
**Enhancing English Idiom Learning in ESL Classrooms through MT (Telugu)
Equivalents and Visual Aids**

Dr. Bh V N Lakshmi¹

Professor

Dept. of English and Foreign languages, SRKR Engineering College (A), China
Amiram, Bhimavaram, Andhra Pradesh, 534 204. drbhvnlakshmi1@gmail.com

Dr. Satish Kumar Nadimpalli²

Associate Professor

Dept. of English and Foreign languages, SRKR Engineering College (A), China
Amiram, Bhimavaram, Andhra Pradesh, 534 204. saketarama77@gmail.com

Dr. Raja Kumar Guduru³

Assistant Professor

Indian Institute of Technology Bhubaneswar, Odisha. rajakumarguduru@iitbbs.ac.in

Article Received: 27/02/2025

Article Accepted: 30/03/2025

Published Online: 31/03/2025

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.03.471

Abstract

Idioms are a vital component of the English language, reflecting advanced linguistic and cultural understanding. However, teaching and learning idioms in ESL classrooms can be challenging, especially when students come from diverse learning backgrounds. Many students across Andhra Pradesh face difficulties in comprehending and using idiomatic expressions in English, leading to apathy towards reading materials such as newspapers and magazines. This, in turn, impacts their professional prospects and social interactions. With a strong belief that the use of the mother tongue (MT) and visuals can greatly assist in learning advanced aspects of a foreign language, this research aims to address the issue by employing visual aids and equivalent Telugu idioms to make idiom learning in English engaging and meaningful. For this purpose, rural ESL students from different proficiency levels (7th grade, 10th grade, and intermediate) were chosen as participants in the study. The focus of the study is to demonstrate how making use of mother tongue equivalents alongside pictorial representations would bolster the learners' comprehension and retention of English idioms. Data collected from ten students in each group of proficiency reveals a substantial improvement in learning the expressions when employing these strategies. Graphical representation conspicuously demonstrates a rise in the acquisition of the expressions with the integration of the two aids.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, ESL Classroom, English Idioms, Telugu Equivalents, Visual Aids.

Introduction

In the second or foreign language context, vocabulary means learning new words and knowledge of words. Vocabulary is identified or considered to be one of five major components of reading which contributes to overall school success specifically in learning to read and in comprehending the text (Baker, Simmons, & Kame'enui, 1998; Anderson & Nagy, 1991; cited in Shari, et al. 2010). The language structure is a complex process where phonemes make morphemes; morphemes make words; words make phrases; phrases make clauses which in turn become sentences. For acquisition of any language, language chunks play an indispensable aid. Language chunks are patterns of words which are always used together in the same order. This Michael Lewis' (1993) Lexical Approach concentrates on accommodating lexemes or words in the centre and suppose that the most involved in language acquisition is the vocabulary and to be more specific vocabulary chunks. In the Language acquisition studies, the term 'chunks' refers to fixed expressions. One such phenomenon is idiomatic expressions which are an essential component of the English language, adding creativity, depth, and cultural richness to communication. Mastering idiomatic expressions not only reflects advanced language proficiency but also showcases a learner's ability to understand cultural subtleties and engage in authentic communication. However, for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, particularly students in Andhra Pradesh, comprehending and naturally using idioms in daily conversations poses a significant challenge. The abstract nature of idioms often makes them difficult to infer from literal meanings, leaving learners confused and disconnected.

This struggle extends beyond classroom learning, impacting students' reading habits. Many become discouraged from engaging with newspapers, magazines, and journals, which frequently feature idiomatic expressions. As a result, they develop a reluctance toward reading, leading to a gradual decline in language proficiency as they advance in their education. To address this growing concern, this research project explores the integration of visual aids and equivalent Telugu idioms as instructional tools. By providing relatable visual clues and culturally familiar references, this approach makes idiomatic expressions more accessible, engaging, and memorable for students. Ultimately, it seeks to reignite their interest in reading and equip them with the communication skills necessary for academic and professional success.

Background to Study

Most of the schools in Andhra Pradesh are located in rural areas where students do not have an adequate exposure to English. Though in many schools, the medium of instruction is English, the language standards are very low not only for the students but also the teachers. In this scenario, there needs a right material that can address this challenge.

