

Explicit Teaching of English Idioms to Tertiary Learners to Enhance Idiomatic Knowledge: An Experimental Study

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Abstract

This paper examined the impact of explicit teaching of idioms to undergraduate learners to enhance their idiomatic knowledge. It was an experimental study and subjects of the study were undergraduate second year students (n=60). Idioms were taught explicitly in context using proper teaching material. Learners were motivated in the present study to learn idioms. Teaching activities and techniques were used to develop learners' idiomatic knowledge. Pre and post tests were conducted to evaluate the impact of teaching intervention. The research data was test scores (pre- and post-test) and the data was analysed using quantitative method (paired T-test). The experimental study results suggest that explicit teaching of idioms to undergraduate learners can improve their knowledge and use of idioms.

Keywords: Idioms, lexical units, multi-word units, formulaic language, explicit teaching, figurative language, experimental and control group.

1.0 Introduction

The present study claims that it is possible to enhance the vocabulary of the tertiary learners by developing their idiom knowledge. It assumes that the tertiary learners are less proficient in figurative language in general and specifically idioms which would help them in L2 fluency and in the creative use of language. In such context, the present study attempts to enhance tertiary learners' knowledge of idioms, which might in turn result in better performance of the learners in English (ESL).

According to Sinclair (1987), idioms are an important class of pre-constructed phrases and are ubiquitous in language and many of them have a very high frequency use. Idioms can help speakers convey their messages in a way non-idiom expressions are unable to do. Idioms

not only may allow L2 speakers to communicate more effectively but might also assist L2 learning by offering learners language input that can be segmented and analyzed. Many idioms are language and culture specific. Encouraging students to learn and use such idioms creates more language input and practice opportunities and L2 learner's grasp of idioms is a good indicator of his or her language proficiency level.

1.1 Review of Literature

Most studies carried out in the area of lexis argue that vocabulary should be placed at the centre of language teaching/learning because language consists of grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalized grammar and lexis is central in creating meaning, and grammar plays only a secondary role in meaning making. As Lewis (1997) puts it, "language consists not only of traditional grammar and vocabulary, but often of multi-word prefabricated chunks" (p.3). These chunks include idioms, collocations, fixed and semi-fixed expressions and these chunks used frequently in the language. Chunks, which enable L2 learners to acquire "collocational properties", include collocations, idioms, fixed and semi-fixed expressions. According to Lewis, they play a crucial role in facilitating language production and they are the key to language fluency.

According to Nattinger & De Carrico (1992), Moon (1998) and Wray & Perkins's (2000), idioms are the most important subcategory of lexical phenomena of formulaic language (as cited in Tajali & Tehrani, 2009). Wray supported Fernando's claim, adding that the absence of formulaic sequence in learners' speech results in unidiomatic sounding speech. On the other hand, ESL learners who only learn individual words will need a lot more time and effort to express themselves. Consequently, it is essential to make students aware of (idiomatic) chunks and their usage in language production.

Acquisition of Idioms

Adkins (1968) and Carter et al., (2001) argued that idioms are useful devices, which provides users of language with readymade phrases that communicate a clear and agreed meaning; idioms add colour and variety to the language. Since most idioms are structurally and lexically fixed, they function more like words than phrases, and in any discussion or analysis of words and meanings, it is useful to treat idioms as words. Learning idioms enriches learners' spoken or written communication. In the context of second language

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:7 July 2017

Dr. Sridhar Maisa

Explicit Teaching of English Idioms to Tertiary Learners to Enhance Idiomatic Knowledge:
An Experimental Study

vocabulary acquisition, like words, idioms can also be acquired. Irujo (1986) considered that idioms are subcategory of vocabulary and stated that learning and teaching of idioms must be regarded as an integral part of vocabulary learning and teaching.

In idiom acquisition process, comprehension of an idiom is a prerequisite. According to Cacciari & Levorato (1995) to comprehend idioms we need cognitive and linguistic skills. These skills especially promote the ability to comprehend idioms in children. They observed facts regarding idiom acquisition in two groups of learners. A comparison of the responses of the two groups showed a significant difference between the learning process of familiar and unfamiliar idioms in different contexts.

According to Liu Dilin (2008) “to fully acquire an idiom, one needs not only to understand it but also to produce it correctly and it is proved that comprehension before production principle is perhaps even more evident in L2 idiom acquisition than in L1” (p.102). In general, idioms that are transparent in meaning and simple in structure are likely to be grasped before those that are opaque in meaning and complex in structure, because the latter often require higher cognitive ability or culture specific knowledge to be understood. Idioms are considered a difficult aspect of language for L2 learners to acquire.

Second language acquisition (SLA) theory supports the claim that a learner’s knowledge can move from explicit (taught) to implicit (known/understood) if the learner has reached the necessary stage of acquisition, and is sufficiently motivated (Ellis, 1997). So first, the learner has to be ready, and then perhaps be taught to ‘notice’ (Ellis, 1994) the idiomatic MWU.

