
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Relationship between Idiomatic Usage and University of Bahrain Students' Proficiency in English Language

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| ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to find out whether there is a correlation between UoB students' English Language Proficiency (LP) and their Idiomatic Competency (IC). In addition, to determine whether culture plays an important role in influencing the students' understanding of idioms. Furthermore, to assess how far the current situation of teaching and learning the English language affects the process of developing IC. And to find out any difficulties and shortcomings of teaching and learning idioms at UoB. Reviewing the previous studies in the field of idiomatic language usage showed that the issue of the correlation between learners' LP and their IC is controversial. This study investigated the controversy around the issue in order to explore the UoB students and to examine whether there is a significant correlation between their LP and IC. The researcher selected a sample of students who sat for a proficiency test along with a test for idiomatic language. Two questionnaires were administered to elicit the UoB students' and teachers' views on the importance of the use of idiomatic expressions in a classroom. The researcher compared scores from both teachers' and students' LP test and their idiomatic language tests. She also measured the effect of culture on the ability to comprehend idiomatic expressions. She examined the current situation of teaching the English language and its role in the learners' comprehension of idiomatic expressions. She discussed the difficulties faced by the UoB's students in learning idioms. The study found that there is a significant correlation between UoB students' LP and their IC. In addition, culture plays a huge role in influencing teaching and learning idioms. Both teachers and students encounter some difficulties in teaching and learning idioms in the classroom.

| KEYWORDS

Idiomatic Competence, English Language proficiency, academic context, idiomatic expressions, idioms difficulties, culture.

| ARTICLE DOI: [10.32996/ijllt.2022.5.6.17](https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2022.5.6.17)

1. Introduction

Language is considered as a means of communication between speakers in a community. Any language includes two ways of communication, which are the direct or the literal way of using a language and the indirect or the figurative way of using a language. Figurative language is an umbrella term that covers many non-literal expressions within the language itself, such as: "kick the bucket," which means "die," and "it rains cats and dogs," which means "rains heavily". In both mentioned examples, expressions differ in their lexical and syntactical parts, but the literal and non-literal meanings are the same. In literal language, words are used in their proper meaning without any implied or misleading interpretation. According to Alkadi (2015), "Language is a vessel that contains and exposit culture, thoughts, and history of a given nation." (p. 1) All languages share the same existence of this figurative language that conveys abstract meanings culturally and pragmatically, which means that people in a society develop their own use of specific language items, which are called idioms, to suit their own purpose during the process of communication. Alkadi stated, "English language is known as a language of idiomaticity. It is rich in metaphors, similes, phrasal verbs, and figurative speech, conventionally referred to as idiomatic expressions" (p.1) Chunke (2011) promoted idioms by stating that "a native speaker would use about 20 million idioms over a lifetime" (p. 2). However, despite their omnipresent role in English language they are, as Alkadi commented, "baffle the novice learners to such large extent. They might cause not only linguistic but

also cultural and technical problems to non-English speakers who learn English as an L2." (p.1) Chunke supported Alkadi asserting that "idioms are a kind of language blocks which carry rich cultural elements" (p.1). This brought about an obvious result that idioms are very important in learning a second language, and as Hashimian and Nezhad (2007) reinforced that "for an L2 learner to be conceptually fluent in a language; is to be able to know how concepts in a given language are encoded or reflected on idiomatic structuring basis" (p. 2). According to many studies such as Boers (2000), Danesi (1992), Guduru (2011), Littlemore (2001), Mantyla (2004), Namvar (2012), idioms are considered as an important aspect to reach the level of language proficiency and it is a sign of fluency. Finally, Alkadi reinforced a consequence that "ESL/EFL learners cannot help but learn idioms, not only for academic purposes but also for day-to-day communication" (p. 1).

2. Statement of the Problem

There are two parts to any language, the literal part, and the idiomatic part. It is very important to find out how good UoB students are in using and understanding the idiomatic part of the English language. It is also important to find out whether their language proficiency has any significant correlation with their idiomatic competency.

Since not much was done in assessing the use of idiomatic language by EFL learners in a Bahraini academic context, it was the purpose of this research to examine whether or not there is any significant correlation between UoB students' English language proficiency and their idiomatic competency. It was also important to find out whether UoB students have problems in understanding and producing this type of language. One more important thing was to measure how far culture can play a role in the students' comprehension. Furthermore, the researcher was interested in finding out to what extent idiomatic expressions play a role in the teaching of the English language and in helping students master the language. According to Danesi (1995), IC is an important and integral part of the English language then; no learner can reach a proficiency level in English without being competent in the use of idiomatic expressions.

As a result, many questions arose regarding the notion of idiomatic competency in language teaching and learning. The questions that can be included are: Is idiomatic competency neglected in the learning and teaching of English? If the answer is "Yes", then what are the reasons? Why is idiomatic competency not taught with equal emphasis alongside other skills of the language? Why do most teaching methods and teaching materials, including textbooks and learning outcomes of the language course, pay little or no attention to the teaching of idioms?

In order to answer these persistent questions, this study was conducted to find out whether or not IC is given equal importance in the teaching and learning of the English language within a classroom. In addition, the study aimed to investigate whether there is a significant correlation between the students' proficiency level and their language competency. In addition, the study aimed to examine the role of culture in relation to idioms understanding and to what extent culture can help in enhancing the students' understanding of idioms. Furthermore, the study touched upon the difficulties that students might face while learning idioms and tried to find out whether the teaching of the English language is helping to develop the students' idiomatic skills.

3. Research Questions

The study attempts to find answers to the following questions:

1. Is there a significant correlation between UoB students' LP and their idiomatic competency (IC)?
2. Does culture play a role in UoB students' comprehension of idiomatic expressions? And if yes, how far does it do so?
3. Does the current situation of teaching the English language help UoB students enhance their understanding of idiomatic expressions? If yes, to what extent?
4. What are the difficulties of teaching idioms at UoB?

4. Aims of the study

The study aimed:

1. To find out whether there is any significant correlation between UoB language proficiency and their idiomatic competency.
2. To find out how far culture plays a role in influencing the students' comprehension of idiomatic expressions
3. To find out to what extent the current situation of teaching the English language helps UoB students' comprehension of idiomatic expressions
4. To find out any difficulties encountered by UoB students and teachers in using idiomatic language within an academic context

5. Significance of the study

Language is the tool speakers use to exchange ideas and concepts; these ideas carry meanings in which the language articulates both ways, literally and figuratively. Idiomatic expressions are words that might be; an expression, word, or phrase that has a figurative meaning conventionally understood by native speakers, and its meaning cannot be eluded from its constituents. Both terms, idiomatic and figurative, will be used interchangeably throughout the study. This study is important because it investigates the idiomatic side of the language. The researcher, throughout her journey in high school going into a higher educational level to get her BA degree, experienced these shortcomings in our educational systems and programs. Therefore, closer attention was given to teaching the grammatical and structural aspects of the English language, and the figurative part was not taken care of as an important part that makes up any language.