The role of Mother Tongue (MT) is indispensable in conceptualization and learning any other language as articulated by NEP-2020. MT is indeed a highly potential tool to gain mastery over other languages and it is even more in the context of learning idiomatic expressions, which are replete with cultural and behavioral mores. The present study concentrates on this phenomenon of learning English idioms through Telugu (MT) equivalents and subsequently visual aids that represent the meaning of the idioms. The targeted students are from rural background from different proficiency levels (7th Grade, 10th Grade, and Intermediate).

Significance of Study

Students from rural background in Andhra Pradesh find it difficult to comprehend and remember verbal expressions of English (L1) for there is no much exposure to the target language. There are many strategies of language pedagogy such as using known vocabulary to familiarize new words, making a list of kindred vocabulary, incidental word learning through wide reading, using word-part clues or morphology, collocations and so on. However, there is still a gap between the materials and students' learning L2 posing a challenge for both the teacher and the taught.

The students' MT can very well be utilized for L2 learning and, in particular, in the case of the rural students, using MT can yield highly satisfying results. And if the mother tongue equivalence is further supplemented with a pictorial representation, it is highly likely that the learning of L2 chunks or idiomatic expressions can take place satisfyingly. It is in this direction, the present study proposes the use of MT and visual aids for learning the fixed expressions in English which pose a challenge in classroom.

As a complement to this practical approach, the researchers compiled *Bilingual Idiom Picture Book* emulating the design of the book *Word Power Made Easy* by Norman Lewis. Thus, the picture book provides exercises, including various questions such as MCQs, fill-in-the-blanks, matching, and true/false statements after a set of 20 idioms, enabling learners to proactively engage in self-assessment. The book is not only portable but also colourful, creative, and engaging. Students are likely to enjoy it as it delves into the significance of L1 transfer, the use of visual aids, and effective teaching strategies. By addressing the challenges these learners face, the research offers practical solutions for educators and learners alike, contributing to innovative language learning strategies tailored to semi-rural contexts.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of the present study is to investigate the impact of MT (Telugu) idiomatic equivalents and visual aids on the English proficiency of 7th Grade, 10th Grade, and Intermediate-level students in Bhimavaram, West Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh.

The objectives of the study are to make an assessment of the English language proficiency levels of learners before and after the intervention with additional input. Furthermore, it also provides a comparison, in terms of their performance, between students who receive equivalent idioms in Telugu and pictures and those who do not. Another objective is to evaluate the efficacy of pictorial help and MT support in bettering word skills and also comprehension skills at large. Eventually, the study also provides a scope for an analysis on the responses and learning experiences of students depending on their qualitative feedback.

Scope of Study

The present study concentrates on the effectiveness of Telugu equivalent expressions and visual aids on learning English among 7th Grade, 10th Grade and Intermediate-level students in Bhimavaram. The work is carried out with a limited group of 10 learners at each level, who are split into an experimental group that receives the intervention and a closed one with no other input.

The present research confines itself to evaluating the acquisition of English idiomatic expressions, comprehension skills, and also the ability to remember, considering quantitative performance metrics and qualitative feedback for assessing the impact of the intervention. The results pave an even better way for better language learning strategies though the students taken for the study are a closed group. However, this research is by no means exhaustive and thus requires further scrutiny in larger educational setups.

Literature Review

Idioms play crucial role in the acquisition of language and communication, providing richness and expressiveness to language use (Mehdi, 2024; Bakhtiyorovna & Khamrokulovna, 2021). They are typically described as having unchanging meanings that may be interpreted both literally and metaphorically (Wood, 2010). One of the primary components of language are idioms, which are rich in culture that percolate from one generation to the next, strengthening the ties that bind that society together and enabling the culture to endure across time (Karatay et al., 2022).

It is widely accepted that idiomatic constructs have a unique place among multiword phrases since they reflect a figurative meaning that cannot be obtained by simply combining the semantics of their constituent words (Jackendoff, 2002). Moreover, Idioms have a crucial role in educating people about the history, customs, beliefs, and way of life of the indigenous culture (Ünalán, 2012). The significance of idioms in communication should not be

downplayed as they are part and parcel of spoken and written discourse, contributing to the naturalness and fluency of language usage.

Despite their importance, Idioms set forth potential learning challenges to learners due to their figurative nature. At times, learners find it difficult to make sense of idiomatic expressions, particularly due to lack of adequate exposure to the cultural and contextual experiences (Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2016). Even for a learner with flawless grammar and a sophisticated vocabulary, it would be problematic to not comprehend or utilize idioms correctly (Cooper, 1998). The underutilization of the idioms at the collegiate level are also emphasized by Karunakaran and Maisa (2013), who assert that language teachers neglect certain word categories like idioms, collocations, proverbs, and fixed expressions.