This ‘noticing’ is likely to occur first through reading. It has been shown that learning to read in a second language centrally involves learning words and that extensive reading – including that of authentic materials – contributes to L2 vocabulary acquisition of both adults and children (Coady, 1997). Therefore, reading materials, preferably those containing authentic examples of idiomatic MWU’s could be used. It has been argued that vocabulary including core idioms should not be taught in a ‘lexical set’, out of context (Nation, 2000). Yet according to McCarthy (1998), while idioms are highly interactive and best studied in context, they tend to be taken out of context and taught as separate items. Because of the

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:7 July 2017

Dr. Sridhar Maisa

Explicit Teaching of English Idioms to Tertiary Learners to Enhance Idiomatic Knowledge:
An Experimental Study

difficulty of constructing the appropriate interactional climate for the teaching of idioms, McCarthy proposes the raising of students' awareness of idiom usage as a first step. Simpson & Mendis (2003) study also found that students responded positively to an approach to learning idioms that began with consciousness-raising and moved to idioms used in authentic discourse contexts (Simpson & Mendis, 2003).

In addition, certain strategies can be used for vocabulary learning, including the learning of idiomatic MWUs. These include guessing in context, keyword technique, especially with words that can be perceived visually (Nation, 2001; Hulstijn, 1997), mnemonics (Nation, 1990, 2001; Hulstijn, 1997), plus exercises involving strong word partnerships and correct word partnerships, matching half phrases, putting idiomatic MWU parts into the correct order, completing sentences by adding a word missing from the idiomatic MWU, matching half idiomatic MWUs with the correct half and with their meanings and so on (Lewis, 1997). Therefore, if the desire to learn some idiomatic MWUs exists, including even the infrequent core idioms, some guidelines for their comprehension, retention, and usage may be useful. There are certain reasons to relate the importance of idioms in language use for language learning and development.

Teaching Idioms

Lewis (1997) argued that the explicit teaching of vocabulary can develop learners' proficiency levels (p.72). The syllabus designers have to make some guidelines on the explicit teaching of vocabulary in the course. Fernando argued that non-native speakers' fluency is often equated with mastery of idioms (as cited in Tajalli & Tehrani, 2009, p.17) but it is difficult for language teachers and material writers to make principled decisions about which idioms should be taught. McMordie (1909) pointed that a good dictionary or a reliable book explaining English idioms will be a valuable help to learners. It is important to note that selection of idioms is of utmost priority to language teachers and material writers.

According to McCarthy (1998), idioms are highly interactive, engaging both the speaker and the listener, and are therefore best studied in context, yet they tend to be taken out of their contexts and taught as disembodied items. The use of real speech samples from contexts is one best method. Therefore, learners will have distinct advantage over using conventional methods of teaching idioms. Wu Yueh Su (2008) also emphasized the role of

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:7 July 2017

Dr. Sridhar Maisa

Explicit Teaching of English Idioms to Tertiary Learners to Enhance Idiomatic Knowledge:
An Experimental Study

context as central in language learning. He further argued that it is fundamental for teachers to provide a rich context for students' language learning and practice. Although the highly interactive nature of idioms calls for a discourse-oriented pedagogical approach, I think for practical reasons such an approach may not be possible in every classroom.

A significant point here is, many applied linguists also suggest that formal instruction in classes ought to be based on teaching/learning of chunks of language instead of functions, notions or grammar (Richards and Rodgers 2001). Here the emphasis on lexical approach is inevitable and it plays a key role in language teaching. The lexical approach emphasizes collocational components of words. This is an influential breakthrough in learning second language, since the word combinations are at the heart of teaching in this approach. Sugano's (1981) study emphasizes the basic strategies or specific stages of the instruction. These could be implemented in the classroom at the present time as a supplement to existing textbooks and these strategies are able to provide paragraphs, exercises, and other materials containing idiomatic expressions, such instruction will certainly help the learners to improve idiomatic knowledge.

Lin (2003) argued that most teaching and reference materials on English idioms are primarily intuition based. According to Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (as cited in Lin, 2003) idioms are very useful feature of ESL/EFL learners because learning a collection of idioms can be a great asset to learners in acquiring a new language.

Teaching idioms with more classroom activities and strategic teaching using contextual approach can help L2 learners' to understand and use idioms. There are certain classroom activities like story contexts, role of illustrations, group discussions, readers' theatre, retelling activities, dialogue writing and role play, which certainly help ESL/EFL learners (Yueh Su.Wu, 2008). Freeman & Freeman (as cited in Yueh Su. Wu, 2008) argued that group tasks can provide learners with rich opportunities to acquire the social and linguistic knowledge necessary for understanding new texts they encounter. Kalinger & Vaughn (as cited in Yueh Su. Wu, 2008) stressed that ESL students engaging in collaborative talk during content reading assist one another in understanding the meaning of words in context. Irujo (1986) suggested that infrequent, highly colloquial idioms with difficult vocabulary should be avoided; activities which compare literal and figurative meanings of

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:7 July 2017

Dr. Sridhar Maisa

Explicit Teaching of English Idioms to Tertiary Learners to Enhance Idiomatic Knowledge:
An Experimental Study

idioms help students to realize the absurdity of the literal meanings and provide a link from the literal words to the non-literal meaning. He further stressed that making up stories or dialogues with idioms would be particularly useful to the learner.