The textbooks that were used mainly served the same purpose and were almost empty of any part that might carry any concentration on teaching and learning the idiomatic language. Taking into consideration that idiomatic language shapes a huge part of the English language and ignoring such an important part of teaching and learning the English language, the researcher found it essential to profoundly investigate this problem in order to find some solutions. In this study, the researcher adopted Danesi's theoretical works (1993), which state that enhancing the idiomatic language usage of the ESL students can improve their conceptual system in which they can use and understand the language in a native-like way. And as a result, they can become conceptually fluent, i.e., they can understand and use idiomatic expressions in their academic context as well as in their everyday life. In this study, the researcher tried to examine whether UoB students had problems in understanding and using idiomatic expressions and to measure how far they were conceptually fluent.

6. Limitations of the study

1. The study addressed the difficulties encountered by UoB students in comprehending idioms; therefore, other linguistic levels such as syntax, semantics, and pragmatics are not considered, and they are beyond the scope of this study.
2. The study depended on the quantitative approach due to the broad scope of the study and time limitations. Performing interviews (qualitative approach) was beyond the study's scope.

7. Literature Review

Learning a second language can be very difficult and confusing to an adult person. Figurative language is part of this learning process. Many studies have taken place involving EFL learners' LP and IC. These studies tackled the skills, the difficulties, the strategies, and future implications of learning the figurative language. Some studies used metaphors as a means of testing the learners' IC, such as Boroujeni, Hashemian, and Saeidfar (2013), Zhao, Yu, and Yang (2014), and Aleshtar and Dowlatabadi (2014). Other studies used other figurative language items such as idioms like Mokhtari and Talebinezhad (2014) and Tabtabaei and Hajizadeh (2015).

Many studies have investigated the correlation between EFL learners' LP and their IC. Some of the studies stood in with this correlation, and some stood against it. Aleshtar and Dowlatabadi (2014) conducted a study that aimed to investigate the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' metaphoric competence and their LP, and the findings showed a significant correlation between EFL proficiency and their IC. In this study, the metaphoric (MC) competency was defined as the ability to comprehend and use metaphors in a given language as used in natural discourse. The subjects of this study were (60) female and male Iranian EFL students at Arak University freshman and junior levels. Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was used to evaluate their general English LP. They were classified as low and high proficiency groups. The rationale for selecting two levels of proficiency group was to study the relationship between their English proficiency and their figurative language competence. ECMPT was employed to assess the MC/IC of the participants. Data were statistically analyzed. Findings of this study indicated that the higher proficiency group outperformed the other level in comprehending metaphors, which leads to the conclusion that participants' proficiency level and metaphor comprehension are positively associated.

Others like Zhao, Yu, and Yang (2014) aimed to investigate the relationship between receptive metaphoric competence and reading proficiency of Chinese learners of English. It examined (80) students from a school of foreign languages, Southwest University freshmen, aged 18-20, selected by computer according to their university number. They sat for a two-part test, the first called MC-xy test and the second part called MC Receptive-test. MC-xy test was designed to test the subjects' metaphorical sensibility and skills, which was originated by Winner, Rosenstiel, and Gardner (1976), where it was used in the first part of the experiment. The second part used the MC Receptive-test adopted from Azuma's study (2005) to test the subjects' metaphoric competence. They used (8) stories with literal target sentences and (8) stories with idiomatic target sentences; then, the subjects were required to write 2 pairs of meanings for each idiom containing literal meaning and the other metaphoric implication. The results showed that both receptive metaphoric competence and reading proficiency are significantly correlated, although English learners in China are ranked middle or low, and skillful L2 learners at L2 reading were more inclined to a higher level of metaphoric competence.

On the other hand, there were studies that revealed no correlation between EFL learners' LP level and their IC, such as Zughoul and Hussein (2001), Namvar (2012), and Alkarazoun (2015). To take an example, a study by Zughoul and Hussein (2001) came up with results that contradicted the presence of a correlation between LP and IC in EFL learners. They examined learners' productive competence in collocations and idioms by means of their performance on two interdependent tasks. The participants were two groups of undergraduate and graduate students from the English department at Jordan's Yarmouk University. The test was a multiple-choice task of (16) randomly selected Arabic idioms and collocation of the verb "kasura" (broke) designed to reveal learners' ability to recognize the correct collocants from among (4) distractors. A translation task was also administered of the same idiomatic expressions and collocations to explore the learners' proficiency in this area. The gathered data analysis revealed that the overall performance of the students of the target idiomatic expressions and collocations was far from satisfactory, considering that they were high-level English majors.

7.1. Idioms in Native and Non-native Contexts Studies

The researchers' investigations undertook the different contexts of the native speakers of the English language and the non-native speakers of learning idioms in order to find out whether native speakers have similar or different problems or difficulties in understanding idioms. Therefore, here are some of these studies displayed.

Mantyla (2004) investigated the recognition and interpretation of English idioms by native and non-native speakers in a qualitative approach. This study mainly aimed to find out (i) how different characteristics of idioms affect their interpretation, (ii) how native speakers get the meanings of idioms, (iii) and how well second language learners recognize English idioms. The researcher acknowledged that although characteristics of idioms have been discussed as to how they have been processed and stored in the memory, still the majority of studies concentrated on native speakers. The respondents in this study were (36) British University students and (144) Finnish university students of English. The material was gathered through a multiple-choice question including 65 idioms alongside a questionnaire on the language contacts of the respondents. The results of this study suggested that English idioms are fairly difficult for Finnish students, while the easiest ones were the ones having an equivalent in the Finnish language. On the other hand, the responses by the native speakers showed that the meanings of idioms are a complex issue, even though they are often taken for granted and expressed as such by dictionaries. The results showed that native speakers frequently disagreed on idiom meanings.

Jabboori and Jazaa (2013) conducted another study to assess and analyze native and non-native speakers' competence and use of English idiomatic expressions. The subjects of the study included (12) English native speakers, of which (6) were (BA) graduates, and the others were secondary school graduates. While the non-native speakers were also (12), of which (6) of them were (Ph.D.) holders in English language, and the others were (MA) holders in linguistics and English language. To obtain the results, a multiple-choice test of idiomatic expressions was given, (15) in the first question, (15) in the second question, and (10) in the final question. Then participants were asked to underline, identify, and clarify these idioms and also explain which aspect of idioms (syntactic, pragmatic) was used by them to identify the appropriate idiom and its meaning. The results indicated that English native speakers were relatively better at answering questions regarding idiomatic expressions.

7.2. Studies on the Difficulties and Problems of Teaching and Learning Idiomatic Expressions in EFL Context

In the field of teaching and learning idiomatic language, many studies investigated this language, related it to EFL learners' learning process, and proved the importance of the presence of such a part of language within the EFL pedagogical system. Some of these studies are Alrishan and Smadi (2015); Cedar (2008); Cooper (1999); Maisa and Karunakaran (2013), and On the other hand, researchers tried to study the difficulties and problems faced by EFL learners during learning idiomatic language and tried to provide the necessary remedy for such problems. Here we present some of these studies.

