



THE EFFECT OF IDIOM INSTRUCTION ON EFL TEENAGE LEARNERS' RETENTION OF IDIOMS

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Abstract:

The present study investigated the effect of idiom instruction on EFL teenage learners' retention of idiom knowledge. The focused techniques used in the intervention were contextual clues, L1-L2 idiom comparison and pictures. Thirty common English idioms were introduced to 37 pre-intermediate Vietnamese students in a private language center in the Mekong delta. During the experiment, idiom tests, IKT and VKSIT, were employed to gauge the effect of instruction on the learners' knowledge. The intervention was controlled carefully for each single technique so that the effects of each technique could be seen clearly. Along with classroom observations for tracking objectives and procedures of instruction, face-to-face interviews were employed for gaining the insights into the learners' attitudes towards learning idioms. The findings showed that all of the participants' posttest results in both IKT and VKSIT were much higher than their pretest results. These results suggested the positive effect of idiom instruction on learners' retention. Moreover, the interviews showed that the use of pictures was the most preferred learning technique of the three. These findings added pedagogical values of these techniques in teaching idioms. Suggestions were made to enhance learner attitudes towards idiom learning.

Keywords: EFL, idiom instruction, using pictures, contextual clues, L1 L2 comparison

1. Introduction

Idioms constitute an important part in understanding the implicit meanings of writers or speakers. They are part of English proficiency that speakers demonstrate in their communication. The ability to understand "*a wide range of idiomatic expressions and*

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colloquialisms” is described as one of the proficiency features (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 66). It also represents a criterion of lexical resource (British Council, 2012, p.1). In Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), especially in such books on training English proficiency (e.g., TOEIC, TOEFL, IELTS, among others), it is easy for English learners to encounter a number of common English idioms.

Although idiomatic expressions appear in all of discourse forms, it seems that second language learners find it challenging to function effectively without the knowledge of idioms. Therefore, learning English idioms is essential for learners to cope with these challenges. Knowing fixed expressions is crucial and indispensable because individuals who can use idioms correctly are regarded as more competent language users (Boers et al., 2006). According to Celce-Murcia (2008), the ability to use idioms, knowledge of idioms, may precede the ability to understand speech by fluent speakers, and therefore, constitutes part of the communicative competence model. However, previous studies in English as foreign language (EFL) settings (Asl, 2013; Khan & Daşkin, 2014; Tarcaoanu, 2012; Tran, 2012; Vasiljevic, 2011; Wray, 2000) have shown that idioms may seldom be applied. Numerous teachers may ignore teaching idioms (Tran, 2012), probably because of its inherent complexity as well as their lack of interest in this area. This may lead to English learners encountering problems in responding to idioms. According to Cakir (2011), it is concluded that the more language teachers use idioms in classroom activities, the better students achieve idiomatic knowledge.

Despite significant previous studies on effective approaches to idiom instruction and learning (Cooper, 1999; Lennon, 1998; Levorato, Nesi, & Cacciari, 2004; Prodromou, 2003; Zyzik, 2011), research on the EFL learners in Asia generally, and Vietnam specifically, is limited. This study was conducted at a private language center in the Mekong Delta, aiming to examine the effect of idiom instruction by focusing on three different techniques on EFL teenage learners’ retention of idiom knowledge. More precisely, this study applied contextual clues in the first stage, L1-L2 idiom comparison in the second stage and pictures in the third one for a single group of participants. The study also aimed to gauge the learners’ attitudes towards idiom instruction.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Idiom Instruction

Idiom instruction involves far more than teaching students how to look up idioms in a dictionary and use the idioms in sentences. According to Michael Graves (2000), since an idiom is a kind of vocabulary, four components of an effective idiom-focused vocabulary program should be:

- (1) Wide or extensive reading to expand idiom knowledge;
- (2) Instruction in specific idioms to enhance comprehension of texts containing those idioms;
- (3) Instruction in idiom-learning strategies;
- (4) Idiom consciousness raising and idiom-play activities to motivate and enhance learning.

As part of vocabulary instruction, several idiom instruction approaches, methods as well as techniques are recommended and employed. An Idiom-Focused Lexical Approach is believed to make a great contribution to idiom instruction. According to Debabi and Guerroudj (2018), the lexical approach is a method of teaching foreign languages which emphasizes the ability to understand and produce lexical chunks. With the lexical approach, students are expected to perceive the meaningful set of uses of words as well as idioms at their disposal. Specifically, Lewis (1997) proposed the following six techniques for teaching vocabulary, including: 1. Intensive and extensive input sources in the target language, 2. First and second language comparisons and translation-carried out chunk-for-chunk, 3. Repetition and recycling of activities, 4. Guessing the meaning of idioms from the context, 5. Noticing and recording language patterns, and 6. Using with dictionaries and other reference tools.

A number of studies (Boers, et al., 2006; Rahimi et al., 2012; Abdellah, 2015; Saygili, et al., 2016; Debabi & Guerroudj, 2018; Yasin, 2019) have provided evidence on the effect of the Lexical Approach to enhancing students' both receptive and productive skills of English language. Some have focused on lexical chunks and collocations, which are close to idioms (Boers, et al., 2006; Abdellah, 2015; Saygili, et al., 2016; Debabi & Guerroudj, 2018). Thus, more attention should be drawn to research on teaching idiomatic knowledge, especially in EFL settings.

Within the scope of the study, idiom focused lexical approach is regarded as an umbrella term. Like vocabulary, an idiom is acquired incidentally through indirect exposure to idioms and intentionally through explicit instruction in specific idioms and idiom-learning strategies.

2.2 Intentional Idiom Instruction

According to the National Reading Panel (2000), explicit instruction of vocabulary is considered greatly effective. To develop vocabulary knowledge intentionally, students should be explicitly taught both specific idioms and idiom-learning strategies. To deepen students' knowledge of idiom meanings, specific idiom instruction should be robust. Seeing idioms in rich contexts provided by authentic texts, rather than in isolated idioms drills, produces robust idiom learning (National Reading Panel, 2000). Such instruction often does not begin with the meanings, for the ability to give a definition is often the result of knowing what the idiom means. Rich and robust idiom instruction goes beyond definitional knowledge to engage students actively in using and thinking about idiom meanings and in creating relationships among words or linking with the text.