Eltahir's (2003) study was intended to examine the teaching and learning of idiomatic expressions and multi-word verbs of English in the context of Sudan. Eltahir's study revealed that the teaching/learning of idiomatic expressions and multi-words of English in the context of Sudan faced various and different problems and difficulties which are the result of several external and internal factors such as the inherent / potential difficulty and complexity of these multi-word lexical items in the system of the target language (English) as well as those related to the students' mother tongue (Arabic) and the general situation of English and ELT in Sudan. Guduru's (2011) study was an attempt to enhance the first generation learners' idiom comprehension strategies. In his study learners were trained to explore and exploit the resources that are readily available in their immediate context.

Lazar. G. (1996) stated that in many classrooms, it is likely that most idioms are taught formulaically as 'chunks' of language to be digested whole. But perhaps alerting the student to the figurative meaning implicit in the idiom is a helpful way of making idioms more meaningful and more memorable.

Teachers of English have to understand the importance of teaching idioms and the approach/method of teaching idioms. According to Grant & Nation (2006) idioms can be called multiword units (MWU). These can be divided into –core idioms, figuratives and literal sequences and suggested that each of these categories requires a different approach to learning. Core idioms need to be learnt as whole units; there are not many core idioms and few of them are reasonably frequent. Learners need to learn core idioms after learning high frequency words of language.

1.2 Method

Aim and Assumptions of the Study

The aim of the study is to enhance tertiary learners' knowledge of idioms by explicit teaching of idioms. The knowledge of idioms is one of the core components in language.

Teachers' efforts can help tertiary learners' idiomatic English, which will promote language proficiency and fluency. The assumptions of the present study are presented below.

The present study is based on the following assumptions:

- 1) Tertiary learners have less classroom exposure of idiomatic English.
- 2) The explicit teaching of idiomatic English will enhance tertiary learners' knowledge of idioms.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question

The following is the research question of the study:

- a) Does explicit teaching of idioms promote idiomatic knowledge of undergraduate language learners?

Hypothesis

The following is the research hypothesis of the study:

- 1) Teaching idioms will help ESL learners to understand and promote idiomatic knowledge.

Subjects

The subjects of the study were undergraduate second year students. The subjects were studying in Osmania university constituent colleges, aided colleges and private colleges. Some of the colleges have autonomous status, but for academic purposes they follow the university syllabus. The subjects were studying B.Com & B.Sc courses in colleges affiliated to Osmania University. The subjects' L1 too varied, but majority of learners had Telugu as L1.

Teaching Intervention Study

The teaching intervention was designed to prove that teaching idioms with specific techniques and activities helps ESL learners to understand and improve English idiomatic knowledge of idioms. The ability to use idioms will improve the learners' overall language fluency. The researcher conducted teaching intervention in a few colleges affiliated to Osmania University. The study was done in three colleges and students from B.Sc and

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:7 July 2017

Dr. Sridhar Maisa

Explicit Teaching of English Idioms to Tertiary Learners to Enhance Idiomatic Knowledge:
An Experimental Study

B.Com participated in the study. The researcher completed this study with the help of college management and cooperation of English faculty.

To conduct the intervention study (experiment), the researcher's aim was to teach two groups—one *experimental group* and one *control group*. Due to unavailability of time and college restrictions, the researcher taught one hundred learners in each group, these learners were from three colleges. For the final analysis of the data, sixty learners were considered due to poor attendance of the students for pre- and post-tests.

The Experiment

The experiment consisted of teaching and testing. According to Nunan “it is not always possible to carry out a true experiment—that circumstances such as the impossibility of randomly assigning subjects to experimental and control groups sometimes dictate that a quasi or pre-experiment rather than a true experiment be conducted” (Nunan 1992, p.40). The experiment adopted for this study was a quasi-experiment. For true experiment both control and experimental groups need to receive training at the same time with similar conditions and the experiment need to be ideal experiment whereas for quasi experiment there is some relaxation. The experiment in the present study has both pre- and post-tests, and experimental and control groups.

The researcher spent twenty days to conduct the experiment for each group. The researcher had prepared pre-test and post-test question papers for the experiment. The teaching material was developed in order to teach idioms in the course book. The frequent idioms were selected for explicit teaching of idioms in the context.