Cooper (1999) investigated (18) non-native speakers of English who were between (17-44) years old and lived in the United States for more than (5) years on average. The materials used to conduct this study were (20) frequently used idioms, (8) of them were standard and (8) conversational, and the rest (4) were chosen from slang expressions. He used a scale of (3) points to grade the answers for the test of idioms comprehension, one point for the answer "I don't know" or a wrong definition, two points for partially correct answers, and three points for a correct answer. The results showed that the most difficult idioms to comprehend were the ones that lacked a clear relationship between their literal and figurative meaning. While the easiest were more salient, the learners had more exposure to them and found them easier to produce because of their frequent use of these idioms during their stay in the USA. The results also showed that the most successful strategy used to understand the idioms was guessing from the context with a 28% score, and the least was 5% which was represented by referring to an L1 idiom.

Cedar (2008), using another context, also tended to study the problems faced by Thai speakers learning English as a second language. The subject of this study was (31) graduate students at Universities in Delaware, Massachusetts, South Carolina, Wisconsin, and Washington. The mentioned students had been in the USA for approximately two and a half years at the time of

the data collection. They were considered advanced learners of English as they had received their Bachelor's degrees and met the university's requirements, including high TOEFL scores. To obtain the data, a questionnaire with (14) Thai idiomatic sayings was used, and the sayings were selected according to their pragmatic equivalents to English ones.

In addition to asking the subjects to know the meaning of those idioms, the researcher asked them to provide an equivalent English idiom if they knew one for each given Thai idiom. The results of the study showed that the graduate students had a very low ability to recognize the shared meanings between the Thai idioms and English idioms as they expressed their uncertainty and inability to know if there were English counterparts for the Thai idioms. The researcher suggested a further study on the factor of LP and its effect on learners' idioms comprehension.

The maintenance of a cultural and national connotation of idioms is the interpretation of the figurative basis of an idiomatic picture of the world in the sign of the cultural and national 'space' of this language community, stated Goshkheteliani and Megrelidze (2013). Considering this point of view, we can elaborate on idioms as they carry "traces of the cultures, customs, and traditions, historical events and life elements" (p. 1), as Goshkheteliani and Megrelidze reinforced. According to Havrila (2009), idiomatic expressions reflect an "extra-linguistic motivation that offers a deeper insight into the origin of the term and provides more complex information on cultural and historical status than the literal single 'words' do" (p. 1).

Alshawi and Mahadi (2012) added that "Culture plays an important role in the course of the idiom interpretation" (p.1), and she continues to reinforce the relationship between idioms and culture, saying, "words which have various connotations in one language may not have the same emotive associations in another. Different languages frequently reflect different connotations and associations of feeling because of the difference in cultural roots." Yagiz and Izadpanah (2013) state that our language and culture are "inextricably intermingled," and in order to reach a successful level of communication, our linguistic features must be supported by an awareness of 'sociocultural context'. It is concluded that context is the container that holds culture, and learners must use it to understand or comprehend idioms or any other idiomatic language. Others like Boers (2001) claimed that knowing the origins and the source domains of the idiomatic expressions help learners to comprehend and remember idioms. In relation to culture and idioms, we will display some studies that tackle these issues.

An example is Boers' (2000) study in which he explored the ways to enhance ESL students' metaphoric awareness and if these ways can help them in their specialized reading as well as the pervasive metaphoric expressions used within an economic discourse. Boers hypothesized that bringing attention to the origin or source domain of those unfamiliar metaphorical expressions can enhance their ability to comprehend those expressions. The subjects of this study were (85) French-speaking university students of business and economics at Universit' eLibre de Bruxelles. The researcher hypothesized that one simple way of raising learners' metaphoric awareness is by directing their attention towards the source domain or the origin of unfamiliar figurative expressions encountered in their reading. Boers used economic discourse as a tool due to the fact that figurative expressions are more pervasive in this kind of discourse. The final aim of his study was to make the subjects able to read with no difficulty the argumentative register of socio-economic discourse used in *The Economist* and *The Financial Times*, which both offer an excellent sources of linguistic varieties. The subjects were given a constructed experimental text with conventional metaphorical expressions that were authentic, of low-frequency use that students were not familiar with, Had no direct French equivalents, were not used in the same context, or lacked the same connotations. The subjects were separated into two groups (39) subjects (the control group) were given an explanation of the metaphorical expressions in the context of economics; the other (46) subjects (the experimental group) were only given an explanation of the expressions in their source domain (i.e., literal usage). The subjects were given (15) minutes to read and comprehend the text in order to prepare them for the comprehension test.

The test consisted of a list of statements about the text, and the subjects were asked whether the statements were in accordance with the text's content. Most of the test items were constructed to examine or measure the subjects' general comprehension. The results of the study indicated that both groups showed no problems with respect to their general comprehension. On the other hand, (2) items of the test were related to the authors' opinion about the state subsidies; both were asked to state the author's opinion accordingly; the control group answered were didn't know, while the experimental group answered that the author was against subsidies. The difference between both groups' scores suggests students are capable of inferencing value judgments of an author by only associating with the source domain of metaphorical expression.

7.3. Previous Studies on EFL Learners' Comprehension and Acquisition of Idioms

Many studies investigated the EFL learners' understanding/comprehension of idioms. AlHassan (2007); Alkarazoun (2015); Charteris-Black (2002); Goma (2017); Gurudu (2011); Littlemore (2001); Mantyla (2004); Mokhatari and Talebenzhad (2014); Shirazi and Talebenzhad (2013); Tabtabaei and Hajizadeh (2015). Each study has tackled the issue of idioms comprehension from a different angle. For example, some studies, such as Littlemore (2001), investigated idiom difficulties and how the misinterpretation of idiomatic language can affect the learners' perceptions of the speaker's stance towards a certain subject. Mantyla (2004) studied

idioms interpretation as well as the strategies L2 learners use to comprehend idioms. Others like Charteris-Blacks (2002) examined the linguistic and conceptual similarities and differences between two languages, which enable the teachers to anticipate problems that ESL learners face in the acquisition of English figurative language. Here we present some of these studies in detail.

Littlemore (2001) conducted a study in two parts; the first part looked at the types of language that caused most of these difficulties for overseas students. The second part was to investigate metaphor misinterpretation and how misinterpretations affect students' perception of the speaker's stance towards a subject. She emphasizes disciplines such as economics, business, and politics, which she considers they represent a field of high metaphor usage. The participants in the study were (20) Bangladesh civil servant students attending short courses in civil service reform in an international development department of a British university, the level of the students was high, and their average score on the (IELTS) exam was (6). The study was divided into two parts. In part one, lecturers made a list of difficult languages in (90) hours of lectures given to the subjects. In addition, the subjects were asked to note down any difficult language they might experience in the lectures. This language was discussed with the students during a series of study sessions, and then a list of (180 words and expressions) perceived by 50% of the students was made, and (145) of them were metaphorical. The results of part one showed that although the students understood the meaning of individual words, they faced difficulties in understanding the overall meaning of the metaphorical expressions.

