Tabatabaei and Hajizadeh (2015) used pre- and post-tests to measure idiom retention. These data collection instruments, such as pre- and post-test, support the implementation and evaluation of instructional strategies, making them essential tools in experimental and quasi-experimental designs (Noroozi & Salehi, 2013; Tabatabaei & Hajizadeh, 2015). The use of these tools (pre- and post-tests) also reflects a concern for verifying the effectiveness of the idiom learning strategies (memorization, visual aids, etc) through empirical validation. This demonstrates the importance of using evidence-based methods to assess how well different approaches support idiom acquisition, particularly in EFL contexts.

Another 25% of the studies analyzed students' essays, highlighting a qualitative dimension in idiomatic learning research. Essay analysis allows researchers to examine the productive use of idioms in context, as it provides insight into how learners apply idioms in authentic communication tasks. Unlike isolated exercises, essays require learners to integrate idioms naturally within coherent discourse, demonstrating their ability to handle figurative language in terms of register, cultural appropriateness, and syntactic adaptation. (Tabatabaei & Hajizadeh, 2015).

Additionally, interviews (15%) and observations (5%) provided richer, more detailed data about learners' thought processes and real-time strategy application, although these were less frequently used. This lower frequency likely occurs because interviews require extensive transcription and qualitative analysis time (Rodríguez Medina et al. 2023), classroom observations pose challenges in maintaining research objectivity (Alhaysony, 2017), and most studies prioritized measurable learning outcomes through standardized instruments like pre- and post-tests (Noroozi & Salehi, 2013; Tabatabaei & Hajizadeh, 2015).

Overall, the diversity of instruments shows a multidimensional approach to investigating idiom acquisition. This reflects an awareness that different tools capture distinct facets of the learning process. While quantitative instruments allow for measuring retention and

performance, qualitative tools such as interviews and essay analyses reveal learners' perceptions, cognitive strategies, and the depth of contextual understanding. When multiple instruments are combined, the analysis becomes more robust, providing not only numerical evidence of effectiveness but integrative approach deepens the understanding of idiom learning as both a measurable outcome and a complex, learner-driven process.

5.1.6 The Most Effective Strategies for Learning Idiomatic Expressions

Table 6:

The Most Effective Strategies

Effective Strategies	N	%
Memorization	7	35%
Movies	2	10%
Social Media	2	10%
Metaphors	2	10%
Visuals	6	30%
<hr/>		
Total:	20	

Table 6 recognizes the major strategies offered for recall idioms, with memorization ranking highest with 35% among all studies. Despite being old-fashioned, memorization remains prevalent and easy to utilize, particularly in areas where instruction follows a more pedagogical approach (Fanani, 2014). However, Noroozi and Salehi (2013) have noted that elaborative recall memorization techniques are far more effective when accompanied by etymological elaboration or examples from texts because they encase cultural and semantic bonds which strengthen retention. This assertion is important regarding idioms because many of them contain metaphorical language, which is contextually specific and historical in nature. Unlike literal vocabulary, idioms cannot be understood by analyzing their individual components, which makes them cognitively more complex and culturally loaded. Understanding the story,

metaphor, or context behind an idiom provides learners with a mental framework that anchors meaning to prior knowledge, making the expression more memorable and easier to retrieve during communication. For example, knowing that the idiom “spill the beans” originated from ancient voting practices adds a memorable narrative that supports both retention and accurate use. This narrative dimension transforms abstract expressions into concrete mental images, which not only aids long-term memory but also allows learners to recognize when and how to use idioms appropriately in real-life situations. Ultimately, this depth of understanding shifts learners from passive recognition to active, communicative competence.

Furthermore, the prevalence of memorization strategies appears to be connected to specific learner characteristics, particularly age and level of instruction. As shown in Table 2, most of the reviewed studies (75%) focused on learners between the ages of 16 and 22, a group often situated in secondary or early tertiary education. At these stages, instruction tends to be more teacher-centered and exam-driven, which helps explain the continued reliance on memorization. Younger learners may also benefit from clear structure and repetition before they are cognitively prepared to engage with more abstract or inferential strategies (Liu, 2017). This connection aligns with the findings of Alhaysony (2017), who observed that EFL learners at beginner and intermediate levels often prefer memorization as a strategy for managing unfamiliar or culturally loaded expressions. Therefore, this agreement with other studies strengthens the argument that memorization remains a foundational, but transitional, tool in idiom instruction, particularly among younger or less experienced learners.

