"Grabbing 40 winks while crying big crocodile tears even under the weather to learn a new bag of tricks":
CONQUERING THE CHALLENGE OF ENGLISH COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE WITH THE AID OF IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS

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Abstract

This study is a mixed-methods research involving pre-experimental and qualitative narrative strategies. It aimed to discuss the benefits of intensive instruction regarding idiomatic expressions to idiomatic competence, to describe the extent of inclusion of idioms in college English 1 syllabi, and to discuss the insights of English teachers on effective measures in teaching idioms.

Results show that there was significant improvement in the test scores of all participant-students from both an HEI from the province and an HEI from Manila after the intervention which was instruction on idiomatic expressions (IEs). Between the two participant groups, the post-intervention scores of students who declared lower levels of exposure to and use of the English language displayed more dramatic improvements in their post-intervention test scores. Furthermore, very low extent of inclusion of idioms was determined in the English 1 syllabi samples. Finally, the teachers' narratives affirmed measures for teaching idioms allotting more time for teaching IEs through various activities; and ascertaining the teachers' readiness to impart idiomatic competence.

This study concludes that instruction on idiomatic expressions is beneficial in promoting idiomatic competence, especially for students with lower levels of exposure to and use of the English language, and that the English 1 syllabi would do well to reflect IEs to a greater extent, with due consideration of varied research-based teaching techniques.

Keywords: English communicative competence, idiomatic expressions, idiomatic competence

INTRODUCTION

Achieving accuracy and fluency in a second language is a daunting feat-idiomatically put, it is "no walk in the park" and certainly not a "bed of roses." Hillert and Swinney (1999) described it as requiring from a learner the familiarity with the appropriate use of not only individual words, but also seemingly countless fixed expressions including collocations, proverbs, quotations, and idioms. The list of prerequisite areas of competence for fluency goes on, as enumerated in Carter and McCarthy (2006), Ager (1998; 2014) and The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language: grammar, otherwise referred to as the rules on the composition of statements and expressions; syntax, or the order in which words are strung together in sentences, clauses or phrases; shapeshifting, or modifying the structure of words through different means to deliver their appropriate functions in sentences; pronunciation, or the enunciation of words; and diction, the recall and appropriate use of a great number of vocabulary items.

Cakir (2010) and Erdener (2004) concur that idioms are a confusing phenomenon in language, owing to their ambiguousness that can only be unraveled through cultural knowledge relevant to the target language. Endeavoring to address the mentioned ambiguousness of idioms for didactic purposes, it is best to differentiate an idiom from an idiomatic expression. Kukurs (2013) attempt at practicable broad categories for the linguistic feature in question: 1) an idiom is a saying or phrase that one cannot interpret literally, for example, "cream of the crop" means the best among the best, but it is not necessarily about farm produce, its intended meaning cannot be deduced from the component words exclusively, and 2) an idiomatic expression predominantly unveils its meaning even upon the first encounter by speakers of English as a foreign language.

Although demarcated here to emphasize the need to untangle the phenomenon of idioms, in the current study, idioms and idiomatic expressions (IEs) are operationally taken as one and used interchangeably in the discussion to pertain to 2 UNIVERSITY OF THE ASSUMPTION GRADUATE SCHOOL strings of words that are described as a code. This internal language can be used to exclude others from a "prestige" group.

On the other side of the coin, Cakir (2010) and Glucksberg (2001) expounded that knowledge of idioms shared within a group presents a metaphorical gate pass through which members share feelings, ideas, opinions, and perspectives. Therefore, to be part of the inner circle of English speaking groups, a learner of the language would have to take on the challenge of mastering the usage of nearly 25,000 idiomatic expressions that occur in various materials: the Bible—"Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket and are counted as the small dust of the balance" (Isaiah 40:15); songs—"Another one bites the dust" (Queen, 1980); newspapers—"Grief-stricken mother's appeal: 'Return my sons to me, dead or alive'" (Philippine Daily Inquirer, February 28, 2015).

Adding to the social pressure to pursue the prestige attached to competence in the English language are the high stakes that come with such a "conquest." Included among those

that could be "up for grabs" in conquering the English language in the sense of attaining a native-like level of ability in the interchange of figurative meaning in conversations or idiomatic competence are the enjoyment of a much-sought-after profession; institutional membership; citizenship; and the like. Policing the enjoyment of such a reward is the requirement for a certification of language proficiency through standardized tests, the likes of Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC).

It is specifically written in the IELTS speaking assessment criteria that to be rated as an "expert user" of English (band 9), one must be able to use idiomatic language naturally and accurately. Bands 7 and 8 of the same test likewise refer to this requirement of the ability to use some less common and idiomatic vocabulary (British Council, in Tran, 2013). A lexical resource is one identifying feature of the ability to perfect a native-like articulation. Furthermore, in the CEFR's highest level of rating for listening skills called C1—equivalent to the IELTS's bands 7 through 9 one of the 3 UNIVERSITY OF THE ASSUMPTION GRADUATE SCHOOL indicators of expertise points to the need for understanding a wide variety of idiomatic and colloquial expressions (Council of Europe, in Tran, 2013).

Aside from the substantial value that is assigned to the achievement of communicative competence in English by the social environment, contributing as well to the weight of the challenge posed to ESL learners is the fact that languages such as English are so replete with IEs that proponents like Kavka (2002), and Makkai (in Eltahir, 2003) go so far as to say that everything in natural languages is of an idiomatic nature—arrangements of words, intended meanings—so much so that getting familiar with idioms would be approximating the study of the very science of assigning or representing meaning in general or epistemology. This indeed spells out the immensity of the challenge of "conquering English," and for the average ESL learner, this could mean feeling that learning English proves to be more than what one bargained for.

Set to figure out the rate at which idioms are used, several studies (in Cooper, 1999), looked into political debates, psychological texts, novels, and psychotherapy sessions and concluded that the majority of speakers of English use nearly ten million new metaphors within a lifetime and 20 million idioms in a lifetime. This adds up to approximately 3,000 new metaphors in a week and 7,000 idioms in a week. This is an indication relating to the importance of idioms as an aspect of effective communication and the difficulty with which ESL learners would need to contend in their study of English.

In considering learners who have to struggle with the difficulties mentioned previously, one should take account of the many immigrants in countries like the United States. Oldenburg (1989) pointed to illustrative cases subsumed in "What are those Crazy Americans Saying?" by Jarold Kieffer. In its discussion, the book established that the main problem of recent immigrants is that their knowledge of English is limited to vocabulary and the use of the dictionary. However, such knowledge falls short in seeing the immigrants through real-life

conversations where intended messages are contrary to meanings indicated in dictionaries. For example, 4 UNIVERSITY OF THE ASSUMPTION GRADUATE SCHOOL when an Asian counselor, a new immigrant, was asked to give Kiefer a hand, the said counselor working in the Senior Employment Office looked at both of his hands as he said, "But I need them both."