In part two of the study, the researcher hypothesized that as metaphors are often misinterpreted, this led to a misunderstanding of the lecturer's attitude towards the lecture's topic. To examine this hypothesis, a preliminary study was conducted on (60) mixed-nationality overseas students. The students were given a transcript of the lecture extract and asked to underline any area of difficulty. Most of the underlined items were metaphorical. Vague language also was a problem. Another area of difficulty was the area in which the anecdotes were used (for example, "I drove to Birmingham this morning") and references to British history or culture (for example, Falklands War). Using the findings of this preliminary study, the most problematic items were used with the Bangladeshi civil servants who were asked to listen to played recordings extracted from lectures and asked to write down their interpretations, then say how they have derived the meaning (context, guessing, knew it already...etc.). They were also asked to write down their responses to three questions given in regard to the speaker's opinion. The results in part two showed most of the (20) participants misinterpreted metaphors in a way it seriously affected their understanding of the lecturer's opinion.

7.4 UOB previous studies on Idioms

In regards to the studies that were conducted at the University of Bahrain which discussed idioms and issues around them; The researcher found a single study that was conducted by an MA student in (2007) called Haider Al Hassan, in which he investigated idioms and the strategies used by the learners to comprehend them and here we represent a brief highlight of the study and its results.

Al-Hassan (2007), in his study, investigated incidental vocabulary learning as a by-product of reading or listening. The study was intended to answer the question "how feasible it is for EFL learners to comprehend unfamiliar multiword units, and he chose idioms in his study as an instrument to measure learners' capability. The researcher examined using the means of guessing from context and lexical inferencing within authentic texts not meant to be written only for non-native speakers. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect and analyze the data. The investigated sample was (29) Bahraini students who were in their third and fourth years majoring in the English language. The subjects were all female EFL learners, and the gender was not controlled as they were randomly chosen from one course. The means used to test the subjects was through an inference task that was especially designed for this study, consisting of (18) short reading excerpts with the idioms underlined and provided with choices for the methods they might use to choose from and then provide a justification for their choice. Finally, the study showed that the subjects used several different techniques involved: idioms constituents, sentences (or phrases), the subjects' own mental images of idioms, metaphor, the whole text, the topics of the sample texts, the subjects' L1 context, paragraphs, keywords, and sometimes mere wild guessing. The findings of this study showed that none of the techniques was more effective than the other for guessing the meaning, yet the results showed that guessing from the context during reading can be a major source of learning the meaning of idioms.

7.5. Comments on the previous studies

As a result, of the difficult and ambiguous nature of idioms, many researchers tried to investigate idioms from different angles. The majority of the research studies shed light on idioms as a part of figurative language. All of the researchers tied the proficiency of an EFL learner to his level of understanding and using idiomatic expressions of a language. Idioms are fixed expressions in which their meanings cannot be deduced from their components. Taking Mantyla's point of view as an example, she states that "idioms are metaphorical and mean more than the sum of their single elements" (p. 27). The scholars of the previous studies were split between two schools of thought, as Benczes (2002) discussed. These schools of thought included two approaches, the traditional approach, which adopted the view that says an overall meaning of an idiom is not equal to the sum meaning of its components. And the cognitive approach embraced the view that the sum meaning of an idiom is connected to its components. The majority

of the scholars adopted the traditional school of thought, such as; Aldahesh (2013); Alkadi (2015); Cedar (2008); Jaboori and Jazza (2013); Lazar (1996); Mantyla (2004).

In the field of studying idioms as a means of mastering the idiomatic language, the issue of the correlation between EFL learners' language proficiency and their idiomatic competency was one of the most investigated sides of idiomatic language. The results were controversial, as some scholars proved the presence of a positive correlation between the two while others proved the opposite. In this study, the results came to join the point of view that showed a positive relationship between the LP and learning and teaching idioms. The previous studies also explored the native and the non-native contexts in which most of the results supported that a non-native learner confronted the majority of difficulties in learning idioms, if ever. The current study was conducted in a Bahraini context as a non-native one, and the results revealed the difficulties that face EFL learners in this particular non-native context, of which some were similar to the previous studies' results, such as the scarcity of teaching idioms and the avoidance practiced by the teachers due to the difficult nature of idioms. Other studies were different, in which the students shared the view that they do know idioms and they can practice them in their daily communications. This study also revealed the many problems and difficulties that face both the teachers and students within the current learning and teaching atmosphere. The difficulties included that idioms are not considered as an objective in their teaching curriculum; they lack the adequate textbooks to use; they lack the proper teacher's training in how to teach this specific side of the language, as well as many more difficulties that were shared between this study and the previous studies such as; Alrishan and Smadi (2015); Cedar (2008); Cooper (1999); Maisa and Karunakaran (2013); Winis and Zakaria (2013).

Previous studies showed that culture was one of the most important aspects of learning a language. Culture strong relationship to teaching figurative language proved to be very important; in order to learn a foreign language. The main concern should be given to learning culture along with learning idioms as it reveals the heart of the idiomatic part of any language, and it is the main tool to understand the ambiguity of the language. In this study, the researcher inspected to what extent culture can affect the learning of idioms within the Bahraini context, and the results exposed that having a solid background of the target language culture is an essential aspect of learning idioms in this case. This study supported the results of previous studies regarding the situation of learning and teaching idiomatic language in regards to EFL learners' comprehension and acquisition of idioms. All of the studies exposed some difficulties that come with the process of teaching and learning idioms. Some of these studies recommended that conceptual fluency (the ability to comprehend idiomatic language) was improved when supplementary readings were used. Others reinforced the importance of using authentic materials to teach idiomatic expressions. The studies also highlighted the effectiveness of the context in comprehending idiomatic language such as Al Hassan's.

This research showed some allied aspects with the previous studies' results and exposed some others that were different. These results point toward the fact that different contexts may incubate different difficulties and problems, which opens the door for further future investigations by other researchers.

8. Methodology

This section discusses the methodology the researcher used to conduct this study. First, it laid down the population of the study that was used to examine idioms' usage and the students' proficiency in English. Then it explained the methodology that was used in collecting the data for the study, which included a TOEFL test, a test of idioms, and a questionnaire. Eventually, this section discussed the data collection procedure that was applied in order to gather the data to be finally analyzed in the data analysis instruments section. The researcher's interest was to apply such a study in the Bahraini context and compare it to other social contexts that have similar interests in idiomatic language.

8.1. Participants

The study was conducted on UoB students. The total population was (134) students divided into two groups; one group was English majors (EM), and the second group was non-English majors (non-EM) students. The participants were males and females aged 20-23 years old. The EM group was taking an advanced course called 'Elements of Poetry' (ENGL 309) which is a third-year course, while the non-major students were also taking an advanced course in English called 'English Report Writing' (ENGL 341). Both groups were given the TOEFL to determine their English LP level. An idiom test modified by the researcher was administered to test their IC and comprehension. The researcher discussed the test with 10 members of the English Language Department and another 10 members of the English Language Centre.

The study also surveyed (40) English teachers who were teaching different English courses (i.e., Literature, language, linguistics, and translation) to obtain their perceptions regarding teaching idioms and whether they teach idioms in the actual live classroom and consider teaching idioms as one of their objectives. To reach the potential results, a questionnaire was developed by the researcher for this purpose. Another questionnaire was also developed with parallel questions (wherever applicable) to obtain the perceptions of the students about the same issues. Other issues were also tested through the questionnaire. The questions were

classified under different themes in order to make it easier for the researcher to get specific answers and analyze the results. The answers for the participating students and teachers were gathered, classified, and statically analyzed in order to come up with the results and potential recommendations.