Idiom-learning strategies include dictionary use, compare to L1, and contextual analysis. Dictionary use supports students about multiple word meanings, as well as the importance of choosing the plausible definition to fit into the particular context. Comparing to L1 may be of great help for students to link to idioms in their L1. Besides, contextual analysis, inferring the meaning of an unfamiliar idiom by scrutinizing the text surrounding it, is concerned a helpful strategy. Basically, instruction by contextual analysis involves guiding learners to employ both strategic and specific types of context clues.

2.3 Incidental Idiom Instruction

Researchers typically distinguish between incidental and intentional teaching. Generally, intentional learning is believed to occur when learners pay attention to new language features (Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2000), while some scholars use the term 'incidental teaching' to describe acquisition which occurs in the learners' absence of a conscious intention to learn, or rather when learners' attention is focused not on language learning, but on understanding the texts they are engaged with (e.g., Hulstijn, 2001; Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2000). Because of this, incidental instruction is thought as providing communicative language tasks which engage students to work to complete (Hulstijn, 2001). Learners, for example, may begin to acquire a new idiom when they encounter it in reading a text that interests them, using contextual information and background knowledge to infer its meaning. To be able to attain successful inference, students are in need of the overall text comprehension and thus, they are required of a minimum lexical coverage (ratio of known and unknown words in the text). To sum up, both of these two approaches can be taken into consideration for idiom instruction.

2.4 Idiom Instruction and Retention of Idioms

Previous studies placed a focus on methods of teaching idioms both implicitly and explicitly to language learners in both ESL and EFL contexts (Buckingham, 2006; Cooper, 1999; Lennon, 1998; Tran, 2012; Vasiljevic, 2011; Wray, 2000; Zyzik, 2009). Nevertheless, in most cases, explicit instruction was mainly employed (Buckingham, 2006; Cooper, 1999; Tran, 2012; Vasiljevic, 2011; Wray, 2000; Zyzik, 2009). For example, Zyzik (2009) focused on using contextual clues, pictures to illustrate meanings, matching idioms to their meanings, filling in blanks with the appropriate idiom, replacing underlined expressions with an idiom, etc., for teaching idiomatic comprehension regarding literal and figurative meanings. Vasiljevic (2011) recommended applying conceptual metaphors and code switching to learners' first language in idiom meaning discussions as effective methods for instruction. Fotovatnia & Khaki's study (2012) showed evidence for significantly positive effects of the type of instruction that deploys L1 translation, L2 definitions and synonyms, and pictures, on learning both meaning and form of idioms. On the other hand, Lennon (1998) showed the success of implicit idiom instruction by employing problem-solving approach and providing clear samples of exercises, which were mostly suitable for advanced learners. Further research focusing on the lower proficiency students could consider using implicit instruction.

The literature indicated that although the effectiveness of idiomatic expression-focused instruction was likely demonstrated, several limitations can be observed, namely small sample sizes, short-term treatments (Boers, et al., 2006; Debabi & Guerroudj, 2018; Rizq, 2015; Solhi, et al., 2013). More attention should be paid to the needs of younger learners. As Boers (2004) suggests, to explore how learners "*actively generate figurative language*" (p.222), learners with an intermediate level of English proficiency should be the most responsive target group. L2 learners at an elementary level may face difficulties, not only in production but also in comprehension due to their lack of lexical knowledge; on the other hand, advanced learners with sufficient lexical knowledge may hesitate to take

risks, which requires figurative expressions production, and they tend to avoid making use of expressions whose acceptability in the target language they are not sure of (Boers, 2004). It is clear that more research is needed for teenagers to widen the contribution of idiom instruction.

2.5 Techniques

Idiomatic language can be taught explicitly to minimize the learning burden of students and optimize students' learning experience. It is also highlighted that the ways in which idiom instruction can be made more effective, meaningful and enjoyable to the learners. Due to the time limitation, this current study could not cover all techniques in the experiment, instead, the three techniques, namely contextual clues, L1-L2 idiom comparison, and pictures for elicitation were used.

Teachers may need to teach relevant vocabulary as well as idioms related to the topics or contexts (Solhi et al., 2013). Therefore, a combination of meaningful and topic/context-based learning principle is highlighted. Besides, encouraging students to compare idioms in L1 and L2 can build up students' awareness and confidence in learning and employing idioms in producing language. It also helps them to have longer idiom retention. Students may find it fun in comparing L2 idioms to their mother language. Richards and Rodgers (2001) mentioned several approaches and useful techniques that we could apply to our teaching vocabulary. Among which is using visual aids, like pictures or pictorial games to help students have longer retention of idioms.

3. Research Methodology

The study attempts to gauge the effect of idiom instruction on EFL teenage learners' idiom knowledge retention. Also, the research aims to gain insights into learners' attitudes towards idiom instruction. Research questions include:

- Does idiom instruction have any effects on EFL teenage learners' retention of idiom retention?
- What are the learners' attitudes towards idiom instruction?

3.1 Participants

The participants involved 37 teenage students from the age of 13 to 16, including 19 males and 18 females, at a private language center in the Mekong Delta. These participants had experienced at least 7 years of learning English by the time the data was collected. Based on the results of placement tests before being assigned to the same English classes, they were judged to be at the same pre-intermediate level of English. Also, their results from previous courses were taken into consideration since most of them had at least two years studying at this international English center and got familiar with having two teachers, one Vietnamese and one native speaker teacher. These students studied at two different shifts, but were at the same level with the same teacher, program and textbooks. Those two classes started at the same week and lasted for 12 weeks, 2 days (4 hours) per week.

At the beginning, the total number was 39 students, but data of two of them were removed at the end due to their regular absence.

3.2 Research Design

The design used in this research was single-subject experimental design and made use of features of an explanatory mixed research methods. The quasi-experimental design was chosen to find out the answer for the first research question. For the second research question, the qualitative method, specifically interviews and observations, was employed. The use of mixed methods was appropriate since the research mainly relied on the learners' performances on the idiom tests and during the experiment through observation notes, as well as the interviews to analyze the students' attitudes. Considering the purpose of the study, no traditional technique and no control group were applied, the use of qualitative approach as interviews and observation notes was enormously helpful to gain insight into learners' attitudes regarding idiom teaching.