Ignorance of IEs can cause more dire consequences, as shown in Japan Today newspaper. The article featured a non-English-proficient exchange student going to a Halloween costume party. Having been taken to the wrong house, he was clueless about what was meant when the house owner shouted, "Freeze!" The novice English speaker got shot and died.

Jackson II and Hogg (2010) traced the origin of the word "idiom" to the Greek word idioma that stands for a string of words that are out of the ordinary. They are said to be "odd ducks" that may seem to behave the same way as normal language.

However, idioms prove to be distinct from other linguistic forms in a great variety of ways. Idioms are non-compositional, with their meanings as a whole not dependent on the sense of each of their components. To illustrate, the appropriate interpretation of "shoot the breeze" (to have an informal chat), may not be derived from the unlocking of the parts of the expression (Chomsky & Fraser in Dastjerdi & Adelnia, 2011).

In the same train of thought, Swinney and Cutler (1979) added that although the literal translation of idioms normally does not make any sense, when used figuratively, the idioms help in conveying meaning in remarkably imaginative ways. "Raining cats and dogs" is a good example. It is considered a single lexical item that means "raining heavily"—a meaning that has nothing to do with the sense of cats and dogs when taken literally.

Another description of idioms pertains to patterns found in the language that allows for a very little variation, if any, in their form. This definition from Baker (1992) also reflected on five conditions for idioms: 1) The order of the words in an idiom cannot be changed; 2) The words in an idiom cannot be omitted; 3) There are no extra words that may be added to an idiom; 4) No words in an idiom can be replaced by other words; and 5) The grammatical structure of an idiom cannot be changed.

Also, Bell (in Meryem, 2009) specified particular attributes that are observed like idiomatic expressions (IE): 1) Alteration of grammar: grammaticality based on the apparent structure of the idioms is not displayed by IEs, but native speakers utilize and accept these IEs with a consistent structure and intended sense, i.e., "It's been ages since we met (singular with a plural noun); 2) Figurativeness: This primary characteristic of IEs metaphorical use, means that the surface structure of the expressions gives very little help in unlocking the expressions' intended meaning, e.g.," to bury the hatchet" (to become friendly again after a disagreement). Taken separately, "To bury" and "the hatchet," shed no light directly on the whole expression's intended interpretation.

Semantically, idioms may belong to any of these groups: phrasal verbs (e.g., break up), metaphors (e.g., spill the beans), metonymies (e.g., throw up one's hands), similes (e.g., as easy as pie), proverbs (e.g., a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush), grammatical idioms (e.g., let alone), idioms with "it" (e.g., live it up) among others (Kovecses & Szabo, 1996).

Galloway (1993) advocated an approach to language teaching in the 1970s called Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The approach utilizes real-life situations that call for communication, requiring less emphasis on the learning of specific grammatical rules, more on acquiring native-like facility and pronunciation, and on using language in day-to-day contexts, with minimal focus on formal structures (Rhalmi, 2009 & Hernandez, 2013). The importance of CLT lies in its focus on the target attributes of a communicator in the English language which include the ability to comprehend messages put across in real-time, and in the same way, the ability to send a message with a fluency that approximates the communicative competence of a native speaker. CLT is then an appropriate model within which to teach idiomatic expressions (IEs), which are forms that intersperse the language of natives in day-to-day communicative contexts.

Tran (2013) synthesized several studies that fit the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) model which presents specific techniques in promoting the learning of idioms for ESL learners: idioms optimize a didactic approach with due consideration to the culture from where they come and which provides the logical basis for the intended meanings with the need of establishing a cross-linguistic link among idioms being taught (Buckingham, 2006); use of varied techniques when students' exploration of choices and their effectiveness is allowed for the solution of challenges in the learning process; it is aimed at perceiving the common metaphoric systematicity, merits of discovery, experimentation and self-educating techniques to enhance the learning of idioms (Cooper, 1999 & Lennon, 1998).

The encouragement of students to observe for themselves the characteristics of idioms as they occur in communicative contexts—thus far observed in the studies of favorable means of teaching idioms—likewise proves to be of advantage in Wray (2000). Nevertheless, the study portended that there would be points where overgeneralization would happen in the students' exploration of the common thread among idioms being studied.

Considering other works that looked into pedagogy or andragogy for idiomatic expressions, Tran (2012) recommended the integration of the four skills; Vasiljevic (2011) claimed that code-switching to the mother tongue might prove to be a beneficial complement to any teaching method; and Zyzik (in Tran, 2012) associated effective idiom teaching to delineating literal and figurative meanings exhibited in idiomatic expressions.

Supporting the argument for a careful and formal study of IEs, Cain, Oakhill, and Lemmon (2004) asserted that the figurative meanings of IEs are inextricably wedded to the connotative intent of the native speakers for the IEs as used in the target language. Kilpatrick (2004) considered mastering IEs and—ultimately exhibiting a higher proficiency in English—presents a big stumbling block for ESL students.

To ensure effective communication, English learners must be enabled to grasp intended meanings from their interlocutors, or the persons they are conversing with. This mutual understanding of the message that is being conveyed in sentences is better achieved if there is familiarization with idiomatic expressions in learning situations such as those in classrooms. This is because, in contrast with native speakers for whom idioms are very ordinary, ESL learners find IEs far from trivial. Because ESL learners are at odds with figurative expressions, appreciation of the study of English may even wane exactly because of these IEs. When this happens, in effect, it limits the opportunities for ESL learners to share in the native speakers' development as members of the particular society that puts a premium on competence in the English language.

Idiomatic expressions in the English language, being realistically numerous and frequently occurring in real-life communication, present quite a challenge for second language learners. Once conquered, the language learners' progress in their mastery of IEs would be of substantial positive consequences. As Ambrose (n.d.) and Bulut and Yacizi (2004) pointed out, mastery of idioms opens the gateway to the richness of the language, its life, and creativity.   Mastery of the use of idioms allows the learners to share in the cultural and historical information in the target language, therefore making possible the partaking of the language learners in the manipulation of the language and command of what this language puts across to the target audiences.

From Jobin (2005), it can be deduced that the use of idioms for their prospective users also lies in their utility in making possible the expression of one's ideas in a language that is literary: the kind of language that entertains the audience and engages them in stimulating talk. A case in point is a headline from the Philippine Daily Inquirer that reads, "Abu Sayaf on the run." A title, as such, will awaken interest and prompt readers to finish the full length of the article.