Experimental Group

In the present research, experimental group consisted of sixty students. The experimental group learners received focused instruction on idioms which was lacking in the control group. The researcher prepared lesson plans for both the groups but the experimental group lesson plan was more focused on language activities with idioms. Further, the example sentences prepared with authentic sentences in the text. The explicit teaching is the only variable in present experiment. Certain strategies like noticing idioms, guessing idiom meaning in the context, raising learners' awareness and interest in idiom learning were used

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:7 July 2017

Dr. Sridhar Maisa

Explicit Teaching of English Idioms to Tertiary Learners to Enhance Idiomatic Knowledge:
An Experimental Study

in teaching. The experimental group received instruction with attention primarily on idioms. Motivation of the learner was one of the strategies used by the researcher. Before every class instruction, the researcher did a review of previous day's teaching. The researcher taught idioms explicitly to the learners in the experimental group to promote their idiomatic English. The researcher purposefully developed teaching material for experimental group learners. The teaching material had a few chapters and in every chapter idioms were incorporated in a suitable context. At the end of each chapter language activities like matching idioms with corresponding meaning, rewriting the idioms (underlined) in a sentence, selecting suitable meaning for the idiom (underlined) and writing the meaning of the idiom (underlined) were given for practice. Learners were given time to practice language activities of each lesson. In language activities, idioms were repeated to promote learning.

Control Group

The control group consisted of sixty learners which is equal in number to the experimental group learners. The control group received the same amount of instruction as experimental group, but the focus of instruction was different. The control group did not receive explicit teaching of idiom instruction; it received the traditional method of instruction with focus on vocabulary, grammar and reading comprehension. The language activities in the control group material were different from experimental group material. It mainly focused on general vocabulary and reading comprehension. The instruction in the control group was not explicitly on idioms.

Pre-test and Post-test

The pre-test and post-test papers were prepared with similar types of question patterns. Pre-test question paper was set for thirty marks. For testing idiomatic English there were four types of questions.

In section (a) of the test there were four types of questions. Question 1 was to identify the meaning of the underlined idioms in the given sentences. This was a Multiple Choice Question (MCQ) type (choosing from the options given). The marks allotted to the question 1 type were five. Question 2 was to identify the meaning of the underlined idioms in the passage from the meanings given. The marks allotted for question 2 were five. Question 3 was to choose the appropriate idiom from the list given and fill in the blanks. The marks

allotted for question 3 were ten. Question 4 was matching the idioms with their corresponding meanings. The marks allotted for question 4 were ten.

Administration of the Test

In the context of research the major uses of test scores are related to evaluation. The interpretation of test results can assist in our understanding of the nature of language proficiency, and may have implications for language learning and language teaching (Bachman, 1990, p.54). The pre- and post-tests were administered in three colleges. The researcher spoke to the head of the department of English before conducting the test. The pre-test was conducted first. Before the researcher started the test he took the attendance of the class and distributed the question papers to all the students. The time allotted for the test was thirty minutes. Post test was conducted in a similar manner as the pre-test. The post test was conducted after teaching intervention. One test type has presented below.

Match the following idioms with their corresponding meaning.

- | | | |
|----------------------|-------|---------------------------------|
| a) bread and butter | [] | i) to die |
| b) a stumbling block | [] | ii) an obstacle |
| c) kick the bucket | [] | iii) livelihood or basic income |

Material for Classroom Teaching

The researcher developed material for teaching and learning. The aim of the teaching material was to make learners to learn idioms in context. The material consisted of a few lessons which aimed to develop the learners' idiomatic knowledge. The idioms were incorporated in the text to promote learning in context. All the lessons aimed to improve idiomatic knowledge of the learners and the text preparation was based on current issues related to India. Each lesson incorporated reading comprehension questions, and a few language activities on matching idioms, rewriting sentences using idioms and multiple choice questions.

Experimental Study Data Analysis Procedure

The data was analysed based on learners' scores using the statistical method paired T-test. The procedure of data analysis is discussed below.

Paired T-test

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:7 July 2017

Dr. Sridhar Maisa

Explicit Teaching of English Idioms to Tertiary Learners to Enhance Idiomatic Knowledge:
An Experimental Study

The paired t-test is used to compare the mean values from two related samples, e.g., comparing the marks of tests. The test marks are continuous (scale) data. Continuous data are often summarized by giving their average and standard deviation (SD), and the paired t-test is used to compare the means of the two samples of related data. The paired t-test compares the mean difference of the values to zero. The test results depend on the mean difference, the variability of the differences and the number of data.

The difference between the means of the samples is unlikely to be equal to zero (due to sampling variation) and the hypothesis test is designed to answer the question: “Is the observed difference sufficiently large enough to indicate that the alternative hypothesis is true?” The answer comes in the form of a probability - the p-value.

The significance of p-value decides whether the result is significant or not. The general p-value is between 0.05 – 0.01. If p-value is >0.05, it means the experiment is non-significant. If p-value is <0.001 (***), it indicates that the result is highly significant.