Studies like that developed by Rodríguez Medina et al. (2023) propose that modern technologies create ease of access for even very young learners to contextualize and interact with idioms in a digital format. These gaps may be indicative of differences, whether it be in the available resources, teaching methods, or the institutional framework. In classrooms where Wi-Fi is still a rumor, teachers often lean on drills and recitation because that approach feels familiar and safe. By contrast, when screens and apps enter the picture, students gravitate toward making connections and drawing on lived experience to master new terms. The resulting split shows that memorization habits are less about how old the learner is and more about the environment the lesson unfolds. Because of this, instructors must decide when simple recall acts as temporary scaffolding and when the moment calls for exercises that nudge the class toward deeper, context-rich understanding.

Nearly a third of the research on instructional imagery, including the study conducted by Saffarian et al. (2013), suggests that learners grasp idioms better when they can see a picture or a moving clip. Oddly enough, those same teams noticed that plain text, stripped of any visual flair, sometimes helped students remember the phrases even more. Static drawings, quick animations, and on-the-spot snapshots keep the sayings glued to the settings- festivals, street signs, casual chat- where they usually pop up, and that tight bond is what stops learners from mistranslating every time they look. Early to mid-stage teens and undergrads tend to lean on these media because their language guts are still wiring up, and the pictures ride along until the phrases feel natural.

Saffarian et al. (2013) study encouraged pre-intermediate students to move past surface confusion, and the gains in their long-term recall were both measurable and encouraging. The insight matches long-standing claims that pictures reduce what once appeared chaotic and that colored shapes can tour the brain while textbook prose is still warming up. At the same time, rough sketches-student doodles often reveal the basic outline of an idea that is still in process, leaving it open to add more details. Unclear visual aids can resemble clutter: a mass of pixels that hide more than they highlight. When a good image lands, an idiom begins to make sense. When it fails, the phrase stays confusing. Elite readers often forget this process, assuming comprehension appears fully formed without any help. But in reality, the early classroom learner uses the same complex text but then asks to improvise meaning. Such improvisation works for a few, but the majority struggle and leave the dormant portion of the brain untouched. What recent classroom observations continue to reinforce is simple but crucial: learners at the pre-intermediate stage usually lack the fluency to translate context into meaning without two or even three auxiliary supports applied at once.

For their part, films, social media, and metaphors all account for 10% of the studies. Audiovisual materials like films and television improve the contextualized learning of idioms through authentic dialogues (Khoshniyat & Dowlatabadi, 2014). Social media platforms provide learners with informal peer-to-peer communication exposure to real-time idiomatic usage (Pramono et al., 2020; Rodríguez Medina et al. 2023). This is important because idioms tend to occur in easily unplanned situations that are rarely captured by classroom resources. Rodríguez Medina (2023) argues that TikTok and other platforms give learners access to authentic input, which digital textbooks fail to provide: everyday idioms used in unstructured contexts, removing the need for contrived contexts. Pramono et al. (2020) claimed that these colloquial terms, as well as slang, are seldom found in formal instructional texts that a learner would be exposed to during their schooling. Most of these studies were conducted on young adult learners from secondary or postsecondary institutions who belong to the generation of

digital natives intimately familiar with socially integrated audiovisual and social media communication used daily.

Strategies like the use of audiovisual material, metaphorical mapping, and social media platforms have been shown to be especially effective within teenage and young adult learners because they not only academically respond to informal stimuli, but they are also mentally advanced enough to draw inferences within dynamic and multimodal contexts. According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, learners in this age group are normally in the formal operational stage, which provides them with the necessary skills to interpret figurative meaning. This highlights a relationship between age, instruction level, and the effectiveness of media-based strategies: while younger learners may benefit more from concrete visuals due to their lack of ability to understand figurative meaning, older students may benefit from metaphorical material thereby supporting the idea that idiomatic teaching may be more effective when tailored to students' social environments and technology proficiency. Research increasingly indicates that integrating online materials into EFL classrooms can broaden student exposure to authentic idioms. Exposure to this digital lexicon often correlates with heightened classroom enthusiasm and greater learner engagement, a trend most pronounced among adolescents who favor interactive, culturally resonant content.