Idioms would also enable the language learners to take part in conversations that cater to topics that demand delicacy of expression, sensitivity to people's feelings, and wariness of unrefined or unethical words. To accomplish this, idiomatic utterances like "He had an affair" are used instead of direct statements such as "He had a sexual relationship with someone other than his spouse." More so, the use of idioms makes brevity of expression possible. Most idioms can say in very few words what would otherwise require so many non-idiomatic statements. To illustrate, the lengthy statement "It is better to retain a particular thing that you already have rather than taking a risk to get more which can lead to losing everything that you have," is effectively replaced by the idiomatic expression "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

Idiomatic expressions form an essential part of the English vocabulary and are considered one of the most interesting and challenging aspects of the English language. Sinclair (in Eltahir, 2003), noted that they are interesting because they are colorful and lively; more so, they are challenging because they have unpredictable meanings. Idiomatic expressions are commonly used in all types of contexts, be it formal or informal, spoken or

written; therefore, idioms play an important role in second language learning (McPartland, 2000; Swan, 1997; Sinclair et al., 1991; McCarthy et al., 1998; & Goodale, 1993). According to McPartland (in Cakir 2010), "every language learner needs to develop competence in them since they are used by native speakers in spoken and written mode" (p 7.) In addition, Dastjerdi (2010) wrote that a great deal of attention had been paid to the role of idiomatic language in learning a second language. He cited Danesi (2003) as one of the second language researchers who acknowledge that second language speakers may sound unnatural if their speech is devoid of idiomatic language.

Guduro (2011) explicated that in recognition of the importance of idiomatic expressions in authentic English language usage, second language learners would do well to aim for greater competence in figurative speech. The same learners should advance and move farther from the limitations of literal language that characterize the novice skill level in English proficiency, the lowest speaking ability level. As second language learners are keenly aware, English is the "prestige" language that lends to its speakers a sense of higher status in society as it enables its speakers to function efficiently in communicative situations. Therefore, as a "felt need," the learning of idiomatic expressions should figure more prominently in the learners' list of priorities in practicing toward native-like use of English in the written and spoken forms. When this is observed, and learners are engaged in gaining a higher ability in the use of idioms with the help of textbooks and references that facilitate learning, as done in some settings, this is a step leading to the appropriate direction.

The benefits that can be derived by learners from the study of idioms hold for graders up to adults with only rudimentary working knowledge of the target language. Carillo (2006) argued along the same vein as Thiel (in Cedar, 2008) in supporting the earlier assertion that limited ability in the use of idioms sets apart ESL learners from the native speakers of the target language. Regardless of their grammatical competence and strengths in vocabulary use and pronunciation, the inability to operate well in the exchange of meaning through figurative language would be sure to undermine the novice speakers' confidence and their ability to command respect from native speakers. Therefore, the pressure is on the ESL learners to "conquer" English: to display *figurative idiomatic competence,* the ability to use idiomatic expressions the way native speakers do.

Among those who outlined the prestige that goes with attaining *communicative competence,* or general proficiency (general ability in listening, speaking, reading and writing) in English and its component, including figurative idiomatic competence in English was Rimando (2010) and Manivannan (2006), and institutions like the United Nations. Important assertions from the mentioned sources of discussions point to the prestige of English as the language that is: one of the six favored by the United Nations; spoken by up to 375 million native speakers and (800 million non-native speakers; utilized in 80 percent of the instructions to facilitate the storage of data in computers worldwide; the language of choice for 50 percent of technical, scientific, and publications of general nature; and the only linguistic link for governing, educating, and providing human needs on a global scale.

Zeroing into the particular case of ESL learners in the Philippines, Gilbas et al. (2012), Espinosa (1997), and sources such as The Philippine Daily Inquirer, Lanka Business Online (2006), and the Department of Education, outlined the major points affirming the urgency of action regarding Filipinos' declining competitive advantage in English communicative competence in which figurative idiomatic competence figures prominently. The points indicate that in 2007, only 20 percent of high school teachers passed in the English proficiency test that included quite a number of idioms; very few of the graduates from the Philippines' top universities exhibited a level of skill in the English language higher than that of children on the second grade in Western countries; less than half of Filipino nurses met the passing mark for linguistic competence; and less than seven percent of graduating high school students in 2005 displayed college readiness in terms of reading, speaking, and comprehending in English; and almost half of secondary students displayed close to negligible achievement and therefore no readiness at all for college-level communication. Moreover, the points outlining the gravity of the problem with particular relevance to the neglect of idiomatic expressions in teaching included the lack of emphasis on idiomatic expressions as a significant part of the English subjects' content, and the limited amount of time allowed for students to acquire the ability to use the idioms communicatively.

Neglect of idiomatic expressions in classroom English instruction has been delved into by the studies of Harmer (in Joklova 2009), and Hussein, Khanji, and Makzoomy (2000). From these works, it can be gleaned that the trend of neglect for IEs in Philippine schools may be attributable to the tendency of teachers to put a premium on grammar; the marginal emphasis assigned to idioms has negative implications on the students' acquired skill in comprehending and utilizing the mentioned fixed expressions; and finally, if students are to communicate as effectively as native speakers in real-life situations, the promotion of skill in idiomatic language use should be directly addressed in syllabi.

Several studies have likewise shed light on concepts related to the present research delineating the positive correlation between understanding idioms and achieving highly in academics (Johnson, 1991; Nippold, Moran, & Schwarz, 2001; Qualls & Harris, 1999; Qualls, O'Brien, Blood, & Hammer, 2003; and Nesi, Levorato, Roch, & Cacciari, 2004).

Given these findings and the evident rewards for learners such as Filipinos to pursue figurative idiomatic competence as a competitive advantage in getting into such industry sectors as call centers, immigrating, or seeking employment abroad, as posited by Richards (in Cedar 2008), it would be worth looking into the nature of classroom instruction that would effectively enable students to exhibit figurative idiomatic competence.

It is along this line that this study was conceptualized. This paper specifically sought to verify whether or not the inclusion of idiomatic expressions (allocating a specific time for instruction) in the syllabi will improve the ability of learners to communicate in English with figurative idiomatic competence.

Further, this study aimed at establishing empirical support for incorporating intensive instruction on idiomatic expressions as a major feature in the teaching of English across all curriculum levels toward enhanced figurative idiomatic competence among learners. Specifically, it described: 1) the participant-students' pre-intervention and post-intervention idiomatic competence; 2) the participant-students' language use and exposure; 3) the extent of inclusion of idiomatic expressions in English language instruction based on the sample English course syllabi, and the accounts of participant-English teachers; and the 4) the perspectives of the participant-English teachers about the importance of idiomatic expressions in enhancing communicative competence, and about measures to enhance instruction on idiomatic expression.