3.3 Instruments

Three instruments utilized in the study were idiom tests, interviews, and observation.

3.3.1 Idiom Tests

In this research, two different idiom knowledge tests were applied for different purposes, including IKT and VKSIT.

A. Idiom Knowledge Test (IKT)

Since the results from Vo & Nguyen (2020) showed EFL teenage students' limited knowledge of common used idioms, an idiom knowledge test was designed relatively with 35 idioms selected from Vo & Nguyen (2020). This IKT was applied as the Pretest to the participants to assess their knowledge of 35 idioms. This was to ensure no prior knowledge affected the experiment result. Also, in order to minimize the difference of parts of the whole test, one type of questioning- fill in the blanks- was employed. This design was based previous studies and references of works from famous experts in TESOL/TEFL field (Nation, 1990; Milton. 2009). In detail, this study focused on measuring idiom knowledge, so the techniques used in the idiom test adapted from Nation (2001), Milton (2009), McGavian (2009), Fotovatnia & Khaki (2012), Tran (2013) and Vo & Nguyen (2020).

The pretest included 30 idiom test items related to the three techniques in the experiment, 10 idioms for each technique. All the items were designed to assess three components of idioms: form, meaning and use. In addition, in order to help the students easily deal with the test, clear instruction and an example were given at the beginning of the test. The selected idioms were screened from a prior test of which the participants had no prior knowledge.

The IKT posttest (appendix 1) was designed with a similar format. The same items were kept and with 3 sets of 10 items respectively for 3 techniques in the intervention namely contextual clues, L1-L2 comparison, and pictures; however, the order was changed within each set. The length and level in 2 tests, pre and post, were equal to

determine the receptive (and controlled-productive) ability, comprehension, and students' retention of idiom knowledge. In addition, the test results were collected, graded, and analyzed with the aid of the SPSS software.

B. VKS- Idiom Test (VKSIT)

Three sets of VKSITs were employed before and after each 30-minute experimental lesson (appendix 2) to observe and gain clear views about the cognitive changes in the scales of learners' idiom knowledge before and after a particular technique was implemented. Therefore, the results were also reported to enrich the data for the experiment. The VKS idiom tests were planned as three sub-pretests corresponding with three sub-posttests with the same content and similar format of 5-point Likert scale, and 10 items for each test. A clear example was given at the top of each test for supporting students to comprehend the test better.

The VKSIT made use of the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) as developed by Paribakht and Wesche (1996), which provides VKSIT scores using a "*combination of self-reported and demonstrated knowledge*" (p. 30) and which can provide scores on a scale of 1–5. The VKS, designed by Paribakht and Wesche (1993, p.15), can be used to assess productive vocabulary depth since test takers are required to show the meaning and use the word in a sentence. It also contains a receptive component, as in the first two scales, no creative use of the word is required, and the last 3 scales of receptiveness ranges from guessing the meaning, surely knowing the meaning to using the word. The authors claim that the VKS is highly practical and can be applied with any set of words. They strongly believe that the test should be viewed as a practical instrument in studies of the initial recognition and use of new words.

For the purposes of this study, the VKS 5-point scale involved a score of 1 equivalent to 'totally unfamiliar', 2 'seeing but not knowing the meaning', a score of 3 'knowing meaning', score 4 'mastery of meaning', and a score of 5 indicating 'mastery of meaning and use'. VKSITs were presented in L1 with clear instruction and an example. Students could fill in the meaning of idioms in L1 or L2, but the examples or sentences must be given in English.

What is more, inaccurate self-assessments could be observed, and the scores could be adjusted by the researcher in accordance with a detailed description of the scoring procedure provided by Wesche and Paribakht (1996). For instance, scores 1 and 2 were clear enough, no adjustment was needed. Scale 3 might become a score of 2 (if the meaning was wrong) or score 3 (if it was correct). Wrong responses in meaning in scale 4 and scale 5 likewise were counted as 2. If responses to knowledge of meaning in scale 5, but the use of idioms was not appropriate in examples/ sentences, a score 4 was assigned. All of the data were entered into SPSS. These idiom tests were highly reliable since Cronbach' alpha was 0.94 (Cronk, 2019).

3.3.2 Interviews

As one of the two key techniques in this current research, interview was opted for gaining insight into the students' attitudes to idiom learning. Also interviews help to provide rich data and offer opportunities to clarify ideas (Mangubhai et al., 2004).

The interview was structured with pre-determined questions. The questions were designed for stimulating the participants to talk about their experiences and thinking with regard to idiom teaching and learning, including their responses to the important role of idiom learning and the preferred techniques in the experiment. The interviews were conducted in the mother language of the participants. The individual interviews were conducted as a way of enriching data for the project. Interviewees were selected randomly in order that the data would be more objective.

3.3.3 Observations

Lesson observations based on two colleagues' note taking and feedback recorded in a structured form, were to see how the teacher implemented the idiom instruction, together with overall class performances. Also, it is often seen in any qualitative research as a method triangulated with interviews, and therefore, it was useful in this study for generating triangulations with observable data. Observations herein the study focused on both the teacher's lessons and learners' learning outcomes that had direct relevance to addressing teacher's self-awareness of the meaningfulness of corrective feedback and commentaries from others and carefulness on the experiment.

3.4 Procedures

The IKT pretest was administered initially. Then after 2 weeks, the intervention was conducted. For each two successive lessons, a preVKSIT and a postVKSIT were administered, and the lessons were taught in two weeks, with one technique. There were 6 lessons, 5 idioms each per week. The IKT posttest was administered at the end.

All of these lessons were delivered to teenage students in PPP (present-practice-produce) model which most teachers and learners in the Mekong delta were familiar with. The model supported explicit instruction. Group work and pair work were also attached with special importance to intensify interaction. The experimental research was done in a period of 12 weeks (2 classes/ week = 4hours/ week).