1.3 Analysis of Teaching Intervention

The teaching intervention consists of the experiment. The teaching intervention was conducted for a period of five weeks after the pre-test. The sample plan of students for the instruction was sixty. The pre-test was conducted for one hundred students but for the final analysis of the data only sixty students’ data were considered because some learners were absent in some of the classes and did not write both the pre and the post-test. The main focus of the researcher was on the experimental group. The main focus of the instruction was explicit teaching of idioms to the experimental group. The control group received traditional method of instruction and there was no explicit instruction of idioms in the control group. The language activities in control group teaching material were not similar as experimental group teaching material. There was no repetition of idioms in the control group language activities. In the following section pre and post-tests are discussed.

Pre- and Post-tests

In the present study the experiment design had three phases--the pretest, teaching intervention and post-test. A pre-test was conducted before teaching intervention to ascertain the level of the students and a post-test at the end of the teaching intervention to see the

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:7 July 2017

Dr. Sridhar Maisa

Explicit Teaching of English Idioms to Tertiary Learners to Enhance Idiomatic Knowledge:
An Experimental Study

impact of teaching. The pre and post-tests for experimental and control groups have same number of sections and questions. In pre and post-tests there were two sections.

The techniques and activities that preceded the actual teaching are: selection of idioms, raising learners' awareness and interest in idiom learning, identifying and noticing idioms in a text, guessing meaning from the context and teaching activities.

1.4 Evaluation

This section evaluates the difference between pre and post-test. The presentation and comparison of the pre and post-test data of experimental and the control group results analysis have been discussed in the following sections.

Data Analysis

The experimental and control group data results are discussed below.

Pre-test

The marks allotted for the idiom knowledge test was thirty. For the final analysis sixty subjects' data was considered (n=60). The maximum score in pre-test of experimental group was twenty seven and the minimum score was four. Ten learners scored in the range of one to ten. Thirty four learners scored in the range of eleven and twenty, and sixteen learners scored in the range of twenty one to thirty. The pre-test mean score of experimental group was 16.9 and control group pre-test mean score was 20.43. Normally in experimental study it is desirable to have the pre-test score of the experimental and control group in the same range but since there was a difference found after dividing the groups, this study will quantify the development from pre-test to post-test differently in the case of both the groups. It is evident that control group pre-test score was higher than experimental group pre-test mean score.

Post-test

The post-test was conducted after teaching instruction. The experimental and control group post-test scores vary among learners. The minimum score of experimental group's post-test was thirteen and the maximum score was thirty. The control group's minimum score was twelve and maximum score was twenty nine. Twenty learners scored in the range of eleven and twenty. Forty learners scored in the range of twenty one and thirty. The mean

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:7 July 2017

Dr. Sridhar Maisa

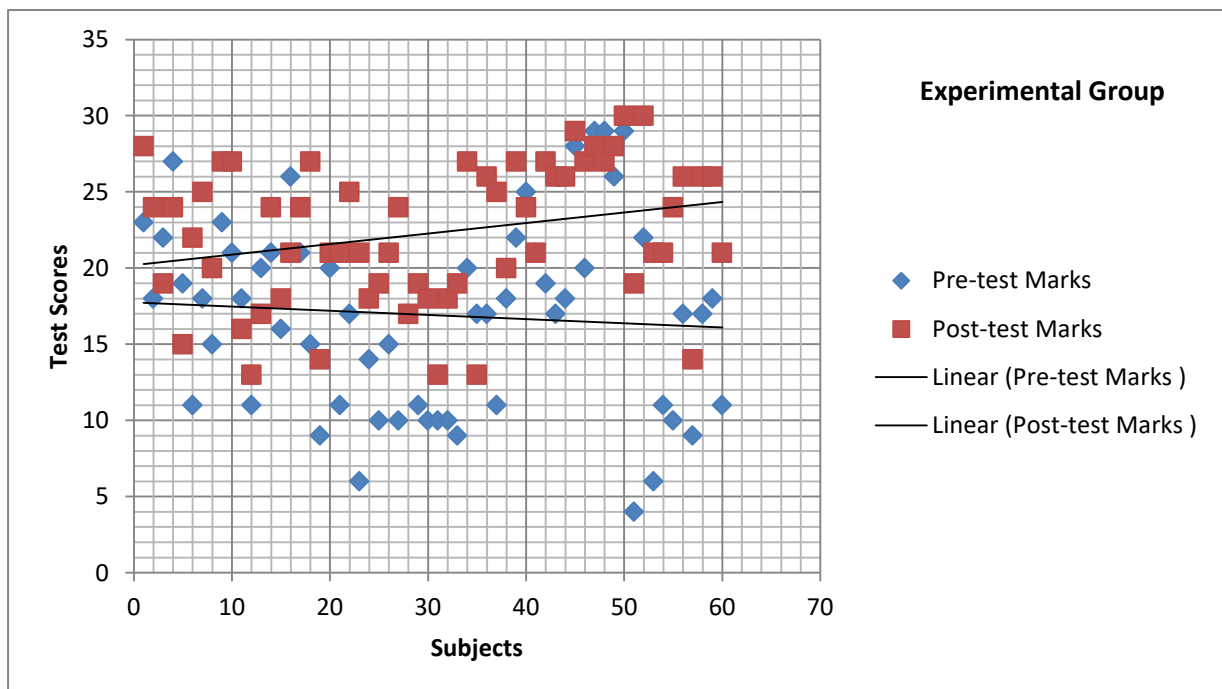
Explicit Teaching of English Idioms to Tertiary Learners to Enhance Idiomatic Knowledge:
An Experimental Study

score of the experimental group's post-test was 22.3 whereas the control group post-test was 20.6. After teaching intervention the experimental group's mean score improved significantly from 16.92 to 22.30. But in the control group, the improvement in scores was not significant (20.43 to 20.64).