Although it may seem that the study is delimited on the analysis of the impact of intensive training on the improvement of idiomatic competence, equally important thrusts of the inquiry lie in: first, the causative link between exposure to English and level of English usage with various interlocutors on the one hand, and on the other, the development of idiomatic competence as a crucial facet of communicative competence; and second, the ways and means in promoting communicative competence through IEs in didactic contexts.

Demarcated from the scope of the research is the quantitative measurement of such factors that may be implicated in the research questions as the effects of teacher factors on the development of communicative competence; the effects of particular teaching approaches to the learning of specific types of idioms; and the relative influence of IE-related instructional material design to the level of progress among students in the communicative competence continuum. While these thrusts may fruitfully motivate researches catering to the concept of idiomaticity in language, they are not within the foci of the current investigation.

It is hypothesized in this study that gaining the knowledge of idiomatic expressions and becoming familiar with their appropriate native-like use through more intensive instruction can lead to communicative competence, particularly in its idiomatic competence dimension.

METHOD

This paper employed a mixed methods research approach (Byrne & Humble, 2007; Creswell, 2012; and Mertens, 2014) involving pre-experimental and qualitative narrative methods (Creswell, 2007). The pre-experimental method was used in determining the participant-students' idiomatic proficiency as a measure of English communicative competence. This quantitative method used in the study was particularly set for pre-post test designs without a control group (Salkind, 2011). Meanwhile, the qualitative-narrative strategy was utilized in the description of the participant-teachers' insights on the incorporation of instruction on IEs in any English Language Course Syllabi. The method specifically interpreted and explained the signification or futility of IEs in English language competence.

Following the pre-experimental design, two sets of pre-post intervention scores were used for statistical analysis. Two groups of participant-students were selected through

criterion-referenced sampling (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003) that considered the student groups' language exposure and communicative use in their respective school and family contexts. The first group which received intensive instruction on IEs as intervention constituted 91 freshman college students (hereby termed School A) from three sections of students enrolled in English 1 in a provincial HEI. The other group, which merely received handouts and research prompts as intervention (School B), had 77 members from two sections of first-year students in an HEI in Metro Manila who also enrolled in EnglCom (English Communication 1).

Addressing the qualitative aspect of the study, a total of 17 English teachers were drawn from public and private elementary schools, high schools, and colleges/universities) who served as interviewees and were asked to share their insights on IE instruction and its relevance to enhanced idiomatic competence in English among students.

This mixed-methods study (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007) used three instruments with contents prevalidated by experts: 1) test questionnaires to obtain the pre-test and post-test results of the participant-students; 2) a survey questionnaire to determine the extent of the participant-students' language exposure and frequency of language use; and 3) an interview questionnaire for the 17 participant-English teachers to generate data regarding their perspectives on whether or not instruction on idiomatic expressions could enhance the idiomatic competence of learners and their insights on the merits of incorporating the teaching of these expressions in the English language subject offerings across curricula. Juxtaposed in this interview was the analysis of the level of inclusion of IEs, evident or not, in the course syllabi.

Before the administration of the pre-test and post-test, the reliability of the list of idioms (Appendix A) had to be established. Initially, all 900 idioms listed in the book *Knowledge of English Idioms* (Gaines, 1986) were fed to a program created by a computer expert specifically for this study. The idioms were assigned a number each, and the program randomly chose a total of 50 idioms. From this list of fifty idioms, three English language experts were asked to choose 30 IEs each. The common ones chosen by the language experts were separated from the batch and were fed again to the computer program, which randomly chose the final thirty (30) IEs. The number of items in this test, as well as in the subsequent ones, was targeted to ensure the non-obtrusive nature of the testing sessions: without the students thinking they were being given tests other than regular classroom assessment to monitor their learning.

The pre-test instrument is composed of a 30-item *Multiple Choice* test (Appendix B), while the post-test consisted of two parts: a 15-item *Filling the Blanks* and a ten-item *Sentence Construction* (Appendix C). This change in the test-type was recommended by the three language experts (who formed the list of idioms), citing that comprehensible and appropriate use of IEs suggests improved communicative competence, a four-item open-ended questionnaire (Appendix E) on the other hand, was used for the interview.

The study commenced in the third quarter of the semester. The pre-test was conducted for both groups during the conduct of their English classes. This procedure was undertaken to determine the extent of the students' familiarity with idiomatic expressions initially. After the pre-tests in both schools, lessons incorporating idiomatic expressions were taught to School A. The results of the pre-test required this intervention because of the low scores they obtained. The intervention consisted of teaching the participants five IEs in 30 minutes for each of the six successive meetings. To ensure that the participant-students would not be confounded, it was deemed best not to conduct randomized controlled trials. It was made to appear that a usual course lesson was being carried on, and they were incognizant that an experiment was taking place.

Meanwhile, School B followed the sequence of their regular English syllabus contents. After the pre-test, they were simply given handouts of listed idioms and required to research on the thirty IEs. An intervention as intensive as that given to School A was not done. The design for these two separate instances of pre experiments set-up with no control groups called for pre-post intervention tests for both groups. The post-test for both groups of participants were administered during the conduct of their seventh meeting. To determine and verify the existence of any significant change in the idiomatic competence level of the student-participants within the interval of the pre-test and the post-test, the T-test (Bonate, 2000) was used.

Similarly, the expertise of three educated native speakers of English was tapped to ensure the accuracy of the IEs in checking the ten-item sentence construction. Correct grammar was not the focus of the analysis but how the students contextually understood and used the IEs in their sentences.

For the interview with the English participant-English teachers to take place, a letter (Appendix F) was drafted with the adviser, reproduced and sent to the ten purposively selected schools. The letter sought permission for the interview and to obtain five copies of their English syllabi here coded as S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5 (S stands for School). The English Course Syllabi were necessary for Content Analysis (Stemler, 2001) to look into the extent of teaching idiomatic expressions among the ten schools.

A total of 14 English teachers confirmed their participation, while three other participant-English teachers came from the provincial HEI. A recorded in-depth face-to-face interview with the participant-English teachers was set, and upon completion, transcription ensued, assigning codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) for each interviewee's response typified as PET1 (Participant-English Teacher-1), and so on up to PET17, respectively. For illustration, transcriptions were extracted verbatim to substantiate the findings of the study.

FINDINGS

Pre-intervention and Post-intervention of IE Test Results

Table 1
Test performance data of Schools A and B

	Pre-test		Post-test 1		t	df	Post-test 2		t	df
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			Mean	SD		
School A	8.34	(4.29)	14.11	(7.08)	-7.936**	90	16.65	(9.65)	-8.561**	90
School B	23.60	(5.17)	24.65	(4.02)	-2.014**	76	28.52	(3.03)	-9.339**	76

Table 1 presents the results of the comparison between School A and School B in their pre-test and post-test scores using the t-test for paired samples or two dependent means. Data show that there is a significant improvement in the performance of the School A from their pre-test to their first post-test by 5.77±6.94 points, t(90)=-7.936,p<0.001 and by 8.31±9.26 points, t(90)=-8.561,p<0.001 to their second post-test. This implies that IE instruction affects students' language competence positively.

