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***Facilitating the Learning of English Idioms  
through Conceptual Metaphor Theory***

**An Experimental Study on Upper-intermediate Students in the  
Department of English at MMUTO**

**Presented by:**

Miss ACHOUR Malika

Miss KOURABA Katia

**Supervised by:**

Mr. HAMMOU Mohamed

**Board of Examiners:**

Mr. AOUINE Akli

MAA Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou

Chair

Mr. HAMMOU Mohamed

MAA Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou

Supervisor

Ms FEDOUL Malika

MAA Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou

Examiner

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N° d'Ordre:

N° de série:

*Dedications*

*To My Beloved parents*

*Who encouraged me in every step and helped me to reach my goals*

*You are the best parents that one can ever have!*

*May ALLAH bless you*

*To My precious brother and sisters*

*To My best friend Mila*

*To my lovely binôme*

*To my cousins*

*MA*

**‘Malika’**



***Dedications***

*To my beloved parents Karima and Rahim*

*My beloved sister Feriel*

*My brothers Rafik and Omar*

*My lovely binôme Malika*

*To all my friends and family*

**‘Katia’**



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## Abstract

*The present research endeavors to investigate the effect of Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor theory on the comprehension and production of English idioms. It seeks to promote language proficiency through the development of Formulaic Competence and to investigate teachers' attitudes towards teaching idioms. Two upper-intermediate groups of EFL students, referred to by experimental and control, at the department of English were selected randomly in order to fulfill the purpose of this study. Prior to the experiment, a pre-test of figurative expressions containing 18 idioms was administered to the participants of both groups to check their idiom understanding. During the instructional phase, the experimental group received systematic groupings of idioms according to specific Conceptual Metaphors while the control group received the presentation of idioms the traditional way. In both cases three idioms for each session were presented in dialogues. At the end of the instructional period, a post-test was carried out. For further investigation of the issue, a questionnaire was distributed to 10 teachers of the Speaking and Listening subject to explore their attitudes towards idiom-instruction in EFL environment. The design of this study is experimental and adopts a mixed-methods approach. The results obtained from the first part of the tests were analyzed by the one-way ANOVA procedure in SPSS, while those obtained from the second part were analyzed by Conceptual Content Analysis and then turned into percentages. Moreover, the quantitative information gathered from the questionnaire was again analyzed by SPSS, but for the qualitative data the Qualitative Content Analysis was used. The results of data analysis disclosed that the Conceptual Metaphor-based method was more effective than the traditional method on idiom comprehension; whereas for idiom production both groups scored similar and fairly low results. The findings also revealed teachers' positive attitudes towards teaching and implementing idioms in EFL context. What is even of further interest is that this study may have pedagogical implications for EFL teachers, students, and syllabus designers of idiom-related courses.*

**Keywords:** Conceptual Metaphor, Formulaic Competence, Idiom, Idiom Comprehension, Idiom Production.

## List of Abbreviations

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
CA	Content Analysis
CCA	Conceptual Content Analysis
Df	degrees of Freedom
EE	Etymological Elaboration
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
F	F-ratio
FL	Foreign Language
L2	Second Language
MWU	Multi-Word Unit
QCA	Qualitative Content Analysis
Sig.	Significant
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences

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# **General Introduction**

## General Introduction

- **Statement of the Problem**

In a recent statement to the press (APS, 2016), the Secretary General of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, has said that Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou has capabilities that can allow it to be among the first universities in both national and European levels. This declaration implicitly motivates each department to rise its ranking to attain both teaching and research excellence. Furthermore, the department of English, in particular, to some extent is aware of the current status of English and its challenges and opportunities. The data collected in the EF English Proficiency Index report (2015) shows that not only English is today a necessary skill but the role of this language has greatly evolved over the past 20 years under the impact of globalization, urbanization and the emergence of the Internet. With these objectives, the department endeavors to provide an appropriate working environment for its students.

Generally, it is a well-recognized fact (Ellis, 2005; Saville-Troike, 2006 and Gass & Selinker, 2008) that learning a foreign language is a challenging process that demands special attention and lot of efforts in order to reach fluency, and notably, to have a high level of language proficiency. Indeed, understanding only the literal meaning of words is not sufficient. The process of understanding needs also knowledge about the word's secondary meaning or the feelings connected to this word. Lantolf (2008) shares the perception that to attain a high level of language proficiency one needs to comprehend and use the figurative language properly.

Cooper also remarks that idioms are extensively used in different communicative contexts and English users produce approximately *"20 million idioms per lifetime"* (1999:233). To a great extent, idioms are used to express our intentions, thoughts or ideas in a

more colorful, subtle and concise style. In addition, a successful FL learning demands a mastery of idioms and an awareness of their usage (Schmitt, 2000). It is evident that idioms broaden people's understanding and use of a language, therefore promoting EFL learners' proficiency.

The process of learning idioms appears to follow the same principles of acquiring vocabulary in general (Lindstromberg & Boers, 2008 cited in Vasiljevic, 2015), in the sense that learners start by first noticing the new expression, then dealing with its encoding and storage, and finally with its retrieval. However, the presence of a great number of English idioms (Ammer, 1997 and Siefring, 2004), the fact that many idioms are culture-specific, in addition to their "*rigid structure*" (Liu, 2003: 671) make learning a challenging task. Moreover, the figurative meaning of an idiom can be hardly deduced from the literal meaning of its constituent elements (Simpson, 2004). All these matters cause confusion and frustration to FL learners.

A brief glance at previous studies concerning EFL teaching reveals that teaching idioms has been of overwhelming interest among many researchers. In this respect, different approaches have been introduced to L2 idiom acquisition. The traditional approach considers idioms as chunks that demand just memorization efforts as their overall meaning is not motivated by the meaning of their individual parts, and as such there is "*no need for a complex theory*" in dealing with them (Vega-Moreno, 2001:74). However, recent developments in the field of cognitive linguistics reveal that the meaning of idioms is not completely arbitrary but rather it can be stimulated by specific conceptual metaphors which are considered as a source from which those idioms are derived (Boers, 2004).

In response to the above mentioned considerations coupled with the assumption that upper-intermediate level students or even graduates of the department of English do not appear to have acquired enough knowledge, skills and practice to efficiently deal with

figurative expressions like idioms, the purpose of this dissertation is to facilitate the learning of English idioms through Lakoff and Johnson (1980) *Conceptual Metaphor* (CM) theory. The study, which is an experimental research conducted in the department of English, aims to bridge the gap between the fact that students do not use idioms in their interactions whether student-student or students-teacher or even in their writing style and the desires of learning and using idioms effectively.

- **Aims and Significance of the Study**

The present study has two main objectives. The first is to determine to what extent does the Conceptual Metaphor theory help EFL learners, that is, how could the systematic presentation of idioms through the CM-based method may lead to better idiom retention and recall. The second is to investigate the attitudes of teachers of the listening and speaking subject. The reason behind focusing on teaching idioms is that many English language students have difficulties when encountering figurative expressions. In addition, the fact that English speakers use a substantial number of idioms in their interactions as referred by Cooper (1999) gives both beauty to language and '*food for thought*' to non-native speakers. Moreover, if we take into consideration the wide spread of English and its important status in the world, it becomes clear that having a satisfactory level of proficiency is the desire of many language learners. Clearly, a lack of an appropriate comprehension of figurative language may delay learners' language development consequently affecting negatively their level of proficiency. It is then worth trying to provide a systematic, useful and simple way to facilitate the learning process of English idioms.

In order to do so, a small-scale experimental research was conducted on upper-intermediate EFL students in the department of English at MMUTO to determine whether the proposed theory has a positive effect on facilitating the learning of idioms. The research also attempts to explore teachers' views concerning teaching figurative idioms, their attitudes

towards using metaphors as a facilitator in learning idiomatic expressions, as well as the strategies that they use to smooth the progress of the instruction process. This experiment would be a first endeavor at the level of MMUTO in encouraging teachers of the department of English to experience a different presentation technique as well as demystifying idioms.

In order to fulfill the aforementioned aims, the following objectives are put ahead. First, the focus was narrowed down to encompass only what Celce-Murcia (2008) called “*formulaic competence*”, since its development contributes considerably in attaining a high level of English proficiency. Second, developing such competence means that EFL learners will have the ability to use appropriate idioms in proper contexts. That is, “*If you keep an open mind and play your cards right, your proficiency in English will soon be something to crow about*” (Laflin, 1996 cited in Bastug & Salihagic, 2014: 74).

#### • **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

In an attempt to bring new insight on the subject matter, this study raises the following questions:

1. Is there any significant difference between applying the conceptual metaphor method and the traditional method on EFL learners' comprehension of English idioms?
2. Is there any significant difference between applying the conceptual metaphor method and the traditional method on EFL learners' production of English idioms?
3. What are the attitudes of teachers of the Speaking and Listening subject toward teaching idioms in an EFL classroom?

To answer the aforementioned questions, we advance the following hypothesis:

**Hp1:** There is no significant difference among the effects of conceptual metaphor-based instruction and traditional idiom instruction on EFL learners' comprehension of English idioms.



**Hp2:** There is no significant difference among the effects of conceptual metaphor-based instruction and traditional idiom instruction on the production of English idioms.

**Hp3:** Teachers of Speaking and Listening subject have negative attitudes towards teaching idioms in an EFL classroom.

- **Research Tools and Methodology**

The dissertation intends to investigate the effect of conceptual metaphors on idiom comprehension and recall relying on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980, 2003) theory of conceptual metaphors, as well as to explore teachers' attitudes towards teaching idioms. It adopts the mixed method of research that combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches for data collection and analysis.

The data has been collected from upper-intermediate students and a collection of 10 teachers of the department of English at MMUTO. This experimental study has been conducted by first performing a pre-test to measure students' idiom comprehension and production. Next, the idiom-instruction process has been carried out by adopting the conceptual metaphor method in the experimental group and the traditional method in the control group. Furthermore, a post-test has been used to compare the results. Finally, a questionnaire has been used to gather more information about teachers' views of idioms. The obtained results have been analyzed by various data analysis procedures, ranging from statistical methods to qualitative content analysis.

- **The Structure of the Dissertation**

The overall structure of this dissertation follows the traditional-complex model. It begins with an introduction describing the problem under investigation and its background, followed by four chapters, and ends with a general conclusion.

The introduction presents the statement of the problem that needs to be solved, the specific research questions to be answered with possible hypotheses to be tested, the reasons behind focusing on the subject matter, the tools and the methodology used in order to gain knowledge, and the overall organization of the dissertation. The first chapter, “*Review of the Literature*”, consists in reviewing and evaluating the information that are related to the selected area of the present research as well as exploring the teaching of idioms in an EFL classroom through the use of Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) theory of conceptual metaphors. The second chapter, “*Research Design*”, includes precise information about the procedures of both data collection and data analysis. The third chapter, “*Presentation of the Findings*”, provides a detailed account of the results obtained from two data collection tools: the experimental study, and the questionnaire. The forth and last chapter, “*Discussion of the Findings*”, highlights and discusses how this dissertation would reinforce what is already known about idioms, and also provides answers to the research questions. Finally, the general conclusion summarizes what has been discussed in the previous chapters, ties and integrates the research issues covered in the body of the dissertation, acknowledges the limitations and provides suggestions for further research.

# **Chapter I: The Review of the Literature**

## Introduction

This chapter provides a theoretical background about the previous works related to the problem under investigation. It tackles various studies conducted by other researchers in the field of teaching and learning idioms together with the theories underlying the types of idiom-instruction. It presents, at the beginning, a set of key terms. Next, for deeper insight, relevant details about classification of idioms, metaphors, and the importance of implementing these types of expressions in teaching are provided. Finally, it ends up with a presentation of different approaches to teaching idioms, especially the Conceptual Metaphor theory as the selected one in our research.

### 1.1 Figurative Language: An Overview

Traditionally, it is believed that the mappings between literal or figurative senses and concrete or abstract concepts are well-established in speech and writing (Kövecses, 2006). In other words, there is a conventional relationship between literal and concrete and between figurative and abstract, and some may resort to figure out the meaning literally. The last decades of research and developments on figurative language and thought, however, steered by Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) publication, have brought new understandings and insights to this subject in the sense that metaphors are not only part of language but also part of how humans think.

*Merriam-Webster* (2016) dictionary defines a figurative expression as that “*used with a meaning that is different from the basic meaning and that expresses an idea in an interesting way by using language that usually describes something else: not literal*”. A glance at our real life can provide us with many examples indicating the widespread use of figurative language in a multitude of areas such as in advertising (Honeck, 1997), in “*mass communication and interpersonal exchanges*” (Ottati & Renstrom, 2010), and psychotherapy (Needham-Didsbury, 2012). For instance, short and expressive phrases in advertising like the *Metrobank*

slogan “*You are in good hands*”; descriptions of feeling and emotions in psychotherapy, e.g., expressing physical pain by means of needles; catchphrases in politics as John Kennedy’s Motto “*My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country*” (President John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address, 1961).

Figurative language is a term that is triggered whenever the meaning of a linguistic expression is not obviously expressed (Vulchanova, 2015). Phrases like “*to eat one’s heart out*” or “*to go through the roof*” do not mean exactly what they denote. Instead the first is used here to describe a person who is suffering silently while the second to mean that someone is highly excited. However, through recurrent use, people spontaneously take their non-literal meaning for granted. In simple words, figurative language can be thought of as giving an expression an implicit meaning that differs from the explicit one. As such, it is employed, especially, by poets to make language sounds more attractive, influential, and colorful.

Many of our everyday utterances are characterized by figurative expressions, e.g. “*Ace in the Hole*”, “*By the Skin of (one’s) Teeth*”, and the “*World Wide Web*”. Although some of these forms are somehow difficult to be easily interpreted people still use them for different reasons. Some of these reasons, mentioned by Gibbs (1999), concern the difficulty to easily express complex and abstract concepts without relying on figurative language, and the use of such expression is beneficial with regard to efforts and words. Gibbs (ibid) has also listed the most used forms like idioms, metaphors, proverbs, metonymies and hyperboles.

Needham-Didsbury (2012), in particular, mentioned three principles for why figurative expressions are used; the “*inexpressibility*” principle that is sometimes hard to convey the meaning literally and hence the reliance on figurative forms to describe concepts with ease, the “*compactness*” principle to convey the meaning succinctly and precisely while the “*vividness*” principle to produce more accurate representations than using the literal language.

Even more, figurative devices such as idioms can be viewed as “*a powerful communicative and conceptual tool*” (Mashal, 2013:211). They are, indeed, useful in economizing words, extending the literal meaning of phrases, and expressing the sense of sentences in an imaginative way. It is, thus, sensible to say that without these valuable devices, our texts and speech will be colorless, less effective and dry. The figurative devices that will be explained in this research are idioms and metaphors.

### **1.1.1 Idioms and their Classification**

Scholars have defined idioms according to different features such as “*figurativeness*”, “*non-compositionality*”, “*frozenness*” and “*multi word units*” (Mäntylä, 2004), where figurativeness refers to the degree of transparency between the literal and the figurative meanings. In other words, the more an idiom is transparent, the easier it can be interpreted. Non-compositionality, in turns, means that the meaning of an idiom is random and thus cannot be directly inferred from the meaning of its parts. Frozenness points to lexico-grammatical restrictions that govern the structure of idioms. From these characteristics, it can be easily noticed that an idiom definition that only contains one characteristic will generate a very broad class of idioms. More to the point, the presence of many characteristics in a definition will provide a narrow class of idioms.

A number of scholars tend to rely on the criterion of *non-compositionality* in defining idioms. Consequently, this feature is influential in the sense that it is used in a number of idiom definitions. Simpson and Mendis (2003:423), for instance, define idioms as “*a group of words that occur in a more or less fixed phrase whose overall meaning cannot be predicted by analyzing the meaning of its constituent parts*”. Swinney and Cutler (1979:523) offer a similar definition in that an idiom is “*a string of two or more words for which meaning is not derived from the meanings of the individual words comprising that string*”. Moreover, *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary* (1984:363) defines an idiom as a “*form of expression or usage*

*peculiar to a language, especially one whose meaning is not given by those of its separate words*". In other words, idioms are ambiguous and sometimes have illogical meaning when analyzing the meaning of its components therefore the surface structure of such expressions plays no role in understanding the intended meaning. For example, in "*to bury the hatchet*", it is almost impossible to arrive to the meaning of making peace after a disagreement from the terms "*to bury*" and "*the hatchet*".