Experimental Group Data Analysis

The test scores of the experimental group are presented below in the form of a scattered graph.

Figure 1: Experimental Group Test Scores in Scattered Graph



The results of the pre and post-tests of the experimental group are presented in tabular form below.

Table 1: Pre-test, Post-test Results of the Experimental Group

Pre-test	Post-test
Mean= 16.92	Mean= 22.30
Standard Deviation =6.26	Standard Deviation =4. 63
Higher Score =29 ; Lower Score = 4	Higher Score =30 ; Lower Score = 13
Median= 17	Median= 23

Table 2: Paired Samples Statistics**Paired Samples Statistics**

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-test Marks	16.92	60	6.258	.808
	Post-test Marks	22.30	60	4.626	.597

The test results of the experimental group prove that the explicit teaching of idioms would promote the knowledge of idioms. The mean value difference between pre and post-test varies (6) and it was significant. The experimental group pre and post-test results shows that the p-value is significant (p-value: <0.0001). The summary of the pre and post-test results with p-value are presented in the table below.

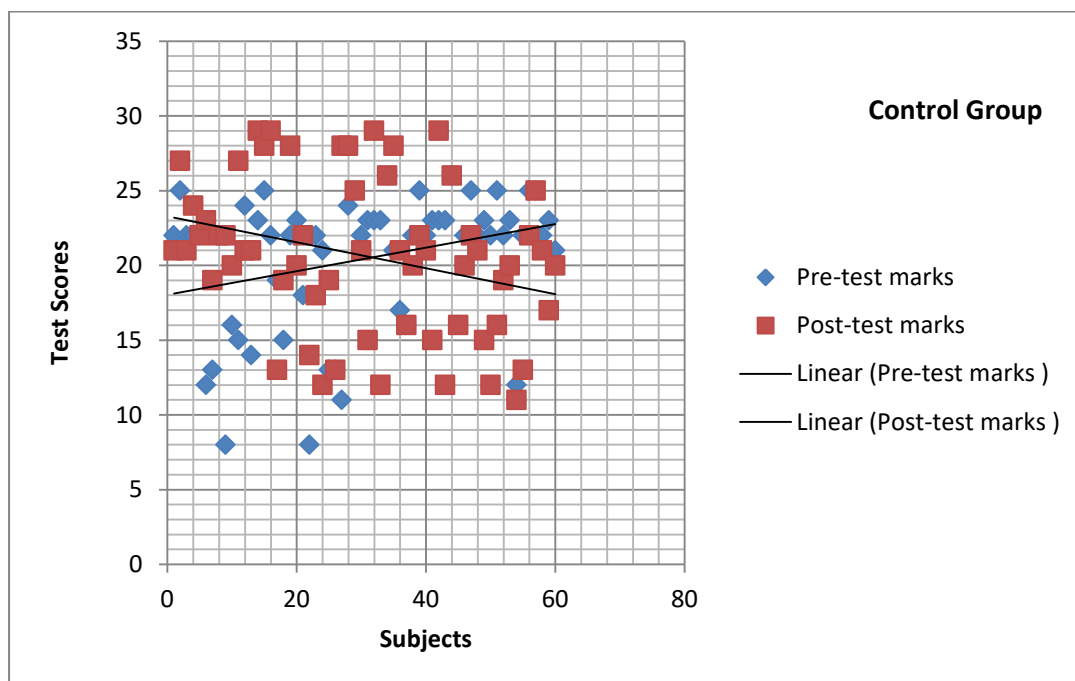
Table 3: P-value & Mean difference of Experimental Group

Paired t test	
P value	< 0.0001
P value summary	***
Are means signif. different? (P < 0.05)	Yes
One- or two-tailed P value?	Two-tailed
t, df	t=7.866 df=59
Number of pairs	60

Control Group Data Analysis

The control group did not receive explicit idiom teaching. The teaching for this group followed the regular method of instruction. The test scores of the pre and post-test of the control group are presented in the scattered graph below.

Figure 2: Control Group Test Scores in Scattered Graph



The results of the pre-test and post-test of the control group are presented in tabular form below.