Meanwhile, students from School B scored relatively high *(M=23.4)* in the pre-test as compared to those from School A *(M=8.34);* there appears to be a glaring disparity between the scores. Post-tests 1 and 2 present a consistent progress in School A *(M=14.11* and *M=16.65)* after having undergone the intensive instruction intervention. However, looking at the test scores of School B, the difference in their pre-post intervention scores is also evidently significant,   although the intervention provided was not as intensive as that given to School A.

Participant-Students' Use of and Exposure to the English Language

Table 2
Use of the English language

	School A		School B		χ^2	
	Frequency of Use	%	Frequency of Use	%		df
Always	**3**	3.3	**41**	53.2	53.832	1
Sometimes	**88**	96.7	**36**	46.8		
Never	0	0	0	0		

*Note: *p < 0.05. **p < 0.001*

Using Chi-square test for association in Table 2 [$\chi^2(1) = 53.832 = p < 0.001$] shows a statistically significant difference between the two schools in terms of how frequently they use the English language. More than 50 percent of the students from School B use English as their language of communication revealing their extensive use of the English language as compared with three percent of School A.

Table 3
The dominant language used at home

School A			School B		
Language	Frequency	%	Language	Frequency	%
English	0	**0**	English	15	19.5
Filipino	26	28.6	Filipino	27	35.1
Filipino & English	25	27.5	Filipino & English	33	**42.9**
Others	40	**44**	Others	2	2.6
Total	**91**	**100**	**Total**	**77**	**100**

Table 3 displays the dominant language used at home by School A students, which is the mother tongue of the province registering at 44 percent, followed by Filipino with 28.6 percent and 27.5 percent for Filipino and English. None of the respondents used English as the medium of communication at home. Meanwhile, the predominant language at home for School B is the combination of Filipino and English with 42.9 percent, followed by pure Filipino language with 35.1 percent. Only 19.5 percent use English as the sole language, and 2.6 percent use other languages or dialects at home.

Table 4
English language exposure

School A			School B		
Forms of Exposure	Frequency	%	Forms of Exposure	Frequency	%
TV/Movies	35	**38.46**	TV/Movies	74	**96.1**
Radio	3	3.3	Radio	53	68.83
Books	24	26.37	Books	66	85.71
Talking	15	16.48	Talking	70	**90.91**
Internet	41	**45.05**	Internet	70	**90.91**

As presented in Table 4, respondents from School A are mostly exposed to the English language through the internet (45.05%), followed by viewing foreign television channels and movies (38.46%). Only 3.3 percent answered that they are exposed to the

language by listening to the radio. Compared to the respondents from School A, respondents from School B are mostly exposed to the English language by watching foreign television programs and movies (96.10%), followed by the internet and speaking the language (90.91%). Only 68.83 percent answered that they are exposed to the language by listening to the radio. It is noteworthy that the appearance of IEs is possible on the internet, but the scope of what they read may be limited. Movies, on the other hand, present the actual dialogue of native-speakers of English.

Table 5
Frequency of language use

Language	School A (n=91)				School B (N=77)			
	Friends	Peers	Family	Prof	Friends	Peers	Family	Prof
	Frequency				Frequency			
English	0	0	0	4	11	15	12	**46**
	0	0	0	4.4	14.3	19.5	15.6	**59.7**
Filipino	**35**	**52**	**41**	14	3	1	22	0
	38.5	**57.1**	**45.1**	15.4	3.9	1.3	28.6	0
Filipino and English	**35**	26	14	**70**	**63**	**61**	**39**	31
	38.5	28.6	15.4	**76.9**	**81.8**	**79.2**	**60.6**	40.3
Others	21	13	36	3	0	0	4	0
	23.1	14.3	39.6	3.3	0	0	5.2	0

In speaking with friends, most of the School A respondents use Filipino or both Filipino and English (38.5%) followed by the provincial language (23.1%); no one among the same group communicates with friends using English alone. On the other hand, School B students use both Filipino and English when speaking with friends (81.8%); 14.3 percent of them use English alone.

Filipino was mostly used by School A respondents when speaking with peers, registering at 57.1 percent. No one from the same group answered English as their sole medium in communicating with their peers. The table likewise displays that respondents from School B use both Filipino and English when speaking to peers at 79.2 percent, while only 1.3 percent use Filipino.

Within the family, almost half of School A respondents used Filipino solely when they communicate with 45.1 percent, followed by the provincial language with 39.6 percent. Furthermore, no one from School A used English alone when communicating with family members. For School B, 50.6 percent of the respondents from using Filipino combined with English, while 5.2 percent use other languages or dialects when they communicate with family members.

To sum up, School A's English language use solely involved the academe, followed by *Taglish* (a mix of Tagalog and English). Their most dominant venue of exposure to the English language is the internet. School B students, meanwhile, use English predominantly be it with professors, or family members and friends. Their exposure was through the internet, the academe, and watching films.

Level of Inclusion of IEs

Table 6
Syllabi analysis

Syllabus	Analysis
S1	Geared toward writing and speaking skills but **no mention of IE**
S2 and S3	Technical jargons, clichés, and **idioms** are mentioned but **no allotted** time indicated
S4	Three hours allocated time for **idiomatic use of preposition**, ten hours on grammar
	but no specified time for verbal communication skills
S5	Focus is on oral communication skills but **no mention of IE**

Based on syllabi analysis. Content analysis of the five syllabi revealed that there was no clear assigned topic and instruction time indicated for the teaching of IEs. S1 is geared toward developing skills of correct, fluent, and confident speaking and writing; accuracy in the construction of sentences; and composition of paragraphs showing unity, coherence, and emphasis. The same falls true with S2's and S3's syllabi, which focus is on writing as a tool in gaining new learning and English grammar, respectively. Although the syllabi do mention technical jargon, clichés, and idioms, there is no time allotment indicated for each of the topics in the course.

S4's syllabus shows a very detailed time allocation, down to the hour. It gives three hours to prepositions as well as the idiomatic use of prepositions. Although a cursory discussion appears apportioned for idiomatic use of prepositions, such an allocation would

fail to promote the learning of idioms in such a way that learners would truly be able to use them as often as they should. Therefore, this syllabus also appears to focus mainly on grammar, with little emphasis on oral communication. There is no mention of idiomatic expressions or idioms in S5. In analyzing this syllabus, the course appears to be very practical, putting a focus on oral communication skills.