To address these challenges, teachers may encourage their students to infer the meaning of new words or phrases based on context or word components they are acquainted with, rather than providing the definition right immediately (Nation, 2013). Additionally, Chen and Wu (2017) developed an S-S-P-C model for improving Chinese learners' idiom acquisition. The main purpose of this model was to examine idioms from a syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and cultural perspective. Al-Ramahi and Smadi(2015) investigated the impact of video games on the learning of idioms. The results showed that learners exhibited positive motivation in learning and using idiomatic expressions in an authentic context while interacting with peers. Moreover, Almogheerah (2020) conducted a study on the effectiveness of using WhatsApp-based learning activities in improving idiomatic knowledge acquisition among EFL students. The findings reported that the given activities improved learners' idiomatic knowledge and use in authentic social contexts.

Methodology

To investigate the effectiveness of visual aids and native language equivalents in enhancing students' comprehension and retention of English idioms, a structured experimental study was conducted involving students from different educational levels in Bhimavaram, West Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh.

Participants:

Participants in this research, in an ESL classroom setting, consist of 10 students from 7th class from Vignyana Bharati High School, China Amiram, Bhimavaram, West Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh, 10 students from 10th class from Jhansi Lakshmi Bhay Girls High School, and 10 students from Aditya Intermediate College, Bhimavaram, Andhra Pradesh, in an ESL classroom setting.

Tools:

The study employs a pre-test and a post-test design for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching idiomatic expressions of English with and without the use of Telugu (mother tongue) equivalents and pictorial aids. In the beginning, a select list of English idioms is

given to the students at all levels of proficiency with mere meaning of the idioms in English followed by oral explanation. Subsequently, for an experimental condition, the same idiomatic expressions are reintroduced with Telugu (MT) equivalents and at a subsequent time supplemented with relevant pictorial representation and oral explanation. Data on the comprehension and retention of idioms is thus collected through pretest, post-tests and also feedback surveys.

Assessment Process

The participants were divided into three groups based on their educational levels: 7th Grade, 10th Grade, and Intermediate level, with ten students in each group. Each group was further divided into an experimental group and a control group, comprising five students each.

Initially, all groups were provided with English explanations of a set of idiomatic expressions suitable for their academic levels. A pre-test was conducted to assess their baseline understanding and retention.

7thGrade: Students were introduced to 10 basic and easy idioms such as: a piece of cake, break the ice, hit the sack, once in a blue moon, spill the beans, under the weather, let the cat out of the bag, bite the bullet, look before you leap, slow and steady wins the race

10thGrade: Slightly more complex idiomatic expressions almost intermediate level were selected to match their linguistic proficiency. The 10 idioms are: Burn the midnight oil, a blessing in disguise, pull someone's leg, barking up the wrong tree, hit the nail on the head, the ball is in your court, better late than never, make hay while the sun shines, don't put all your eggs in one basket, turn a blind eye.

Intermediate Level: Practical and Formal Idioms from newspapers were chosen to align with their advanced academic level. They are: in the limelight, a storm in a teacup, call a spade a spade, face the music, hit the ground running, read between the lines, rock the boat, take the bull by the horns, the last straw, and a level playing field.

After the explanation phase, a 30-minute post-test was conducted for all groups. The pre-test and post-test results were analyzed and sequentially visualized using bar graphs (Figures 1, 2, and 3), which clearly illustrate the experimental groups' superior performance across all levels. The findings underscore the significant role of visual aids and native language support in enhancing students' comprehension and retention of idiomatic expressions, thereby contributing to improved English language proficiency.

Sample visuals

Zip your lips. నేటికీ లాళం

Meaning: to stop talking, remain silent, or keep a secret.



Literal



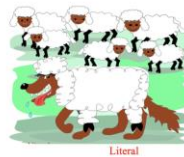
Figurative

The teacher asked the students to zip their lips during the exam.

Wolf in sheep's clothing

మేక పప్పు చూర్తి

Meaning: a person who pretends to be kind or harmless but actually has bad intentions.



Literal



Figurative

Raghu appeared friendly and trustworthy, but he turned out to be a wolf in sheep's clothing, betraying his business partner at the first opportunity.