8.2. Data Collection

A quantitative data collection method was adopted; means, standard deviations, and percentages were calculated to obtain the study results. The researcher used a TOEFL test and an idiomatic test that was carefully developed by the researcher using tests from (The English Club) site.

8.2.1 Tests

For the purpose of the study, two tests were administered to the participants. One was a TOEFL test, and the other was an idiom test.

8.2.1.1 TOEFL

A TOEFL test was administered to the participants for both the EM and the non-EM to obtain results that reflected the participants' LP level. The TOEFL was chosen as an official, reliable English language proficiency test. The results of the test were used to measure their level of proficiency.

8.2.1.2 Idiomatic Test

An idiomatic test was developed based on an online resource, which is (The English Club.com). The researcher carefully modified the test to suit the aim of the study in order to answer the study's question. The idiomatic test was intentionally tailored into (30) questions, (15) were considered to be culturally related, and the other (15) were not related to culture. The validity of the developed test was judged by a jury of English teachers from the English Department and the English Language Centre in order to validate the researcher's choice and construction of the idiomatic test. The test was piloted during the previous semester on students from other groups to examine the reliability of the test items. The results showed a validated test to apply to the participants in the next course. To investigate the reliability, Cronbach's Alpha was implemented for the data of the experimental sample in the pilot study, which showed an index of 0.818, which can be considered a high value for reliability.

| Reliability Statistics | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha | No. of Items |
| 0.818 | 30 |

8.2.2 The Questionnaires

For the purpose of the study, two questionnaires were administered to the participants. One was for the teachers, and the other was for the students. The questionnaire was also judged by a jury of English teachers in the English Department and the English Language Centre in order to ensure its validity. It was administered by the researcher to obtain the perceptions of both teachers and students in regards to teaching and learning idioms in the classroom with more detailed questions.

8.2.2.1 Teachers' Questionnaire

The questionnaire, which consisted of (37) questions, was developed to obtain the teachers' perceptions about teaching idioms in the classroom. The first (33) questions were based on a Lickert Scale 1-5 (strongly agree-agree-not sure-disagree-strongly disagree), while the questions (34-36) were multiple-choice questions in which teachers can choose more than one answer and give their justifications respectively. The question number (37) was an open-ended question, and the teachers were asked to add further details, if needed, regarding the difficulties facing the teachers in teaching idioms. To ascertain the reliability of the teachers' questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha was implemented for the data and showed an index of 0.845, which is considered a good value for reliability.

| Reliability Statistics | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha | No. of Items |
| 0.845 | 33 |

8.2.2.2 Students' Questionnaire

The questionnaire which was consisted of (33) questions developed with a parallel counterpart (where applicable) with the teachers' questionnaire in order to obtain the students' perceptions about similar issues, in which their responses can be compared to those

of the teachers'. The students' answers to the questionnaire were used along with the teachers' answers to answer the third and fourth research questions, which aimed to measure to what extent the current situation of teaching the English language helps UoB students to enhance their understanding of idiomatic expressions and what the difficulties of teaching idioms face UoB students are. The Cronbach's Alpha was also used to investigate the reliability of the students' data which appeared to have an index of 0.885 which can be considered a good value for reliability.

| Reliability Statistics | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha | No. of Items |
| 0.885 | 33 |

8.2.3 Data Collection Procedure

The following process took place to help the researcher obtain her data. A condensed TOEFL test was taken from the English Language Centre, which is usually used for exemption tests. First, a pilot study was done during the period of the first semester (2015) from September to January, and the data was collected. The first trial to give the tests showed the sufficiency of the time. At the beginning of the second semester, the researcher obtained permission in order to take the class instead of the teachers to administer both TOEFL and idiomatic real tests. Then, she started with the EM students who were, taking the 309 courses in (2) sections. The researcher chose the days with longer periods to give the tests. The time scheduled to finish the TOEFL was (30) minutes, and the idiomatic test was given in another (30) minutes. Different sections were taken on two different convenient days. The same process was adopted by the non-EM. The questionnaire was administered in different sessions for both the EM and non-EM to make it convenient and not very overwhelming for the students. The teachers' questionnaire was sent to them through their department's mail and asked to contribute to the study and then give their answered questionnaire to the English department's secretary in order to be collected by the researcher.

After two weeks, the researcher was able to make the arrangements to administer the questionnaire to the non-EM for the course (ENGL 341) to administer the questionnaire again. The researcher was able to administer the questionnaire on three different days as the period of the final exams was about to start, and the students were not likely to attend classes during their preparation for their exams. Finally, all the data was collected and ready to be presented in detail in excel sheets and be statistically analyzed.

8.2.4 Data Analysis Instrument

To establish a valid base for a quantitative method, the researcher used the Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyze the collected data with the professional assistance of a statistician. Results for both TOEFL and idiomatic tests were statically analyzed to answer the first and the second research questions, which were: (1) is there a significant correlation between UoB students' LP and their IC, (2) does culture play a role in UoB students' comprehension of idiomatic expressions? And if yes, how far has it done so. On the other hand, a Lickert Scale was used to judge the teacher's and students' opinions of teaching idioms in the classroom. The mean, standard deviation, and coefficient of variation were calculated accordingly. Calculated percentages for the other part of the questionnaire were used to answer the study's question number (3) to what extent the current situation of teaching the English language helps UoB students to enhance their understanding of idiomatic expressions. And finally, the fourth question regarding the difficulties of teaching idioms at UoB.

This section mainly discussed the adopted methodology that was used to conduct this research. First, it described the population of the study that was used to examine idioms' usage and the students' proficiency in English. Next, it described the data collection method, which was a quantitative method. Then, it described the main tools of the study, which were the TOEFL test and the idiom test. After that, it talked about the data collection procedure used in the study. Eventually, this section discussed the data collection procedure that was applied in order to gather the data to be finally analyzed in the data analysis section instruments. The following section will have the study's findings and a detailed discussion of the collected data.

9. Findings and Discussion of Results

Here are the findings and discussion of the results of this research. It used a quantitative approach to analyze the data that was collected in order to answer the four research questions posed by the researcher. These questions were:

1. Is there a significant correlation between UOB students' LP and their IC?
2. How far does culture play a role in UOB students' comprehension of idiomatic expressions?
3. To what extent does the current situation of teaching the English language help UoB students enhance their understanding of idiomatic expressions?

4. What are the difficulties of teaching idioms at UOB?

It first analyzed the data elicited from the idiomatic test to answer the study's first question. The idiomatic test results also participated in answering the second question, as the questions were purposefully developed to include items that were related to culture and not related to culture. Then, it presented the analysis of the questionnaires distributed to both teachers and the students to obtain their perceptions regarding teaching and learning idioms in the UoB context on parallel issues and non-parallel questions occasionally. The results of the questionnaire were used to answer the third and the fourth questions.