Table 7
Participant-English teachers' experiential accounts

Teacher-Informants	Experiential Account
PET1 and 3	-high inclusion of IEs through teacher talk; -idioms not being reflected in syllabi; - PET3 sometimes featured IEs in writing exercises depending on student ability
PET2	-happenstance, irregular inclusion of IEs in discussions; -discussions on IEs may last up to half an hour; - idioms also infrequent in tests
PET4, 5, 6 7, 8 and 9	- highly infrequent inclusion of idioms; - PET 4, 5 & 7 pointed to having discussions on idioms only when materials incidentally contained IEs; - PET 4 & 7 attributed the low frequency of discussions on idioms to these items' absence in the syllabi topics; - PET 5 minimized tackling IEs because he saw these as too difficult for his class

Based on teachers' experiential accounts*. PET1 shared that the level of inclusion for IEs in her class is very high despite the non-reflection of such a practice in the syllabus she is supposed to follow. She makes such a high level of inclusion possible by allowing idiomatic expressions to be figured much in her lesson plans' teacher talk. Similarly, PET3 expressed that she models the use of idioms in her teacher-talk, aside from providing the idiomatic expressions and their meanings in class and later on asking the students to use these in writing exercises. She said that the level of inclusion for IEs in her classes depends on the ability of students, with more advanced students getting more instruction on IEs upon successful accomplishment of related tasks assigned.

PET2 declared that she teaches idioms as the need arises and that although discussions centered on IEs could last up to half an hour in her class, this transpires only when lessons happen to include idioms. She said this is not regularly observed, and neither is the inclusion of idioms in the exams.

PET 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 likewise disclosed that instruction on idioms happens in their classes but is very infrequent. For PET 4, 5, and 7, the instruction is given when the content of the lessons incidentally featured IEs. They added, however, that this is chanced upon in their classes to a very limited degree owing to the non-inclusion in the syllabus topics, in the case of teachers 4 and 7, and the difficulty the students display in studying them, in the case of teacher 5.

Teachers' Perspectives on the Relevance of Idiomatic Expressions in Developing Communicative Competence

The interviews with the participant-English language teachers (PETs), gave birth to several perspectives on the signification of IEs in developing communicative competence:

Lack of familiarity with idiomatic expressions causes instances of a breakdown in communication. Since idiomatic expressions are figurative, the meanings of the expressions are different from what the words would imply for non-native speakers. Not understanding what these expressions convey leads to miscommunication.

The nature of Idioms, being non-literal and occurring in very high frequency in reading materials, poses great difficulty for poorly trained ESL learners. Teachers interviewed often referred to general reading materials abounding with idiomatic expressions. A significant number of the teacher-informants believe that aside from textbooks related to idioms, almost all books, newspapers, magazines, and other reading materials demand from the ESL learners the ability to understand idiomatic expressions that can make English learning overwhelming for those who are ill-equipped.

Exposure to the figurative language set up through formal instruction on idiomatic expressions directly helps in promoting idiomatic competence. The teachers emphasized that when students are asked to read published materials other than their textbooks, they would be able to recognize idiomatic expressions and their meanings provided that the same students received a good amount of awareness-raising activities in the classroom pertaining to the targeted lexical features. The teachers acknowledged the wide usage of idiomatic expressions and the general sense that the classroom should, therefore, equip the learners for the experience of encountering figurative language with better preparation.

Knowledge of idiomatic expressions could also improve the listening skills of the students. Almost all learners of the English language experience difficulty understanding the native speakers of English, especially when they are not used to conversing with them. Most of the respondents agreed that knowledge of idiomatic expressions enhances listening comprehension skills. Formal speeches, television shows, movies, and even popular music are filled with idiomatic expressions. Therefore, it is evident that in order to understand speakers, television shows, and music, knowledge of idiomatic expressions plays a very important role.

Measures to Enhance Instruction on Idiomatic Expressions

As practicing English language teachers, their insights on what measures will enhance the instruction on IEs were also elicited:

Injecting the use of idiomatic expressions in compositions activities. Teaching students idiomatic expressions and challenging them to use these expressions in both formal and informal writing scenarios will increase their ability to use idiomatic expressions. Having the students write essays and entries for their diaries and journals using idiomatic expressions has also shown to be helpful. Based on the interviews conducted among the respondents, it was noted that the injection of idiomatic expressions in their writing assignments is an effective measure of facilitating the learning of these figurative expressions.

Utilization of idiomatic expressions through role-plays. Role-playing can be an effective tool to be used to expose students to the use of idiomatic expressions in conversation settings. This can help reinforce the students' ability to use the expressions naturally.

Providing exercises to enhance their knowledge of idiomatic expressions. Exercises such as having the students practice sentence construction that includes the use of idiomatic expressions can increase the confidence of the students to converse freely. Providing a specified amount of time each week can help introduce idiomatic expressions that increase their idiomatic knowledge base. Testing the students as to the meaning of idiomatic expressions that they had been taught provides teachers with the means of measuring the students' knowledge.

DISCUSSION

Developing communicative competence and reaping the rewards-extrinsic or intrinsic-of its corollary language skills is a need deeply felt by students of English as a foreign or second language. Whether it be for satisfactorily accomplishing academic tasks, getting ready for one's profession, or working for eventual immigration, the acquisition of the requisite linguistic proficiency is the bone of contention from which no student of at least moderate ambition is exempt.

Idiomatic competence, part, and parcel of communicative competence that is of no mean significance is a specification that needs to be satisfied to be rated an "expert user" of English, corresponding to band 9 in the IELTS speaking assessment test. Particularly, the band details the ability to utilize idiomatic expressions, including the less common ones. The band score, aside from identifying the successful test-taker with native speakers' ability to articulate accurately and communicate proficiently, also opens a world of opportunities that renders the conquest of the English language a worthwhile endeavor. Mendez (2004) revealed that starting in 2005, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), which is the premier exam for international students planning to enter American universities and one

that approximates communication in real-world contexts will include more idiomatic expressions.

Starting to acknowledge the importance of idiomatic expressions in being counted as a worthy communicator in the language falls short of easing the difficulty of acquiring idiomatic competence. The myriad idiomatic expressions encountered by learners in media from every nook and cranny, the wide variety of these lexical features, and the apparent dearth of opportunities to enrich idiomatic competence in classroom teaching-learning settings for one reason or other, all point to the burden that idioms are to L2 learners.

Thus having at least scratched the surface of the challenge of contextualizing the problem of idiomatic competence acquisition given its pedagogical/andragogical and sociological-economic underpinnings, the researcher delved into the empirical and scientific look into the possible causal link between idiomatic competence acquisition and intensified training on idioms; the consideration of English language use and exposure to the analysis of progress in idiomatic competence; and the favorable didactic approaches for the learning of the lexical features in question in the current inquiry.