In a different view, other scholars define idioms in relation to the criterion of *compositionality*, in that some idioms can be understood from the surface structure but they take a completely different meaning when used in a specific context (Cain & Oakhill, 2007 and Cain, et al. 2008). For instance, the idiom "*to spill the beans*" literally signifies to let the beans fall out of a pot, but when it is used figuratively the meaning changes to "*revealing a secret or a surprise*". Thus, idioms are subject to misunderstanding even with the complete understanding of all their parts. As a matter of fact, for better intellectual capacity, EFL learners need to be familiar with some idiomatic expressions or at least, as pointed out by Grant (2007) and Liu (2003), the most used ones.

Scholars didn't only provide various definitions but also different classifications of idioms with a reliance on a variety of criteria. Idioms can be classified according to their "*semantic*", "*syntactic*", and "*functional properties*" (Grant & Bauer, 2004). Following is a description of three of the most used classifications.

Nunberg (1978 cited in Glucksberg, 1993) categorized idioms as follows:

- 1. Normally decomposable idioms:** in which the literal meaning of their components plays a part in understanding the figurative meaning. The expressions "*pop the question*" and "*button your lips*" are two examples of such idioms. In these idioms, "*question*" and "*button*" belong to the same conceptual domains as "*ask*" and "*close*", respectively.

2. **Abnormally decomposable idioms:** these idioms contain words that can suggest their figurative meanings but in an indirect way. For example in the term “*spill the beans*”, spill can be understood as to reveal, and beans as a secret.
3. **Semantically non-decomposable idioms:** in which the literal meaning of the components does not offer any indication about the idiom figurative meaning. Examples of this class include the idiomatic phrases “*kick the bucket*” which means “to die” and “*chew the fat*” which means “to chat”. In other words, the meaning of the idiom’s components does not reflect the overall figurative meaning.

Cacciari and Glucksberg (1991), in turn classified idioms as:

1. **Opaque:** for these idioms, the meanings of the components may limit the comprehension. The verb kick in the expression “*Kick the bucket*”, for example, constrains interpretation.
2. **Transparent:** for such idioms, the link between literal and figurative meanings is not fully obvious. For example, the word break in the idiom “*break the ice*”, which means to end or avoid an awkward situation by starting a conversation with someone, maps on to changing a mood or feeling, and the word ice maps on to social tension.
3. **Quasi-metaphorical:** an idiom of this type refers to a model of a concept that can be applied to other similar situations. For example, ‘don’t give up the ship’ is simultaneously an ideal exemplar of the act of fighting and also a phrase that can refer to any instance of keeping on trying or working on something until getting it right.

Fernando (1996, cited in Kainulainen, 2006) grouped idioms into three classes:

1. **Pure idioms:** these refer to conventionalized and figurative multiword units. For examples “*blow the gaff*” that means to reveal a secret and “*kick the bucket*” that means to die.



2. **Semi-literal idioms:** these contain one or more literal elements and at least one with a non-literal sense. For example to “*promise the moon*” and “*foot the bill*” are two semi-literal idioms, in which “moon” and “foot” are the non-literal constituents whereas “promise” and “bill” are the literal ones.
3. **Literal idioms:** these idioms adhere to the invariability or restricted variation criterion, e.g., “*on foot*” and “*on the contrary*”.

### 1.1.2 Metaphors and their Types

Metaphors have been a subject of interest for many scholars for more than 2000 years (Ning, 1998). The old belief is that figurative phrases are considered as mere “*ornaments*”, and extraordinary facet of language. Aristotle describes metaphors as follows:

Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else; the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or on the ground of analogy (Poetics, 1457b).

To put it clear, the transfer from one concept to another can give an object a feature of other objects like attributing the quality of “*standing*” to a “*ship*” as displayed in the metaphoric expression: “*Here stands my ship*”. Another similar definition is provided by The *Pocket Oxford Dictionary* (1984: 461) where a metaphor has been defined as “*an application of a name or descriptive term or phrase to object or action where it is not literally applicable*”.

Recently, scholars in the school of cognitive linguistics have changed the habitual view of metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson (1980), for instance, assert that metaphors are no longer viewed as only ornamental devices or forms of speech which are limited to literature and poetry but also a “*form of thought*” that shapes the way we think, behave and interact. These two scholars were the former to dig deeper in the field of metaphors, especially after publishing their influential book entitled “*Metaphors We Live By*”, which highlights new perceptions about the nature of figurative language in general and metaphors in specific. For

them, it is hard to do not resort to metaphors because these are pervasive in our everyday interactions and these structure our brain's conceptual system. That is to say, the human conceptual system is "*metaphorical in nature*". Moreover, they assert that metaphors can be defined as the comprehension and the experience of one thing in terms of another. Concerning the term "*conceptual metaphor*", it is the same as "*metaphor*" but the difference is that the former is used to refer to a connection between two "*semantic areas*" at the level of thought, such as the metaphorical connection that exists between "*argument*" and "*war*" as in the conceptual metaphor, *ARGUMENT IS WAR* (Lakoff and Johnson, *ibid*). Apparently, metaphors can be thought of as a combination of both form of language and thought, and people can use it as a way of better expressing their ideas in a more colorful and decorative way.

There are several levels of understanding metaphors. The degree of comprehension depends on the hearer's knowledge about metaphors and on their types, that is, simple metaphors can be easily understood and are in some way similar to the understanding of literal sentences, whereas complex metaphors need "*analogical reasoning*" (Kintsch, 2008).

In the same vein, different types of metaphors are provided by different scholars. Nordquist (2015) offered 13 different types of metaphors from which we have selected the following five major ones.

1. **Absolute Metaphor** is a metaphor where there is absolutely no connection between the intended meaning referred to by a "*tenor*" and the figurative expression that is also named a "*vehicle*". In other words, the tenor is hard to grasp from the vehicle as in the expression "*A television set is the autobahn of a living room*". Its main purpose is to leave readers to draw their own interpretations.

2. **Conventional Metaphor** is a well-known comparison to members of society who share similar culture in the way that the literal meaning of such an expression “*The Wight House has issued an amendment*” doesn’t sound irrational.
3. **Dead Metaphor** is a figure of speech whose metaphorical meaning has become so familiar through frequent use. It is dead in the sense that its literal meaning is forgotten or unnoticed. The terms “*a computer mouse*”, “*the body of an essay is its main portion*” and “*foothills or the foot of a mountain*” are three examples of dead metaphors.
4. **Visual Metaphor** is a comparison between two different things by way of a visual image. For example, in order to encourage people to develop communicative skills, a picture of a person with a beautiful flower coming out from his mouth can be used.
5. **Conceptual Metaphor** is a figurative comparison in which one idea is understood in terms of another such as the metaphorical link that is established between anger and fire in “*his eyes were burning coals*” or between time and money in “*time is money*”.

Another classification of metaphors containing only four classes is provided by Kintsch (2008).

Types of metaphors:	Examples:
a) simple metaphors of the form N1 -is- N2	My lawyer is a shark My surgeon is a butcher
b) Simple analogy based metaphors	She blew up at me She shots down all of my arguments
c) Complex analogy-based metaphors	The universe is a computer
d) Literary metaphors	We are the eyelids of defeated caves

**Table 1.1 - Examples of different types of metaphors** (Kintsch, 2008:130)

However, apart from the various types of metaphors, this study puts emphasis on “*Conceptual Metaphors*”, more precisely “*Structural Metaphors*” that are explained in details in Lakoff and Johnson’s (2003). They distinguished three categories:

- a) **Structural Metaphor** is the case where one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another clearly defined concept, like “*Argument Is War*”, which can generate other idiomatic expressions, such as “*He attacked every weak point in my argument*” and “*our claims are indefensible*”.
- b) **Orientational Metaphor** is the case where concepts are organized with respect to one another. Most of this group has to do with “*spatial orientations*” like up/down, in/out, front/back, on/off, deep/shallow, central/peripheral. For instance, “*Happy Is Up*”. This orientational metaphor allows expressions such as “*I’m feeling up today*”.
- c) **Ontological Metaphor** is the case where concepts are understood in terms of objects and substances, e.g., “*Inflation Is An Entity*”. Viewing inflation as an entity allows us to refer to it and measure it, like in “*Inflation is lowering our standard of living*” or “*If there's much more inflation, we'll never survive*”.

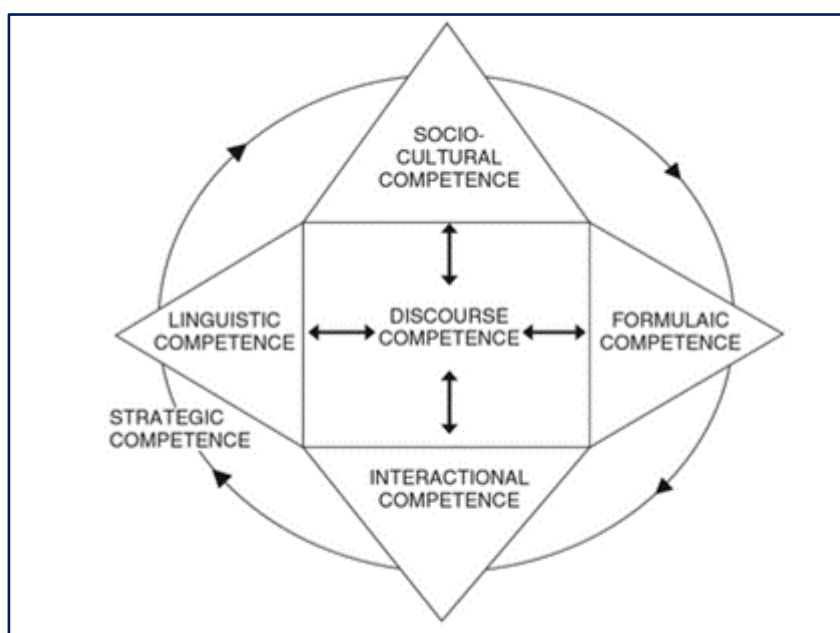
## 1.2 Formulaic Competence

Formulaic language, although, has not been fully given much consideration till the last 20 years (Liu, 2014), occupies a non trivial part of our everyday speech. Formulaic sequences can be in form of chunks, multiword units, collocations, idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs, figurative, non-literal routines, conventionalized forms, to mention only a few (Schmitt & Carter, 2004 and Wray, 2002). In additions, these chunks are referred to by various terminologies: formulaic language (Wray, 2002), lexical bundles (Biber & Barbieri, 2007), formulaic sequences (Escaip, 2016), prefabricated patterns (Granger, 1998), lexical phrases (Schmitt & Carter, 2000). However, providing a precise definition of formulaic language can be a challenging process since the term encloses a variety of expressions in the literature (Wray & Perkins, 2000). Wray for instance defined it as:

A sequence, continuous or discontinues, of words or other elements, which is, or appears to be, prefabricated: that is, stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar. (2002:1)

In other words, formulaic language can be seen as a set of phrases, word strings or clauses that have a fixed form and meaning which appear to be stored and retrieved from memory as one language item. As a result, formulaic competence refers to the ability to use these expressions or chunks appropriately in different communicative contexts (Celce-Murcia, 2008).

Formulaic competence starts to gain considerable importance after the works of Pawley & Syder (1983) and Nattinger & DeCarrico (1992). It is manifested in the person's usage of prefabricated chunks appropriately in different contexts (Braidwood & McAnsh, 2011). Celce-Murcia (2008) is among the linguists who have dealt with this subject. She sheds light on formulaic competence in her model of communication, as shown bellow in figure 1, and considers it as the ability to use idioms such as *"to kick the bucket"*, *"to get the ax"*, and *"to give the cold shoulder"* in everyday contact. She puts emphasis on both the interaction and the dynamic nature of the constitute parts of her model. For this reason, when speaking about formulaic competence, one cannot avoid mentioning communicative competence.



**Figure 1.1 - Schematic Representation of Communicative Competence**  
(Celce-Murcia, 2008:45)

Linguistically, idioms when used by EFL speakers give a native-like impression or “*Native-like fluency*” as stated by Pawley and Syder (1983). Sociolinguistically, these require less time and consume less effort in making the person knows exactly what to say in each and every situation. Furthermore, as stated by Ellis (1997) and Yorio (1989), idioms play a significant role in indicating student’s L2 communicative competence. It is, then, completely valid to say that, the more students learn idiomatic expressions the more their formulaic competence will be developed.

### **1.3 The Importance of Teaching Idioms in a FL context**

Idioms, very frequent in everyday uses, are the colorful face of every language. Several authors have highlighted their impact and significance. Cooper (1999), and others like Cieśllicka, (2006), have cited that English speakers use many idioms in their interactions. Moreno (2011) has stated that idioms widen people’s understanding of a language and provide learners with cultural and historical information about the target or foreign language. Looking even further ahead, some researchers like Cooper (1998) who thinks program designers along with teachers should give idioms the right consideration. More clearly, Burke (1998) has pointed out that it is not only difficult for a non-native speaker of English to easily interact with native speakers but also to completely understand a set of stimulating topics such as American movies, TV shows, news broadcast, and mainstream conversations without an understanding of idioms. Complementing these reflections, we also think that the ability to enhance idiom comprehension and production is closely linked to the development of the figurative aspect of the target language. Idioms, specifically, appear to have significant importance for non-native speakers as not dealing with them properly can hinder fluency and effective communication.

Broadly, the importance of teaching figurative language, namely idioms, in a foreign language context has been recognized by many scholars (Wilk, 2015). Alali and Schmitt

(2012), for example, have stated that formulaic language is a key component of communication and needs to be addressed in a SL/FL teaching. Johnson–Laird (1993) also has advocated the idea of teaching idiomatic expressions; for him, idioms can be considered quite easy for native speakers, but when it comes to non-native speakers, idioms present a challenge and an obstacle to EFL learners since most of them do not have simple equivalents in their first language. More to this point, Thyab resumes all that has been mentioned above in few lines:

The usage of idiomatic expressions by those speakers is considered as an important issue and is regarded as an essential part of the English language competence. It is a necessity that all speakers of the English language become aware and proficient in using English idiomatic expressions. It is essential and is considered a big part of English language proficiency to be able to use idiomatic expression when communicating in the English language. (2016: 105)

Following this considerable interest from many researchers and considering the fact that there is a wide range of situations in which people encounter idioms in both spoken and written discourse, we can safely say that it is crucial to pay a substantial attention to teaching idioms and implementing them in all programs of language studies. Furthermore, the emphasis should be on the pedagogical aspect of idioms as well as the adoption of adequate teaching strategies such as etymological elaboration.

## **1.4 Approaches to Teaching Idioms**

### **1.4.1 The Traditional Approach**

In the article entitled ‘*Cross-Cultural Variations as a Variable in Comprehending and Remembering Figurative Idioms*’, Boers, et al. (2004) stated that before 1990, language was viewed as “rules” of grammar and “lists” of individual words that demands a memorization effort, and idioms as multi-word units (MWU) were not put into account. As another remark, they also reported that idioms were considered as only ornaments of language that can add prestige, variations and color. Finally and following these two considerations, the arbitrary relation between idioms and their meanings is mentioned. That is, the figurative meaning

cannot be understood from the meaning of the lexical constituents, and as such idioms are considered as non compositional. For instance, there is nothing in the meanings of the terms ‘kick’ and ‘bucket’ that inform us that kick the bucket means to ‘die’. Consequently, the dominant perception was that idioms could not be taught in an orderly way, and the only available strategy for students to master idioms was rote learning and memorization (Boers, et al., 2004 and Mäntylä, 2004).