To obtain the findings, the researcher used two types of instruments to conduct the study, which was the TOEFL test and the idioms test. The researcher also used two questionnaires to collect data; one was administered to teachers and the other to students. The teachers' questionnaire consisted of 37 questions, and the students' questionnaire consisted of 33 questions. Besides, the questionnaires also had questions to support the tests' results in relation to questions 1 and 2. The tests' results were mainly used to answer the first and the second questions of the study, while the questionnaire's results were used to answer the third and the fourth questions.

9.1 Findings and Discussion of Question 1: Is there a significant correlation between UoB students' LP and their IC?

To answer question 1, the statistics were analyzed in two ways. The first way was by taking the results of the TOEFL test and the idiom test within the groups of the majors and the non-majors by using Pearson Correlation coefficients. The second way was conducted as a comparison between their results separately.

9.1.1 Within the groups' tests

To identify the correlation between the scores of the TOEFL and the idiom tests within the majors and the non-majors, the researcher used Pearson Correlation Coefficient. The findings are displayed in table 1.

Table (1)
Correlation Coefficient between UoB Students' LP and their IC

| | Score of idioms test for the majors | Score of idioms test for Non-majors |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| TOEFL scores for the majors | .511** | - |
| TOEFL scores For non-majors | - | .440** |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The study found that there is a significant correlation between the TOEFL scores for the English language and their scores on the idiom tests for both the EM and the non-EM students. While the correlation coefficient value for the EM students was .511, it was .440 for the non-EM. This indicated an average correlation level between scores of the TOEFL and idiom tests for major students. On the other hand, the results indicated a significant correlation coefficient of .440 between TOEFL scores and idiom test scores of the non-EM students. This showed that the correlation is higher in the EM group than in the non-EM.

9.1.2 Between the groups' tests

To investigate the differences between the majors' and the non-majors performance in TOEFL and idiom test, the researcher used the means, standard deviations, and the t-test, which the findings are presented in the following table.

Table (2)
The Means, the Standard Deviations and t-test of EM and non-EM Groups in TOEFL and Idiom Test

| Tests | Group | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | T | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|-------|------------|----|--------|----------------|-------|-----|-----------------|
| TOEFL | Majors | 66 | 502.80 | 63.779 | 4.813 | 134 | .000 |
| | Non-majors | 70 | 457.50 | 44.873 | | | |
| Idiom | Majors | 66 | 68.99 | 13.100 | 7.101 | 134 | .000 |
| | Non-majors | 70 | 52.14 | 14.480 | | | |

As seen above, the numbers showed a significant correlation between the learners' LP level and their ability to comprehend and understand idiomatic language. The comparison between the performance of both the EM students and the non-EM students also indicated that the EM students in UoB were much better at comprehending idiomatic language than the non-EM ones. The findings also indicated and were supported by the views of the teachers and the students, in which they both had high regard for the concept that learners' LP indicates their level of IC, as well as that IC can be used to enhance and improve the level of LP for the EFL learners. These findings support some previous studies, such as Alkadi (2015) and Aleshtar and Dowlatabadi (2014), in which their findings indicated that the higher proficiency group outperformed the lower level in comprehending idiomatic language. While the findings contradicted other previous studies, such as Namvar (2012), Alkarazoun (2015), and Zughoul and Hussein (2001), which concluded that the LP level of a learner might not be a sign of their competency level.

9.2 Findings and Discussion of Question 2: Does culture play a role in UoB students' comprehension of idiomatic expressions? If yes, how far does it do so?

The researcher worked on the second question of this research, which stipulates, "How far does culture play a role in enhancing UoB students' understanding of idiomatic expressions." The researcher calculated the means and the standard deviations of the sample of both the EM and the non-EM through the idiom test, which contained (15) items of culturally related idioms and another (15) items of non-related ones, and by calculating the (t) value for a paired sample (t-test) to find the means differences between the students' performance in the culturally related and the non-related test items. The researcher came up with some findings displayed below in table (5):

**Table (5)
The (t-test) Results of Students' Performance of
Culturally related and Non-Related Idioms**

| Group | Tests | Mean | N | Std. Deviation | T | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|------------|-------------------------------|-------|----|----------------|-------|----|-----------------|
| Majors | Culturally related idioms | 25.94 | 66 | 2.38 | 5.117 | 65 | .000 |
| | Culturally non-related idioms | 24.41 | 66 | 2.52 | | | |
| Non-majors | Culturally related idioms | 23.51 | 70 | 2.29 | 4.322 | 69 | .000 |
| | Culturally non-related idioms | 22.14 | 70 | 2.82 | | | |

The findings of the test showed that culture plays a significant role in the students' answers, in which the mean and the standard deviation of the culturally related questions were high for both the EM and the non-EM as well, while the EM had a higher mean for their answers considering that they are more exposed to the English language. The findings of the questionnaire also supported the tests' findings where the majority of the teachers and a high percentage of the students had a high perception of the item stating that learning idioms depend largely on one's culture. They also showed a consensus that cross-cultural idioms were the easiest to learn, which clearly relates to the fact that learning an idiomatic language can be easier if the idioms from the L1 had a counterpart in the target language or in the L2.

Studies such as Banjar (2014) go in line with the results in showing that even the tested sample, which consisted of Saudi students studying English in the USA, found it difficult to comprehend idioms that totally had no cultural counterparts in their L1. Bastug and Salihagic (2014) reinforced the same findings in their study that showed ESL learners' competence to use idioms in their speaking and writing was weak, and the productive language skills such as writing and speaking were rarely used although learners recognized their importance. This was due to the lack of exposure to English in its cultural environment. Alshawi and Mahadi (2012) examined the cultural issue from the translation point of view and concluded that "the difference between the SL and the TL, as well as the variation in their cultures, make the process of translating a real challenge." they added that:

"Culture plays an important role in the course of the idiom interpretation. Only by having a solid foundation of the culture of the target language can the translator catch the implied meaning. It, therefore, requires enhancing cross-cultural awareness and needs an open-minded understanding of the culture of the second language from different aspects" (p. 141).

Yagiz and Izadpanah (2013) corroborated the same results stating:

"If figurative language such as idioms, metaphors, and metonymies is pervasive in real life as a part of the culture, then it is not surprising that the language learners will be certainly encountered and exposed with idiomatic as a part of language learning and they should attempt to build up their knowledge of idioms if they want to survive in real communication settings" (p. 954).

Chunke (2011) also supported a similar finding in the study conducted on Chinese students to measure the impact of cultural context on the university students' understanding of English figurative idioms as a part of second language learning. The results confirmed cultural context of idioms facilitated their acquisition of idioms and helped them to remember idioms better. All the mentioned studies go in line with the findings of this study in that culture play a significant role in teaching and learning idioms.

9.3. Findings and Discussion of Question 3: To what extent does the current situation of teaching the English language help UoB students enhance their understanding of idiomatic expressions?

