



## DEVELOPING STUDENTS' IDIOMATIC COMPETENCE: APPROACHES AND STRATEGIES

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**Abstract:** Idiomatic competence is a crucial part of foreign language proficiency, since idioms play a key role in the speech naturalness, the understanding of texts. However, most students may face a significant challenge while mastering idiomatic expressions. The aim of this article is to consider methods and approaches for improving students' idiomatic competence, taking into consideration cognitive and communication theories. This article analyzes contextual method, visualization, as well as interactive methods that can contribute to the successful development of idioms and their active use in real life.

**Key words:** idiomatic competence, teaching methods, context, visualization, cultural context, active use.

### INTRODUCTION

Idioms, being a vital part of any language, are fixed phrases whose meaning cannot be figured out from the literal meaning of their constituent words. Mastering idioms demands not only knowledge of vocabulary, but also the cultural context, as well as the ability to use these expressions in real life situations. Efficient development of students' idiomatic competence is a significant aspect of teaching foreign languages, since mastery of idioms considerably increases the level of communicative competence and contributes to a deeper understanding of the culture of native speakers.

Recent studies, such as the works of M. V. Grigorieva [ M. V. Grigorieva 2013] and S. A. Kucharenko [S. A. Kucharenko 2014] emphasize the role of using a variety of techniques and approaches aimed at improving students' skills in understanding



and applying idioms in real communicative situations. This article discusses the primary methods for upgrading students' idiomatic competence, which ensure their skill in idiomatic language and the use of these expressions in common speech.

### ***Definition of idiomatic competence***

Idiomatic competence refers to the ability to understand and use idioms appropriately and accurately in a variety of sociocultural contexts, in a manner similar to that of native speakers, and with the least amount of mental effort. [Liontas 1999] This is a complex skill that involves not only knowledge of the meanings of idioms, but also knowing how to use them correctly in communication, recognizing their cultural specifics as well as being aware of the context in which they may be appropriate.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Idiomatic competence is a major part of language competence, however, unlike traditional vocabulary, idioms require deeper cultural and cognitive training. The challenge is that the proper use of idioms requires knowledge not only of their meanings, but also an awareness of the cultural and sociolinguistic factors that affect their use.

### ***The role of cultural context in learning idioms***

According to cognitive linguistics, idioms are closely associated to metaphorical concepts and cultural patterns. To gain fluency in idiomatic speech, it is necessary not only to comprehend the literal meaning of expressions, but also to be aware of the cultural background in which they are used. The work of Lakoff and Johnson highlights that idioms are not only linguistic units, but also a reflection of the specific thinking and perception of the world of native speakers. [Lakoff and Johnson 1980]

### ***Methods for improving students' idiomatic competence***



*Contextual method.* In this method the context is the basis for the effective development and use of idioms, since knowledge of the meanings of expressions is not always enough for their proper use. It is essential that students can learn idioms in real communication contexts, which can play a role in not only for memorization, but also to the formation of skills while using them in speech. Using texts, dialogues, different exercises and role plays engages students to see idioms in the context of real communication. Take an example of the idiom “*to hit the book*”, students might engage in a dialogue in which a student who tries to study hard. Contextual exercises can also involve analysis of authentic materials in particular, films, videos, songs, and literary works, which serve students to master idioms in a natural cultural context. It provides not only understanding, but also to the constant use of idioms in daily life.

*Visualization.* The visualization method is an impactful tool that helps students understand and remember idioms better. Researches show that visual images play an important role in the process of memorizing and perceiving language [Grigorieva, 2013]. Making strong associations with images or pictures helps students connect abstract idioms with specific situations, making them easier to understand and learn.

For example, for the idiom “*spill the beans*”, we can use an image of a person who is accidentally spilling beans, which illustrates “giving away information”. Then students can analyze in what context such a situation might be reflected, which promotes better comprehension of the phrase. Besides that, the use of multimedia such as animation and videos also promotes effective teaching of idioms by providing students with the opportunity to see them in action.

*Using authentic materials.* Immersion in authentic materials such as films, books, songs and news is a crucial method for improving idiomatic competence. This approach allows students not only to become familiar with idioms, but also to understand their cultural meaning, which contributes to a deeper understanding of the language. Authentic materials help students see how idioms function in real life, in everyday communication situations. Take an example of watching films where



idioms are actively used allows students to realize when and why they are used, as well as what emotions and associations they arouse in native speakers.

*Interactive methods: games and exercises.* These methods such as role plays, quizzes and other exercises also play an essential role in developing idiomatic competence. They encourage students to actively engage in the learning process, which helps them not only memorize idioms, but also use them in real-life situations. For instance, in a role play, a student might take on the role of “*cold fish*” who is emotionally distant or unfeeling. In contrast, “*A heart of gold person*” is very kind with generous nature. This approach helps students develop real-world communication skills and teaches them to use idioms in non-standard but real-life situations.

### ***Practical significance of methods for teaching idioms***

The effectiveness of various methods of teaching idioms has been confirmed in a number of studies, including the work of Kucharenko, where the use of contextual and visualization methods in teaching idioms was analyzed using the example of foreign language students. The results showed that students who use authentic materials and actively participate in interactive exercises learn idioms much faster and begin to use them in real communicative situations. [ Kucharenko 2014]

## **CONCLUSION**

Developing students' idiomatic competence requires the use of comprehensive methods that involve contextual approaches, visualization, using authentic materials, and active use of idioms in real-life situations. These methods help not only for improving the comprehending idiomatic expressions, but also upgrading the skills of their active use, which is the key to successful mastery of a foreign language. In the future, further research in this area is needed to identify new effective methods and strategies that can help students improve their idiomatic competence and increase their language proficiency.





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