Two researcher's colleagues were invited to do the observations and take notes. The interviews were conducted after the posttest and were recorded. All of the recordings were transcribed, coded and grouped into themes of preferred techniques.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Effects of Idiom Instruction on Learners' Retention of Idioms

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of IKT

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PRETEST (30 items)	37	.00	.00	.0000	.00000
POSTTEST (30 items)	37	13.00	29.00	22.4054	3.59366
POSTPART1 (10 items)	37	4.00	10.00	7.0541	1.73118
POSTPART2 (10 items)	37	3.00	10.00	7.8919	1.61217
POSTPART3 (10 items)	37	4.00	10.00	7.4595	1.86480
Valid N (listwise)	37				

Table 1 shows that the mean increased from $M = 0$ to $M = 22.41$, was positively high in terms of the measurement (Richards, 1976; Henriksen, 1999; Nation, 2001) regarding the depth of idioms. This showed the positive impact of idiom instruction. It was also noteworthy that there was no significant variance between the mean results of 3 parts in terms of three techniques employed in the experiment. The mean score of part 1 ($M = 7.05$ out of 10) was quite high, for part 2 ($M = 7.89$), and for part 3 ($M = 7.46$), which showed the students' gain in idiomatic knowledge as a result of using contextual clues (part 1) and L1-L2 idiom comparison (part 2) and pictures for elicitation (part 3).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of VKSIT subtests

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
SUBPRET.1 (10 items)	37	1.00	1.80	1.3054	.24031
SUBPOST.1 (10 items)	37	3.00	5.00	4.2108	.58108
SUBPRET.2 (10 items)	37	1.00	1.90	1.3730	.21036
SUBPOST.2 (10 items)	37	3.60	5.00	4.4486	.47295
SUBPRET.3 (10 items)	37	1.00	2.00	1.2622	.26072
SUBPOST.3 (10 items)	37	3.90	5.00	4.4865	.42763
SUBPREwhole (30 items)	37	1.00	1.70	1.3135	.16878
SUBPOSTwhole (30 items)	37	3.73	5.00	4.3820	.44767
Valid N (listwise)	37				

As Table 2 indicated, the results of both sets of idiom tests, the IKTs and VKSITs indicated a low level of idiom understanding. In particular, the IKT pretest result was observed as 0 and the average VKSIT pretest was $M = 1.31$ out of 5 ($M_{\text{sub-pre.1}} = 1.31$, $M_{\text{sub-pre.2}} = 1.37$, $M_{\text{sub-pre.3}} = 1.26$), which falls between level 1- the learners had never seen the idioms before, and level 2- the learners had seen these idioms but did not know the meaning. However, the posttests of VKSITs showed the growth in scores ($M_{\text{subpost.1}} = 4.21$, $M_{\text{subpost.2}} = 4.45$, $M_{\text{subpost.3}} = 4.49$), which means the learners knew the idioms well in meaning, and somehow in use of these idioms ($4 < M < 5$).

An independent sample test was employed on IKT posttest to test if there was a difference between the two groups, 19 male ($M = 22.63$) and 18 female ($M = 22.17$) students' performance on IKT posttest. The result showed no statistically significant difference in the two groups' levels of idiomatic retention ($p = .701$). The result of independent sample

test on VKSIT sub-posttest revealed the same outcome (Mmale= 4.34, Mfemale = 4.43, and $p = 0.553$).

Finally, in order to analyze the effect of the intervention a General Linear Model Test on IKT data was run to observe whether there was a statistically significant difference in EFL learners' idiomatic knowledge before (pretest) and after (posttest) applying the treatment. The results from Tests of Within-Subjects Effects demonstrated that there was a statistically significant difference in the EFL teenage learners' knowledge of idioms before and after the experiment ($F= 1438.244$, $df= 1.000$ and $p= 0.000<0.05$). The findings indicated that there was a strong effect on participants' retention of idiom knowledge after 12 weeks. In general, the use of GLM test greatly supported the positive effect of focused-idiomatic teaching on teenage learners' retention of idiom knowledge.

The line graphs, figures 1 & 2 described a dramatic increase in the scores of the beginning and end of treatment which means there was a substantial effect of idiom instruction that helped learners memorize knowledge; however, no noteworthy difference between the effects of 3 techniques was found. Despite this, in terms of IKT results, L1-L2 comparison had the greatest effect on learners (from 0 to 7.89); whereas, in terms of VKSIT results, using pictures was experienced as the most effective technique for learners (smallest pretest 1.26 to biggest posttest 4.49).

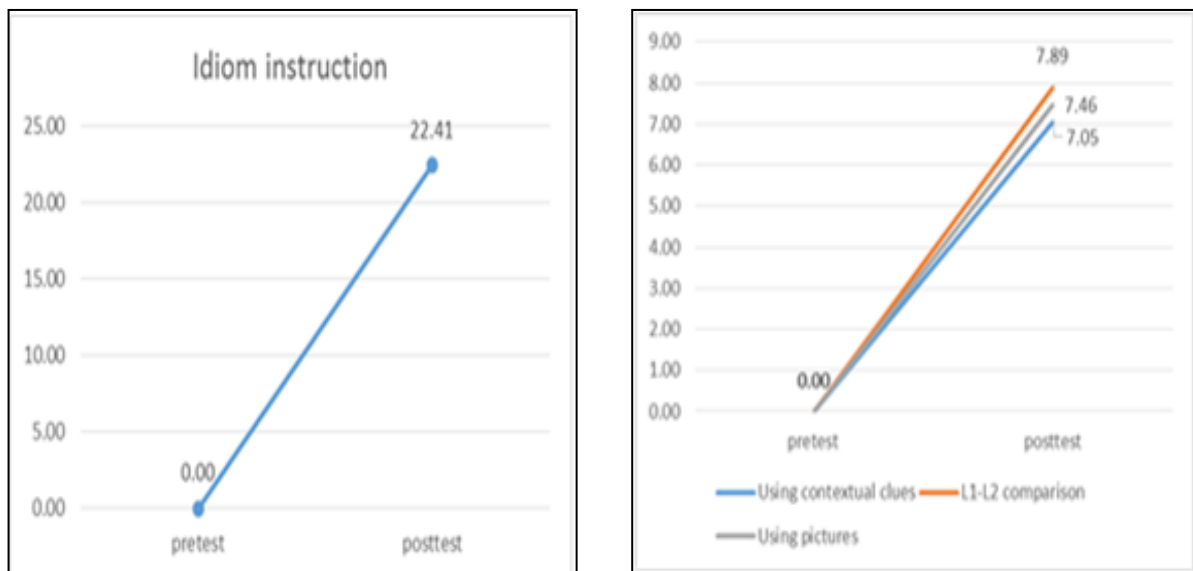


Figure 1: The effects of idiom instruction and separate technique on idiom knowledge measured by IKT