In This matter, there was almost a consensus among the teachers and students on the importance and significance of idiomatic expressions to be taught in the classroom. The results enhanced this importance as well as shown in the following charts:

Table (9)

Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching Idioms

| Statement | Agree | Not sure | Disagree |
|---|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Q 4. It is important to teach idioms to improve EFL learners' LP in English | 80% | 13% | 7% |
| Q 16 .I know there are special dictionaries for idioms. | 72% | 23% | 5% |
| Q 18. Students can learn idioms better when they use a dictionary of idioms | 60% | 25% | 15% |
| Q 27. My students have positive attitudes towards learning idioms | 25% | 50% | 25% |
| Q 30. Native speaking teachers are more qualified to teach idioms | 35% | 15% | 50% |

Table (16)

The Students' Attitudes of Learning Idioms

| Statement | Specialization | Agree | Not sure | Disagree |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Q 15. I use dictionary in learning idioms | Major | 25% | 10% | 65% |
| | Non-major | 28% | 17% | 55% |
| Q 16. I learn idioms better when I use idioms' dictionary | Major | 33% | 38% | 29% |
| | Non-major | 38% | 27% | 35% |
| Q 28. I learn idioms better when taught by a native speaking teacher | Major | 58% | 23% | 19% |
| | Non-major | 52% | 25% | 23% |
| Q 4. Learning idioms helps me improve my English language | Major | 88% | 6% | 6% |
| | Non-major | 78% | 14% | 8% |
| Q 14. I know there is a special dictionary for idioms | Major | 31% | 27% | 42% |
| | Non-major | 35% | 35% | 30% |
| Q 25. I enjoy learning idioms | Major | 88% | 8% | 4% |
| | Non-major | 60% | 23% | 17% |

9.3.1 Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching Idioms and Students' Attitudes of Learning.

The perceptions of the teachers regarding teaching idioms showed that the majority of them agreed that teaching idioms are important to improve EFL learners' LP in English. Furthermore, the majority of both the majors and the non-majors agreed on the importance of teaching idioms to improve their language. These findings go in line with Misa and Karunakaran (2013), in which the majority of the teachers who participated in their study agreed that idiomatic expressions were important in everyday English language use.

The majority of the teachers agreed that they know there are special dictionaries for idioms, while the perceptions of the students were different as the EM disagreed regarding their knowledge of a special dictionary of idioms, and the majority of the non-EM were not sure they know the presence of special dictionaries for idioms. The teachers agreed that using an idiom dictionary can better the learning of idioms, while at the same time, the EM students were not sure about it, and the non-EM agreed. The different opinions of the teachers and the students cannot deny the importance of using dictionaries of idioms in the teaching and learning process as the main source for meaning comprehension and categorization of idioms. The findings also showed that the majority of students disagreed that they use a dictionary to learn idioms. This finding supports their hesitation and the differences in their perceptions. The findings also revealed that the majority of the teachers disagreed that teaching idioms need or require native-speaking teachers, while the majority of the students had a consensus that native-speaking teachers are better for teaching idioms.

These findings highlighted that despite the teachers' full awareness of the existence of idioms' dictionaries, it seemed that they did not actually encourage their students to use them to learn idioms, as the percentages of both groups showed. The teachers' perceptions were supported by the students' answers that they don't use dictionaries in their actual learning in the class in learning idioms. Secondly, the teachers and students' perceptions contradicted each other in a way that the teachers thought that teaching idioms did not need a native speaking teacher and they were qualified enough to teach idioms, while the students preferred a high percentage to be taught by a native speaker when it comes to learning idioms. These findings reinforced the teachers' confidence in their abilities and qualifications to teach this special part of the vocabulary. It also emphasized the students' preferences to have native-speakers when learning idioms and showed more confidence that these special vocabularies should be taught by a native speaker to gain the highest benefit from learning. Interestingly, the majority of the teachers were not sure about their students' attitudes toward learning idioms, and they did not know if their students had a positive attitude or not regarding learning these idiomatic expressions. On the contrary, the majority of both groups of students showed that they highly enjoy learning idioms.

The findings of this study corroborate the findings of Tran (2013), as his findings uncover the learners' desires and abilities to learn idiomatic expressions. Tran stated, "the analysis uncovers part of the learners' desires and abilities to learn idiomatic expressions, which language educators, teachers, and policy makers may want to consider when designing an English course or making a language policy" (p. 32).

9.3. Findings and Discussion of Question 4: What are the difficulties of teaching idioms in UoB?

Table (20)

Teachers' Perceptions of the Difficulties of Teaching Idioms in UoB

| Statement | Agree | Not Sure | Disagree |
|---|-------|----------|----------|
| Q 3. I have enough teaching materials to teach idioms | 35% | 28% | 37% |
| Q 5. I allocate enough time to teach idioms in the class | 28% | 27% | 45% |
| Q 9. Teachers need special skills to teach idioms | 42% | 15% | 43% |
| Q 10. The textbook helps me in teaching idioms. | 20% | 15% | 65% |
| Q 11. The textbook I am using is enough to teach idioms. | 10% | 20% | 70% |
| Q 12. Teaching idioms to EFL/ESL students is a difficult task | 40% | 15% | 45% |
| Q 15. I have attended workshops / seminars on teaching idioms | 12% | 13% | 75% |
| Q 20. I use different activities on idioms in my class | 27% | 18% | 55% |
| Q 22. My students have problems in learning idioms | 48% | 35% | 17% |
| Q 6. Teaching idioms is time-consuming | 40% | 13% | 47% |
| Q 8. Teaching idioms is an integral part of teaching language | 75% | 7% | 18% |
| Q 13. Teaching idioms requires separate course | 22% | 8% | 70% |

From the previous findings, the researcher came up with some of the difficulties that are facing both the teachers and the students in teaching and learning idioms at the same time. Most of the difficulties were shared between the teachers and the students. For example, idioms were not taught explicitly and on excessive bases, and they are only encountered occasionally in the teaching or

taught at a minimal level. Moreover, considering the difficult nature of idioms, the majority agreed that there was not enough time allocated by the teachers to teach idioms, and teachers were avoiding teaching them in the classroom. The students, on the other hand, also faced problems in learning idioms in general due to the minimal courses dedicated to teaching idioms as well, as the textbooks were not helpful in teaching idioms to them. The findings also revealed that the teachers thought that they were qualified enough to teach this special part of the language, while the students disagreed and did not think that their teachers were qualified to teach them idioms and preferred that they were taught by native-speaking teachers. Another supporting point that teaching idioms are not at their peak in the current teaching situation is stated by the teachers themselves, saying that they do not normally attend any kind of workshops or seminars to update their knowledge in the field.

The findings of this study go in agreement with many studies such as Alrishan and Smadi (2015); Najarzagdegan and Ketabi (2015); Utami and Munir (2014); Robo (2014); Winis and Zakararia (2013); Maisa and Karunakaran (2013); Cedar (2008); Cooper (1999), in that they all agreed on the presence of problems in teaching and learning idioms for the second language learners. For example, Maisa and Karunakaran (2013) revealed that despite the majority of teachers agreed upon that idiomatic expressions are highly important in everyday English use, EFL students still face serious problems and difficulties when learning idiomatic expressions. They stated that most of the students who came from regional mediums found it difficult to learn idiomatic expressions, unlike the students who were from English mediums. Secondly, most of the investigated students were confused and were not able to identify the meaning immediately. Besides, the learners were not aware of the presence of an idiom dictionary. In addition to all the previous difficulties and problems, Maisa and Karunakaran concluded that the students were hesitant to speak in the class and had a laid-back attitude.