TikTok and Instagram now deliver learners live, unedited exchanges with native speakers. This form of exposure is particularly useful since informal idiomatic language, which is profoundly culturally rooted, is rarely found in EFL textbooks (Rodríguez Medina et al. 2023; Pramono et al., 2020). The casual feel of these feeds adds more than vocabulary: gestures, in-the-moment decisions, and situational cues all signal what matters when a phrase lands in everyday talk. Rodríguez Medina et al. (2023) observe that idiomatic speech in three-minute clips invites participation precisely because it feels off-the-cuff, whereas scripted exercises, by contrast, frost over that natural impulse.

Between classes, students absorb English in rapid bursts, tracking academic jargon alongside the streams of nonsense that flood their mobile screens. For most sixteen-to-thirty-year-olds, those micro-encounters fill the gaps that formal syllabi leave open, turning practice into a side effect of scrolling. The affordances of current platforms are instinctive for this demographic, and the layered cultural hints of an idiom feel more rewarding than the empty precision of rote drills.

Extensive classroom observation, as documented by Chávez and Arias (2019) and Rodríguez Medina et al. (2023), has revealed that websites, apps, and video modules work best with students whose comfort with screens matches their age. Younger pupils and learners still

mastering basic technology may stick with old-fashioned drills, whereas older cohorts tend to profit from situation-based exercises that exploit rich digital environments (Kan & Murphy, 2020; Chen & Lai, 2013).

Furthermore, cognitive linguistics is grounded in the idea that language lives inside the mind—not just in sentences, but in the images and templates we keep on standby. When learners mentalize an idiom by mapping it onto a visible scene or familiar story, the proverb suddenly feels less cryptic and a bit like common sense. Researchers who tracked Latin-American teens practicing in this way discovered that memory substantially outperformed any drill based solely on repetition (Chen & Lai, 2013; Khoshniyat & Dowlatabadi, 2014). Such imagery-heavy tasks, however, work best once students have already pushed into the intermediate zone, while younger beginners often stall unless teachers hand them concrete pictures or cartoons. Even the sleekest metaphor-grid will fall flat if the audience is developmentally out of sync with the material. Instructors, then, are left tweaking the exercise on the fly, pulling the speed up or slowing it down until comprehension and recall start to even out.

Evidence in this section points to a gradual transition away from rote memorization toward more integrative, cognitively taxing methods that encourage genuine grasp of idiomatic expressions. Studies such as Noroozi and Salehi (2013) and Alhaysony (2017) argue that students retain language far longer when they forge personal links and encounter terms in rich, realistic settings.

This aligns with the Task-Based Learning (TBL) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) frameworks discussed in Chapter II, which center on interaction, real-world relevance, student agency, and independence. Two practical techniques that underscore this principle are etymological exploration and context-driven vocabulary teaching. Neither practice is likely to wow observers with instant results, yet both consistently prove that thoughtful engagement trumps mechanical review.

Saffarian et al. (2013) and Ghaderi and Afshinfarb (2014) both observe that picture-laden lessons resonate with two separate language learning methodologies: Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and project-based pedagogy (see section 2. Theoretical Framework). CLIL leans toward embedding vocabulary in cognitively demanding subject matter (Abid, 2019; Hussin & Aziz, 2022; Rodríguez Medina et al., 2023), while project-based design pushes students toward concrete tasks that demand real-world talk (Abid, 2019; Hussin & Aziz, 2022; Pramono et al., 2020); in both cases, a well-placed image or graphic helps students fasten abstract words to concrete contexts (Boers et al., 2009; Saffarian et al., 2013; Ghaderi & Afshinfarb, 2014). Moving beyond slides and posters, several other methods listed