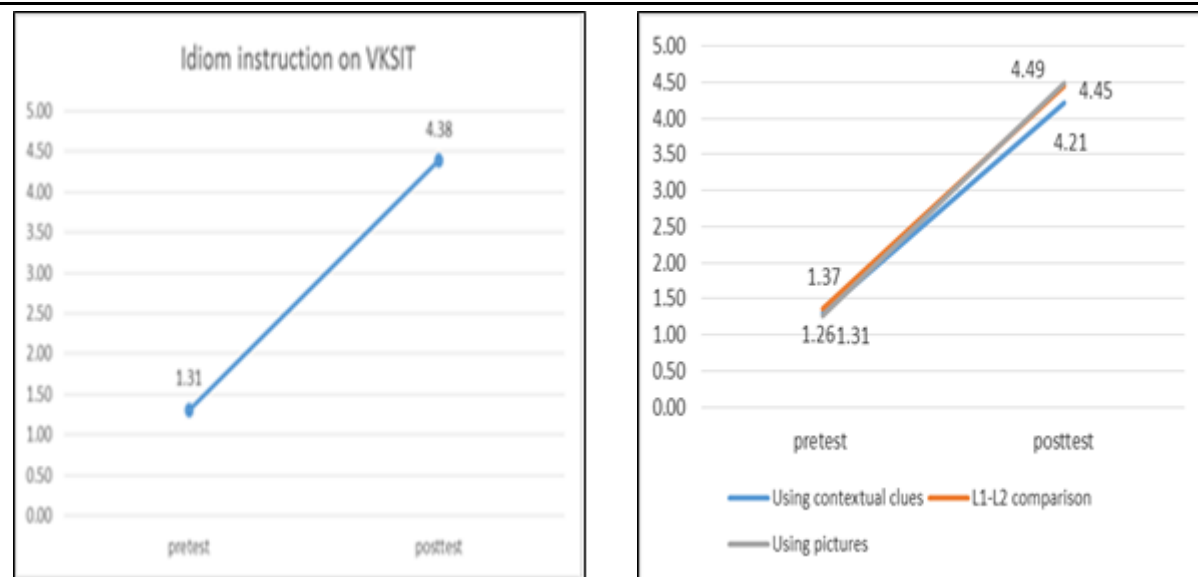


Figure 2: The effects of idiom instruction and separate technique on idiom knowledge measured by VKSIT

In general, the data analysis show that the EFL Vietnamese teenage learners retained knowledge of the idioms as a result of the experiment. This finding is in line with previous studies like Buckingham (2006); Canagarajah (2006); Cooper (1999); Fotovatnia & Khaki (2012); Lennon (1998); Tran (2012); Vasiljevic (2011); Wray (2000); Zyzik (2009). The first research question which asked whether there was any significant effect of idiom instruction on learning idioms, was answered with a definitely positive result.

Regarding the positive effect of pictures, it was likely that pictures added and enhanced the learner's understanding of meaning as well as the form of the idiom in the memory. This was also supported by Plass, Chun, Mayer & Leutner, (1998) on word learning, and it was in line with the generative theory of multimedia teaching (Mayer, 1997, 2001). Mayer (2005b) believes that human beings normally represent and manipulate knowledge through two channels: a visual-pictorial and an auditory-verbal. Cognitively, L2 learners may be engaged in active processing within the channels which includes selecting idioms relevant to pictures, organizing, and integrating them together or with the available mental knowledge. Furthermore, Mayer (2005b), along with Al-Seghayer (2001), Chun and Plass (1996), Yeh and Wang, (2003), and Yoshii and Flaitz (2002), shows that the participants performed the best when both visual and textual information was selected.

Regarding advantages of contextual clues, the technique might enable learners to process idioms used in written and spoken language in specific contexts better by internalizing and assimilating the text. Context allows learners to guess in order to complete the task of word-meaning inference (Peters, 2007; Hamada, 2009, Riazi & Babaei, 2008). This was completed by taking the entire sentence, the whole text and by understanding the immediate text into consideration (Riazi & Babaei, 2008). Yule (1996) points out that the surrounding co-text has a strong effect on learners' thinking of word meanings. Brown (2001) argued that context-reduced language cannot provide the

language learner with a rich source of contexts. Also, Schouten-van Parreren (1985), Hastrup (1991) and Mondria (1996) believe that the context aids the learner to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words correctly and leads to better retention. Another sensible explanation supporting the retention effect of using contextual clues is related to deep processing where the unknown words as idioms, their meanings, and the context, the background knowledge of the learner are established in relation to their cooperation (Anderson, 1990; Ellis, 1995; and Hulstijn, 2001). According to Nation (2001), idiom learning can be considered as an integral part of vocabulary learning. However, compared to the learning of vocabulary or grammatical structures, learning idioms is a hard task for the EFL learners. The contextual clues in extended contexts provide the learner with enough information to make associations between the unfamiliar idioms and the contexts within which they occur. This association helps the learner to remember the meanings of the idioms longer.

In addition to that, L1-L2 comparison added values to the participants' retention of idioms in the current study, which was found the most effective technique as measured by IKT posttest. This demonstrates the equivalent idioms in L1 played the enormous role in the learners' memorizing L2 idioms. This is similar to Irujo (1986) in that L1 knowledge added great assistance to L2 learners in comprehending identical and similar idioms in L1 equivalents. Taki and Namy Soghady (2013) also found that L1 translation was the most favored of EFL learners' strategy in decoding similar, identical and different types of idioms.

In brief, idiom instruction in general, and the use of pictures, contextual clues and L1- L2 comparison in particular had the positive effects on teenage learners' retention of idiom knowledge. The following part explores the answer for the second research question.

