



**THE EFFECT OF WATCHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE
ANIMATION MOVIES ON LEARNING IDIOMS:
A CASE OF IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS**

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Abstract:

The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of watching English language animation movies on learning idioms by Iranian EFL intermediate learners. To conduct the study, 40 female learners were randomly divided into an experimental group and a control group at English language Institutes in Sari. The experimental group in instruction period was exposed to idioms by using text-book plus English language animation movies which contained, the researchers' intended idioms but control group just was exposed to text-book. The data were collected through two instruments: the pre-test and the post-test, which were both developed by the researcher. The data obtained from the administration of the pre-test and the post-test were analyzed using SPSS software. The findings were compared to examine the effect of watching English language animation movies on learning idioms by Iranian EFL intermediate learners. The result of this study showed that the implementation of English language animation movies used in the study had a significant effect on learning idioms by Iranian EFL intermediate learners.

Keywords: animation movies, learning idioms, EFL learners

1. Introduction

Figurative idioms, although neglected before the 20th century, have received a great deal of attention from pedagogical point of view in recent years; it has been partly because of the growing awareness that these inseparable aspects of human language are

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very frequent in everyday language use. On the other hand, teaching and learning idioms is one of the most difficult areas in second language acquisition because most of them have an arbitrary nature.

As Charteris, (2002) states, figurative idioms are challenging for SL teachers and learners because the meanings of many idioms do not arise from the sum of their grammatical and lexical parts and this causes difficulties in the systematic instruction of idioms in SL classrooms. As a result, applying a proper approach to teaching idioms has always been of overwhelming interest among language teachers.

Learning is a cognitive process that involves conscious and active behavior. Students look for similarities and differences between new information and prior knowledge, and in this way are able to effectively assimilate new learning into existing cognitive structures (Piaget, 1980).

Language, according to Hudson (1980), is at the center of human life and the ability to learn language is among the greatest mental achievements of mankind. It is evident that input has great importance in second language learning. This implies that a greater level of attention needs to be paid to the modality of input in language learning. In recent years, many researchers have considered the effect of multimedia materials on second language teaching (Fernando, 1996). With the increasing popularity of multimedia sources among the younger generation, one can hardly deny the effect of various aspects of multimedia on the learning of various language components and skills.

The fast moving technology provides people in the area of education with limitless opportunities. With the global interest in computers, innovative teaching methods have been oriented to English language learning environments. With the help of innovative methods and materials that multimedia, language learning environments can be more colorful, motivating and at the same time more supportive for students in the learning process (Lowe, 2004).

Animation movies are such valuable and rich resources for teaching because they present colloquial English in real life contexts rather than artificial situation; an opportunity of being exposed to different native speaker voices, slangs, reduced speeches, stress, accents, and dialects (Mayer & Sims, 1994).

Watching animation movie has some advantageous. The most significant advantage is that learners are exposed to real spoken discourse with both linguistic and paralinguistic features – the sounds and the images (Abel, 2003). Without the written texts, which may cause distractions, learners are required to listen for the gist (general information) and specific information conveyed by the characters. The learners need to draw inferences from the images and sounds they have paid attention to (Boers, 1992).

2. Literature Review

A. Figurative Idioms

According to Fernando (1996: 35), idioms are categorized under three sub-classes: pure idioms, semi-idioms and literal idioms.

- 1) Pure idiom is a type of "conventionalized, non-literal multiword expression" whose meaning cannot be understood by adding up the meanings of the words that make up the phrase (ibid.: 35-36).
- 2) Semi-idiom which has at least one literal element and one with a non-literal meaning. Then, this type of idioms is considered partially opaque (Fernando, 1996, p.60).
- 3) Literal idioms are semantically less complex than the other two, and therefore easier to understand. However, these expressions do qualify as idioms because they cannot be changed or allow only restricted variation.

Many attempts have been made to define and classify idioms (e.g., Cooper, 1999; Grant & Bauer, 2004; Lennon, 1998; Simpson & Mendis, 2003). Some scholars such as Lennon (1998) have emphasized the continuous scale of idiomaticity in language. Others such as Zyzik (2011) have focused on the fixed characteristic in the syntax of an idiom. In this viewpoint, the constituents of an idiom appear to co-occur (words that comprise an idiom may not be substituted or transformed). Idioms can also be categorized by the scale of non-literal meaning (e.g., Fernando, 1996), or length (e.g., Makkai, 1972).

