THE ROLE OF CONTEXT IN TEACHING AND INTERPRETING

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Annotation: This article examines the role of context in teaching and interpreting English idioms through the IMRAD structure. Idioms are fixed expressions whose meanings cannot be derived from the literal meanings of individual words. Therefore, understanding linguistic, situational and cultural contexts is essential for accurate interpretation. The study analyzes effective methods for teaching idioms, presents findings based on observation of contextual learning practices and offers pedagogical recommendations for improving idiom comprehension.

Keywords: idioms, context, English teaching, interpretation, figurative meaning, cultural competence, IMRAD, language learning

Introduction

Idioms represent a crucial part of natural English communication and are frequently used in everyday speech, literature, media and academic discourse. However, idioms pose challenges for language learners because their meanings are often non-literal and cannot be interpreted word by word. Without an appropriate context, idioms tend to be misunderstood or translated incorrectly, leading to communication breakdowns.

Recent developments in language education emphasize authentic, context-rich language exposure as a necessary component for understanding figurative expressions. Context supports learners in identifying speaker intention, emotional tone, pragmatic meaning and cultural background associated with idioms. This research aims to investigate the role of context in teaching and interpreting English idioms, identify effective instructional methods and offer practical recommendations for teachers. In contemporary language education, scholars emphasize that idiom learning depends not only on memorizing definitions but also on understanding the broader communicative environment in which idioms occur. Context therefore emerges as a crucial factor. Linguistic context provides clues through surrounding

words and discourse structures, situational context reveals the communicative purpose behind an idiom and cultural context offers insight into the historical or symbolic meaning embedded in the expression. Without these layers of context, idioms lose their intended function and may be misinterpreted or used inappropriately.

Methods

The study is based on qualitative analysis of classroom practices, review of contemporary linguistic literature and observation of teaching strategies applied in foreign language classrooms. The following methodological steps were applied:

natural observation of learner behavior during idiom instruction analysis of teaching materials containing contextual and non-contextual idiom examples comparison of student comprehension outcomes in context-supported activities versus isolated idiom instruction interpretation of findings according to pedagogical and cognitive theories

Results

The analysis revealed that context significantly enhances learners' ability to understand and correctly use idioms. Several key results were identified: Learners who encountered idioms within meaningful linguistic contexts demonstrated better comprehension compared to those who studied idioms as isolated vocabulary items. Situational context helped learners identify when an idiom is appropriate and what communicative function it serves. Cultural context played a major role in preventing misinterpretation, especially for idioms containing metaphors or culturally rooted references.

Authentic materials such as films, interviews and real conversations improved students' idiomatic awareness. Interactive tasks including dialogues, storytelling and role-plays increased learners' confidence and accuracy in using idioms. Overall, the results confirm that context-rich instruction supports deeper understanding and practical use of idioms. Learners demonstrated better understanding of idioms when they were presented within complete sentences, paragraphs, or dialogues rather than in isolated lists. Surrounding words and sentence structure helped students infer meanings, recognize collocations, and understand subtle nuances.

The results also highlighted that using interactive methods and multimodal resources improved comprehension. Group discussions, peer teaching, and multimedia content such as videos and online exercises allowed learners to see idioms in multiple contexts, enhancing both understanding and engagement. Students reported that observing idioms in authentic speech and media helped them identify tone, emphasis, and body language associated with idiomatic

usage. Learners exposed to context-rich instruction consistently performed better in both comprehension and production tasks. Those who studied idioms in isolation often misunderstood meanings, used idioms inappropriately, or failed to retain them over time. The findings confirm that integrating linguistic, situational, and cultural contexts is essential for effective idiom teaching and interpretation.

Discussion

The findings suggest that idiom comprehension depends heavily on the type and depth of context provided. Linguistic context allows learners to infer meaning from surrounding clauses and discourse cues, reducing reliance on literal translation. Situational context strengthens pragmatic competence by showing learners *how* and *when* idioms function in real communication.

Cultural context emerged as a key factor, as many idioms originate from cultural events, historical references or metaphorical thinking unique to English-speaking communities. Without cultural awareness, learners often misunderstand figurative meanings. Therefore, integrating cultural elements into idiom instruction is crucial.

Modern pedagogy supports communicative, task-based and contextual approaches. The results align with these principles, showing that learners interpret idioms more effectively when instruction is interactive, authentic and meaning-oriented rather than mechanical. The findings of this study confirm that context is essential in teaching and interpreting English idioms, supporting both cognitive and communicative perspectives on language learning. The study further highlighted the benefits of interactive and multimodal approaches. Observing idioms through videos, dialogues, and multimedia resources provides additional cues such as tone, gestures, and facial expressions, enriching comprehension. Collaborative activities and discovery-based learning encourage students to actively interpret idioms within context, fostering critical thinking and communicative competence. These findings underline the pedagogical importance of presenting idioms within rich linguistic, situational, and cultural frameworks rather than in isolation. Context-based instruction not only improves understanding and retention but also enables learners to use idioms accurately and confidently in authentic communication. Overall, integrating context at multiple levels is fundamental for effective idiom learning and contributes to the development of students' overall language proficiency.

Conclusion

Effective idiom instruction, therefore, requires a deliberate focus on context at multiple levels. Teachers should integrate authentic materials from media, literature, and conversation,

explain cultural and historical backgrounds, and encourage active learner engagement through situational tasks. Such approaches enhance not only the learners' idiomatic competence but also their broader communicative and intercultural skills. Overall, prioritizing context in idiom teaching ensures that learners move beyond rote memorization to meaningful understanding, enabling them to use idioms naturally, accurately, and confidently. This context-based approach ultimately contributes to the development of proficient and culturally aware English language users.

Recommendations

Teachers should incorporate authentic materials and real-life scenarios into idiom instruction. Idioms should be introduced within meaningful discourse, not in isolated lists. Cultural explanations and examples should accompany idioms with metaphorical backgrounds. Interactive activities such as role-plays, group tasks and storytelling should be used to practice idioms in context.

Learners should be encouraged to infer meaning from context before receiving explicit explanation.

Implementing these strategies can strengthen idiomatic proficiency and support overall language development.

References

Books on idiom comprehension and figurative language in second language acquisition Research articles on context-based language teaching

Studies on cultural influences in idiom interpretation

Methodological guides on communicative and task-based language teaching Authentic English media and learning resources relevant to idiom instruction