Table 4: Pre-test, Post-test Results of the Control Group

Pre-test	Post-test
Mean= 20.43	Mean= 20.63
Standard Deviation = 4.61	Standard Deviation = 5.14
Higher Score =26 ; Lower Score = 8	Higher Score =29 ; Lower Score = 11
Median= 22	Median= 21

Table 5: Paired Sample's Statistics

Paired Sample's Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-test Marks	20.43	60	4.612	.595
	Post-test Marks	20.63	60	5.145	.664

The summary of the pre and post-test results with p-value is presented in the table below. The p-value of the control group is not significant (p-value: 0.8001).

Table 6: P-value & Mean difference of Control Group

Paired t test	
P value	0.8001
P value summary	Ns
Are means signif. different? (P < 0.05)	No
One- or two-tailed P value?	Two-tailed
t, df	t=0.2544 df=59
Number of pairs	60

1.5 Results from Pre-test and Post-test

The test result shows that there is improvement of idiomatic knowledge through explicit teaching of idioms in the experimental group. The paired t-test analysis shows that the learners' knowledge of idioms has improved significantly. The findings from the t-test disclose that the experimental group significantly (i.e. $p < 0.0001$) outperformed the control group in the English idioms test. The table below illustrates the findings from the paired t-test.

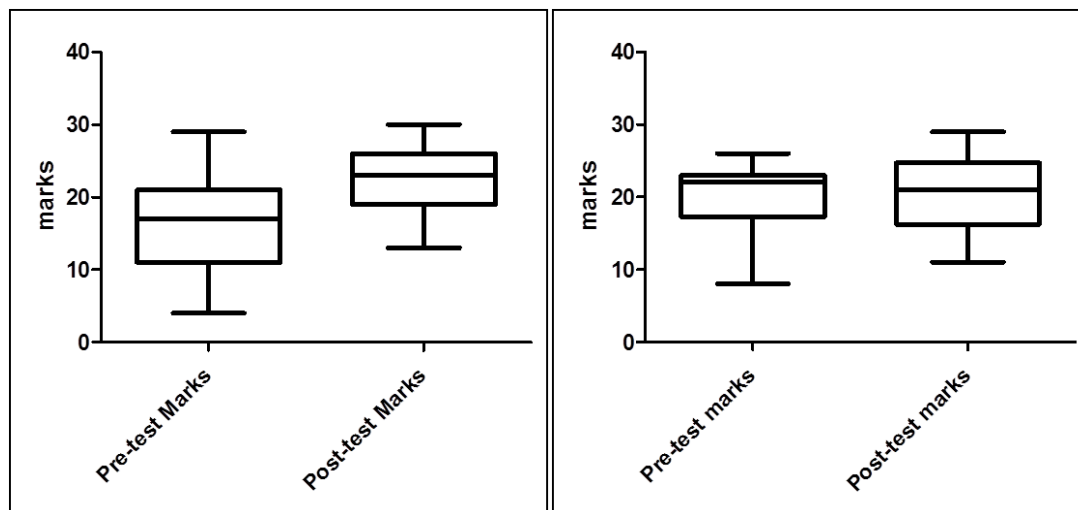
Table 7: Mean differences between the Pre and Post-tests (n=60)

Group	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Paired t-test (Sig.<0.05)
Experimental	16.92	22.30	< 0.0001
Control	20.43	20.63	0.8001

The pre- and post-test results of experimental and control group are presented in the plots graph below. The graph clearly indicates that there is a significant improvement in the performance of learners in the experimental group. In the given graph the post-test box of the experimental group is higher than the pre-test box. It indicates that the difference in scores were significant in the experimental group. Control group graph post-test plot is a little above the pre-test plot graph. It indicates that there was very little improvement in control group post-test. And as compared to the experimental group, the learning of idioms was not very

much significant. Therefore, the results proved that the explicit teaching of idioms can improve the learners' idiomatic knowledge.

Figure 3: pre and post-test results of experimental and control group in the plots graph



1.6 Discussion and Conclusion

Hypothesis is that teaching idioms will help ESL learners to understand and promote idiomatic knowledge of undergraduate learners. The present research shows that there is a significant relation between teaching of idioms and improvement of undergraduate learners' idiomatic knowledge. The results of the present experimental study are similar to previous studies such as Eltair, 2003; Liu, 2008; Guduru, 2011; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Liontas, 2002. The finding that the explicit teaching of formulaic sequences using task-based language teaching can develop the knowledge of the formulaic sequences is in line with that of McGuire, 2009. Therefore, it provides evidence that the explicit teaching of idioms could promote the knowledge of idioms in the English language. Similarly vocabulary studies, such as Ellis (1999), Barcroft (2009), Paribakht & Wesche (1997) (as cited in Gass & Selinker 2008) found that inferences such as guessing from context is the most common strategy. Schmitt (2000), Nation and Meara (2002) emphasized the importance of explicit vocabulary learning. Nation and Meara (2002) as well as Schmitt (2000) acknowledge the fact that incidental learning is effective. But, according to Schmitt (2000), "incidental learning is slower and more gradual, lacking the focused attention of explicit learning" (Schmitt, 2000, p.102). Ellis (2002) points out that even though language learning is implicit by nature, one cannot deny the role of explicit instruction. Certain teaching techniques and activities have