The notion of figurative idioms in this study follows Grant and Bauer's (2004) definition and classification in which the degree of compositionality and figurative interpretation is counted. For example, the phrase "my cup of tea" in "some people fancy tennis, but it's not my cup of tea" is a figurative idiom. This idiom does not refer to a drink but to something or someone that one finds pleasing. In figurative idioms, there are figurative and literal meanings; therefore, listeners have to decide the meaning of a figurative idiom in a particular context.

B. Idiomatic Competence

Idiomatic or figurative competence has recently been discussed in accordance with communicative competence, which was inspired by Chomsky (1965) and Hymes (1972), Canale and Swain (1980).

In the revised model of communicative competence by Celce-Murcia (2008), the ability to use idioms is regarded as a component of formulaic competence. Formulaic competence refers to the selection and use of fixed chunks or stretches of language in

communication (Celce-Murcia, 2008). As part of formulaic competence, idiomatic competence is the ability to appropriately communicate with idioms in the roles of both an addressor and an addressee (Buckingham, 2006; Burke, 1988). It helps communicators fully encode and decode the meaning of a conversation.

Knowles (2004) described the learning process in five steps ranging from familiarization, recognition, and comprehension to mastery and automaticity. When students reach automaticity, they are able to confidently communicate in the language they are learning. Automaticity can be achieved through the practice of phrases and thought groups and the exposure to the target language, Knowles (2004) argues. This implies that language learners should be exposed to idiomatic expressions and should have intensive practice to be able to use idioms for communication.

C. Idiom Processing and comprehension

Research on idiom processing and comprehension in English has resulted in the emergence of different idiom processing models, which have been summarized as five models (Bobrow & Bell, 1973; Gibbs, 1984; Gibbs & Gonzales, 1985; Gibbs, Nayak, & Catting, 1989; Swinney & Cutler, 1979; Titon & Connie, 1999) This section will review these models briefly.

The first model of idiom processing, which was proposed by Bobrow and Bell (1973), is idiom list hypothesis. According to this model, idiomatic expressions are accessed from a 'mental idiom word dictionary' called idiom list that is not part of the person's normal mental lexicon and access from this list takes place through what has been called idiom mode. Bobrow and Bell believe that such processing strategy is different from the processing of literal expressions and normal sentences. When a person first encounters an idiom he/she would attempt to analyze it literally. If the literal analysis fails, the person will access the mental idiom list and then will interpret the idiom non-literally. In other words, the figurative meaning of the idiom will be activated.

This model was criticized by later studies in that the essence of this model implied serial processing of idioms, and therefore, could not measure on-line or real time language processing. Swinney and Cutler (1979) argue the research supporting this model has relied on post-perceptual measures of idiom comprehension processes: "*post-perceptual tasks are not necessarily capable of supporting inferences about perceptual processes; any task which measures effects only after they are over runs the risk of reflecting merely the final, conscious, result of such processing by which that final processing was achieved*" (P. 526).

The second model of idiom processing is lexical representation hypothesis, which was supported by Swinney and Cutler's study (1979). The main principle of this

model is that idioms are simply complex long words that are stored in the mental lexicon just like all other words and are processed in the same way as ambiguous words (e.g. bug which has multiple meanings). This assumption was supported by Titon and Connine (1999), whose study showed that depending on the degree of familiarity with a particular expression, idioms like other lexical entries are readily accessible.

According to this model, during idiom comprehension both literal and figurative interpretation of idiomatic expressions take place simultaneously and in parallel not serial manner; then, in a horse race model only one interpretation will be available using the related context.

The third hypothesis is direct access hypothesis (Gibbs, 1984), which maintains that non literal interpretation of idioms takes place before literal meaning. Gibbs (1984) argues that when a native speaker encounters a familiar idiomatic expression, s/he will access its figurative sense directly without any reference to literal meaning and will not process the idiom literally before comprehending its intended non-literal meaning.

The three mentioned models of idiom processing are subsumed under the direct look up class as all of them share a common assumption that figurative meaning of idiomatic expressions are comprehended through direct memory retrieval (Glucksberg, 1993). These models treat idioms as words-with-spaces that are arbitrarily learned mapping between syntactic form and meaning (like words) and whose meanings are retrieved as a whole during the comprehension process. That is to say, the models rely on the idea that idioms are non-compositional strings whose figurative meanings are quite arbitrary. This assumption was later rejected by the compositional view of idiom comprehension in that the relation between figurative and literal meanings of an idiom is not always arbitrary and the meanings of individual constituents of idioms contribute to their figurative sense (compositional view).