The students from the provincial college significantly improved their idiomatic competence after having undergone the intervention, which entailed intensive instruction on idiomatic expressions. This improvement in the students' comprehension and usage of the idiomatic expressions merits the description as a dramatic one. The students had a very low pre-intervention idiomatic competence which may be likened to that displayed by many Filipinos referred to in Gilbas et al. (2012) who have passed through classroom instruction where idiomatic expressions were largely overlooked (Eltahir, 2003; and Hussein, Khanji, & Makzoomy, 2000). Furthermore, the increase in the idiomatic competence of the students affirms the effectiveness of the provision of intensive instruction and the application of the steps supported by the Communicative Language Teaching model of instruction, as explored in Galloway (1993), Hernandez (2013) and Rhalmi (2009).

On the other hand, the students from the university in Manila also improved in their idiomatic competence, as seen in their post-intervention test scores. Their pre- and post-intervention scores, however, were of a less dramatic difference. This student group from an HEI in Manila had a high pre-intervention idiomatic competence score to start with. Their being from a school that, for the most part, accepts and trains Filipino students from the higher quartiles of intellectual ability, prompts one to analyze idiom understanding in the light of learner background (Johnson, 1991; Nippold, Moran, & Schwarz, 2001; Nesi, Levorato, Roch & Cacciari, 2004).

The mentioned participant-students from an HEI in the nation's capital did not receive intensive instruction on the idiomatic expressions. What the group received was an instruction that entailed simple IE awareness-raising steps about the idioms selected for the study. The steps involved the handing out of the list of idioms and the provision of the prompt for unlocking the meanings and appropriate usage of the same idioms through independent

library research.   Notwithstanding, the instruction provided was followed by improved idiomatic competence indicated through post-intervention scores, which may point as well to the possible positive contribution of the demographic circumstances attending the case of these students from one of the country's top universities.

To wit, the majority of the students consistently use English at home; and almost all of them are steeped in the English language via the media resources. This is very far from what could be said about the students from the small provincial college, where a negligible number of them were able to claim consistent use of English at home, and less than half of them declared they were exposed to the English language through the media resources.

Language course syllabi determine the contents students will have to undertake for the entire duration of the course. The study initially inferred that there should be IE competence among students if there is a specific allotted time for its instruction and application. Overall, the content analysis – making sense out of text and image (Creswell in Manalansan, 2008) of the various syllabi in English 1 revealed that the lessons gave more emphasis on grammar lessons, strategies in communicative language teaching particularly, the parts of speech.

S1 syllabus envisions that the students acquire adequate vocabulary for their academic study through various strategies. The cursory mention and dearth of instruction in IEs in the two mentioned syllabi are in all likelihood largely due to difficulties experienced by teachers and syllabus designers regarding how to teach IEs effectively and in what combination and sequence to present the idioms. This was discussed in Grant (2003), which was noteworthy as the work also mentioned language learners' difficulty in interpreting and appropriately using the idioms. This situation where teachers and students are at a quandary on account of idioms is one that is not likely to improve without greater inclusion of IE instruction in CLT.

Communicative Language Teaching (Tran, 2013) as a means towards communicative competence is hinted upon in four of the five syllabi examined. This is true; however, only as far as the intended objectives of the courses were concerned and hardly visited upon in the syllabi's actual topical entries. CLT's areas for improvement in terms of promoting communicativeness that is conducive to idiomatic language learning in the classroom still leave much to be desired.

The importance of CLT lies in its focus on the target attributes of a communicator in the English language, which include the ability to comprehend messages put across in real-time, and in the same way, the ability to send a message with a fluency that approximates the communicative competence of a native speaker. CLT, then, is an appropriate model (teacher talk) within which to teach idiomatic expressions (IEs), which are forms that intersperse the language of natives in day-to-day communicative contexts (Rhalmi, 2009 & Hernandez, 2013).

Communicative competence that is aimed at in the four syllabi mentioned is, in fact, a teaching-and-learning goal that is fostered through IEs and their learning in class. The argument for this was appropriately established in researches summarily cited in Andreou-Galantomos (2008), which points to the pervasiveness of idioms that renders idiomatic competence as conceptually akin to second language proficiency, particularly higher-level fluency. Therefore idiomatic competence, being an indicator of native-like proficiency, is more harmonious with the analyzed syllabi's virtual thrust toward communicative competence.

Be that as it may, the acknowledgment—in principle—of the need for communicative competence in the syllabi's general objectives provides the theoretical anchor through which the addition of intensive instruction on IEs would be rationalized. All these mentioned aptly provide philosophical scaffolds by which the inclusion of intensive instruction on IEs in the syllabi may proceed in synchrony with the other contents lined up.

Insights shared by the teacher-informants displayed an awareness of the limiting effects of instruction that is devoid of content that promotes knowledge of and skill in using IEs. One of these insights that came to the fore from the interview data is that the lack of familiarity with idiomatic expressions frequently causes a breakdown in communication. Furthermore, the content analysis of the transcription crystallized as well the standpoint that IEs, non-literal and ubiquitous in reading materials, may undermine the motivation of ESL learners who are ill-equipped; and that formal instruction on idiomatic expressions directly helps in promoting idiomatic competence.

Intersected, in terms of common themes, the pronouncements of the teachers hailing from varied school backgrounds, produced specific ways of improving the teaching of IEs. Injecting the use of IEs as an expository device in compositions was one point of agreement among a number of the informants.   In line with this, McCarthy (2006) and Goodale (1993) pertained to the roles that idiomatic expressions play in contexts of writing for specific purposes such as journalistic writing and highly formal technical writing for civil service. `

Occurring in comparative consistency as well in the responses of the interview were the measures: utilization of IEs through role-plays; providing a variety of exercises to enhance students' knowledge of IEs; fostering the use of IEs as a rhetorical device to enhance speech; modeling the use of IEs through teacher-talk in the lesson; contextualizing IEs in course-specific content; allotting more time for teaching IEs through various activities, and ascertaining the teachers' readiness to impart idiomatic competence.

With strongly recommended activities like composition writing, role-play presentations, and a battery of exercises and drills, all of which require considerable time in class, there is an overwhelming agreement among the teacher informants that more time should be allocated for IE instruction. More so, more time needs to be provided for IE instruction, owing to the difficulty of acquiring idiomatic competence, in part because of IEs' peculiar nature (Jackson II & Hogg, 2010; Chomsky, 1980; Destjerdi & Adelnia, 2011; and Swinney & Cutler, 1979).   Furthermore, a more generous allocation of time for IE instruction

is of the essence on account of the pressing need for Filipino students to regain what used to be their globally competitive proficiency ratings (Gilbas et al., 2012).