Figure 1

7th Class Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

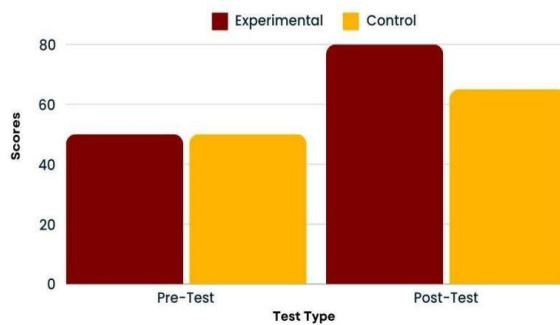


Figure 2

10th Class Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

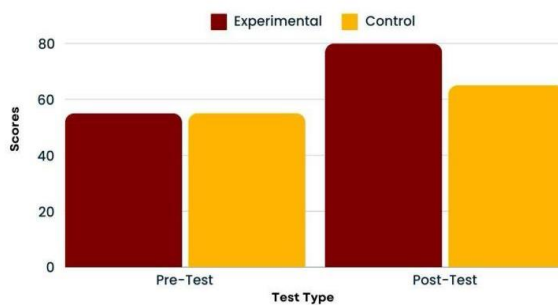
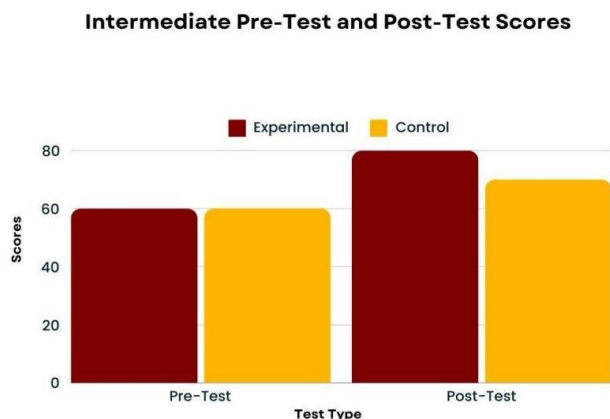
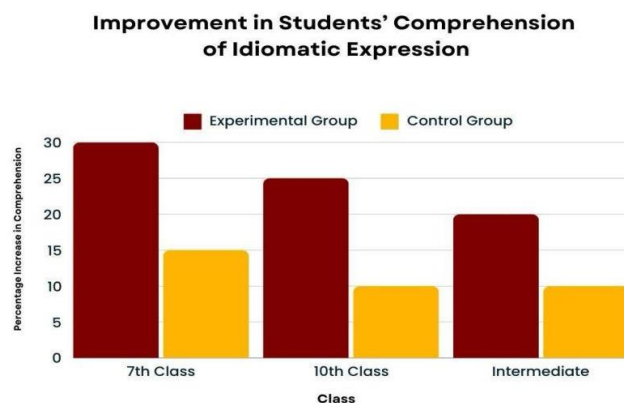


Figure 3

All the three proficiency levels are shown in the following diagram for better comprehension.

Figure 4

Results

The results denote a significant improvement in students' comprehension as well as retention of idiomatic expressions of English when supplemented with the corresponding Telugu idioms followed by visual representation. Among the select students from 7th Grade, there is an increase of 30% in the understanding of idioms after the intervention, compared to an increase of 15% in the control group on the other hand. Similarly, with the experimental way, the students from 10th Grade exhibited a rise of 25% in the comprehension, compared to a 10% rise in the control group. In the same way, Intermediate-level students too exhibited

a notable improvement with a 20% rise in the comprehension in the experimental condition, compared to a mere 10% increase in the control group.

Discussion

As noticed, the outcome underscores the effectiveness of adding Telugu equivalents and also visual aids in teaching idioms of English to students in the rural areas of Andhra Pradesh. By making a link between English idioms and Telugu equivalents or relevant concepts in Telugu, teachers can facilitate better comprehension of idioms across all the levels of proficiency we have carried out on. The graphical representations afore-given further demonstrate the substantial improvement in acquiring idiomatic expressions through these innovative teaching practices.