#### **1.4.2 The Cognitive Approach**

In Cognitive Linguistics, scientists have come up with a rather different approach to treat idioms. This approach is based on the fundamental assumption that “*meaning is equated with conceptualization*” and “*conceptualization resides in cognitive processing*” (Langacker, 1986:3). According to Footé (2010), idioms have received a considerable importance in the context of ESL since the 18th century. They are no longer considered as language ornaments but an inherent part of all languages as Boers (2008) stated in MED magazine. Clearly, cognitive linguists, among them Lakoff (1987), consider that idiomatic expressions are directly connected to our conceptual thinking. For this reason, and contrary to the traditional view, the meaning of most idioms is not arbitrary but rather motivated by conceptual metaphors, cultural and historical contexts in which they were originated. Therefore, it is worth saying that, the cognitive view of idioms makes the learning process interesting and insightful since idioms are considered as “*semantically motivated*” expressions (Boers, 2001). This approach advocates a number of strategies for teaching idioms including those proposed by Zarei and Rahimi (2012), namely “*contextual pragmatic clues*”, “*lexical knowledge*”, and “*etymological elaboration*”. Zarei and Rahimi (ibid) also maintain that etymological elaboration, in particular, comprises a number of theories that may well contribute to teaching and learning idioms, including the “*Conceptual Metaphor Theory*”, and the “*Dual Coding Theory*”. In this experimental study, the CM theory is adopted.



#### 1.4.2.1 Etymological Elaboration as a Strategy

Etymology, in simple words, is an explanation of a word or phrase origin and derivation. Etymological elaboration (EE), in turn, is a mapping technique that links the meaning of multi word units (MWUs), such as idioms, with their literal origins or source domains (Boers, et al. 2004). Another definition featuring the notion of dual coding given by Skoufaki is:

Etymological elaboration refers to the practice of making learners aware of the historical-cultural-etymological origin of idioms. This practice is believed to call up in learners' minds mental images of concrete scenes that can be stored in memory alongside the verbal form (and any propositional meaning) of the idiom – in short, lexical information can be dually coded. (2008:108)

In the field of L2 vocabulary learning, Boers (2004) stated that providing explanations of idioms' origins plays a significant role in building FL students' etymological awareness. Furthermore, a research study conducted by Zarei and Rahimi (2012) provides considerable support of the use of etymology on idiom production when compared to other strategies. They have investigated the impact of etymological elaboration on understanding the metaphorical meanings of idioms, and argued that knowing from where words and phrases are derived contribute to the overall idiom production. In the same way, Golaghaei and Kakolian (2015) carried out a comparable research that investigated the effect of visual and etymological treatments on learning English idioms by intermediate Iranian students. The results of which revealed that the etymological elaboration was more effective than visual aids on learning idioms.

Concerning idioms, a large number of them are not arbitrary (Lakoff, 1987). Recent developments in cognitive linguistics maintain that the meaning of most idioms which was oncs arbitrary and conventional is by some means “*motivated*” and can be traced back to conceptual metaphors. Boers, et al. (2010:245) state that “*figurative phrases can be motivated by reference to overarching conceptual metaphors*”. For example the word “gun” in the idiom “*jump the gun*” refers to the pistol used in sports contests that are started by firing a gun, and

the idiom itself means to start running before the starting signal. If the learners are given this explanation, they are likely able to link the literal meaning with a mental image which they can use later to comprehend and to recall idioms. Explicitly, this process is called etymological elaboration.

#### **a. Conceptual Metaphor Theory**

The conceptual metaphor theory has changed the long held belief about understanding figurative language. The traditional view considers figurative expressions such as idioms and metaphors as fixed and irregular units of language. A number of cognitive linguists (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Murphy, 1996; Gibbs, et al. 1997; Evans & Green, 2006 and Kövecses, 2005) adhere to the idea that conceptual metaphor theory, in contrast, assumes that metaphors are both a form of thought and language. The conceptual metaphor theory started in 1980 to become famous after the publication of '*Metaphors We Live By*' by George Lakoff, and Mark Johnson, and since then, it has been developed and used.

This theory consists of understanding one concept from the 'target domain' in terms of another one from the 'source domain'. In other words, a metaphorical mapping between a target domain and a source domain is established in accordance with our everyday experience like in "ARGUMENT IS WAR". To further clarify this binding, most cultures view "*arguments*" as partially structured and understood in terms of "*wars*". In fact, the two terms are completely different things, one is a verbal discourse and the other is a physical conflict, but the actions we perform while arguing resemble those we perform while fighting, i.e., we behave as opponents, win or lose, attack and defend, and use strategies (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). However, it is important to recognize that the meaning that can be attached to the concept "argument" is directly related to how our culture defines it. Consequently, the interpretation and behavior may differ and thus according to culture.

The prominent feature of this theory according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 2003) is that it provides a systematic way of organizing and presenting idiomatic expressions to FL learners. For example, the conceptual metaphor “IDEAS ARE FOOD” generate the following idiomatic sentences: “*to leave a bad taste in one’s mouth*”, “*to smell fishy*”, “*to sink one’s teeth into something*”, “*food for thought*”, and “*to spoon feed*”, whereas the conceptual metaphor “LIFE IS A GAMBLING GAME” produces the following idioms: “*to take one’s chances*”, “*the odds are against one*”, “*to have an ace up one’s sleeve*”, “*to hold all the aces*”, and “*to be a toss-up*”.

Accordingly, the CM theory seems to contribute to idiom comprehension and production by tracing back many idioms to specific conceptual metaphors. Beréndi, et al. confirm this by stating that “*metaphor awareness aids vocabulary learning [...] learners who know how certain conceptual metaphors (CMs) function*” (2008: 65).

### **1.5 Previous Studies on Conceptual Metaphor theory**

The effect of CM theory on L2 idiom comprehension has been examined by many scholars. Boers (2000), for instance, has conducted three experiments on Belgium intermediate EFL learners. He has investigated the effectiveness of grouping L2 vocabulary by CMs on idiom retention. In both groups, a number of idiomatic expressions that belong to the CMs “*anger is a hot fluid in a container*” and “*the body is a container for emotions*” were presented in texts. The difference is in the presentation of idioms, in that in the experimental group, the expressions were organized according to specific CMs, while in the control group the idiomatic phrases were grouped according to functional themes e.g., “*to describe acute and sudden anger*”, and “*to describe anger as a process*”. After reading the texts and discussing the meaning of idioms, the students were given a final test. The obtained results were in line with Li’s (2010) experiment and provided a significant role of using CMs as a technique in teaching figurative language, namely idioms.

Beréndi, et al. (2008) also carried out three experiments on upper-intermediate Hungarian students to determine the effect of applying the CM approach in facilitating the comprehension and retention of L2 idioms. They used 22 idioms presented in a text, and followed by a list of the same idioms with L1 translations in both groups. The only difference is that in the experimental group, the list of idioms is organized according to four conceptual metaphors: “*anger is fire*”, “*anger is a hot fluid in a container*”, “*anger is insanity*”, and “*an angry person is a dangerous animal*”; whereas in the control group the idioms appeared according to their order in the text. After performing a post-test, the results have demonstrated that students of the experimental group were found to have comprehended and understood on average 87.5 % of the idioms. Thus, providing explicit CM explanations seems to help learners in the understanding L2 idioms.

Li (2010), investigated the relationship between CMs and “*semantic motivation*” of both English and Chinese idioms by examining all types of metaphors including structural, orientation and ontological metaphors. With the use of a great number of English and Chinese idiomatic word strings, Li has found that a considerable number of idioms derive from different CMs and they are motivated by conceptual metaphors. He has also come to a conclusion that the CM theory to a great extent is an effective strategy in ameliorating the teaching and learning of L2 idioms.

Vasiljevic (2011, 2015) conducted a number of studies to explore the usefulness of CMs on idiom retention and recall. The participants in the first experiment (Vasiljevic, 2011) were Japanese first-year university learners of English. They were first divided into four groups and then received idiom-instruction under different conditions. These groups are:

- 1) “*CM English Group*” – the idioms were organised according to specific CMs, and both English definitions and example sentences were presented.

- 2) “*CM Japanese Group*” – the idioms were grouped according to CMs, in addition to their definitions and example sentences which are translated into Japanese language.
- 3) “*Listing English Group*” – idioms were mixed with no reference to their underlying CMs, and both definitions and example sentences were provided in English.
- 4) “*Listing Japanese Group*” – idioms were mixed with no reference to any CMs, and both definitions and example sentences translated into Japanese were provided.

The results, once more, revealed a positive support to the CM theory. In her research paper (Vasiljevic, 2015), she stresses the importance of employing the experimental results in the instruction of idioms. Among her practical suggested theories, we can find the CM theory. She supports this idea by relying on memory studies that have demonstrated that learning can be facilitated by linking new information with previously existed ones (Baddeley, 1999).

## **Conclusion**

The present chapter has reviewed some of previously established works that deal with implementing idioms in EFL teaching/learning as well as the use of CMs in dealing with figurative idioms. It has provided an overview about figurative language and has offered detailed information about idioms, metaphors, and formulaic competence. Furthermore, it has tackled the importance of teaching idioms and the different strategies and approaches that can be used to present them, with a focus on the strategy provided by Lakoff & Johnson. Finally, the review has explored some experimental studies that are related to the use of the CM theory in facilitating the learning of idioms.

# **Chapter II: Research Design**

## **Introduction**

This chapter is concerned with the methodology that is used in this research. It serves to provide information about the instruments used to address our research questions. It starts by presenting the data collection procedures, including the major elements of the experiment such as variables, participants and the materials, then the procedures of data analysis.

### **2.1 Research Method**

The research paradigm that we have chosen and applied to conduct our study is the mixed methods approach. As defined by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, “*mixed methods*” is a term used to describe “*the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study*” (2004:17). In a more recent study Johnson, et al. (2007), in which 19 definitions of mixed methods research given by leaders in the field were analyzed, the authors synthesized the following definition:

Mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration. (2007:123)

This paradigm presents the advantage of incorporating the strengths of both methodologies, offers an expanded prospect to understand complex situations and gives more insight than the use of a single methodology. Its choice for the present study is then predominantly motivated by the desire to get an all-embracing approach where the outcome would be a complete understanding of the topic under investigation.

### **2.2 Experiment Study**

In general, in a controlled experiment, researchers implement treatments to sampling units such as people, animals, or plants and then observe the effect of the treatments on the experimental units during a determined period of time. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (AHDictionary, 2016) defines an experiment as “A test under controlled

*conditions that is made to demonstrate a known truth, to examine the validity of a hypothesis, or to determine the efficacy of something previously untried*". In this study, the experiment considers two groups of students, namely the experimental and the control groups. The former is the group that will receive idiom-instruction according to the variable under study, namely a systematic presentation of idioms through the CM theory. The second is the group that will receive idiom-instruction without following any representation method.

### **2.2.1 Participants**

The participants of this study are 60 EFL male and female students at upper-intermediate level of language proficiency in the department of English. All of them learned idioms under the instruction of the same teacher in the Speaking and Listening subject. The participants were divided into two groups each one containing 30 students, and they received different treatments. Group 1, the experimental group, received contextualized idiom instruction. Idioms were grouped according to specific conceptual metaphors, and a metaphorical explanation was provided by the teacher. Group 2, the control group, received traditional instruction by presenting idioms in context and by providing the definition of each idiom.

### **2.2.2 Experimental Design Variables**

A Variable is defined as "*anything that can vary such as memory, attention, or time taken to perform a task*" (McLeod, 2008:1); it is a unit, quantity or quality that can have different values (Trochim, 2002). The experimental design variables of interest in our study are of two types: dependent and independent. The dependent variable is the value that will be affected during the experiment, and in our case we have two of this type of variables: idiom comprehension and idiom production. The independent variable, in turn is the element that will affect the dependent variable, and in this study, teaching idioms using conceptual metaphors and teaching idioms with traditional methods are the two independent variables of the experiment. Moreover, other types of variables in this study such as the age of the



participants, the dialogues used for idioms, the instructor, the number and level of students remain stable throughout the investigation. In other words they are control variables.

### 2.2.3 Material and Procedures

The material selected for this study is a collection of 12 different compiled dialogues containing a total of 36 idioms. These idioms belong to six different structural conceptual metaphors: “*Moods are weather*”, “*A project is a race*”, “*Anger is a hot fluid in a container*”, “*A company is a ship*”, “*Ides are food*”, and “*Love is a journey*” which were selected from two text books (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003 and Wright, 2002). Concerning the dialogues, they were developed by making use of the online resource called “One Stop English” (OSE, 2016) then were modified in a way that each dialogue contains three idioms. Each of the dialogues was carried out in a 30-minute period, twice a week. The whole implementation started in the 8<sup>th</sup> of May and was completed in three weeks under the instruction of the same teacher. The meaning of the idioms were mainly taken from two sources: “*The Reference Guide to American English Idioms*” and “*The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms*” (OELP, 2010 and Ammer, 1997).

The instruction procedure was not the same in the two groups. In the experimental group, the instructor first gives students a detailed explanation of what metaphor and conceptual metaphor are, and how it is possible to generate a number of idioms from a specific conceptual metaphor. Furthermore, he also tells the learners that each metaphor has two concepts: one is abstract like “*argument*” and the other is concrete like “*war*”. This indeed illustrates the idea of understanding one thing in terms of another and which is behind the use of metaphors. For example, the conceptual metaphor “*Argument is war*”, as reported by Lakoff and Johnson, generates the following idiomatic expressions:

*Your claims are indefensible.*  
*He attacked every weak point in my argument.*  
*I demolished his argument.*  
*I’ve never won an argument with him.*

*If you use that strategy, he'll wipe you out.  
He shot down all of my arguments. (2003:5)*

According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), arguments are partially structured, understood and talked about in terms of battles and this, in turns, influences the way we structure our sentences when we argue. That is, we use expressions from the “*vocabulary of war*” to show the “*battling aspects of arguing*”. To sum up, Lakoff and Johnson (2003) assert that the concept, such as argument, is “*metaphorically structured*”, the triggered action is metaphorically structured, and, consequently, our language is metaphorically structured.

After the introduction of metaphors and their impact, students were given a handout structured into three sections (see appendix C). The first section is a warming up activity that lists some literal meaning of words coming from the concrete concept. In the conceptual metaphor “A Company Is a Ship”, for example, the concrete concept is “a ship”. Thus, the corresponding literal words include ropes, deck, and to rock. The purpose of this activity is to elicit a mapping function between the literal source domain and the figurative target domain. The second section presents a dialogue to familiarize students with the use of idioms in contexts. The dialogue contains three idioms that are grouped under the same conceptual metaphor. For instance, the idioms “*to be in the same boat*”, “*to know the ropes*” and “*all hands on deck*” belong to the conceptual metaphor “A Company Is a Ship”. The final section contains questions about the comprehension of the idioms implemented in the dialogue.

In the control group, the instructor is not supposed to give any metaphorical explanation. All he has to do is to give the meaning of idioms in the target language and ask students to memorize them. Then a warming activity is presented. However, unlike the experimental group, the aim of this activity is to function like an attention grabber to start the lesson. Each dialogue incorporates three idioms selected randomly (see appendix D). This means that the selected idioms belong to different conceptual metaphors. As the other group, a number of questions about idiom comprehension were provided.

## **2.3 Procedures of Data Collection**

### **2.3.1 Pre and Post Tests**

A pre-test and a post-test (see appendices E and F, respectively) are two assessment tools used in this study. The former was given to the students before the instruction period while the latter was given at the end to see whether they have improved their capacity to understand idioms. Each of the tests consists of two sections and necessitated a 30-minute session. The first section, similar in both tests, contains 14 multiple-choice questions to check students' idiom comprehension. The second section contains 4 open-ended questions to check students' idiom production. Although the form of this last part is different in the two tests, the aim is the same. In the pre-test, students were asked to write the correct idiom instead of a provided expression, but in the post-test, they were asked to complete each sentence with the correct idiom from its corresponding list.

### **2.3.2 The Questionnaire**

The present study used a questionnaire as a means for collecting some of the data that are needed to answer our research questions in a consistent manner. Its intent is to gather more and well-founded information about the topic under study. A questionnaire is defined by Key (1997:1) as *“a means of eliciting the feelings, beliefs, experiences, perceptions, or attitudes of some sample of individuals”*. Another definition, given by Brown (2001:6), describes questionnaires as *“any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers”*. One advantage of using a questionnaire rather than any other tool is the ability to reach a large number of participants easily. Another advantage, cited by Dörnyei (2003), is its exceptional effectiveness in terms of saving time, effort, and “cost-benefit”.