4.2 Learners' Attitudes towards Idiom Instruction

Explanatory data analysis from the interviews showed that the majority of learners (94.4%) initially had a tendency to perceive the importance of idiom learning. They explained their positive attitudes to idiom learning by integrating 4 main skills, and that helped them enhance their academic English as well as widen their range of vocabulary. Also, they found it easier and more effective to communicate in English.

Regarding the techniques applied, there was a disparity in learners' favored techniques. The data showed that 50 % of the interviewees preferred using pictures. This is aligned with the results in the greatest improvement reported in VKSIT sub-posttests. The data revealed that 5 out of 18 participants favored the use of contextual clues for the reason that this technique helped them to remember and use the idioms better. Meanwhile, L1-L2 comparison was the least preferred (4 out of 18). This technique helped them easily relate to the first language and link to their prior knowledge where idioms are used. It was faster for them to achieve the knowledge and use idioms more accurately as they had a clear understanding of meaning and use which are equivalent in L1.

On the other hand, there were also difficulties encountered by learners. The lack of familiarity to idiom learning especially in EFL context created obstacles. This is due to

the nature of their figurative meanings, for example, "*those words (part of figurative idioms) have no relation to the meaning of the idiom*" (James, 13 years). In addition to this, looming pictures would be hard for students to guess the meaning and use of idioms if the teachers did not provide careful explanations. According to the students, they hardly found similar word-choice idioms both in form and meaning.

Several methods were suggested and provided by the learners themselves. First, in order to have longer retention of idioms, contexts where idioms are utilized should be created. Learners suggested taking notes about idioms encountered in reading texts or listening audios, and search for new idioms, or practice speaking more regularly with foreigners. They also suggested writing the idioms down several times in order to avoid mistakes in spelling. They further asked for visual illustrations or games to review idiom knowledge. Moreover, the data of classroom observations indicated that students were disciplined, interested in learning idioms familiar with them in Vietnamese, such as 'take it or leave it', and 'add fuel into fire'. They were motivated and participated in classroom activities because they had never learned idioms before; some tried to use them in class for fun. The majority of them might understand the meanings of idioms they learned and used them correctly.

On the contrary, weaknesses were found regarding three students' complaints about no new practice activities for idiom production. Two students found idioms hard to remember as they focused on translating them literally. Besides, a few learners got bored because they had to study a lot with full schedules in schools and private centers. Some idioms were not explained in Vietnamese, so it was also difficult for them to infer and memorize, e.g., *all of sudden, on my plate*. Sometimes, the class was noisy because of the discussing activity which might cause problems for some students to concentrate. Also, the lack of authentic context to create sentences and conversations was a noticeable point.

To conclude, the results from interviews and classroom observations illustrated that these particular participants expressed the positive attitudes towards idiom instruction. This was reinforced by previous studies of Asri et al. (2017), Mohammadi & Enayati (2018), Nguyen et al. (2014), Sayili et al. (2016). Specifically, the interviewees desired and enjoyed learning idioms by using pictures for elicitation. The result also supports the possibility of visual aids. Using contextual clues and L1-L2 comparison were less interested; however, their effects on students' retention of idiom knowledge were noticeable.

5. Suggestions and Conclusion

The present research, in line with the literature, indicates idiom instruction has positive effects and that students are inspired, interested, satisfied and willing to learn idioms. Using pictures is most favored by learners in shorter term while comparing idioms in L1 and L2, the least favored, was the most valuable in the longer term retention. This suggests the review of the target language lessons, particularly in all features of idiom

knowledge should be considered, as supported by Karpicke (2012); Karpicke & Roediger (2007); McDaniel, Howard, & Einstein (2009).

Difficulties encountered in learning idioms by learners added several suggestions. First, the issue of EFL context where idioms are rarely taught as well as the lack of English environment caused learners not to acknowledge the role of idiom learning. Also, they found difficulties in getting familiar with the figurative meanings instead of the literal meaning. In order to enhance their awareness and knowledge of idioms, more and more opportunities for English practices and use should be created together with more idiom instruction and practice. Second, teachers should be careful in picture selection to promote learning and avoid looming pictures which may cause confusion and hinder idiom acquisition. Teachers' language choices in instructions, explanations and giving examples would also be greatly essential in promoting learners' understandings of idioms. Both the instructions and choice of idioms should be relevant to with learners' level of proficiency. For pre intermediate teenage learners, idioms contain similar or identical words in both first and second language, which may enhance learners' motivation. It was recommended that a combination of more than one technique in teaching like pictures and games, pictures and songs or contextual clues and L1-L2 comparison may intensify the learners' positive attitudes and effects on learning.

The research had several limitations. The experiment was conducted in a short term of 12 weeks, and the delayed posttest was not organized to observe the longer retention of idioms. The time of applying each technique was limited, so longer treatments for each method need to be conducted for assurance of effects. Due to the small convenient sampling, the findings could not be generalized; thus, further research should focus on a larger sample and involve other age groups of participants. Despite these admitted limitations, the current research has contributed further understanding of the effect of idiom instruction with a focus on EFL teenage learners with a lower proficiency level. The value of the study is of useful reference to practitioners in other similar contexts.

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Appendix 1: Idiom Knowledge Test (IKT) posttest

Idiom Test (IKT- Posttest)

(Duration: 30 minutes)

Write ONE or TWO words to complete the idioms based on their meaning in the situations.