The fourth model of idiom processing is the compositional analysis proposed by Gibbs, Nayak, and Cutting (1989). Their study revealed that subjects process decomposable idioms faster than non-decomposable idioms. Decomposable idioms are idioms whose figurative meanings are related to literal meanings (e.g. pop the question) while in non-decomposable idioms the figurative meaning cannot be derived from literal meaning (e.g. kick the bucket). According to compositional analysis model, during idiom processing people analyze the meanings of individual words of the idioms and then come up with their overall meaning as any phrase or sentence.

Finally, the Hybrid model (Titon & Connine, 1999) gained insight from all earlier models. It has been suggested in this model that the 'direct look up' model as well as the 'compositional model' are involved in idiom processing. Titon and Connine argue that none of the above approaches alone is adequate for idiom processing, and that

compositional and non-compositional (direct look up) approaches are complementary and essential for idiom comprehension.

The hybrid model is based on the belief that during idiom comprehension both literal and figurative meanings are activated. In addition, processing decomposable idioms is faster than non-decomposable idioms because it takes longer to integrate the correct sense into intended meaning and idiomatic context. This model was supported by Abel (2003) in that it posed both literal and figurative meanings and controls for the decomposable idioms. He extended the model and introduced the dual idiom representation model. The idea behind this model was that non-decomposable idioms are accessed from an idiom entry while decomposable idioms are represented via their constituent entries, which can develop an idiom entry if they are encountered more frequently. According to this model, frequency is an important aspect in language processing and should be part of every model of idiom comprehension. On the other hand, idiom entry should be regarded as additional information about frequently accruing linguistic entities (Abel, 2003).

D. Statement of the Problem

One of the main problems which seem to bedevil EFL learners has to do with the acquisition of idioms and figures of speech. Students often complain about the difficulties involved in understanding idiomatic expressions such as to fall in love, to be over the moon or to be under the weather, when the image of a person falling, standing over the moon or being placed under meteorological conditions apparently holds no relation whatsoever with the states of love, happiness and sadness conveyed by these expressions respectively.

E. Research Question and Null Hypothesis

This research was aimed to find out the effect of using English language animation movie in the classroom on idioms learning capacity of learners. The research question is as follow:

“Does watching English language animation movies in the classroom have any statistically significant effect on learning idioms by Iranian intermediate EFL learners?”

This study carries the following null-hypothesis:

“Watching English language animation movies in the classroom does not have any statistically significant effect on learning idioms by Iranian intermediate EFL learners.”

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

For the purpose of this study, 40 out of 59 available Iranian intermediate EFL learners were selected randomly from English Language Institutes in Sari (Safirani Khazar, Sahel Shomal, Cambridge and Danesh Gostar). All of them were female learners and their age ranged between 14-18 years old. For the purpose of the homogeneity, the researcher used OPT (Oxford Placement Test) for putting sample members in the same level of proficiency. They are of two separate classes but the teacher is the same.

3.2 Instruments

For the purpose of this study, some instruments were needed such as:

- **Textbook:** textbook which enable the researcher to instruct the learners with purposive domain of idioms during instructional period.
- **Idioms Table:** the researcher used a table with 40 idiomatic expression which covered during instruction period as two idioms for each session.
- **OPT (Oxford Placement Test):** This test was administered to determine the proficiency level of the students to make them homogenized. This test was developed by Oxford University Press and University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate. The students were required to answer the test during a 60 minute session.

3.3 Procedure

The participants were randomly selected and the researcher tried to select them at the same level. For this purpose, the researcher administered standard language proficiency test (OPT) from potential sample learner in different English institutes in Sari. The goal of this test was to more secure their homogeneity in terms of language proficiency, background knowledge and preferring at the same age and with the same gender.

After selecting sample members, the researcher randomly divided them into two groups as control group and experiment group. Before starting instruction, the researcher evaluated the extent of idiom which the participants know, by using standard and reliable pre-test included 20 multiple choice test about the researcher intended idioms for instruction period. The instruction was held for 20 sessions for all of them in separate classrooms. For each session, the researcher instructed two idioms from idioms tables which mentioned before as an instrument of study to participants. As a research treatment for experiment group the researcher presented idioms by using English language animation movies which contain target idioms but control group

participants just exposed to idioms presented by the researcher during instruction period. After instruction, the researcher evaluated the extent of idiom they learned by using a standard and reliable post-test included 20 multiple choice test about target idioms to participants and asked them to answer it. Then the researcher rated these tests and recorded participants' scores for future data analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

From 59 participants, 40 of them were considered homogenous members based on their scores on OPT ranging from 35 to 45 (Intermediate level). The 40 homogenized participants were randomly put into 2 groups of control and experimental, N = 20 for each.