Accordingly, the designed questionnaire was distributed to 10 teachers of the English department while keeping their answers highly anonymous. The questionnaire contains 21 questions that vary between open-ended questions where teachers can chose an answer from a set of suggestions, and close-ended ones where teachers are given the chance to provide their own opinions. It is divided into three sections. Section one is set to investigate teachers' attitudes towards teaching idioms, section two to examine the relation between idioms and metaphors, and section three to record teachers' suggestions for facilitating idiom-instruction.

## **2.4 Procedures of Data Analysis**

### **2.4.1 Descriptive Statistical method**

The quantitative data obtained from the first section of the pre and post tests are processed in three steps. First, students' scores are computed using Frary's (1988) formula scoring which is:

$$FS = R - W/(C - 1)$$

Where, R is the number of items answered right, W the number of answered wrong, and C the number of choices per item.

Next, the gain score is calculated.

$$\text{Gain Score} = \text{post-test score} - \text{pre-test score}$$

Finally, the differences are analyzed in a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) procedure that aims to determine whether there is any significant difference between the groups.

The numerical data obtained from the close-ended questions of the questionnaire are converted into percentages by means of a widely used statistical analysis program called Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). It is described by (Ntoumanis, 2005: 1) as "*a comprehensive statistical program with a wide variety of options and statistical analyses available for social scientists*". The reasons behind choosing SPSS include its easiness, ability to provide clear tables, and its capacity to transform data with great precision into statistics. In

addition, SPSS allows the comparison of the means between two or more groups, offers descriptive statistics, and complex data analysis procedures (SPSS, 2005).

#### **2.4.2 Content Analysis**

Content Analysis (CA) is the analytical tool used in this study to specifically analyze the second section of the pre and post tests. It is used to establish the occurrence of certain words or concepts within a text and to measure this occurrence in an impartial manner. As defined by Krippendorff (2004:18), content analysis “*is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use*”. The method to perform a content analysis on any given text is that the text is first coded, or divided into categories, and then analyzed using one of content analysis’ basic methods whether “*conceptual analysis*” or “*relational analysis*” (Guide, 2016). In our case, we opt for Conceptual Content Analysis (QCA) to search for the existence of words of an idiom in a student’s response to an asked question. To perform this task, students’ answers were analyzed on the basis of a set of well identified idioms. The coding scheme used contains six logical grades: correct idiom form, wrong idiom form, no answer, one correct word, two correct words and three correct words. It is worth noting that the maximum number of words of a target idiom is 4, and functional words such as ‘the’, ‘in’ or ‘on’ are counted as words. Finally, the results are turned into percentages and presented in diagrams.

#### **2.4.3 Qualitative Content Analysis**

Content analysis is a method that can be used with either qualitative or quantitative data. Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), as stated by Zhang and Wildemuth (2009), is a widely used technique in a variety of research applications. For Mayring (2014:6), qualitative content analysis is defined as “*a mixed approach containing qualitative and quantitative steps of analysis*”. For Hsieh and Shannon (2005:1278), it is “*a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of*

*coding and identifying themes or patterns*”. Furthermore, they have advocated three theoretical developed approaches: *conventional*, *directed*, and *summative*. The emphasis here is on conventional content analysis as this is particularly suitable when analyzing responses to open-ended questions. The prime merits of QCA include its flexibility that characterizes the interaction between the researcher and the participant, and potential to investigate research problems in a language learning setting. In this dissertation, to analyze and interpret the data gathered from both the questionnaire open-ended questions and the idiom production sections of post and pre tests, a qualitative content analysis (QCA) is adopted.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explained in details the methodology that is followed to conduct this experimental study. It has started by first introducing the research design along with a short overview about what is an experimental research. Next, it tackled the major points that should be taken into consideration in such an experiment such as the participants, variables, resources and procedures of the idiom-instruction. Then, information about data collection precisely, the assessment tests and the questionnaire were outlined in details. Furthermore, the chapter described the different techniques that were used to analyze the data including the SPSS program with its different procedures, Conceptual Content Analysis, and Qualitative Content Analysis.

## **Chapter III: Presentation of the Findings**

## Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the practical part of our research. It presents the results obtained from the pre- and post- tests administrated to 60 upper intermediate EFL students, and from the questionnaire distributed to 10 teachers of the department of English. The selected tools aim to provide appropriate answers to the aforementioned research questions and hypothesis. This chapter is divided into two parts; the first part presents the results obtained from the experiment's tests to examine the effect of CM theory for idiom comprehension and production while the second part reports the data of the questionnaire that provides supplementary information about the research issue.

### 3. 1 Presentation of the Experiment's Pre and Post Tests

#### 3.1.1 Pre and Post Tests: Section One

The analysis of this part is based on the data gathered from students' scores that concerns idiom comprehension. The scores were computed and then analyzed by a one-way ANOVA procedure in a trial to answer the first research question which is: 'Is there any significant difference between applying the CM Method and the Traditional Method on EFL learners' comprehension of English idioms?' The following table summarizes the mains variables of the comparison. The only columns that are important for the interpretation of data are the first and the third, and others are used for other computational purposes.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Conceptual Metaphor Theory (experimental group)	30	6.8663	4.61739	.84302	5.1422	8.5905	-1.33	15.00
Traditional Method (control group)	30	1.8440	4.03770	.73718	.3363	3.3517	-9.67	9.33
Total	60	4.3552	4.99056	.64428	3.0660	5.6444	-9.67	15.00

**Table 3.1 - Descriptive Statistics for the ANOVA on Idiom Comprehension**

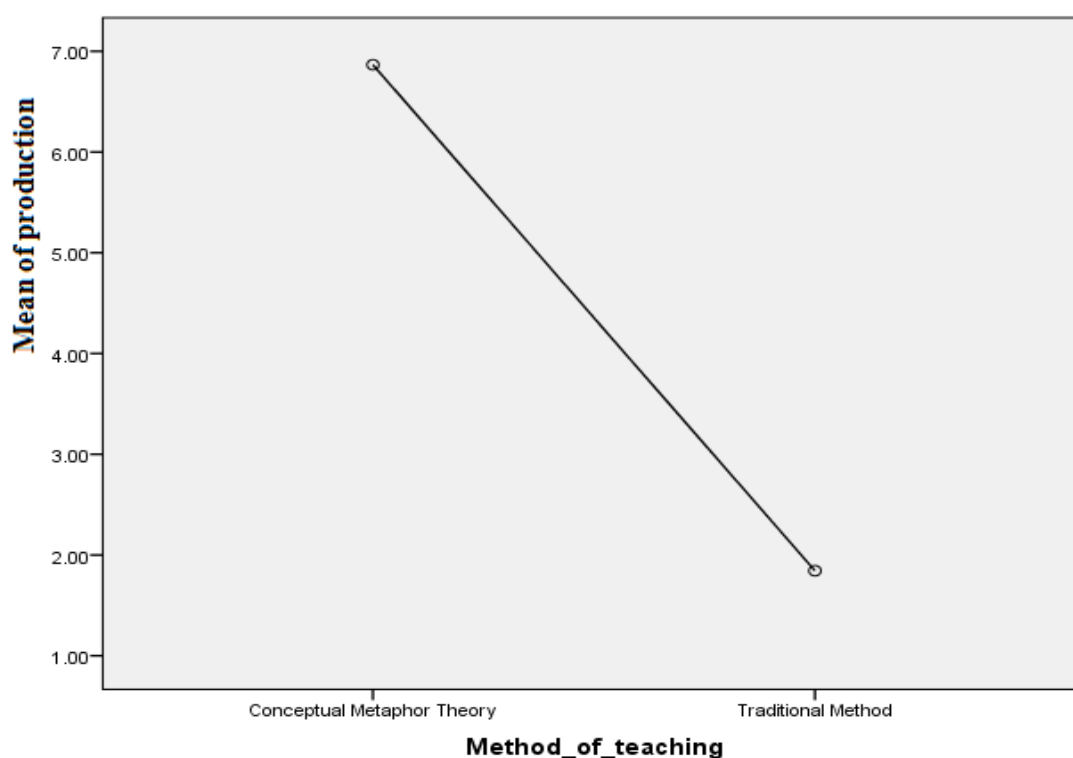


From Table 3.1, the group who had received CM instructions scored a higher mean than the group who received Traditional method of instruction in idiom comprehension. In order to see if there is really a significant difference between the experimental group and the control one, another one way ANOVA procedure was used. The results are shown in Table 3.2:

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	378.357	1	378.357	20.113	.000
Within Groups	1091.077	58	18.812		
Total	1469.434	59			

**Table 3.2 - ANOVA on Idiom Comprehension**

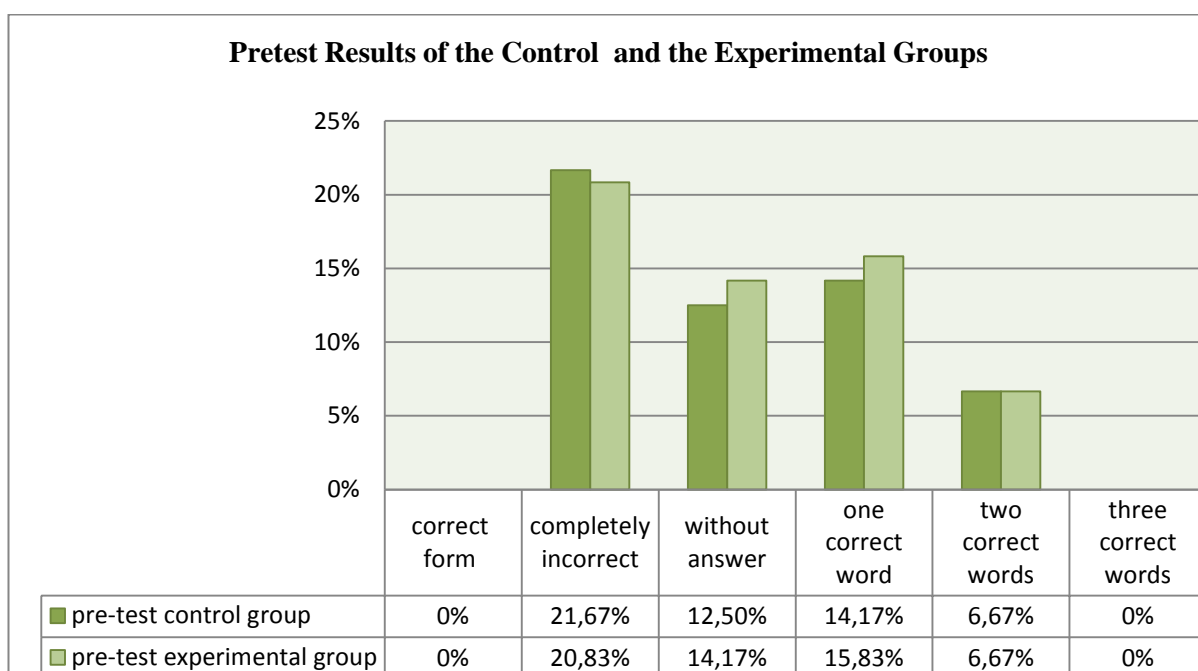
The results of ANOVA in Table 3.2 show that the significant value (Sig =.000) is less than  $\alpha = .05$ . So, in this case, because the significance value is less than  $\alpha$ , we reject the second hypothesis (HP2). Therefore, it is evident that applying CM method as a strategy in teaching idioms results in significant effects on learners' idiom comprehension. For further details, a graphical representation, Figure 3.1, is provided.



**Figure 3.1 - Idiom comprehension of the control and the experimental group**

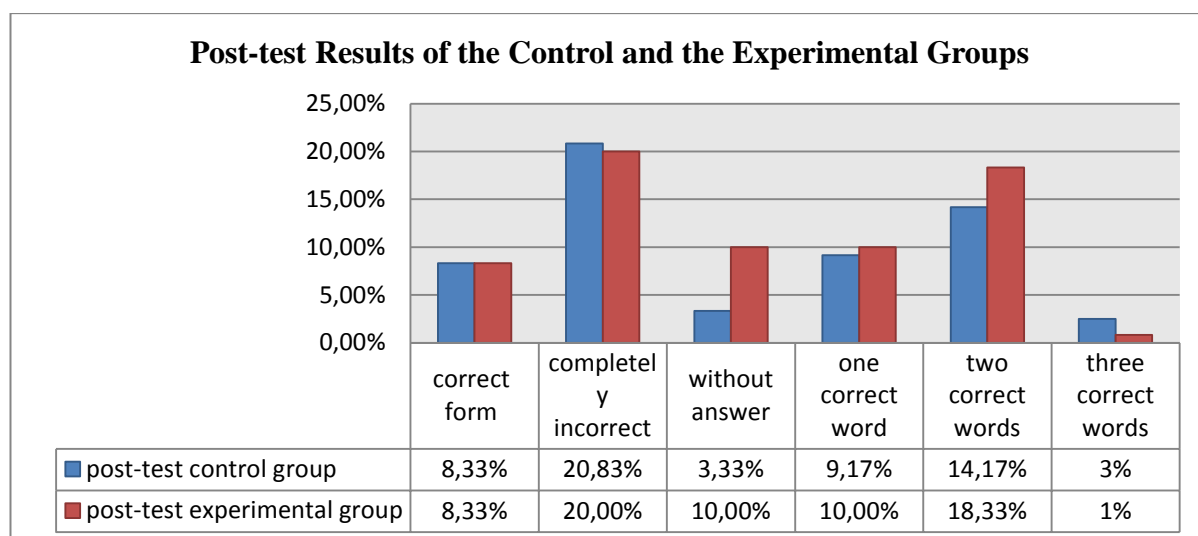
### 3.1.2 Pre and Post Tests: Section Two

The analysis of this second part is based on the information gathered from students' scores that concerns idiom production. The procedure was first carried out by using Conceptual Content Analysis and, the results were turned into percentages by the SPSS program in an attempt to find out the number of students' answers concerning each of the correct answers, wrong answers, and partially correct answers. The results of the pre-test are presented in diagram 3.1 while the results of the post-test are presented in diagram 3.2.



**Diagram 3.1 - Pre-test Results of the Control and the Experimental Groups**

The information contained in Diagram 3.1 shows that none of the students, in both groups, has provided neither the correct form nor three correct words of the target idioms. It also indicates that the percentages for the completely incorrect answers are relatively high (21.67% and 20.83%) whereas the percentages for two correct words are very low (6.67% for both groups).



**Diagram 3.2 - Post-test Results of the Control and the Experimental Groups**

The diagram demonstrates that there is a noticeable improvement in that the percentages of the correct answers rose from 0 to 8.33%, those to three correct words from 0 to up to 3%, and those to two correct words from 6.67% to up to 18.33%. Furthermore, the percentage of the items left without answers dropped significantly, from 12.50% to 3.33% and from 14.17% to 10.00%, for both groups. However, about 20% of students still produce incorrect forms of idioms even after the instruction process and there is only a little difference between the results of both groups in producing idioms.

### **3. 2 Presentation of the Questionnaires' data**

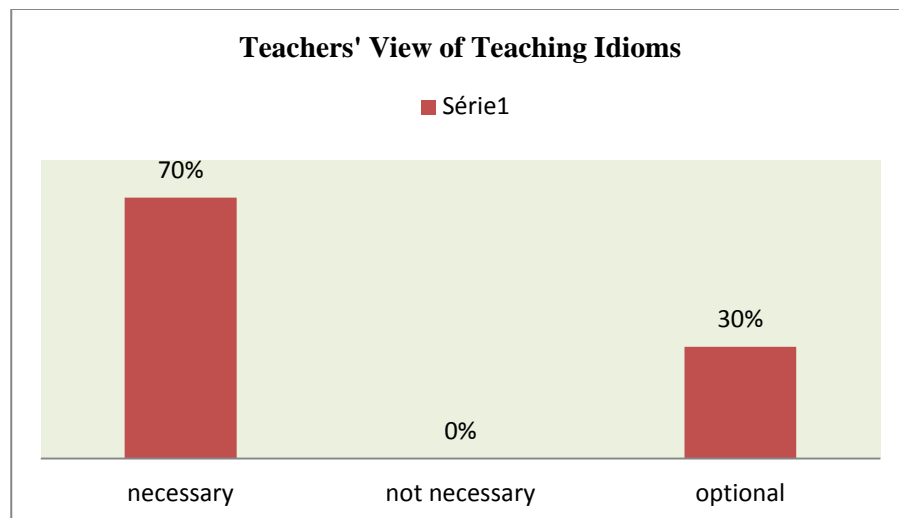
#### **3.2.1 Part I - Teachers' Attitudes towards Teaching Idioms**

##### **Q1: Could you provide three benefits for learning idioms?**

The respondents have provided various benefits of learning idioms. Some believe that the learning of idioms *maximizes students' understanding of language, widens people's comprehension of other cultures*, and more importantly *increases the learners' knowledge about idioms*. Others enthusiastically assert that learning idioms not only helps students *acquire new vocabulary* and *improve their communicative skills* but also grant them the ability to *appropriately express their ideas in situations for which an idiom is the best choice*. According to some teachers, idioms are like '*poetic devices*' that paint pictures or add color to

speech. They also emphasize that the more students are able to comprehend idioms, the more their listening, speaking, writing and reading skills will improve.