Example: He could have bought that stock last week at half the current price. He really **missed ...the boat...**

1. It was a Sunday night and **all of a**the dogs came howling and yelping back to their masters.
2. As a general.....**of thumb**, children this age should not spend more than one hour on homework.
3. When faced in a situation where you **have** whether to buy a quality and expensive helmet or a so-so but cheap one, then choose the first option.
4. I don't know for sure, but **off**, **of my head** I'd say that renting a two-bedroom apartment would cost about a thousand dollars a week.
5. So, all my knowledge of art came from the lesson **bits and**in the late hours of the morning.
6. I'll be able to install this new program and run it in five minutes. It is **plug and**
7. I usually **shoot from**but honestly make other people angry sometimes.
8. I **bend over** to make him happy, but he was never satisfied with what I did for him.
9. We're tired of all the polite words. Just **lay it on** for us.
10. Don't worry you are allowed to**your mind** in front of your boss.
11. A: Can you install this software, Daniel?
B: No, it is not just a **piece of**
12. Please don't **to the fire**, she is already unhappy and disappointed.
13. He offered the cash and said **take it or**and the bank eventually came back and said it would accept the cash.
14. Don't worry about that mistake anymore. It is now **water under**
15. That was a good business. We both got what we wanted most. It was a**situation**.
16. This job has had problems from the beginning. It's a **pain in a**
17. We're **down to**on this project so we have to work overtime for sure.
18. Unexpectedly, the company is growing too fast. I'm wondering if they **have the**to manage the changes.
19. If you cut back your hours to have more free time for your family, you'll earn less. It's a

20. If you were **in her**what would you do?
21. I decided to **take the bull by**and talk to the president about his mistreatment towards workers.
22. It is not **my cup** but this girl is very nice and polite.
23. I have my own theories about this, but I decided that to really **get to****of things**, I had to consult an expert.
24. Her was a performance **out of**but one that she certainly can repeat again as he grows in confidence.
25. Most people may be unsure about where to **draw the**privacy and security, but at least the issue is being brought to their attention.
26. That man was really **in my**I didn't like him. He stood very close and was very impolite.
27. He is **between a rock and a**If he does what his mother wants, his wife will be angry.
28. Don't **put all your eggs in** It's less risky to have more than one plan.
29. They reward leaders who **push the** catalyze action, and get stuff done.
30. We have enough **on our**right now. We shouldn't care about that. That is their responsibility.
-The end!

Appendix 2: VKSIT- sub-pretest 1

Họ và tên: _____ Nam _____ Nữ _____

Đối với mỗi thành ngữ trong bảng dưới đây, bạn hãy tự đánh giá mức độ hiểu biết của mình bằng cách khoanh tròn một con số. Nếu chọn mức 3,4,5 bạn vui lòng điền thêm thông tin vào ô trống theo chỉ dẫn.

Thí dụ: 'beat about the bush'

1. Tôi chưa từng thấy thành ngữ này.
2. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này, nhưng không biết nghĩa gì.
3. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này. Tôi đoán nó nghĩa là _____ . (điền từ đồng nghĩa, nghĩa tiếng Anh, hoặc tiếng Việt)
4. Tôi biết thành ngữ này. Nó nghĩa là _____ . (điền từ đồng nghĩa, nghĩa tiếng Anh, hoặc tiếng Việt)
5. ● Thành ngữ này nghĩa là: not talk about what is important (hoặc) nói vòng vo. (điền từ đồng nghĩa, nghĩa tiếng Anh, hoặc tiếng Việt)

Câu ví dụ là (hãy cho câu ví dụ): Don't beat about the bush. What do you want say?

Thành ngữ	Mức độ
1. all of a sudden	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tôi chưa từng thấy thành ngữ này. 2. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này, nhưng không biết nghĩa gì. 3. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này. Tôi đoán nó nghĩa là _____ 4. Tôi biết thành ngữ này. Nó nghĩa là _____. 5. Thành ngữ này nghĩa là _____. <p>Câu ví dụ là (hãy cho câu ví dụ): _____</p>
2. a rule of thumb	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tôi chưa từng thấy thành ngữ này. 2. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này, nhưng không biết nghĩa gì. 3. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này. Tôi đoán nó nghĩa là _____ 4. Tôi biết thành ngữ này. Nó nghĩa là _____. 5. Thành ngữ này nghĩa là _____. <p>Câu ví dụ là (hãy cho câu ví dụ): _____</p>
3. off the top of one's head	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tôi chưa từng thấy thành ngữ này. 2. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này, nhưng không biết nghĩa gì. 3. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này. Tôi đoán nó nghĩa là _____ 4. Tôi biết thành ngữ này. Nó nghĩa là _____. 5. Thành ngữ này nghĩa là _____. <p>Câu ví dụ là (hãy cho câu ví dụ): _____</p>
4. make up one's mind	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tôi chưa từng thấy thành ngữ này. 2. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này, nhưng không biết nghĩa gì. 3. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này. Tôi đoán nó nghĩa là _____ 4. Tôi biết thành ngữ này. Nó nghĩa là _____. 5. Thành ngữ này nghĩa là _____.

	Câu ví dụ là (hãy cho câu ví dụ): _____
5. plug and play	<p>1. Tôi chưa từng thấy thành ngữ này.</p> <p>2. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này, nhưng không biết nghĩa gì.</p> <p>3. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này. Tôi đoán nó nghĩa là _____</p> <p>4. Tôi biết thành ngữ này. Nó nghĩa là _____.</p> <p>5. Thành ngữ này nghĩa là _____.</p> <p>Câu ví dụ là (hãy cho câu ví dụ): _____</p>
6. bits and pieces	<p>1. Tôi chưa từng thấy thành ngữ này.</p> <p>2. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này, nhưng không biết nghĩa gì.</p> <p>3. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này. Tôi đoán nó nghĩa là _____</p> <p>4. Tôi biết thành ngữ này. Nó nghĩa là _____.</p> <p>5. Thành ngữ này nghĩa là _____.</p> <p>Câu ví dụ là (hãy cho câu ví dụ): _____</p>
7. have second thoughts	<p>1. Tôi chưa từng thấy thành ngữ này.</p> <p>2. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này, nhưng không biết nghĩa gì.</p> <p>3. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này. Tôi đoán nó nghĩa là _____</p> <p>4. Tôi biết thành ngữ này. Nó nghĩa là _____.</p> <p>5. Thành ngữ này nghĩa là _____.</p> <p>Câu ví dụ là (hãy cho câu ví dụ): _____</p>
8. shoot from the hip	<p>1. Tôi chưa từng thấy thành ngữ này.</p> <p>2. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này, nhưng không biết nghĩa gì.</p> <p>3. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này. Tôi đoán nó nghĩa là _____</p> <p>4. Tôi biết thành ngữ này. Nó nghĩa là _____.</p> <p>5. Thành ngữ này nghĩa là _____.</p> <p>Câu ví dụ là (hãy cho câu ví dụ): _____</p>
9. bend over backwards	<p>1. Tôi chưa từng thấy thành ngữ này.</p> <p>2. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này, nhưng không biết nghĩa gì.</p> <p>3. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này. Tôi đoán nó nghĩa là _____</p> <p>4. Tôi biết thành ngữ này. Nó nghĩa là _____.</p> <p>5. Thành ngữ này nghĩa là _____.</p> <p>Câu ví dụ là (hãy cho câu ví dụ): _____</p>
10. lay it on the line	<p>1. Tôi chưa từng thấy thành ngữ này.</p> <p>2. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này, nhưng không biết nghĩa gì.</p> <p>3. Tôi đã từng thấy qua thành ngữ này. Tôi đoán nó nghĩa là _____</p> <p>4. Tôi biết thành ngữ này. Nó nghĩa là _____.</p> <p>5. Thành ngữ này nghĩa là _____.</p> <p>Câu ví dụ là (hãy cho câu ví dụ): _____</p>