Table 1: The Descriptive Statistics of the Homogenized Participants

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Homogenized Members	40	35.00	45.00	42.3000	2.22111	4.933
Valid N (list wise)	40					

As it can be seen in table 1 above, the mean and the standard deviation of the homogenized participants were 42.30 and 2.22 respectively. Figure 1 below shows the histogram with normal curve for the homogenized participants.

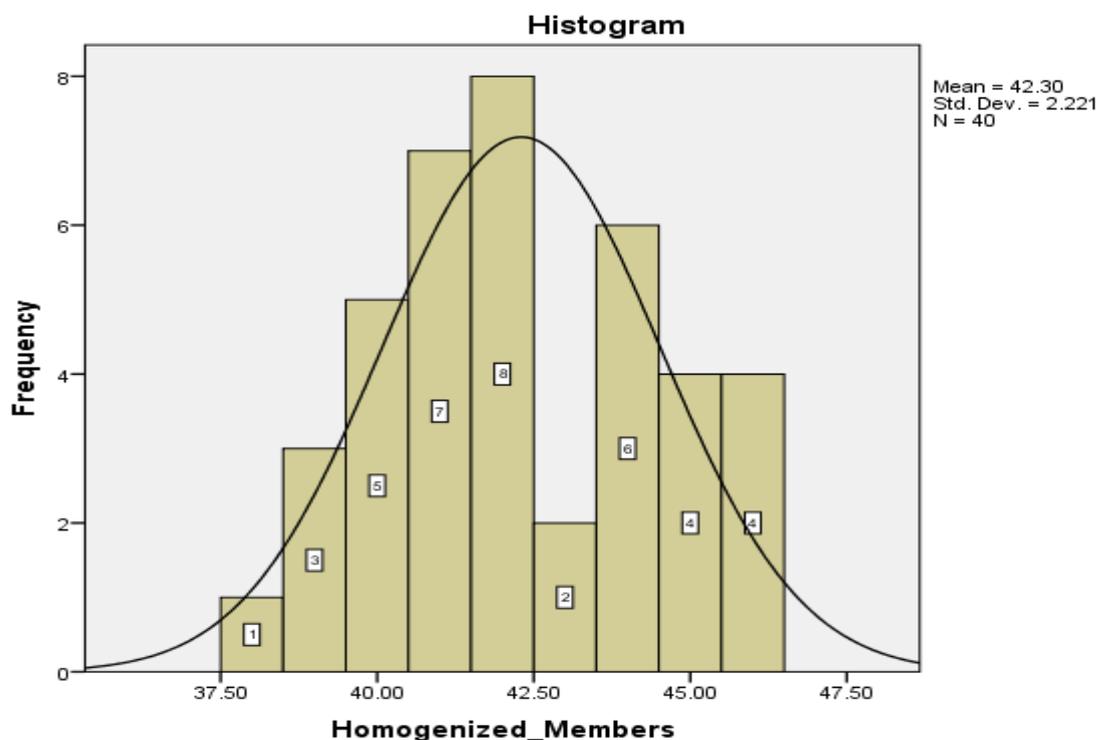


Figure 1: Histogram with normal curve for the OPT scores of the homogenized members

In order to choose the appropriate statistical method for the post-test comparison between the control and the experimental groups, the researcher ran the test of normality. The following table shows the normality analysis result.

Table 2: Result of Normality Test for Idiom Post-test Scores of the Control and Experimental Group

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Post_Cont	.950	20	.372
Post_Exp	.962	20	.585

As it can be seen in table 2 above, the Sig value of the Shapiro-Wilk test is higher than 0.05 for post-tests of the two groups on the idiom test. It means that the data does enjoy normal distribution for the two sets of scores. Therefore, the appropriate test would be the independent t-test.