helped the learner to improve idiomatic English. Such tasks have been used in similar research (Schmidt, 1990), which mentioned ‘noticing’ target vocabulary which was used as a teaching technique. In the present study, it has been proved as one of the best ways of promoting vocabulary. McCarthy (2008) proposes the raising of students’ awareness of idiom usage as a first step which has been proved in the present study to enhance learners’ idiom knowledge. Nation (2001) and Hulstijn (1997) study on guessing meaning in the context technique and similar techniques were used in previous studies. A similar study of Patricia Adkins, “Teaching Idioms and Figures of Speech to non-native Speakers of English” (as cited in Sugano, 1981) suggests that teaching frequent idioms can promote better learning of idioms and idiom knowledge.

Explicit teaching of idioms has an effect on the improvement of the learners’ idiomatic knowledge. Interestingly, all the students have been enthusiastic about explicit idiom learning.

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Dr. Sridhar Maisa

Explicit Teaching of English Idioms to Tertiary Learners to Enhance Idiomatic Knowledge:
An Experimental Study

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Appendix: Post-test Question Paper

Post-test Question Paper

Time: 30 min

Total Marks : 30

Section - A

I) Identify the meaning of the underlined idioms in the following sentences.

Choose from the options given.

5M

- 1) My neighbours always poke their nose into others' matters
 - a) do not get involved in others' matters
 - b) show too much interest into others matters
 - c) discussing others' matters
 - d) none

- 2) The arrival of a brand new electronic washing machine is a red letter day in the life of any household.
 - a) a holiday
 - b) a special day
 - c) a festival
 - d) an unhappy day

- 3) When my grandfather reached home after many years he was delighted to have his kith and kin around him.
 - a) only close friends
 - b) only close relatives
 - c) close friends and relatives
 - d) family

- 4) These days onions cost an arm and a leg.
 - a) are low-priced
 - b) are very expensive
 - c) are not available
 - d) are available

- 5) One EC official said the French government, now isolated in the rest of Europe because of its stubborn stance, finds itself between the devil and the deep blue sea.
 - a) between two equally acceptable choices.
 - b) between two equally unacceptable choices.
 - c) between two unequally acceptable choices.

d) none of the above

II) Identify the meanings of the underlined idioms in the passage from the meanings given below. 5 M

Alf **hit the ceiling** [a] this morning for no reason at all. I thought he'd just **got out on the wrong side of the bed** [b], but then his girlfriend tried to explain his unreasonable behaviour saying that he'd been **burning the candle at both ends** [c] because of his exams. I'm glad she **put me in the picture** [d] because now I can understand why he reacted so crossly. However, I wish Alf would **take a leaf out of his girlfriend's book** [e] and go to bed at a reasonable time.

- 1) get up in a bad mood ()
- 2) keep someone informed ()
- 3) copy something from someone to gain advantage ()
- 4) react angrily ()
- 5) stay up late and get up early ()

III) Choose the appropriate idiom from the list below and fill in the blanks. (in places, you might have to change the tense, person etc., of the idiom to suit the sentence).

10 M

1. caught in the cross fire
2. put the cart before the horse
3. call a spade a spade
4. count chickens before they hatch
5. build castles in the air
6. bull in a china shop
7. actions speak louder than words
8. in the doldrums
9. on cloud nine
10. can't judge a book by its cover

i) My brother was _____ when he passed S.S.C with distinction.

ii) Some people don't look very intelligent, but we _____.

- iii) I think buying a ticket before we make any plans is _____.
- iv) I should warn you that Swamy _____, so if he thinks you say something wrong or make a mistake, he'll say so.
- v) A friend of mine was competing in a race, but before it had even begun he was already planning his victory celebration. I warned him not to _____ and to instead focus on just finishing the race.
- vi) When I heard some bad news last week, it put me _____.
- vii) My colleague is like a _____ when it comes to dealing with people's feelings.
- viii) Government makes all sorts of promises to people but as we all know, _____.
- ix) Unfortunately, my friend often dreams to _____ and doesn't do much to improve his situation.
- x) We don't want this institute to be _____ between proponents and antagonists.

IV) Match the following idioms with their corresponding meanings. 10 M

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1) once in a blue moon | [] i) be very sad |
| 2) think out of the box | [] ii) an obstacle |
| 3) monkey business | [] iii) to die |
| 4) feel blue | [] iv) agree about something |
| 5) add insult to injury | [] v) very rarely |
| 6) high time | [] vi) complete a difficult activity very successfully |
| 7) kick the bucket | [] vii) silly behavior |
| 8) see eye to eye | [] viii) make a bad situation worse |
| 9) come through with flying colours | [] ix) appropriate or urgent moment |
| 10) stumbling block | [] x) think freely |

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Dr. Sridhar Maisa
 Explicit Teaching of English Idioms to Tertiary Learners to Enhance Idiomatic Knowledge:
 An Experimental Study 383