Appendix 3

Lesson Plan 1: Idiom Instruction – Using Contextual Clues

Presenting- Practicing- Producing (Ppp)

Objective: by the end of the lesson, students (sts) are able to gain knowledge of 5 idioms.

Stage	Activities	Procedures	Note
Presenting (10')	A1. Guessing the meaning of idioms from contexts. A2. Presenting: form+ meaning+ use	First, T sets the scene about the importance of learning idioms. Deliver handouts to sts. Ask students to do activity 1. Show 5 contextual clues. Then ask sts to guess the meaning of 5 idioms. Check the meanings of idioms to the contexts above. Then ask sts to complete activity 2. Matching the meanings to idioms. Check and give examples. Also invite sts to incorporate. Examples: 1. A: All of a sudden, yesterday my mom was angry on me. I did not know why B: maybe, your teacher called her to complain about you. Ha-ha. 2. If you don't know how to do this homework. A good rule of thumb is to ask your teacher. 3. Jerry likes to shoot from the hip, which makes some people uncomfortable because he's very direct. 4. Jerry said he was willing to bend over backwards and work very hard to please his boss.	Meaningful learning principle. Check and give feedback. T-S interaction.
Practicing (10')	A3. Asking sts to fill in the sentences with appropriate idioms.	T already presented the meaning, form, and use. Now ask sts to practice using idioms. sts can think and work in 5 minutes and then give their opinions. T check and encourage them.	Encouraging. Check and give feedback.
Producing (10')	A4. Ask sts to work in pairs and create conversations using idioms.	This step is to ask sts to apply idioms and produce the language. Sts work in pair to enhance interaction. Then sts role play in pair. T and other sts give feedback.	S-S interaction Homewok

		End the lesson, T reminds for further practices at home of 5 idioms in new sentences.	
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A1 (5'): Read the sentences and guess the meaning of idioms.

1. Why do some women, **all of the sudden**, stop replying to men's texts? Maybe she want to say "I'm not interested in you anymore".
2. The first conversation is taking place between a father and son.
Person 1: "I have passed my driving test."
Person 2: "Well done but you must remember to drive safely."
Person 1: "I will, I have a **rule of thumb** that I do not drive faster than 50km/h."
3. A: "How much can we expect to earn this quarter?"
B: "**Off the top of my head**, it should be around \$200,000, but I'll have to check the figures when I get to the office."
4. I'm not sure what kind of ice-cream I want—let me **make up my mind** and then tell you.
5. The wireless is easy to use thanks to the **plug and play** USB adapter and the battery easily lasted enough for a few marathon sessions before needing a good charge.

A2 (5'): Match the idioms with the meanings:

Idioms	Meanings
1. all of the sudden (adv) E	A. a practical method of doing or measuring something
2. a rule of thumb (n) A	B. relating to software or devices that are intended to work perfectly when first used or connected
3. off the top of my head (adv) C	C. recall / speak something without preparation
4. make up my mind (v) D	D. to decide what to choose
5. plug and play (adj) B	E. very <u>quickly</u> , <u>not expected or planned</u>

A3 (5'): fill in the blanks with correct idioms:

1. If you are struggling with the software, a good is to restart the computer.
2. Customers want products that is and they can use straight out of the box.
3. A: "Which one do you like best?"
B: "I don't know – I can't"
4. A: "What's the capital of Malaysia?"
B: "..... I don't know , but I could go and look it up".
5. It seemed to happen - I felt dizzy and lost all of my money.

A4 (10'): Work in pair. Create a conversation using one of the idioms.

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Handout 1

A1 (5'): Read the sentences and guess the meaning of idioms.

1. Why do some women, **all of the sudden**, stop replying to men's texts? Maybe she want to say "I'm not interested in you anymore".
2. The first conversation is taking place between a father and son.
Person 1: "I have passed my driving test."
Person 2: "Well done but you must remember to drive safely."
Person 1: "I will, I have **a rule of thumb** that I do not drive faster than 50km/h."
3. A: "How much can we expect to earn this quarter?"
B: "**Off the top of my head**, it should be around \$200,000, but I'll have to check the figures when I get to the office."
4. I'm not sure what kind of ice-cream I want—let me **make up my mind** and then tell you.
5. The wireless is easy to use thanks to the **plug and play** USB adapter and the battery easily lasted enough for a few marathon sessions before needing a good charge.

A2 (5'): Match the idioms with the meanings:

Idioms	Meanings
6. all of the sudden (adv)	F. a practical method of doing or measuring something
7. a rule of thumb (n)	G. relating to software or devices that are intended to work perfectly when first used or connected
8. off the top of my head (adv)	H. recall / speak something without preparation
9. make up my mind (v)	I. to decide what to choose
10. plug and play (adj)	J. very <u>quickly, not expected or planned</u>

A3 (5'): fill in the blanks with correct idioms:

1. If you are struggling with the software, a goodis to restart the computer.
2. Customers want products that is and they can use straight out of the box.
3. A: "Which one do you like best?"
B: "I don't know – I can't"
4. A: "What's the capital of Malaysia?"
B: "..... I don't know , but I could go and look it up".
5. It seemed to happen - I felt dizzy and lost all of my money.

A4 (10'): Work in pair. Create a conversation using one of the idioms.

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