



ENGLISH IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN EFL CLASSROOM THROUGH MOVIES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract

This paper investigates the use of movies in teaching idiomatic expressions within English Language Teaching (ELT), focusing on both challenges and opportunities. Using a library-based research methodology, the study synthesizes findings from existing literature to address key questions about the primary challenges, benefits, and best practices associated with this teaching approach. The analysis identifies cultural barriers, contextual complexity, and student engagement as significant challenges. Conversely, movies enhance comprehension and retention, provide cultural enrichment, improve listening and speaking skills, and encourage autonomous learning. The findings suggest that movies, when carefully selected and appropriately used, can be a powerful tool in ELT, offering a dynamic and effective method for teaching idiomatic expressions. This study provides practical recommendations for educators on integrating movies into their teaching strategies to maximize educational outcomes.

Keywords: English idiomatic expressions, ELT classrooms, challenges and opportunities, movies in education

INTRODUCTION

Idiomatic expressions in English play a pivotal role in both everyday conversations and literary contexts, enriching the language with layers of cultural and historical significance. Moreover, those expressions help the language users to emphasize their judgement or explanation livelier also help people to communicate a great deal of information in just a few words or phrases. Serving as linguistics shortcuts, the idiomatic phrases used can be somewhat comprehensible for both the native speakers and the language learners. In addition, the EFL learners also encounter idiomatic expressions in any media used for instance, newspaper, TV shows or series, announcement board, social media and so forth while learning and practicing the language. As it is inseparably integrated process to acquire the real interpretation of the language used, the EFL learners get to be familiarized with it. Needless to say, the meaning of those idiomatic expressions does not always make sense if it literally translated or through word-by-word translation. Therefore, mastery of these expressions signifies a high level of language proficiency, as it requires not only linguistic knowledge but also cultural understanding (Kövecses, 2010)

In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), idiomatic expressions are often challenging for learners due to their non-literal nature and cultural specificity. To illustrate, idioms such as "kick the bucket" (meaning to die) or "let the cat out of the bag" (meaning to reveal a secret) whose meanings cannot be inferred from the literal definitions of the words within them, play a crucial role in mastering any language also add color and cultural depth to communication. However, their acquisition is essential for achieving fluency and understanding native speakers in real-life situations. As Liu (2017) points out, idioms are pervasive in everyday language use, appearing frequently in both spoken and written English. Thus, teaching idiomatic expressions can significantly enhance learners' communicative competence and cultural literacy.

Movies offer a rich resource for language learning, providing authentic contexts where idiomatic expressions are used naturally. They combine visual, auditory, and contextual cues that help learners grasp the meanings and usages of idioms more effectively. According to Ismaili (2013), films can bridge the gap between the classroom and real-world language use, making the learning process more engaging and relevant. This paper explores the challenges and opportunities of using movies to teach idiomatic expressions in ELT. It aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the benefits and limitations of this approach, supported by theoretical insights and practical strategies for effective implementation.

Idiomatic expressions have long been recognized as a challenging yet essential component of language learning. Kövecses (2010) highlights that idioms are integral to achieving native-like fluency and understanding the subtleties of a language. The cognitive load required to learn idiomatic expressions is significant, as it involves

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not only memorizing phrases but also understanding their metaphorical meanings and cultural connotations (Boers, 2013). Traditional ELT methodologies often overlook the importance of idiomatic expressions, focusing instead on grammar and vocabulary. However, modern approaches increasingly emphasize the need to integrate idioms into language instruction. Vasiljevic (2015) argues that teaching idioms within meaningful contexts, such as through storytelling or dialogue, can enhance learners' ability to comprehend and use them appropriately.

The use of movies in ELT has gained traction as a method to provide authentic language input and cultural exposure. Ismaili (2013) notes that films offer a dynamic and engaging medium for presenting idiomatic expressions in context. Previous studies, such as those by Li et al. (2015), have shown that movies can improve listening comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and cultural awareness among language learners. Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input for language acquisition. Movies provide a rich source of such input, with idiomatic expressions embedded in authentic dialogues. This exposure helps learners internalize the language naturally and contextually.

Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory posits that language learning is a social process, mediated by interaction and cultural tools. Movies serve as a cultural tool, offering learners the opportunity to engage with the language in socially and culturally rich contexts. Multimodal learning involves using multiple modes of communication, such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic, to enhance understanding and retention. According to Mayer (2014), combining different modes can lead to deeper learning and better retention of information. In the context of ELT, movies are a prime example of multimodal learning resources. They provide visual and auditory stimuli that can reinforce language input and facilitate the acquisition of idiomatic expressions. The contextual cues provided by movies help learners infer meanings and usages of idioms more effectively than isolated text-based instruction (Sharma & Barret, 2017).

In conclusion, idiomatic expressions are essential for achieving fluency and understanding in English, yet they pose significant challenges due to their non-literal nature and cultural specificity. Movies offer a rich and engaging medium for teaching these expressions, providing authentic contexts that enhance comprehension and retention. This paper aims to explore the challenges and opportunities of using movies in ELT to teach idiomatic expressions, offering theoretical insights and practical strategies for effective implementation. By integrating movies into the language learning process, educators can provide learners with the tools they need to navigate the complexities of idiomatic language and achieve greater communicative competence.

METHOD

This study employs a library-based research methodology, which involves the systematic collection, review, and analysis of existing literature, journal articles, books, and other academic resources to explore the use of movies in teaching idiomatic expressions in ELT. Library-based research is recognized for its ability to provide comprehensive insights and a robust theoretical foundation by synthesizing findings from diverse sources (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). The research is guided by key questions: What are the primary challenges in teaching idiomatic expressions through movies? What benefits and opportunities do movies offer in this context? What are the best practices and successful implementations of using movies to teach idioms in different educational settings? Addressing these questions aims to provide a thorough understanding of the effectiveness and practicality of using movies in ELT.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges in Teaching Idiomatic Expressions through Movies

Cultural Context and Background Knowledge

One of the primary challenges in teaching idiomatic expressions through movies is the necessity of cultural context and background knowledge. Idioms are deeply embedded in the cultural and historical fabric of a language, often reflecting unique cultural references, historical events, and societal norms. For learners, especially those from different cultural backgrounds, understanding these references can be quite challenging. Without sufficient cultural knowledge, learners may find it difficult to comprehend the full meaning and appropriate usage of idiomatic expressions, even when they are presented in context within movies (Soltani & Soori, 2015).

To illustrate, the idiom "spill the beans" might be confusing to learners without the cultural background that explains its origin related to revealing secrets. Movies can provide some context, but if the cultural or historical references are obscure or not well-explained, learners may still struggle. Additionally, movies often contain cultural nuances, humor, and colloquialisms that require a deep understanding of the culture to fully appreciate and understand the idiomatic expressions used (Tabatabaei & Gahroei, 2011).



Complexity and Ambiguity of Idiomatic Expressions

Idiomatic expressions often have multiple meanings and usages, which can be confusing for learners. An idiom like "break the ice" can mean initiating conversation in one context, while in another, it might refer to starting a project. This variability makes it difficult for learners to understand the precise meaning and appropriate context for each usage. Movies, while providing rich examples, can also introduce idioms in diverse contexts that might be overwhelming for learners to parse (Ashcroft et al., 2018).

Idiomatic expressions are highly context-dependent, and their meanings can shift based on the situation in which they are used. In movies, idioms appear in dynamic and varied contexts, which can be challenging for learners to interpret correctly. For instance, the idiom "to be in hot water" could be used in a professional setting in one movie and a personal one in another, each carrying slightly different connotations. This contextual dependence requires learners to have advanced comprehension skills and the ability to infer meaning from surrounding dialogue and situations (Mardani & Najmabadi, 2016).

Student Engagement and Motivation

Maintaining student engagement and motivation is a significant challenge when teaching idiomatic expressions through movies. While movies are generally engaging, their effectiveness can wane if learners are not interested in the film's genre or content. A movie that captivates one group of students might bore another, leading to disengagement. For instance, action movies might be appealing to some learners, while others might prefer dramas or comedies. Selecting movies that cater to diverse interests is crucial but challenging (Basol & Kartal, 2019).