The researcher used inferential statistics to make judgments of the probability that an observed difference between groups is a dependable one or one that might have happened by chance in this study. Inferential statistic shown as tables follow:

Table 3: Result of the Independent T-Test for the Comparison of the Control and Experimental Groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Homogenized Members	Equal variances assumed	.045	.833	.141	38	.889	.10000	.71137
	Equal variances not assumed			.141	37.872	.889	.10000	.71137

As table 3 above shows, the control and experimental groups were homogeneous in terms of language proficiency, $t(38) = .141, P > .05$

Table 4: Result of the Independent Sample T-Test for
 Idiom Pre-test of Control and Experimental groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Pretest	Equal variances assumed	.607	.441	.509	38	.614	.30000	.58983
	Equal variances not assumed			.509	35.922	.614	.30000	.58983

The independent sample t-test was run to compare the mean scores of the two groups on the pre-test of idiom. As table 4 above shows, it can be concluded that the two groups were homogeneous in terms of their knowledge of idiom (sig= .614, P>.05).

Table 5: Result of the Independent T-test for the
 Posttest of Idiom of the Two Groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Posttest	Equal variances assumed	.118	.733	9.723	38	.000	-4.50000	.46283
	Equal variances not assumed			9.723	37.541	.000	-4.50000	.46283

As it can be seen in table 5 above, the obtained Sig value is less than 0.05 (Sig= .000, P<.05). Therefore, the researcher safely **rejects** the research hypothesis that watching English language animation movies in the classroom does not have any statistically significant effect on learning idioms by Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

As it was revealed, watching English language animation movies in the classroom was effective in idiom learning and also it can improve the ability of learning idioms by EFL learners. This effect can be due to several reasons; which five main reasons presented as follow:

First, as Lonergan, (1984) asserted; animation movies are seen as an important resource for use in the EFL\ESL classroom because it is dynamic, immediate and

accessible. In addition to the visual supports, the films also provide exposures to the language uttered in authentic settings.

Secondly, as King (2002) states: "*films provide more pedagogical options and are a rich resource of intrinsically motivating materials for learners*". When students are exposed to movies, they can learn some words and phrases used in the movies and by using animation movies, students can learn how to pronounce many words, and also help them to acquire new vocabulary and idioms.

Third, according to Rieber, (1990); there are several instructional opportunities that can be explored with the change in the representation form, from static graphics to graphical computer simulations. Animation is one of those components.

Forth, empirically Morrison and Tversky (2001), compared animated graphics, static graphics, and text alone for teaching the permissible paths of people or vehicles. Graphics produced better performance than text alone, but animated diagrams provided no benefits compared to (single) static diagrams.

Fifth, according to Schnotz and Rasch (2005), there are two ways that animations might support cognitive processing. The first way is to enable the function of animation, which occurs when animations provide additional information that cannot be displayed in pictures. The second method is in the facilitating function, when animations are able to help learners build mental models of situations with external support. This shows that animations make cognitive processing easier.

This research potentially has some implications that may help English language teachers, students, EFL learners and educational syllabus designers which some main implications presented as follow:

1. For students learning English in schools is to enhance their naturalness and fluency in speaking a foreign language, then it seems only necessary to learn idioms in order to have better communicative skills. Unfortunately, nowadays, almost there is no syllabus about learning idioms in Iranian schools or in some rare case, syllabus plans are useless, uninteresting and somehow boring for students, so by using animation movies in the classroom, they can motivate learners learn idioms so much better.
2. For EFL learners learning English in English institutes, teaching idioms enables them to acquire information about a language's culture. It is now considered as a common knowledge that idioms are and should be used in a broad range of everyday-life situations. Furthermore, idioms have been considered an area of language which fits better with higher levels of L2 fluency. For this purpose, using static text-book resources seems insufficient and need to use more joyous

methods such as implying animation movies to enrich their idioms learning ability.

3. It's also helpful for English teachers whether teaching in schools or institutes to find more effective and practical methods for teaching idioms to their students and learners because, language learning cannot be restricted to classrooms since the amount of language exposure there is not enough. In fact, the amount of exposure to English in such countries can be raised through implementing technology in language learning. Animation movies make available stretches of language exposure so longer than traditional methods of teaching idioms to learners.
4. Finally, it potentially can help educational syllabus designers to provide more sufficient and effective plans and syllabuses for teaching and learning idioms in schools or English institutes to gaining much more useful methods in their educational programs.