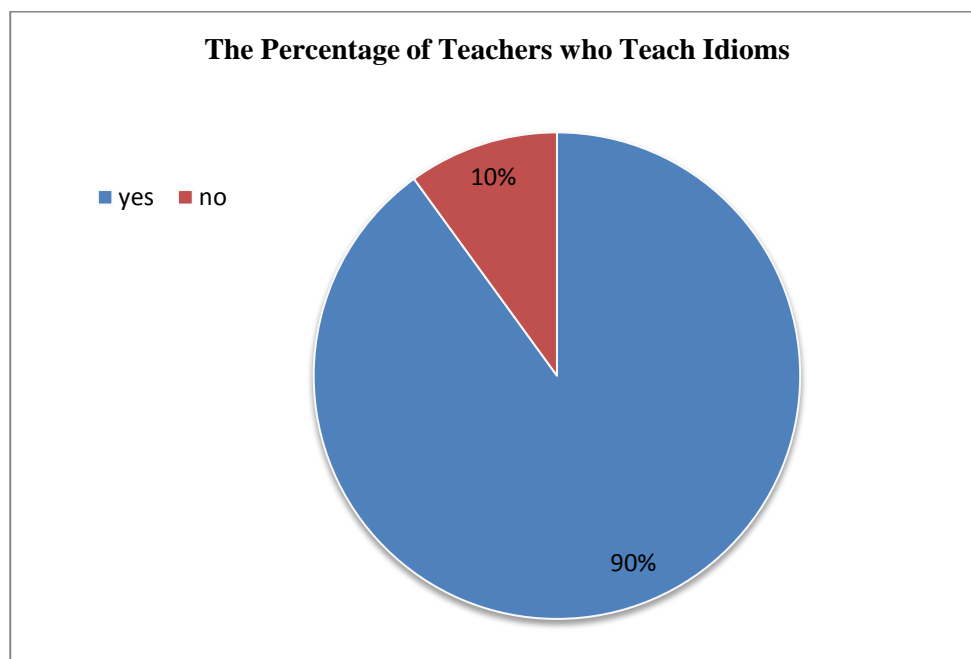
**Q2: What do you think about teaching idioms to EFL students?**



**Diagram 3.3 - Teachers' View of Teaching Idioms**

70% of the respondents judge that teaching idioms to EFL learners is necessary while 30% think it is optional.

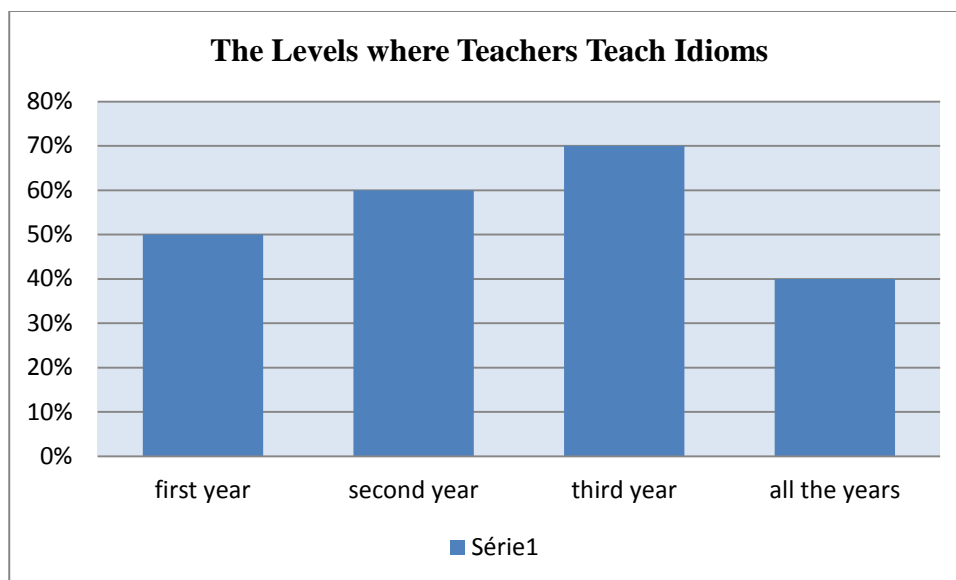
**Q3: Have you ever taught idioms?**



**Diagram 3.4 - The Percentage of Teachers who Teach Idioms**

From Diagram 3.4, it came out that the majority of teachers, specifically 90%, have taught idioms while only a small fraction, 10%, didn't lecture idioms before.

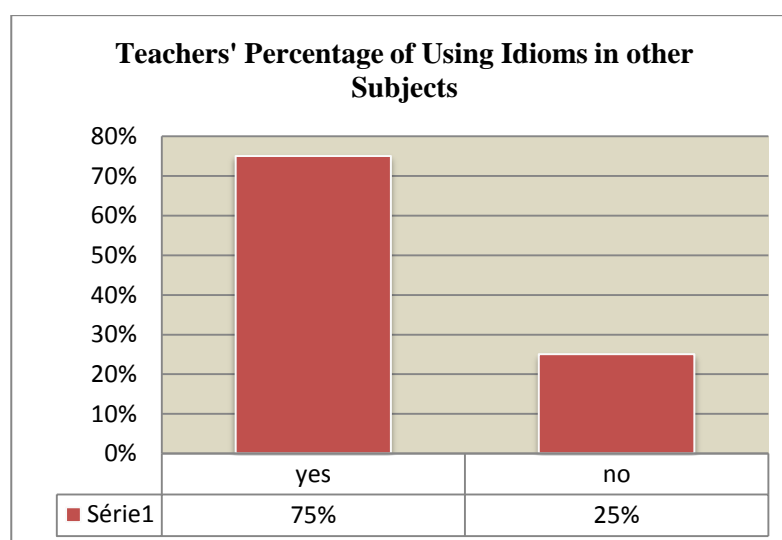
**If yes, to which students?**



**Diagram 3.5 - The Levels where Teachers Teach Idioms**

From Diagram 3.5, it is clear that the respondents teach idioms at different levels, 50% lecture them for the first year students, 60% for the second years, and 70% for the third year. The last case concerns teachers lecturing idioms for all three levels.

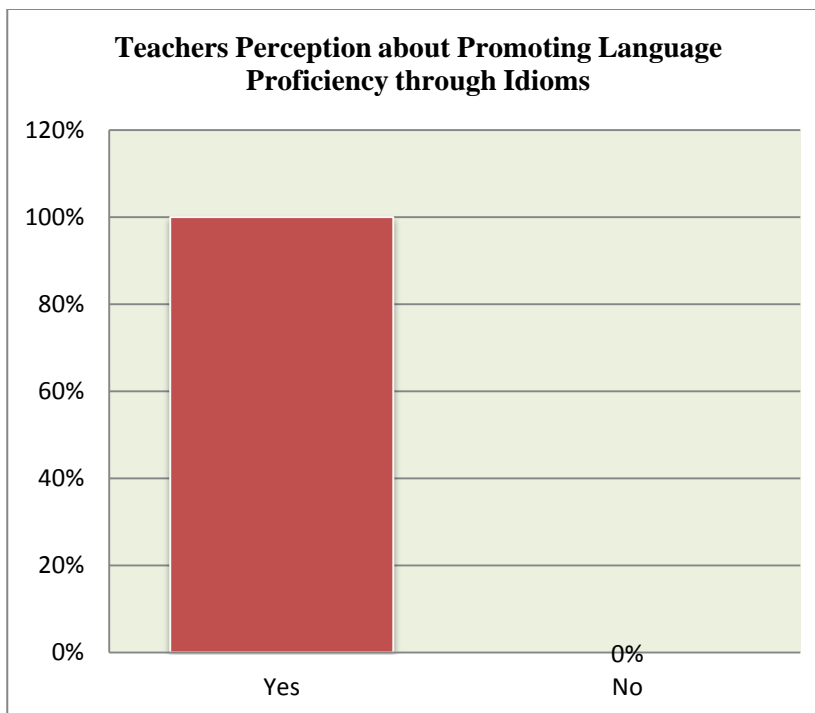
**Q4: Apart from teaching oral sessions, do you use idioms while teaching other modules?**



**Diagram 3.6 - Teachers' Percentage of Using Idioms in other Subjects**

Most teachers, that is 75%, have used or taught idioms in other modules, and only 25% said that they have taught them only in oral modules.

**Q 5: Do you think that teaching idioms can promote students language proficiency?**



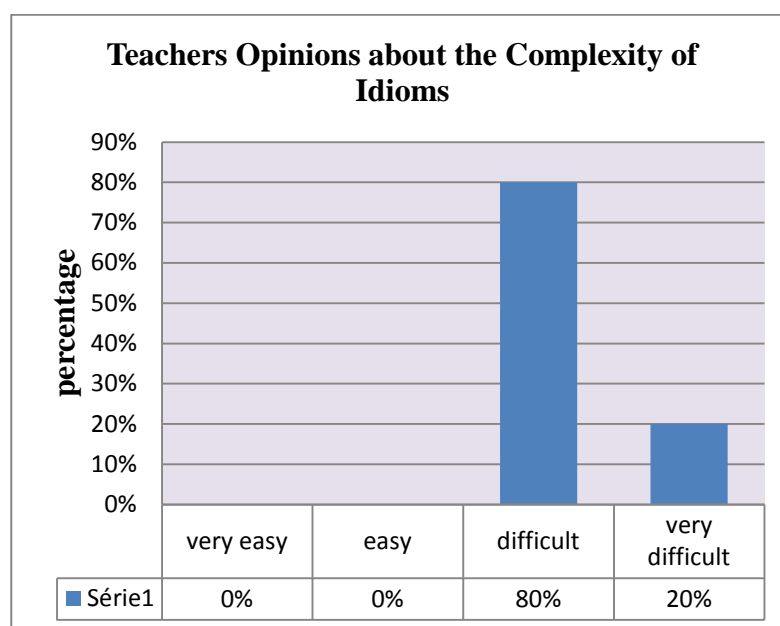
**Diagram 3.7 - Teachers Perception about Promoting Language Proficiency through Idioms**

All teachers agree on the importance of teaching idioms in developing and promoting EFL language proficiency.

**Q6: Would you give us a precise definition of an idiom?**

Although the respondents have provided different answers, all of them agree on that “*idioms cannot be understood from the literal meaning of its constituent words*”. For example, one has defined idioms as “*a sentence that cannot be understood from the individual words, but it should be understood as a whole*”, and another has described them as “*an expression whose meaning extends the sum of the meanings of its individual parts as it refers to a specific culture where it is coined and where it produces a particular effect*”.

**Q7: How do you find idioms? Would you justify your answer?**



**Diagram 3.8 – Teachers’ Opinions about the Complexity of Idioms**

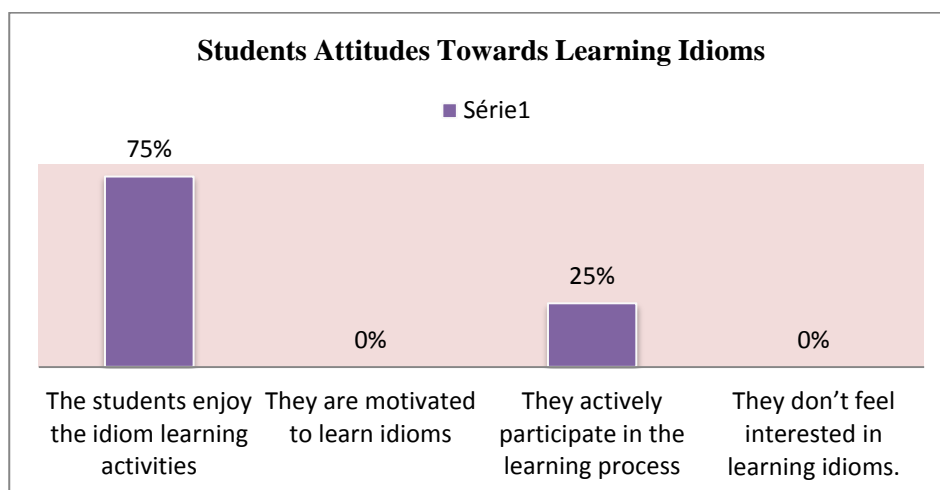
The majority of teachers, 80%, consider idioms as difficult expressions for non-native speakers of English to understand while the rest, 20%, see them as being very difficult. Some argue that the difficulty to understand idioms resides in that they are linked to specific cultures, and in order to understand them we must be aware of that culture. A representation of this view is a teacher stating that “*Idioms require the mastery of the target culture*”. Others maintain that, “*idioms are difficult because most of them require the presence of context without which the meaning will not be reached*”.

**Q8: Would you tell us about the strategies and the activities that you use to present idioms to your students?**

The majority of teachers prefer to use idioms in context to make it possible to the learners to guess their meanings. The majority said that they present idioms in dialogues and then discuss or analyze them while others prefer to use texts and try to connect L2 idioms to L1 whenever it is possible. A few of the respondent prefer to use lists of idioms combined with their L2 definitions or analysis, then they ask their students to write a story using some

of the idioms presented in order to read it out loud. Only a small number of teachers use images and sometimes translation to French, Arabic or Kabyle languages for further explanations.

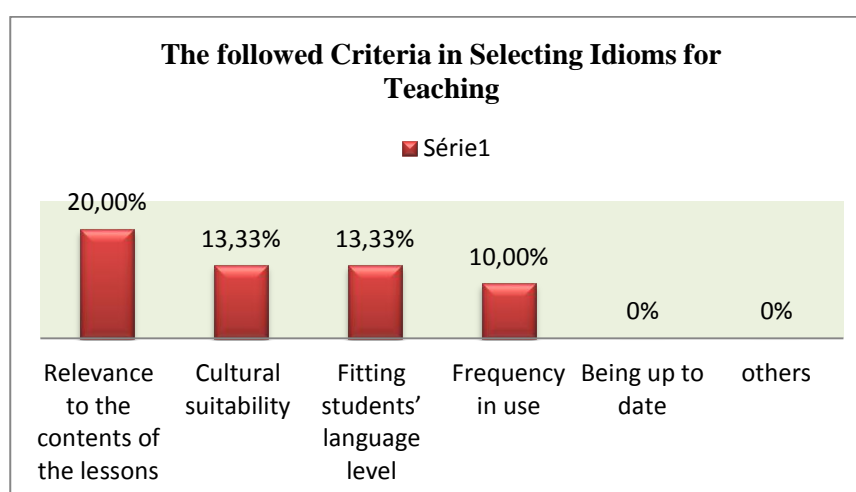
**Q 9: How do find your students towards learning idioms?**



**Diagram 3.9 - Students Attitudes towards Learning Idioms**

Diagram 3.9 illustrates that students enjoy and participate in the learning process. 75% of them find idiom-activities and learning enjoyable and 25% actively participate in the learning process.