Another point is related to cognitive overload. Movies provide a wealth of linguistic input, including idiomatic expressions, cultural references, and complex dialogues. However, this abundance of information can lead to cognitive overload, particularly for learners at lower proficiency levels. When students are overwhelmed by too many new idioms and cultural nuances at once, their motivation to learn can decrease. It becomes essential to balance the richness of movies with the learners' capacity to process and retain new information effectively (Kim, 2018).

Opportunities and Benefits in Teaching Idiomatic Expressions through Movies

Enhanced Comprehension and Retention

Movies provide a combination of visual and auditory stimuli that significantly enhance the learning experience. Visual cues, such as facial expressions, body language, and contextual settings, help learners infer the meanings of idiomatic expressions more effectively. Auditory reinforcement, including tone, pitch, and rhythm, further aids in understanding and remembering these expressions. This multimodal approach aligns with Mayer's (2014) theory of multimedia learning, which posits that learners understand and retain information better when it is presented through multiple channels.

Movies also offer authentic and varied contexts for idiomatic expressions, which helps learners understand how these expressions are used in real-life situations. Unlike traditional teaching methods that often present idioms in isolation, movies provide rich contextual backgrounds that show idioms in action. This contextual learning helps students grasp the nuances of idiomatic expressions, making them more likely to use them correctly in their own speech. According to Ismaili (2013), this real-world application is crucial for deep learning and long-term retention.

Cultural Enrichment

Movies are a window into different cultures, providing learners with exposure to diverse ways of life, social norms, and linguistic nuances. By watching films from various English-speaking countries, students encounter a wide range of idiomatic expressions and their uses in different cultural contexts. This exposure helps learners understand how idioms are influenced by cultural and societal factors, enhancing their overall language competence (Jurkovic, 2016).

Learning idiomatic expressions through movies promotes cultural awareness and sensitivity. It helps students appreciate the cultural richness behind the language and understand the subtleties that shape communication in different cultures. This cultural immersion fosters empathy and respect for diversity, essential skills in today's globalized world. As students become more aware of cultural differences, they develop a deeper understanding of the idiomatic expressions and the contexts in which they are used (Yaseen & Shakir, 2015).

A high school in Helsinki introduced movies in their ESL program to enhance students' idiomatic knowledge and cultural awareness. Teachers used films like "Dead Poets Society" and "Forrest Gump" to illustrate various idioms and cultural contexts. Activities included pre-viewing discussions, idiom identification tasks during



viewing, and post-viewing projects. Students showed significant improvement in understanding and using idiomatic expressions. They also developed a deeper appreciation of cultural nuances. Effective strategies included pre-teaching key idioms, using subtitles to aid comprehension, and engaging students in creative projects related to the movie's themes (Jurkovic, 2016).

Improved Listening and Speaking Skills

Movies provide authentic language exposure, allowing learners to hear idiomatic expressions as they are naturally used by native speakers. This exposure helps students become accustomed to the rhythm, intonation, and pronunciation of idioms in real-life contexts. Hearing idioms in a variety of accents and speech patterns can improve learners' listening comprehension and pronunciation. Additionally, movies present real-life conversational contexts where idiomatic expressions are used, giving learners practical examples of how to incorporate these phrases into their own speech. By observing and mimicking the dialogues in movies, students can practice and improve their speaking skills, making their use of idiomatic expressions more natural and fluent (King, 2002; Stephens, 2017).

The visual and narrative elements of films can make idiomatic expressions more memorable and relatable for students. Furthermore, movies can cater to different learning styles and preferences, providing a versatile tool that can be adapted to various teaching methods and activities. This increased engagement and motivation can lead to better learning outcomes and a more positive attitude towards language learning (Chung, 2019; Luo, 2020). Therefore, using movies in the classroom creates an engaging and motivating learning environment. Movies capture students' attention and interest, making the learning process enjoyable and dynamic.

An adult education center in Toronto utilized movies in their ESL classes to address diverse learning needs. Films were chosen based on their idiomatic density and relevance to everyday conversations. Students engaged in listening exercises, role-plays, and discussions centered around the idioms encountered in the movies. The program saw enhanced listening and speaking skills among learners. Students became more confident in using idiomatic expressions in real-life conversations. Best practices included incorporating a variety of film genres to maintain interest, using scenes with high idiomatic content for focused study, and providing context through cultural explanations (Yaseen & Shakir, 2015).