Robo (2014) also discovered more difficulties in her study. She commented, "Idioms are the most difficult part of the vocabulary to teach. They are not considered to be taught at the elementary level" (p.313) Robo's study showed that idioms were not taught in the class on a regular basis because of time pressure. Besides, the teacher did not teach idioms in the classroom, either because they did not know their meaning or did not know their origins. Robo also suggested a few teaching hints to teach idioms, such as more problem-solving activities that help the students to discover the metaphor in the idiomatic expressions, as well as motivating them to translate their L1 metaphors to the target language in order to share with the class their culture. She added that it is essential to integrate the students' four skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) into the process of learning idioms. She elaborated that teachers should be able to design various class activities for the students to use English idioms and make their students act as a team to use them in different contexts.

Alrishashan and Smadi (2015) supported the same results that idioms are a source of difficulty even for highly advanced level students in; which the study showed that MA students have difficulty in translating opaque and semi-opaque idioms from contexts of authentic texts, and they tend to use paraphrasing as a strategy to give the meaning of these idioms. For Winis and Zakaria (2013), the findings indicated that idioms were difficult because of the lack of cultural background behind idioms, and that was supported by the students' responses in which more than half of the investigated students, 55%, thought that cultural background effects understanding of idiomatic expressions. Another reason for creating difficulty was that idioms were not taught in the class, which is similar to this study's findings and also to Robo's (2014). Winis and Zakaria also added that difficulties included incidents where students found it difficult to comprehend the meaning of the individual words that made up the whole phrase which they could not denote to the expression itself.

Furthermore, this study's findings were also in line with the difficulties suggested by the study presented by Najarzagdegan and Ketabi (2015). In their study, they came to tackle some similar difficulties within the Iranian context. Students generally had problems in learning idioms due to the special nature of the idioms and their difficult structural patterns. The main source of these problems, as stated by Najarzagdegan and Ketabi, was a scarcity of idiomatic expressions in the L1 of the students, then the lack of the EFL students' awareness of the importance of learning idioms in general. They also lacked the skills or the necessary strategies that can help them to guess the meaning of new lexical items. Additionally, they had very limited exposure to the target language, and hence they lacked the proper practical practice of the target language. As we might conclude that, the difficulties were endless and almost similar but not identical. In every teaching context, there were problems concerning learning idioms.

10. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to find out if there is a significant correlation between the UoB's students' LP and their idiomatic language use. It also aimed to investigate whether culture plays an important role in the comprehension of idiomatic expressions by EFL learners. Furthermore, the study examined the current teaching situation of the English language and whether it helps to enhance the learners' idiomatic competence. Finally, it investigated the difficulties that UoB students face in learning idiomatic language and idioms in particular for this study. The findings pointed out several conclusions.

First, the results confirmed that the students who scored high on the idioms test also scored high on the proficiency test. This confirms the previous claims of the presence of a positive relationship between IC and English LP. In addition, the study confirmed that there is an important role that culture plays in the teaching and learning of idioms. Yagiz and Izadpanah (2013) emphasized that "language and culture are closely connected to each other. Language embodies and transfers culture. Varieties in language use within culture create different views" (p. 956)

The findings also revealed that idioms were minimally taught depending on the nature of the course. There was a consensus regarding the importance and significance of teaching idioms, in which the teachers and students agreed that using idioms could help them in enhancing their LP level. It also can be a marker to exhibit the students' competency through the proper use of idiomatic expressions in everyday language. The views varied about using tools, such as dictionaries, to teach idioms. Furthermore, the views were different between the teachers and the students in regards to using language skills in learning. The students thought that their level of usage was good, while the teachers thought the opposite. On the other hand, the general perception about using idioms activities and homework was that there were fewer activities offered to the students, and no homework on idioms was given.

Furthermore, the teachers were very positive about their qualifications in teaching idioms, while the students' preference was to have a native-speaking teacher to teach them idioms. The teachers were very skeptical about their students and were not sure they had a positive attitude toward learning idioms; on the other hand, most of the students showed great enjoyment in learning idioms and were asked to be taught with more emphasis.

The study also pointed toward some difficulties, which were shared between both the teachers and the students. Some difficulties included issues such as not dedicating enough time to teach and learn idioms; therefore, idioms were not taught excessively. It also showed that there were few courses that covered teaching idioms. The textbooks were also part of the difficulties as not being helpful in learning idioms and not having enough materials that cover the subject. The teachers also faced another difficulty which was the scarcity of attending any workshops or seminars that might help them to update their knowledge in the field of idiomatic language teaching.

11. Recommendations

From the findings of the study, we can obviously notice the positive attitude of both the teachers and the students towards teaching and learning idioms. The researcher of this study believes that more solid steps should be taken by the University of Bahrain to enhance the teaching of idiomatic language in their courses. They should take further measures to introduce specialized vocabulary courses in which idioms and other parts of idiomatic language teaching are the core point as we may conclude that teaching language courses that include linguistic and structural parts of the English language should be complemented by learning the figurative part of the language as well. Teaching idioms should be accompanied by teaching the culture of the target language, as culture is the main part of learning any language. As Yagiz and Izadpanah (2013) pointed out, "Language teachers should equip themselves with the knowledge of the second culture to make students familiar with cultural differences and have high esteem for students' native culture; thus facilitate the process of language learning" (p.956). They emphasize the importance of teaching culture along with teaching idioms stating that "language policy makers should consider different cultures equally well and develop positive attitudes towards target cultures, especially in planning and designing materials, hence avoiding any culture shock and cultural misunderstandings" (ibid).

It is also recommended that teachers have clear criteria for idiom selection and idiom teaching methods so that students become more familiar with this special aspect of learning a second language. Additionally, more idiom activities should be included in the language class in order to enhance the learners' practice and skills to comprehend and learn idioms. Moreover, choosing the textbook to teach this special language should be taken into consideration. Textbooks should be carefully chosen in order to get the maximum benefit from them. The University of Bahrain should offer a variety of choices of language books so that teachers can choose from them in accordance with what they think will serve better for the students. Proper steps should be undertaken to train teachers in teaching figurative language, including idioms. The teachers should be updated with the current pedagogical trends in teaching idioms to EFL learners, and courses that are more specialized should be offered for them in order to enhance the level of teaching this part of the English language.

This study is considered one of the most recent studies conducted in the field of Idiomatic Competency and Language Proficiency. Its importance comes from covering most of the related aspects. A very big effort was made to reach the final findings, but the need for more large-scale studies is recommended in order to study the figurative language and to find out how to develop the level of IC of UoB students. More questionnaires need to be administered, and individual interviews need to be conducted as well to study the current English language learning situation in order to find solutions for any pitfalls and to help the learners use idiomatic language more properly and easily, not only within the academic class but also in their daily communications and usage.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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