in the synthesis still follow a shared philosophical arc. For example, the metaphorical mapping exercises Chen and Lai (2013) and Khoshnuyat and Dowlatabadi (2014) favor draw directly from cognitive linguistics, just as task-based speaking-and-writing rounds that shift attention to genuine meaning-making echo the core of communicative language teaching and task-based instruction alike. Rodríguez Medina et al. (2023) and Pramono et al. (2020) investigated how learners navigate short videos and social-media feeds, and those spontaneous exchanges often function as prototypical instances of multimedia learning, since idioms appear in the wild and students must parse them on the fly.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that each teaching method, image cycles, brief animations, stand-alone graphic narratives, works well in its own right and corresponds neatly with long-standing theories that call for learners to be active, to encounter language in meaningful settings, and to see material rather than just hear it. When educators paired idioms with these visual tools, students reported that the phrases stuck with them and, perhaps more striking, that they could visualize the expressions weeks later as if recalling a familiar scene. This pattern lines up with suggestions that using a semiotic range wider than spoken words—short clips, vibrant pictures, quick sketches—provides cultural clues embedded directly in the language instead of leaving learners to imagine the context on their own. In that regard, the data echoes Coyle and Valcarcel (2005) argument about language-learning approaches, which do not compete in isolation but fold into one another so fully that their combined effect is more than the sum and fits neatly within the learner-centered, context-driven model that guides English-idiom instruction overseas.

Teachers and researchers continue to debate how receptive and productive skills should be balanced in the teaching of idioms. Comprehension-driven techniques—such as metaphor analysis, video aids, and situation-based exposure—allow students to spot and grasp idiomatic expressions with relative ease. Still, researchers like Orfan (2020) and Liu (2017) insist that learners must actively produce idioms through speech or writing. Only then does passive recognition transform into true command. Such hands-on practice mirrors the core tenets of Communicative Language Teaching and Task-Based Learning, both of which place interactive language use at the forefront of instruction. The difference between production-focused methods and those centered on comprehension underscores the need for more comprehensive integrated model teaching frameworks considering both input-output systems.

For this reason, approaches which facilitate understanding of idiomatic expressions at various contexts but also require their vigorous application in speech and writing are essential for fluency alongside long term retention.

Chapter V

6. Conclusions

This synthesis set out to pin down the instructional routines that help non-native speakers of English snag idiomatic expressions while studying the language abroad. The project sifted through twenty peer-reviewed papers, looking for techniques that both boost initial comprehension of an idiom and keep it alive in memory over time. Researchers have long noted that the figurative twist of any given idiom, its rootedness in a particular cultural scene, and the twist countless meanings it can pack make learning them a persistent headache (Chen, 2013; Shojaei, 2012; Khoshniyat and Dowlatabadi, 2014). Still, a handful of classroom moves showed up again and again as strong performers no matter what age group or background the learners brought with them.

This research illustrates a persistent advantage of multimodal and integrated instructional frameworks over isolated strategies. Rote repetition, metaphorical mapping, audiovisual streams, and even simple charts deliver improved outcomes only when they are meaningfully stitched together. A classroom that incorporates etymological elaboration (Noroozi & Salehi, 2013), works with live video segments (Chavez & Arias, 2019), and invites learners to discuss cultural allusions generates noticeably deeper engagement. Each technique reinforces the others, yielding an experience that feels less like exercises and more like organic conversation.

Research indicates that visual materials, whether they take the form of still images, short looping videos, or slides laced with story-elements, serve as powerful memory anchors for idiomatic phrases. By pairing abstract language with vivid, concrete visuals, these artifacts help learners see and feel the meaning behind the words, making the expressions easier to recall later (Boers et al., 2009; Saffarian et al., 2013; Ghaderi & Afshinfarb, 2014). Groups taught with these images routinely outpace peers who see little beyond the printed word, a trend documented (Saffarian et al., 2013; Mehrpour & Mansourzadeh, 2017). However, TikTok videos or a late-night binge on Netflix can keep learners glued to the screen while exposing them, often without fanfare, to the kind of loose, natural-sounding idioms a classroom whiteboard never quite delivers. That pattern turns up in recent studies (Proamono et al., 2020; Pedreros & Nuez, 2021) and echoes Krashen's (1982) long-argued point: we pick up new forms when the input makes sense, even if we are not sitting an grammar drill.