Appendix A: Idioms Table

S/n	Idiom	Example	Definition
1	gave me a hand	He gave me a hand with my homework.	To help somebody
2	pain in the neck	My sister is a pain in the neck.	Someone is very irritating
3	took the words out of somebody mouth	You took the words out of my mouth.	Saying something that exactly someone wanted to say
4	drama queen	My sister is a drama queen.	Someone is overreact
5	knowing inside out	I know English inside out.	Knowing everything about something or somebody
6	a cry baby	Don't be a cry baby.	Someone is complain so much
7	wet behind the ears	My new boss is wet behind the ears.	Someone is very inexperienced
8	on the tip of tongue	His name was on the tip of my tongue... but I couldn't remember it.	used to say you are almost able to remember something, but you can't
9	let the cat out of the bag	It was going to be a surprise party, until Todd let the cat out of the bag.	told the secret so other people found out too early
10	give it your all	Even though I lost the race, I gave it my all.	tried your hardest
11	learn your lesson	The boy learned his lesson. He'll never play with fire again.	to learn something important about life from making a mistake/doing something wrong
12	speak your mind	Timmy was afraid to speak his mind in front of his schoolmates.	say what you honestly feel

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13	a piece of cake	The test was a piece of cake. I finished it in 20 minutes.	very easy
14	break the ice	At the start of the meeting, Mike tried to break the ice by telling a joke.	To initiate social interaction/conversation
15	slip your mind	I was going to return the library books today after work, but the thought slipped my mind.	used to say you forgot to do something
16	The ball is in your court	The ball is in their court now. Let's wait for their decision.	used to say that you now have control of the situation
17	get a kick out of something	I get a kick out of reading science fiction novels.	to get enjoyment from something
18	catch somebody's eye	The bright advertisement caught my eye.	to grab somebody's attention and make them look at something
19	be in hot water	Ken was in hot water about forgetting his wedding anniversary.	to be in trouble
20	an eye-opener	The film on global warming was a real eye-opener for Tom.	something that makes you see or think about something differently from then on
21	a change of heart	After seeing a mouse on the floor, I had a change of heart about eating at the restaurant.	a change of feeling; used to say you changed your mind about something
22	a breath of fresh air	The new employee, Gail, is a breath of fresh air in the office.	something new that adds life and energy to a situation
23	put all your eggs in one basket	Greg invested his money in a few different areas. He didn't want to put all his eggs in one basket.	to put all of something you have in the same area (note: generally viewed as a bad thing to do)
24	Birds of a feather (flock together)	A: It's funny that all of Kate's friends are attractive. B: So is she. I guess birds of a feather flock together.	Similar people tend to spend time with each other.
25	pay the price for something	Don't touch my stuff. If you do, you'll pay the price.	to suffer as a consequence of doing something
26	not have a clue	I don't have a clue where Nunavut is.	to have no idea or absolutely no knowledge (about something)
27	be in the same boat	The governments of Portugal and Greece are in the same boat. They both need financial assistance.	to be in the same situation
28	get into gear	You'd better get into gear or you'll be late.	hurry up; start moving at a faster speed
29	out of the blue	One day, out of the blue, I received a letter from my former schoolmate.	unscheduled; without previous warning
30	keep an eye on	The security guard kept an eye on	watch closely; monitor

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		the suspicious man.	
31	out of sight, out of mind	Jim was happy when his classmate moved out of his apartment, out of sight, out of mind.	this means that if you do not see someone regularly, you will stop thinking about them.
32	give somebody the cold shoulder	Ted gave his friend the cold shoulder when he saw him at the party.	to ignore somebody
33	know something like the back of your hand	Takeshi knows the streets of Kyoto like the back of his hand.	to be very familiar with something
34	burn your bridges	Jack tried to be kind to his boss when he quit in job because he didn't want to burn his bridges.	ruin a relationship, resulting in you being unable to return somewhere
35	get cold feet	It's normal to get cold feet before your wedding day.	to become nervous/frightened right before something you had planned to do
36	get your foot in the door	Janice took a position as an administrative assistant to get her foot in the door at the famous fashion company.	to complete the first step towards achieving an opportunity
37	pull your weight	Lisa had to work extra hard because a few members of the team weren't pulling their weight.	to do your share of the work; to contribute your share of effort
38	in the middle of nowhere	Their car broke down in the middle of nowhere.	in a place far away from anywhere known to you
39	follow in somebody's footsteps	Bill chose to follow in his father's footsteps and become a dentist.	follow someone else's path
40	bring something to light	The report brought some previously unknown facts to light about the causes of cancer.	to make something previously unknown become known

Appendix B: Pre and Post-test multiple choice test

Idioms for intermediate learner

Student name:

Institute name:

Please read each question carefully and choose the correct answer.

1- He ----- with my homework.

a) gave me a hand

b) knowing inside out

c) wet behind the ears

d) break the ice

2- Frank is ----- . He is so irritating person.

a) a cry baby

b) knowing inside out

c) pain in the neck

d) a piece of cake

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