**Q10: What are the criteria that you follow in selecting idioms for teaching?**

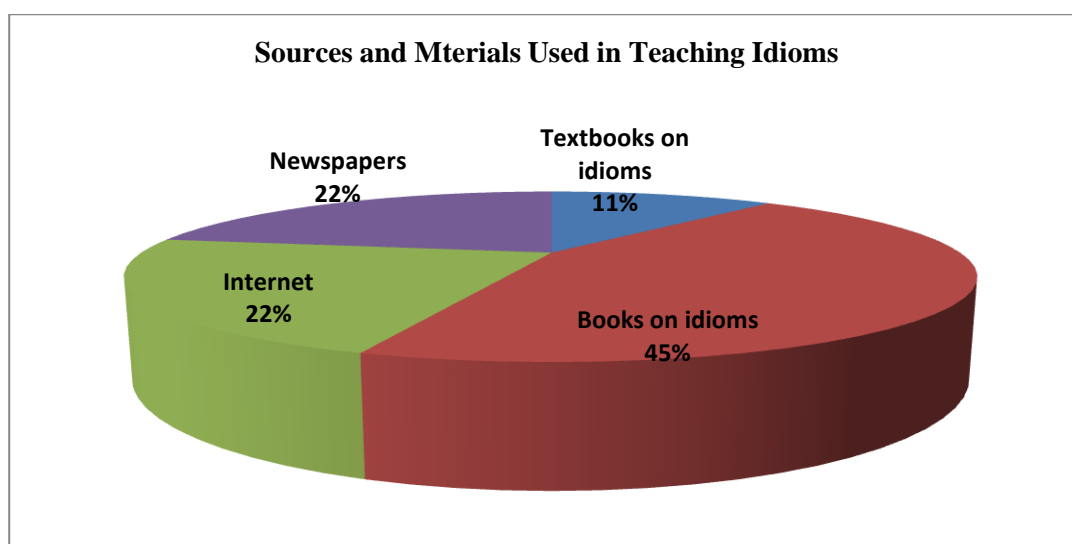


**Diagram 3.10 - The followed Criteria in Selecting Idioms for Teaching**



Diagram 3.10 plainly displays that 20% of teachers tend to select idioms according to their relevance to the lessons whereas 13.33% of them select idioms according to the level of students. 13.33% put the cultural suitability as their main criteria and 10% focus on selecting only the most frequent used idioms.

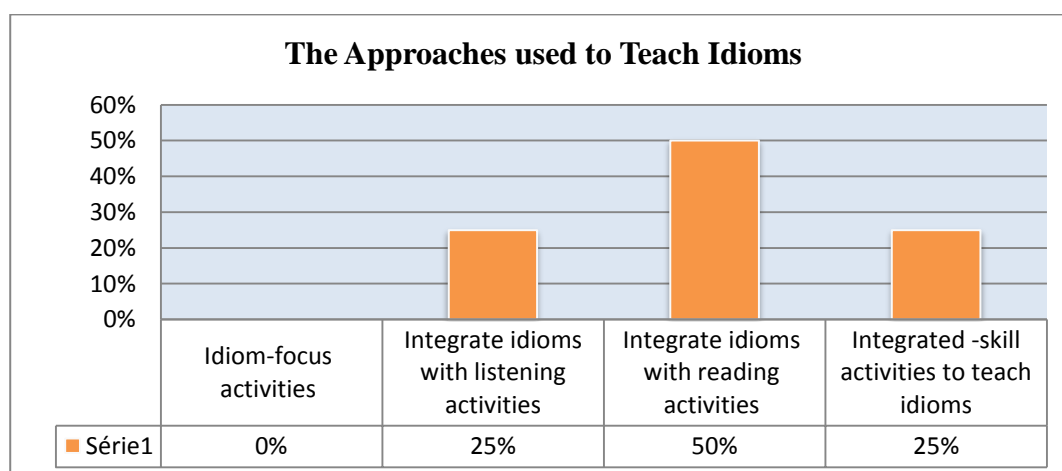
**Q11: What are the sources and teaching materials that you use to teach idioms?**



**Diagram 3.11 - Sources and Materials Used in Teaching Idioms**

From Diagram 3.11, it appears that a great number of teachers, that is 45%, use idiom-collection books, 22% utilize the World Wide Web, 22% choose newspapers, and 11% prefer idiom textbooks as the sources for the selection of idioms.

**Q12: What is the approach that you use in teaching idioms?**

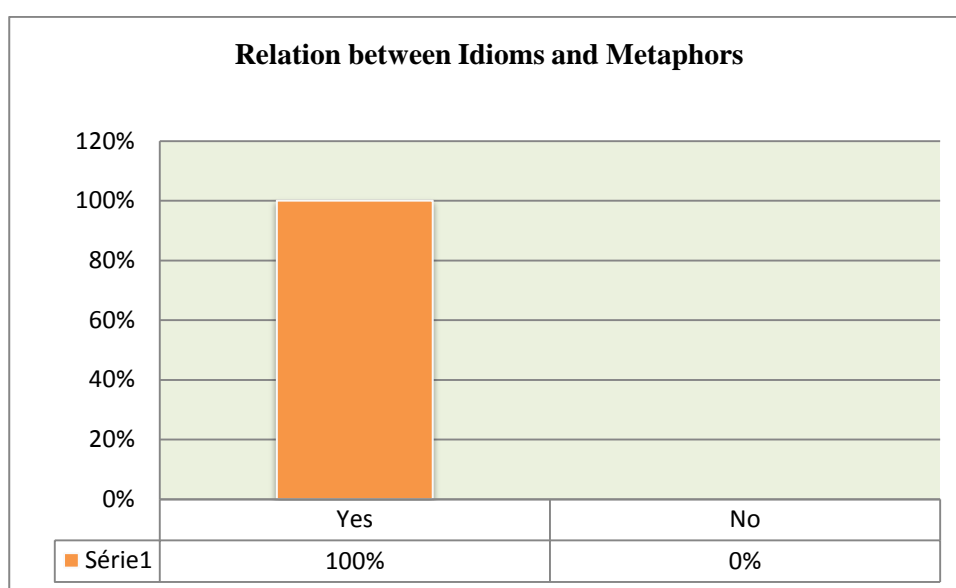


**Diagram 3.12 - The Approaches used to Teach Idioms**

As regard to the approach for presenting idioms, Diagram 3.12 reveals that 50% of teachers focus on reading activities, 25% emphasize on listening activities, while the rest 25% prefer integrating all reading, listening, writing and speaking skills.

### 3.2.2 Part II - Idioms and their Relation to Metaphors

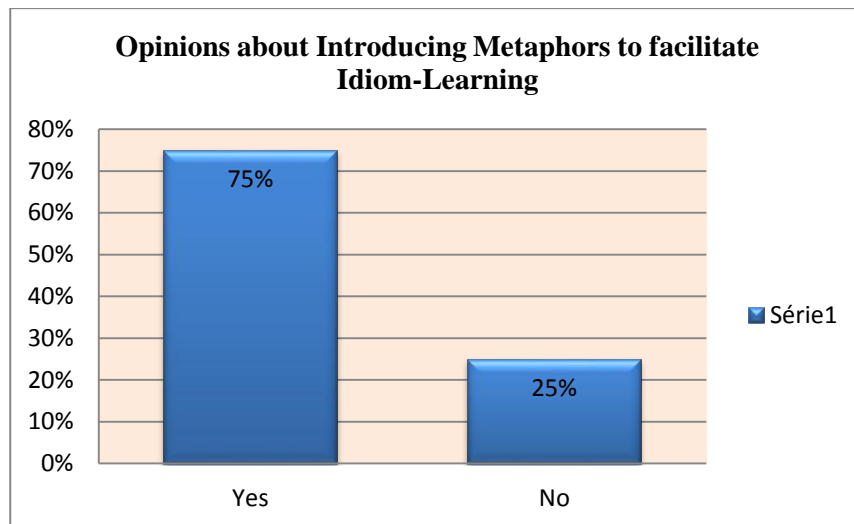
**Q13: Do you see any relation between idioms and metaphors? If yes, would you give us an explanation?**



**Diagram 3.13 - Relation between Idioms and Metaphors**

As illustrated in Diagram 3.13, the totality of the respondents agrees on the existence of a relationship between idioms and metaphors despite the fact that they have provided different explanation. Some argue that both idioms and metaphors require imagination as well as higher order skills like analysis, comparison and inference. Others maintain that both of them are based on analogies and are culture specific. While several find idioms and metaphors similar in the sense that they create images in a reader's mind.

**Q14: Dou you think that introducing metaphors to students will facilitate their comprehension of idioms? If yes, would you tell us how?**

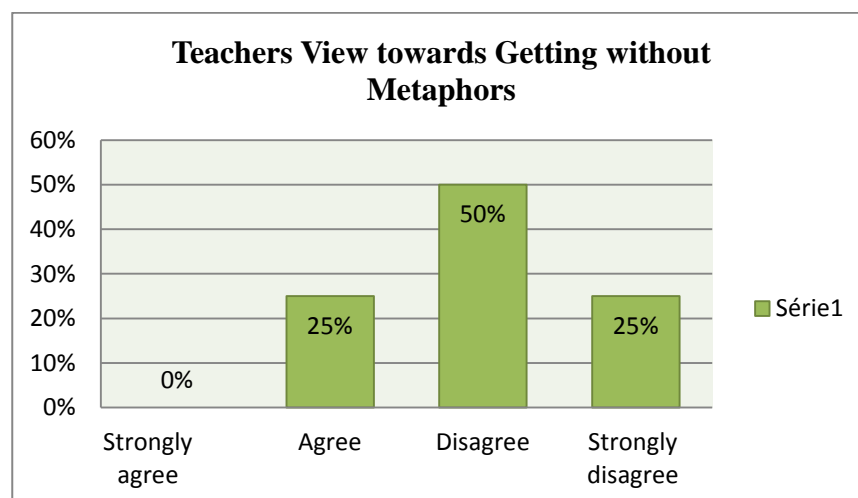


**Diagram 3.14 - Opinions about Introducing Metaphors to facilitate Idiom-Learning**

From Diagram 3.14 presented above, the results clearly state that a great number of teachers, 75%, advocate the idea of introducing metaphors to their students before teaching idioms while a small number, 25%, are not proponents. Most advocates acknowledge that sometimes it is hard to explain an idiom especially if it carries out an abstract meaning or if there isn't its equivalent in students' L1, and consequently the underlying benefits of metaphors are real since these abstractions help to convey the meaning in an effective way.

**Q15: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?**

*People think they can get along perfectly well without metaphors.*



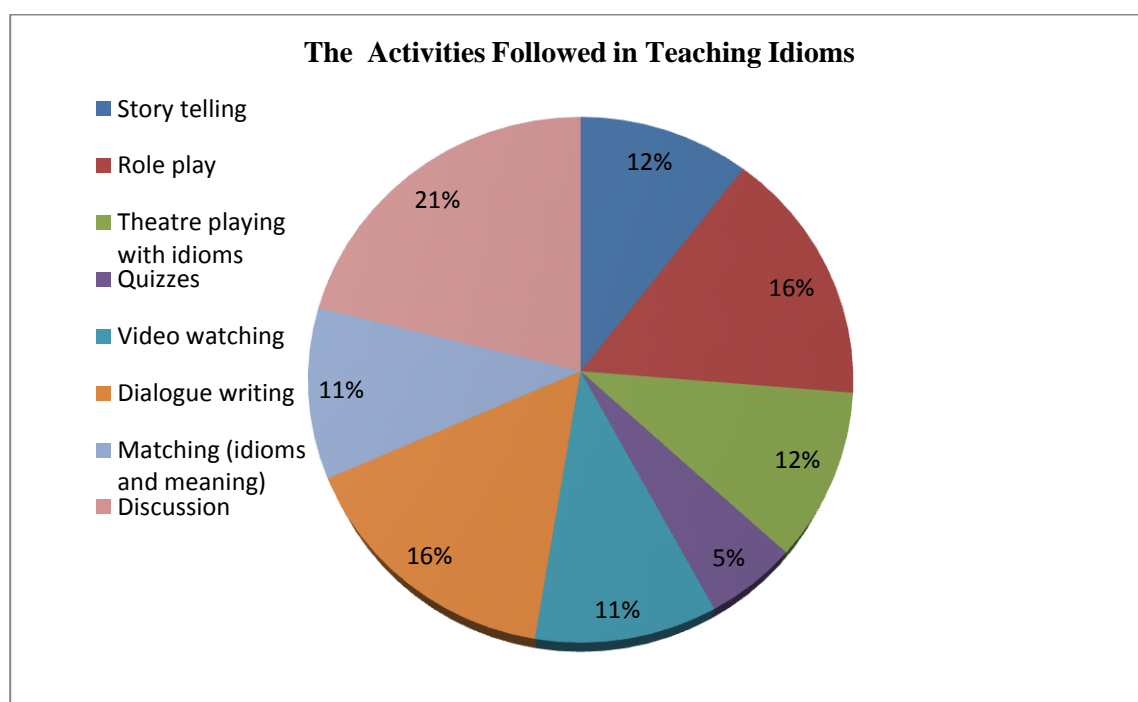
**Diagram 3.15 - Teachers View towards Getting without Metaphors**

From Diagram 3.15, it can be seen that the majority of teachers give a considerable importance to metaphors, in that 50% of them disagree on the statement that people can get perfectly well without using metaphors in their communications, and noticeably 25% strongly disagree. However, 25% see that metaphors don't play any role in dealing with idioms.

### 3.2.3 Part III - Teachers' Suggestions for Ways of Facilitating Idiom-Instruction

**Q16: Which of the following activities you think should be followed in teaching idioms?**

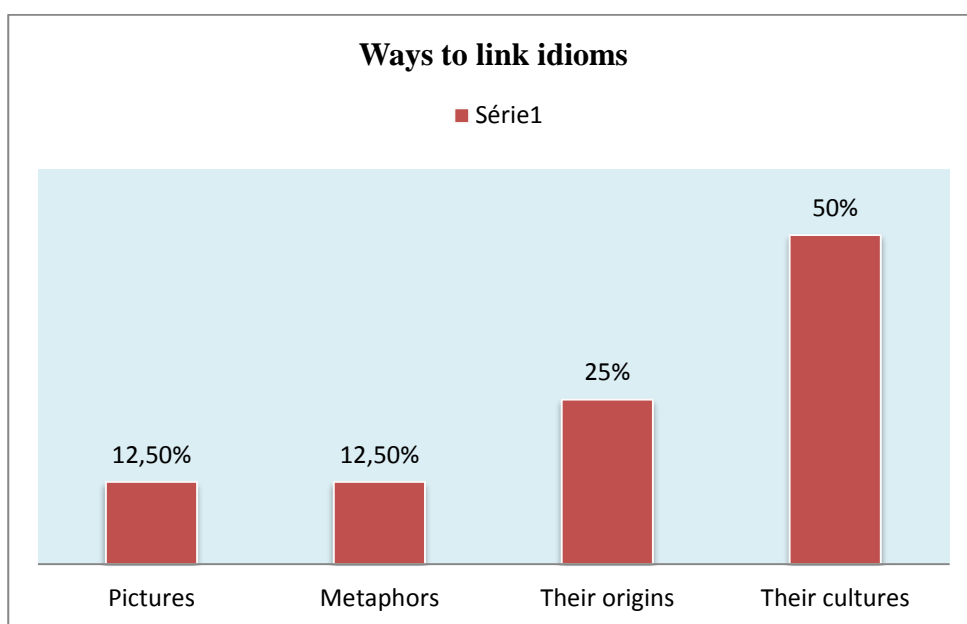
**(You can select more than one option)**



**Diagram 3.16 - The Activities Followed in Teaching Idioms**

As it is presented in Diagram 3.16, the most proposed activity to be followed in teaching idioms is discussion with 21% followed by both role play and dialogue writing with 16% each. The other major activities include storytelling and theatre playing with 12% for each, and matching idioms with their meaning and video watching with 11% for each. Finally, only 5% suggested quizzes as an activity that can be implemented in teaching idioms.