Current research increasingly favours an integrated, context-aware model for teaching idioms. Students tend to hold on to expressions far better when the instructional methods match their

stage in life, cultural frame of reference, language skills, and willingness to engage. Put another way, mastering these figurative phrases relies less on the textbook and more on the care taken to suit activities to learners' mental, social, and emotional circumstances—turning isolated chunks of language into vivid, retainable memories.

7. Recommendations

On the basis of this overview, an English-as-a-foreign-language teacher might start mixing the toolbox. Flat rote practice fades in favor of game-based, multimodal tasks that pair visual hooks with metaphorical brainstorming, offer short bursts of cultural backstory, and invite real talk (Boers et al., 2009; Chen & Lai, 2013). A two-minute clip from a sitcom, for instance, not only plants the saying in living color but also cues the hidden cultural nods that help it stick long after the lesson ends (Chavez & Arias, 2019; Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki, 2014).

When exposure to natural English is scarce, particularly in places like Ecuador, where the classroom often serves as the only place where input in the target language is provided, an integrative framework becomes not just useful but necessary. Public schools there confront a perfect storm of obstacles, from outdated materials to teachers who have had little in the way of specialized training, and the end result is a learning environment that seldom generates real-world English interaction (Sevy-Biloon, Recino, & Muñoz, 2020). Under these circumstances, students rarely bump into idioms outside of their grammar charts, so those expressions remain theoretical curiosities. Blending short films or songs with metaphor-driven discussions, then following up with speaking or writing tasks, offers one straightforward way to move vocabulary out of the syllabus and into the wild. Once teachers pair that hands-on work with etymological notes, sketches, and role-plays set in familiar settings, comprehension improves and the phrases stay put longer.

Planning lessons in which idioms appear on a rhythm-or spiral-that matches learners' growing skills is therefore essential. Without that orderly integration, the phrases will slip through the cracks as mere footnotes, not living language. Idiomatic expressions should not be reserved solely for advanced learners, as early exposure in meaningful contexts, such as storytelling, collaborative dialogues, and media consumption, can foster gradual and sustained acquisition of (Tabatabaei & Hajizadeh, 2015; Khoshniyat & Dowlatabadi, 2014). These strategies are particularly effective when aligned with learner interests and real-life applications.

Most teacher-training courses still fall short when it comes to figurative language. Far too many instructors report they have never received hands-on practice with idioms, and the theoretical

background is seldom covered (Rodríguez Medina et al., 2023; Alhaysony, 2017) . Schools that make a point of addressing that gap give teachers the confidence to draft lessons that respond directly to what learners need. Empowered educators, in turn, are better at guiding students through the twists and turns of idiom acquisition. Training should include guidance on how to apply strategies like etymological elaboration, metaphorical mapping, and technology-based instruction. Another solution is to experiment with richer, multi-faceted models that pull together different strands of learning. Blending cognitive, visual, and communicative approaches forces the mind to catalogue idioms in different ways, reinforcing memory and instinctive use. Curriculum designers, classroom practitioners, and researchers all stand to gain from those pilot tests.

Still, nearly all the published work focuses on Europe or North America, leaving Latin America and adult learners almost completely out of the picture (Rodríguez & Winnberg, 2013). Fresh longitudinal studies that mix surveys, interviews, and classroom observation would reveal how idioms actually settle into real brains over time. That kind of documentation is urgent and long overdue. Future research should also examine the role of cultural intelligence and how learners' intercultural awareness may influence their ability to comprehend and use idiomatic language. Culture breathes meaning into each phrase, and simply knowing the grammar often falls short. Learners who tune their cultural radar usually catch the subtleties that elude others. Heightened intercultural awareness can steer students away from awkward faux pas and into smooth, authentic exchanges. Investigating that connection promises to sharpen figurative-language pedagogy across the board.

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