Conclusion

In conclusion, idiomatic equivalents in mother tongue and a visual representation of the meaning of idioms in target language can substantially facilitate a better acquisition of L2. In order to trigger interest and promote meaningful engagement with L2 in students, the instructors can leverage whatever English knowledge students have and their pictorial knowledge. However, certain idioms in English may not have direct counterparts in Telugu or L1. The teachers can then resort to some explanative idiom-like phrases in L1. The empirical evidence from the research underscores the fact that mother tongue and visual resource can be leveraged as innovative tools in language pedagogy in ESL setting. Thus, the compiled Bilingual Idioms Picture Book not only familiarizes local Telugu idioms but uses it as a tool to learn and memorize English idioms. This, in turn, encourages students to use the idioms in their day-to-day life. Evidently, it turns out to be a transformative tool for language education, promoting bilingual proficiency and cultural understanding.

Acknowledgements

This research article is part of a Major Research Project titled “Bilingual Idioms Picture Book: a self-learning tool” funded by ICSSR, Ministry of Education, Govt. of India, granted in 2023.

References:

- Al-Khawaldeh, N., Jaradat, A., Al-Momani, H., & Bani-Khair, B. (2016). Figurative idiomatic language: Strategies and difficulties of understanding English idioms. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 5(6), 119-133.
- Almogheerah, A. (2020). Exploring the effect of using WhatsApp on Saudi female EFL students' idiom-learning. *Arab World English Journal*, 11(4) 328–350. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol11no4.22>
- Al-Ramahi, R. A. & Smadi, A. (2015). Video games and English idioms: Toward effective learning. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 5(1), 109–117.

- Ayto, J. (Ed.). (2010). Oxford dictionary of English idioms. Oxford University Press, USA.
- Bakhtiyorovna, B. N., &Khamrokulovna, O. G. (2021). The Role and the importance of idiomatic expressions in English language. *Researchjet journal of analysis and inventions*, 2, 356-358.
- Brown, C. P. (1853). "A" dictionary, English and Telugu: explaining the English idioms and phrases in Telugu; with the pronunciation of English words (Vol. 2). Christian Knowledge Society's Press..
- Chen, H. & Wu, X. (2017). A teaching experiment of Chinese college students' English idioms comprehension. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (iJET)*, 12(06), 22–30. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v12i06.7096>
- Cooper, C. T. (1998). Teaching idioms. *Foreign Language Annals*, 31(2), 255–266.
- Dasu, P. L. N., &Chevula, R.(2023). Cross-Cultural Facets of Language: The English Usage of Telugu.
- Karatay, H., Kartallıoğlu, N., Zorpuzan, S. S., & Tezel, K. V. (2022). The effect of the conceptual metaphor theory on the teaching of orientation idioms in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. *Foreign Language Annals*, 55(4), 944-962.
- Lakshmi, B. V., & Al-Fauzanb, A. H. A. (2019). Idioms and Culture: Exploring the Inter-Influence between English and Other Languages. *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews*, 7(6), 131-138.
- Lewis, M. (1993). *The Lexical Approach*. Hove: Language Teaching Publications.
- McCarthy, M. (1992). English idioms in use.
- Mehdi, S. (2024). Techniques Used in Teaching Idioms. *Acta GlobalisHumanitatis et Linguarum*, 1(2), 34-42.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2013). Learning vocabulary in another language (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Ray Jackendoff (2002) Foundations of Language: Brain, Meaning, Grammar, Evolution. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shari Butler, Kelsi Urrutia, AnnetaBuenger, Nina Gonzalez, Marla Hunt, and Corinne Eisenhart. (Eds.). (2010). A Review of the Current Research on Vocabulary Instruction. *Developed by the National Reading Technical Assistance Center (NRTAC), RMC Research Corporation*.
- Srinivasa Teja, P. (2017). *Teta Telugu Jaatiyaalu*. Andhra Pradesh, Sahithi Books Publication.
- Ünalın, Ş. (2012). *Language and culture*. Old New Publications.
- Wood, D. (2010). Perspectives on formulaic language. *Perspectives on Formulaic Language*, 1-298.

SP Publications

International Journal of English and Studies (IJOES)

An International Peer-Reviewed and Refereed Journal

Impact Factor: 8.175 (SJIF) | ISSN: 2581-8333|Volume 7, Issue 3 | March 2025

Citation:

Dr. Bh V N Lakshmi, Dr. Satish Kumar Nadimpalli& Dr. Raja Kumar Guduru” Enhancing English Idiom Learning in ESL Classrooms through MT (Telugu) Equivalents and Visual Aids”*International Journal of English and Studies (IJOES)*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2025, pp. 461-471.
DOI: 10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.03.471.