**Q17: When teaching idioms, what concept do you think would be a better link?**



**Diagram 3.17 - Ways to link idioms**

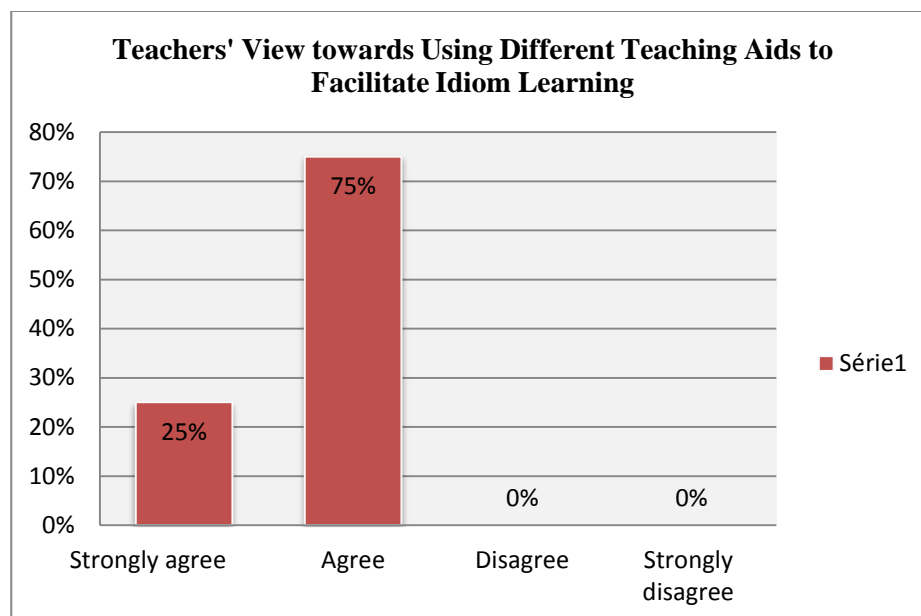
The majority of teachers suggest that it is better to link idioms to the culture in which they are originated. 25% said that it is better to link them to their origins, 12.50% to metaphors and 12.50% to pictures.

**Q18: According to you, what is the maximum number of idioms to be taught during one semester?**

The answer provided by all teachers is to do not overload students with too many idioms at a time. It is rather better to limit the numbers of idioms per lecture; four or five is perhaps a good number. For instance, one teacher said that “*there is no magic number, but the most important is to avoid providing students with too many idioms at once*”. Another argued that the number of idioms depends on the program and the time allocated for teaching idioms, collocation and phrasal verbs. In other words, program designers organize the lesson plan in a way that makes it possible to present a variety of idiomatic expressions in a 45-minute lecture.

**Q19: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

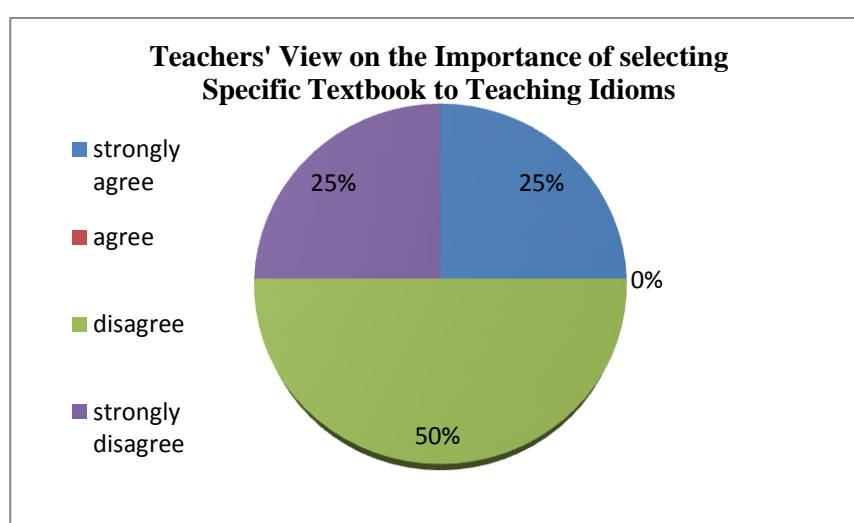
***Statement one: Teachers should use different teaching aids to ease the idiom learning process.***



**Diagram 3.18: Teachers' View towards Using Different Teaching Aids to Facilitate Idiom Learning**

Diagram 3.18 shows that 75% of teachers agree on using a variety of techniques or teaching aids to present idioms to EFL learners while 25% strongly agree.

***Statement two: Teachers should use a specific textbook in teaching idioms.***



**Diagram 3.19: Teachers' View on the Importance of selecting Specific Textbook to Teaching Idioms**

Diagram 3.19 shows that 50% of teachers are against limiting themselves to a specific textbook whereas the other 50% are equally distributed between those who agree on adopting a specific textbook and those who strongly disagree.

**Q20: Could you provide three main problems for teaching idioms?**

The respondents highlighted some of the problems and difficulties that they face when teaching idiomatic expressions. According to them, a large number of students do fail to produce correct idioms for the reason that they often use either wrong particles or prepositions with verbs. Another common problem is the selection of adequate resources that fit with the learners' level because of the individual differences between students. A further difficulty that students face to understand idioms is due to the lack of time to provide clear and comprehensible explanations for all common idioms as well as their inherent and tricky structural patterns.

**Q21: Would you please mention any further suggestions for ways to facilitate the learning of idioms.**

None of the respondents has provided any further suggestions other than the previously mentioned ones.

**Conclusion**

This chapter presented the results gathered from the pre and post assessment tests together with the questionnaire that aimed to reveal if there is any significant difference between using two different methods, the CM method and the Traditional method, in presenting idioms to EFL students. The results presented in tables, figures and diagrams revealed that the use of CM method is significant in idiom comprehension but rather inconsequential in idiom production. In addition, teachers showed a positive attitude towards teaching idioms in EFL context.

## **Chapter IV: Discussion of the Findings**



## **Introduction**

This chapter reports and discusses in details the major findings obtained from both the pre- and post- tests along with the questionnaire. The results are discussed in the light of the literature review presented in chapter one. The outcomes serve to answer the research questions as well as to confirm or refute the hypotheses suggested in the general introduction.

The discussion chapter is divided into two main sections and each is further divided into sub-sections. The first deals with the discussion of the role of conceptual metaphor theory on facilitating idiom comprehension and idiom production, whereas the second deals with teachers' attitudes towards teaching idioms, idioms and their relation to metaphors, and teachers' suggestions for ways to facilitate idiom-instruction.

### **4.1 Discussing the Findings of the Experiment Obtained from the Tests**

#### **4.1.1 The role of Conceptual Metaphor Theory on Facilitating Idiom Comprehension**

As regards the first research question of the present study, the findings indicate that there is a significant difference in the performance of the experimental group in comparison with the control one. From table 3.1 it is clear that the mean (6.86) of the experimental group who received idiom instruction according to CM theory is higher than that of the control group (1.84). More to the point, table 3.2 provides a clear cut answer in that it shows the significant difference between applying CM grouping and the random grouping of idioms. These results go hand in hand with a number of previously published studies and which some were reviewed in chapter 1 such as Boers (2000), Beréndi, et al. (2008) and Li (2010). All these studies have proved the significant effect of students' knowledge of conceptual metaphors on idiom comprehension, and have come up with the conclusion that metaphors help understanding figurative language.

One possible reason for the similarities between the findings of the present study and the aforementioned studies is the similar level of students. Specifically, all participants were

university students aged between 20-21 years old. Another reason is that conceptual metaphors to some extent operate as a motivator. In other words, “*some idioms make sense because they are motivated by conceptual structures of language*” as stated by Keysar and Bly (1999:1559). Clearly, this motivation is due to the link that exists between the abstract concept and the concrete concept which in turn leads to better idiom retention. Furthermore, presenting metaphorical explanation allows learners to create an imaginary scene or mental picture. The link of those images with common source domains permits learners to access the meaning of some idioms easily, thus, promoting their retention and comprehension as referred to by Rodriguez and Winnberg (2013).

#### **4.1.2 The role of Conceptual Metaphor Theory on Facilitating Idiom Production**

It can be easily noticed, from most of the previous studies, that the focus was on the process of learning idioms in general without distinguishing between comprehension and production. In fact, an effective learning of idioms needs a combination of both receptive and productive knowledge. Boers, et al. (2007) confirm this view by stating that the “*mastery of idioms goes beyond (receptive) comprehension*”. That’s why this study puts emphasize on both idiom comprehension and production.

The content analysis of the pretests answers reveals that neither correct forms nor three correct words of the target idioms were found by both groups (diagram 3.1). This, indeed, confirms the claim made by Cooper (1999) that English idioms are difficult for English native speakers, and subsequently they would be much more problematic for ESL learners since they do not have a lot of information about L2 idioms which makes it difficult to produce correct idioms. Concerning the percentages of providing two correct words, the control and experimental group scored similar results, (6.67%). One possible explanation is that first we took into consideration the articles and functional words as being one correct word, and second because of the semantic similarities between the target idioms and the provided

expressions. To explain the meaning of semantic similarities, students were asked, for example, to write an idiom instead of the expression ‘*at the end*’ (see pretest section 2) and some of them came up with answers such as ‘*the last day*’, ‘*the last step*’, ‘*to reach the last day of the journey*’ and ‘*the last period of time*’ instead of the correct idiom which is “*on the last lap*”. It is quite obvious that the word ‘*last*’ is provided because it is a synonym of the word ‘*end*’ in the expression provided in the question, not because they know the target idiom. The same explanation can then be used to sort out why the percentage of finding two correct words, which is 6.67%, is similar in both groups. In fact, such answers don’t fit with the definition of the idiom, as mentioned in chapter 1, and cannot be considered as idioms rather they are normal phrases that have nothing to do with idioms. In addition, this can be considered as another indication of their limited idiomatic competence. Another possible explanation for why students could find few correct words consists in the existence of the context from which they can guess the intended meaning.

On the other hand, the results of the posttests presented in diagram 3.2 show a variation in students’ answers; some scored higher results than the pretest while others didn’t. To make it clear, we are going to take the ‘correct word’ as a criterion of comparison. It is apparent that students in both groups scored approximately similar results. That is, 8.33% for correct form and 20% for completely incorrect form with a slight difference for the other forms. The finding of this study contradicts, partially, a study conducted by Vasiljevic (2011). She found that the CM approach to teaching idioms makes the explanations more comprehensible and memorable for learners. In fact our findings agree with her in the first part (comprehension) but not with making idioms memorable. The difference may be because she provided the meaning of idioms in students’ first language when introducing the conceptual metaphors, whereas in this study only L2 definitions were used whether in the control or in the experimental group. Another possible reason for such disagreement is that the control group

was asked to memorize the idioms, the strategy which was missed in the CM group. It seems that memorization has a considerable role in idiom recall/production. In the same vein, Oanh and Hien state that:

Experience and observation as learners and teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) as non-native speakers (NNS) convince us that memorization seems to be a valid learning strategy, provided that memorization is used appropriately to help students internalize what they have learned to apply in actual communication (2006:1).

Apart from that, the abnormal observation is that a great amount of wrong answers were committed by both groups and lots of common mistakes were produced. For examples, some students changed the verb tense, e.g., from present to past simple, or from singular to plural, while others misused the functional words like ‘of’ instead of ‘for’ or ‘on’ instead of ‘in’. One reason can be found in Glucksberg’s statement (2001) where he considered idioms as irregular expressions with a “*non-logical*” property. It is also important to note that L2 learners should respect the original structure of idioms, in that only minor changes are, sometimes, allowed because these may affect the figurative meaning (Baker, 1992).

## **4.2 Discussing the Findings of the Teachers’ Questionnaire**

### **4.2.1 Teachers’ Attitudes towards Teaching Idioms**

The results of the questionnaire point out that a great number of the respondents have a positive view towards teaching idioms, all of them (10/10) are completely aware of the difficulty that lies behind teaching/learning idioms to EFL students, and accordingly they adopt various presentation techniques. All of these considerations are quite apparent from the results presented in the previous chapter. For instance, the respondents provided various benefits for learning idioms, in that students can do a lot with the knowledge of idiomatic expressions. They can also enhance their communicative abilities and develop their language competence in a way that sounds like native speakers of English. In fact, teachers’ views seem to be in line with what has been mentioned in the review of literature (chapter 1) about the importance of teaching, learning and using idioms in daily communication. One teacher,

particularly, has stated that idioms “*maximize students’ understanding of language*”. Indeed this belief can be considered as a broad benefit of learning idioms as these are used extensively in various communicative situations. Ambrose (2003), for instance, states that idioms are not only an important part in different forms of communication but they are also used in various domains including education, sports and business. She also states that the individuals who don’t know the meaning of the idiom “*He struck out*”, for instance, which is used in baseball, will not know that the expression is a reference to someone who has failed to get what he wants.

Another indicator for positive attitudes towards teaching idioms in the English department is clearly displayed in diagram 3.3 where the majority of teachers (70%) consider teaching idioms as something necessary in the development of L2 language as well as in making language more colorful. Similarly, this view is shared by different scholars such as Cooper (1998), Tran (2013), Rodriguez and Winnberg (2013). Nevertheless, some teachers (30%) think that idioms are not necessary but rather optional. This view contradicts to some extent the view of most of the scholars that have been mentioned in chapter 1. It seems that the 30% of teachers hold the traditional view of idioms which considers them as mere ornaments of language that are used to add vividness and creativity. Another possible reason is that in the Algerian context, there is a very low chance to encounter idiomatic expressions outside the classroom; therefore a mastery of the basic language skills seems to be sufficient to handle an ordinary conversation.

Moreover, the results of diagram 3.4 show that although 10% of teachers don’t teach idioms, 90% of them teach idioms in different levels and in different modules as confirmed when looking to diagrams 3.5 and 3.6. Diagram 3.5 clearly demonstrates that idioms can be taught either in first year, second year, third year, or in all years. Their percentages are 50%, 60%, 70% and 40%, respectively. It is clear that the highest percentage is that of third year.

Diagram 3.6, in turns, demonstrates that 75% of teachers use idioms in other modules while 25% use them only in oral sessions. However, it will be better if all teachers teach idioms at different level and in different sessions so that student will have a chance to be familiar as much as possible with different idiomatic expressions without being bored or annoyed. In the light of what has been discussed above, it is worth saying that even though there are a small number of negative views towards teaching idioms, all the respondents (10/10) agree on the view that idioms promote L2 language proficiency, and diagram 3.7 is clear cut evidence.

When asked about providing a precise definition of an idiom, the respondents gave different definitions based on different perspectives. Some rely on the cultural dimension while others focus on the non-compositional dimension by arguing that the meaning of idioms cannot be derived from the meaning of its constituent parts. Moreover, a few rely on the feature of frozenness or fixedness. Indeed, this difficulty of providing an agreed and precise definition of the term is referred to by many scholars. Mäntylä (2004) points out that despite the numerous studies on idioms, scholars have failed to provide a unified or common definition of an idiom. One reason may be due to the different characteristics of idioms that can be sometimes applicable even on proverbs, collocation and sayings. Kainulainen (2006:7) argues that *“different approaches and the different features of idioms have added to the complexity of the term”*. Actually, the respondents are aware of the complex nature of idioms. As it can be noticed from the answers in diagram 3.8, the highest percentage of the answers, 80%, asserts that idioms are difficult; whereas 20% indicates that they are very difficult. The majority of the respondents argue that the difficulty of idioms resides in that they are cultural-specific and it is not easy to understand them without an understanding of the target culture. In fact, this explanation goes hand in hand with Boers (2008) who confirmed that idioms have a strong relation to culture, and as much as the cultural differences are reduced as much as people will be able to comprehend idioms. However, the rest of the respondents consider

idioms difficult especially without the presence of the context which makes it difficult and sometimes impossible to guess the meaning. That is why many scholars stress the importance of presenting idioms in contexts, thus giving the opportunity to readers to guess the figurative meaning of idioms. For example, a study conducted by Cooper (1999) found evidence in favor of the benefits of using the context in helping students to understand figurative idioms.

Regarding teachers' awareness of the difficult nature of idioms, each has his own method in the way he presents them to students. As displayed in the previous chapter, the wide spread technique in presenting idioms is in context either in dialogues or within texts. This strategy is advocated by Dunmore (1989) who believes that the meaning of idioms, to some extent, can be deduced by using "*contextual clues*" which plays a considerable role in vocabulary learning. The rest of the respondents use idiom-lists combined with L2 definitions and explanations as a technique, and a small group uses images and translation to French, Arabic or Kabyle languages to provide more explanations. To some extent, this minority shares a common belief which is the importance of explicit teaching of the vocabulary that constitutes idioms. In other words, this strategy is similar to what is called "*lexical knowledge*" technique that takes the knowledge of both literal and connotative meaning of a word (Zarei & Rahimi, 2012). Based on the information provided in the literature review section about the strategies used in presenting idioms, it is worth saying that although teachers use different strategies to teach idioms, mainly "*contextual clues*" and "*lexical knowledge*", none has used the considered strategy to carry out our research which is "*etymological elaboration*".