Encouraging Autonomous Learning

Movies can also encourage autonomous learning by providing motivation through interest-based content. When students find the content interesting, they are more likely to engage with it outside the classroom, fostering a sense of autonomy in their learning process. Moreover, movies offer a wealth of resources for self-study, including subtitles, transcripts, and supplementary materials, allowing learners to explore idiomatic expressions at their own pace. This self-directed learning helps students take control of their language acquisition journey, reinforcing their skills through repeated exposure and practice (Bahrani & Tam, 2012; Shrosbree, 2016).

At Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, instructors integrated movies into the curriculum for advanced EFL students. Movies were selected based on their cultural relevance and the richness of idiomatic content. Students watched assigned films outside of class and participated in guided discussions and activities focusing on idiomatic expressions. This approach led to improved comprehension and usage of idiomatic expressions. Students reported increased motivation and engagement. Best practices included choosing films that matched students' language proficiency and interests, and providing supplementary materials such as transcripts and vocabulary lists (Chung, 2019).

Practicality of Using Movies in Teaching Idiomatic Expressions

Selection of Appropriate Movies

Selecting suitable movies is crucial for the effective teaching of idiomatic expressions. Educators must consider the language proficiency of students, ensuring the film's complexity matches their comprehension level. Films with rich idiomatic content and cultural relevance are ideal. According to King (2002). Using subtitles and providing supplementary materials such as transcripts and vocabulary lists can help students better understand and retain idioms

Classroom Activities and Strategies

To maximize the educational benefits of movies, teachers can employ various classroom activities and strategies. Pre-viewing activities, such as discussing the movie's context and introducing key idioms, prepare students for what they will encounter. During viewing, students can engage in tasks like idiom identification and note-taking.



Post-viewing activities, including discussions, role-plays, and creative projects, allow students to practice and apply the idiomatic expressions they have learned (Chung, 2019).

Addressing Diverse Learning Styles

Movies cater to different learning styles, making them a versatile tool in the language classroom. Visual learners benefit from the visual context provided by films, while auditory learners gain from listening to authentic language use. Kinesthetic learners can engage in activities such as role-playing scenes from the movie, which can help reinforce their learning. This versatility ensures that all students, regardless of their preferred learning style, can benefit from the use of movies in ELT (Stephens, 2017).

Enhancing Autonomous Learning

Movies also support autonomous learning by providing resources that students can explore independently. With access to a variety of films, students can select content that interests them, increasing their motivation to engage with the material outside the classroom. Resources such as online streaming services, subtitles, and language learning apps can further facilitate self-study, allowing students to practice idiomatic expressions at their own pace and convenience (Bahrani & Tam, 2012).

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this paper examines the integration of movies in teaching idiomatic expressions within English Language Teaching (ELT), highlighting both challenges and opportunities. Cultural barriers, such as the need for extensive background knowledge and understanding of varied idiomatic usages, present significant hurdles. Contextual complexity and student engagement also pose challenges, but movies can enhance comprehension and retention through visual and auditory reinforcement and contextual learning. Cultural enrichment through exposure to diverse idiomatic uses and promoting cultural awareness are notable benefits. Additionally, movies improve listening and speaking skills by providing authentic language exposure and real-life conversational contexts. They also encourage autonomous learning by motivating students with interest-based content and offering ample resources for self-study. Case studies from university-level EFL courses in South Korea, high school ESL programs in Finland, and adult ESL education in Canada demonstrate successful implementations. These studies highlight the improvement in idiomatic knowledge, cultural awareness, listening and speaking skills, and overall student engagement, emphasizing the efficacy of using movies in ELT (Chung, 2019; Jurkovic, 2016; Yaseen & Shakir, 2015). Furthermore, incorporating movies into the teaching of idiomatic expressions offers a dynamic and effective approach that addresses the challenges of cultural context, complexity, and student engagement. By selecting appropriate films, employing diverse classroom activities, and encouraging autonomous learning, educators can enhance students' understanding and use of idiomatic expressions, making the learning process both enjoyable and educational.

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