Next, from the above discussion, it can be inferred that the selected techniques are all interesting and enjoyable in making learners actively involved in the learning process. This is confirmed from teachers' responses in diagram 3.9 where 75% of them assert that students find idiom-learning enjoyable and 25% maintain that their students actively participate in the

learning process. Another possible reason for why learners are active in the classroom is the criteria that the teachers bear in mind for idiom selections, teaching materials and idiom-related activities. Diagram 3.10 shows that there is a difference in priority among the criteria followed by teachers. 20% of teachers are keen on selecting the materials which are relevant to the contents of the lessons or program, 26.66% varies between selecting materials according to the level of students and cultural suitability, and 10% select the most frequent idioms. In short, in all cases it is better to take into consideration all the above mentioned criteria but perhaps to focus on the criterion which concerns fitting students' level. Idioms should not be too difficult or too easy, the level of difficulty may possibly discourage students. This is also illustrated in Vygotsky's theory of *Zone of Proximal Development* (1978), where he stresses the importance of locating students' level. That is, giving them information that doesn't exceed their level of comprehension, thereby encouraging and promoting individual learning. The attention to the most frequent idioms is also recommended by Zyzik (2009). She advocates the idea that teachers should better use the most frequent and most useful idioms. In this respect, EFL teachers may well find two potential resources, Liu (2003) and Grant's (2007), useful for selecting the most frequent EFL idioms.

Regarding teaching sources and materials, there is also a variation in the choices; 45% of teachers use referent books on idioms, 22% prefer to use the internet, 22% use newspapers while only 11% use specific textbooks. Actually, there are also other useful sources that are not frequently used in the teaching process such as songs, parts from TV shows, movies, and theatre playing. This may come from the fact that there is not enough time to practice such activities in the classroom and to the difficulty to find appropriate shows or movies that deals with idioms. In terms of activities and approaches, diagram 3.12 clearly shows that the reading activities are at the top with a percentage of 50% then followed by listening and integrated skill activities, with a percentage of 25% each. This indicates that while the



majority sees that idioms should be better taught and introduced in either listening activities or reading activities, some see that the integrated-skill approach is the most appropriate. In fact, focusing only on receptive skills, i.e. listening and reading, reduces students' capacity of productive skills which are speaking and writing, and leads to a poor production of idioms. Pignot-Shahov (2012) asserts that knowing a word or MWUs demands a combination of both "*receptive*" and "*productive*" knowledge. Bygate (1987) perceptively states that in learning a foreign language, teachers are supposed to engage students in "*speaking practice*" and oral activities. He rightly points out that "*there is a difference between knowledge about a language, and skill in using it*" (Bygate, *ibid*:3). That is, if idioms are only presented in reading and listening activities, students will not have the experience to know when and how to use them appropriately. In other words, this approach not only helps students to use language in its right contexts but also provides them with the adequate knowledge of vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar for an effective learning. Consequently, adopting an "*integrated-skill approach*" in teaching idioms seems to be the most appropriate one as emphasized by Oxford (2001).

#### **4.2.2 Idioms and their Relation to Metaphors**

As already mentioned in chapter 1, idioms and metaphors are two different types of figurative language, and it is believed by many cognitive linguists that a great number of idioms come from different conceptual metaphors. As Gibbs and O'Brien (1990) maintain, conceptual metaphors motivate the figurative meaning of many idioms. Actually this relationship is acknowledged by all the respondents (see diagram 3.13).

One teacher stated that "*both idioms and metaphors are based on analogies*". It means that both are expressions which are used to compare one thing to another. While idioms are a combination of words that together have a different meaning from when used separately, metaphors are expressions that describe something by referring to it as something else. One

can say that the prominent feature of idioms consists in attributing a particular meaning to several words that have a completely different meaning when used alone. For instance the meaning of the idiom “*butterflies in one’s stomach*” is parallel to the effect caused by “*hunger*”, thus the idiom’s figurative sense is equivalent to the word “*hunger*”. In contrast, the apparent feature of metaphors is in creating figurative mental images. For example the expression ‘*he was sad*’ brings to the mind only the intended meaning but the metaphor ‘*he drowned in a sea of grief*’ brings not only the meaning but an image that expresses the depth of grief through comparing it to the sea. What is more, the metaphoric expression is equivalent in sense to the expression ‘*he is sad*’.

Another teacher asserts that “*idioms and metaphors require higher order skills*”. This means that some idiomatic expressions and metaphors cannot be understood easily due to their complex nature and hence they require some additional higher order skills. The latter is defined by King, et al. (1998:1) as “*higher order thinking skills include critical, logical, reflective, metacognitive, and creative thinking*”. They assert that those activities can be triggered when passing by an unfamiliar problem such as simple or easy questions, doubts, or dilemmas (King, et al., *ibid*). Thus, when encountering idioms or metaphors, students try to guess the figurative meaning relying on different skills, such as analyzing the different part of the expressions, providing possible interpretations based on creativity, reflecting on their own prior knowledge and personal experiences, or simply connecting them to other facts and concepts.

Moreover, some teachers argue that both of them have a strong relation to specific cultures, and this view is shared by a number of scholars such as Kövecses (2010) and Lakoff and Johnson (2003). That is to say, English idioms and metaphors carry a large amount of cultural, historical, religious, and other information about American and Britain countries, and a lack of this useful background means that the understanding of some expressions will be

difficult. For instance, the idiom “*to have the Midas touch*” has a strong relation to Greek and Roman mythologies. According to *The Free Dictionary*, the figurative meaning is “*to have the ability to be successful, particularly the ability to make money easily*”, that is, to understand the idiom from the first glance, one must have information about Greek and Roman culture because the idiom comes from the name of a legendary king ‘Midas’ who was given a magical power by the gods to turn everything he touches into gold. However, even though idioms and metaphors are two different concepts, there are situations when an expression is considered as an idiom and a metaphor at the same time. For example, Lakoff and Johnson (2003) referred to the expression “*time is money*” as a conceptual metaphor, while the same expression is referred to by McCarthy (2008) as an idiom.

When the respondents were asked whether introducing metaphors to learners helps in facilitating the comprehension of idioms, the majority of them (75%) were in agreement; whereas only a few (25%) were against (see diagram 3.14). Most of the respondents who advocate the introduction of metaphors in teaching idioms argued that “*metaphors are abstractions*”. That is, metaphors make implicit comparison between two unrelated things but that share common qualities, precisely abstract characteristics. In other words, metaphors are based on comparing qualities of different objects, persons, ideas and so on. Quirk (2008) states that “*metaphors may be used as a window into the understanding of abstractions*” (2008:iv). In that, they allow understanding of abstract concepts in terms of concrete or “*commonly experienced*” concepts (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003). For instance, associating ‘time’ with ‘money’ like in the metaphor ‘*time is money*’ allows the individual to use his previous knowledge that exist in his mind about money to understand that time is something valuable.

However, as discussed earlier, there are some respondents who don’t take into consideration the reference to metaphors as a facilitating tool to grasp the meaning of idioms.

Actually, this view contradicts a number of studies about the importance of conceptual metaphors in language learning in general and idiom learning in particular. In fact, many researchers declare the effectiveness of using conceptual metaphors in idiom learning such as Kömür and Çimen (2009), Chen and Lai (2013). These studies assert that the process of mapping one domain with another complex one is of a great value in learning both the meaning of idioms and their cultural connections. Applying the theory of CMs is also of significant importance in encouraging teachers and students to develop their metaphorical awareness. Actually, the majority of teachers (75%) confirm that people cannot go perfectly well without metaphors (see diagram 3.15). Nevertheless, 25% of the respondents share a different view, which we think is due to their support to the traditional view of metaphors where these are merely considered as ornaments of the language.

#### **4.2.3 Teachers' Suggestions for Ways of Facilitating Idiom-Instruction**

From what we have discussed so far, it is clear that teachers adopt a variety of approaches to present idioms including activities such as dialogues, discussion, translation, storytelling, and role play. A possible explanation behind this creativity consists in that teachers are aware of the individual differences that exist between students; therefore a mixture of different activities seems to be the best choice. For some respondents (21%), the discussion activity is the most appropriate activity to be followed in teaching idioms, and this is quite obvious from diagram 3.16. Indeed, this is not surprising since this activity is widely used and proposed by many researchers. Wu (2008), for instance, affirms that when students engage in group discussions, they become more motivated, and because each one tries to pass his own ideas, they all share their individual experiences and knowledge.

Another proportion of teachers (23%) have suggested dialogues and role plays as activities to teach idioms. Similarly, Wu (ibid) affirms that presenting idioms in dialogues gives an opportunity to practice every day conversations, develop speaking skills, and to

understand the meaning of idioms in various communicative acts especially if those students were the ones who write the dialogues. For this reason, providing a rich and a meaningful context is fundamental in language learning. Wu (ibid) also adds that the other activity that develops oral skills is “*role play*”, particularly, when combined with dialogue writing. In fact dialogue writing encourages students to be creative and produce their own ideas, and role play helps them to remember the dialogues that they have written. Regarding the rest of activities, 24% of teachers have suggested storytelling and theatre playing. This means that both storytelling and theatre create interest and passion for learning as well as they are effective even for slow learners. Matching activities and video watching along with quizzes are completely ignored by the respondents.

One can assume that since idioms are important for EFL learners, it is important to include all the aforementioned activities in the classroom as much as possible, thus helping learners to effectively acquire them. In effect, this is supported by all the respondents as it is demonstrated in diagram 3.18, where 75% agree on using different techniques in teaching idioms while 25% strongly agree. Furthermore, learning can be more effective if it is authentic and more importantly not tedious. One teacher stated that in teaching idioms “*the most important thing is to avoid providing students with too many idioms at once*” since it may reduce students’ performance and activity.

When the respondents were asked to provide a suitable concept to where idioms can be linked, half of them, that is 50%, have proposed to link idioms to their cultural background and 25% preferred to link them to their origins as it is presented in diagram 3.17. This appears to fit quite well with what has been discussed before in that language, precisely idioms are closely tied to culture. Unexpectedly, relating idioms to metaphors and pictures did not receive considerable importance as only 25% of the respondents suggested them. Although teachers are aware of the important role of metaphors as discussed earlier, no one uses them

as a strategy to present L2 idioms. Even more, only 12.5% of them have proposed to be implemented in teaching idiomatic expressions. On the contrary, the issue of linking idioms to metaphors received a considerable attention by many researches as explained in details in the review of literature.

However, even with the presence of different techniques and different strategies to present idioms, they may be considered as '*the ugly duckling*' of learning a new language as they present lot of challenges and difficulties for teachers and students alike. The majority face difficulties in selecting the suitable material since the program doesn't limit the freedom of teachers, in that they have the choice to use a variety of sources. Although this difficulty, the majority (75%) of teachers strongly disagree on limiting themselves to a specific textbook since it can hinder effective learning. Moreover, others face difficulties in devoting enough time to teach idiomatic expressions, because some activities are time consuming that is why they tend to focus only on some and neglect others. Another common problem which has been stressed by some teachers is that students commit recurrent mistakes while producing idioms like changes in particles or propositions. This study confirms the existence of such mistakes.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the major points reached through the analysis of the tests and teachers' questionnaire. The results provided answers to the previously mentioned questions and at the same time confirmed some of the proposed hypothesis and refuted some others. In this sense, the first hypothesis which affirms that there is no significant difference among the effects of conceptual metaphor method and traditional method on EFL learners' comprehension of L2 idioms is refuted because, first the mean of the CM group (6.86%) is higher than the traditional method group (1.84%), and second the significant value (.000) is less than ( $\alpha = .05$ ) which means that the difference between the groups is significant. In

addition, the results approved the second hypothesis in that there isn't much difference among the effects of conceptual metaphor-based instruction and traditional idiom instruction on the production of L2 idioms since the results of the two groups in providing correct and incorrect idioms were similar. The findings also, revealed the positive attitudes of teachers towards idioms, thus refuting the third hypothesis. It seems that all (100%) teachers agree on the difficult nature of idioms as well as their importance in developing and promoting EFL students' proficiency. More to the point, the majority of teachers (70%) consider teaching idioms as something necessary. Due to these facts, different teachers use different techniques and strategies to present idioms, however, the CM technique was not used in the instruction of idioms in our department, though teachers' awareness of the importance of metaphors in daily life.

# **General Conclusion**



## General Conclusion

The present work is an experimental research conducted in the English department of Tizi-Ouzou on EFL upper-intermediate students. It aims to facilitate learning one essential type of figurative language, namely idioms, which in turn helps promote students formulaic competence, and hence leading to better language proficiency. It has investigated whether there is a significant difference between using two different methods; the conceptual metaphor-based method that consists on presenting idioms in a systematic grouping, and the traditional method where L2 idiom definitions were presented. The study aimed also to investigate teachers' attitudes towards idioms in general and teaching idioms in a FL context in specific. In other words, in order to deeply explore the complexity and the importance of idioms, we relied on teachers' perceptions of idioms and idiom-instruction as well as on the strategies used by teachers of our department to facilitate the learning of idioms.

Among other idiom presentation strategies, this dissertation advocates the strategy of '*etymological elaboration*' relying on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory of conceptual metaphors as a model of presenting idioms along with the implementation of the mixed-method approach. This approach combines both qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and data analysis. The data were gathered by using a variety of techniques. First, prior to the experiment a pretest was conducted to measure students' ability to understand and produce figurative idioms. Second, after the instruction of idioms, a post-test was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of the two considered methods, namely the CM and the traditional methods. Then, a questionnaire was distributed to a collection of 10 teachers of the Speaking and Listening subject where idioms are included in the program. The first part of both tests generated quantitative data, and in order to determine whether there is any statistically significant difference between the means of the two groups the one-way analysis of variance procedure (ANOVA) that is available in SPSS statistics was used. The same SPSS

program was used to analyze the quantitative data emerged from the questionnaire. The second part of the tests resulted in qualitative data which were analyzed by the use of conceptual content analysis (CCA) through first establishing specific codes, then converting the results into percentages relying, once more, on SPSS statistics. Another kind of qualitative data were emerged from the open-ended questions of the questionnaire which were analyzed by qualitative content analysis (QCA).

The results of the pre-test have evidently revealed the learners' limited idiomatic competence of both experimental and control groups concerning comprehension and production of idioms. That is no one of the groups has produced the complete form of the target idioms. However, this competence was fairly ameliorated after having presented the idioms to learners in different ways. The post-test came up with different results, that is, for idiom comprehension the experimental group scored a mean of 6.86 while the control group scored only 1.84. Moreover, for idiom production, the percentages rose from 0% to 8.33% in both groups. The difficult nature of idioms, their connections to historical and cultural backgrounds along with the tendency by many teachers to focus heavily on reading and listening approaches in presenting idioms are the key reasons behind scoring low results in idiom production, and this was clearly demonstrated through the interpretation of the questionnaire results. Moreover, the results of the questionnaire have unmistakably demonstrated that all teachers have positive attitudes towards teaching idioms and more towards metaphors but none has used the CM approach to teach idioms. Consequently, it is worth suggesting the use of this CM-based approach in presenting idioms, especially after proving its significance on idiom retention/comprehension, and would be even better if this presentation technique were accompanied by other strategies like memorization which seems of great significance in helping the control group to remember some idioms and produce them correctly. In fact, the CM approach is not a replacement to the strategies followed by teachers,

but rather a complementary technique that can improve and facilitate learning and teaching idioms.

The present work also recognizes a number of limitations and challenges. First, this study used only structural metaphors, and consequently, neither orientational nor ontological metaphors, which generate more idiomatic expressions than idioms, were considered. Second, the experiment was limited to only two groups of students because of a lack to find more than two groups under the instruction of the same teacher. Third, considering the great number of English idioms, the difficulty connected to formal instruction in a classroom setting together with the workload of oral sessions, only 18 idioms were selected. Finally, among the potential challenges encountered in carrying out this research, we can cite the difficulties related to the design of appropriate dialogues that fit with the meaning of our chosen idioms, to identifying proper questions for both the assessment tests and the questionnaire, and to finding an oral session teacher supporting the experiment and willing to cooperate.

It is hoped that the results of this study will open new pathways for further research on idiom presentation techniques, especially those that can enhance idiom production.

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