Allowing for sufficient time spent for IE instruction makes for a conducive situation to have an eclectic mix of methodology that does justice to student diversity, the multifariousness of real-life situations where idioms do occur in conversational exchanges, and the ubiquitous and multifarious nature of idiomatic expressions as asserted in Bulut and Yazici (2004), Kovecser and Szabo (1996), and Cedar (2008). Add to this the fact that idioms need to be learned alongside an array of other challenging fixed expressions as collocations, proverbs, and a cumbersome spectrum of vocabulary words and common quotations (Hillert & Swinney, 1999). The list goes on with instructional content, which, in combination with other challenging subject matters, could be tedious: pronunciation (Hernandez, 2013), and integration of grammar and fluency (Galloway, 1993).

Cakir (2010) and Erdener (2004) substantiate the PETs' statements saying that idioms are a confusing phenomenon in language, owing to their ambiguousness that can only be unraveled through cultural knowledge relevant to the target language. As such, idiomatic expressions IEs can be described as a code, an internal language that can be used to exclude others from a "prestige" group. On the other side of the coin, Cakir (2010) and Glucksberg (2001) expounded that knowledge of idioms shared within a group presents a metaphorical gate pass through which members share feelings, ideas, opinions, and perspectives.

Everything in natural languages is idiomatic—arrangements of words, intended meanings—so much so that getting familiar with idioms would be approximating the study of the very science of assigning or representing meaning in general or epistemology. This indeed spells out the immensity of the challenge of "conquering English" (Kavka, 2002; & Makkai in Eltahir, 2003).

In the same train of thought, Swinney and Cutler (1979) added that although the literal translation of idioms normally does not make any sense, when used figuratively, the idioms help in conveying meaning in remarkably imaginative ways. "Raining cats and dogs" is a good example. It is considered a single lexical item that means "raining heavily"—a meaning that has nothing to do with the sense of cats and dogs when taken literally.

As Kumary (2004) observed, idiomatic expressions are utilized in almost every reading material because they help facilitate such demands of real-life, meaningful interchange such as the creation of a sense of enthusiasm among the readers, conveying undertones and sarcasm, reporting in an engaging manner, embellishment of expression and the establishment of unique styles of composition.

Therefore, it is evident that in order to understand speakers, television shows, and music, knowledge of idiomatic expressions plays a very important role. As Ambrose (n.d.) and Bulut and Yacizi (2004) pointed out, mastery of idioms opens the gateway to the richness of the language, its life, and creativity. Mastery of the use of idioms allows the learners to share

in the cultural and historical information in the target language, therefore making possible the partaking of the language learners in the manipulation of the language, whether spoken or written and command of what this language puts across to the target audiences.

Idiomatic expressions are commonly used in all types of contexts, be it formal or informal, spoken or written; therefore, idioms play an important role in second language learning (McPartland, 2000; Swan, 1997; Sinclair et al., 1991; McCarthy et al., 1998 & Goodale, 1993). According to McPartland (in Cakir 2010), "every language learner needs to develop competence in them since they are used by native speakers in spoken and written mode" (p 7.) Second-language speakers may sound unnatural if their speech is devoid of idiomatic language (Danesi, 2003).

Integrating idiomatic expressions in learning content relevant to the fields of specialization of the students ascertains their readiness to comprehend the meanings of the expressions.

Set to figure out the rate at which idioms are used, several studies (in Cooper, 1999) looked into political debates, psychological texts, novels, and psychotherapy sessions. They concluded that the majority of speakers of English use nearly ten (10) million new metaphors within a lifetime and twenty (20) million idioms in a lifetime. This adds up to approximately three thousand (3,000) new metaphors in a week and seven thousand (7,000) idioms in a week. This is an indication relating to the importance of idioms as an aspect of effective communication and the difficulty with which ESL learners would need to contend in their study of English, so there certainly is a need to allot more time for IEs mastery.

The competence of teachers, among other factors, contributes to the students' learning, and therefore the readiness of instructors to teach IEs should precede any attempt at imparting content to students.

The informant-teachers in the study reflected, in part, the teacher characteristics observed among other Asian teachers of English featured in Tran (2012) and Vasilijevic (2011). This is in the sense that a number of them exhibit a lack of empowerment in facing head-on the challenges related to teaching idioms with research-based pedagogical decisions. These decisions relate to teaching methods that would optimize the students' learning, idiom types to be taught, the arrangement and number of idioms to be distributed in learning units, and the effective promotion of the use of idioms in real-life, genuine communication.

As teachers see knowledge on idiomatic expressions to be of indispensable benefit for the promotion of proficient oral communication and reading, measures for the effective teaching of IEs should be carried out as seen fit for specific circumstances of students. More so, teachers who feel equipped to accomplish this challenge of imparting idiomatic competence undeniably have a key role to play.

While a few teachers enumerated—after sufficient prompting—what they perceived by their experience as proprietary steps towards improved IE instruction, their effective utilization necessarily entails the methodical application of knowledge from research. This research orientation was, for the most part, unobserved in the participants' responses. Add to this the indication of self-doubt in terms of readiness to teach idiomatic expressions in rare but significant instances during the interviews (…am I making any sense regarding this issue?...[ETP8]). This is a legitimate area for improvement among the teachers in the study (Tran, 2013).

The scenario discussed merits, as well, the consideration of the assessment of the IE competence among teachers, and after that, the provision of training for the teachers' working knowledge of IEs, alongside pedagogical expertise in training students towards idiomatic competence. The teachers' assessment of their own and colleagues' idiomatic competence can guide their training intervention where they would gain more advanced competence in IE utilization and instructional know-how on the same. This is akin to *reflective practice.* This, as discussed in Florez (2001), is a valuable tool in enabling the teachers to progress towards effective practice, which would ultimately redound to enabling the students likewise to perform better.

Following reflective practice, the teachers would take stock of their pedagogical limitations and work on these so the teaching-learning situation would result in optimal improvement in student abilities. In like manner, teachers would have a keener awareness of their inventory of strengths and work on these to their classes' more definite advantage. This research orientation that gives way to greater self-awareness as professionals is bound to result in a higher level of efficiency (Florez, 2001). With reflective practice, teachers may fully accomplish what they purported in the interview as most helpful in the promotion of idiomatic competence—the methodical exposure of the students to figurative language through formal instruction; more so, the kind that is shaped by pioneering precepts in pedagogy as established in researches.

After such an objective self-awareness made possible by reflective practice would be the advent of well-honed sensibilities inappropriately deciding on the mix of idiomatic competence-promoting teaching approaches such as those explored in Cooper (1999); Lennon (1998); Nesi, Levorato, Roch and Cacciari (2004); Prodromou (2003); and Zyzik (in Tran, 2013).

The teacher-informants made succinct indications of their belief in the effectiveness of maintaining a keen awareness of the students' favorable emotional condition while in class and grappling with a lesson quite as challenging as the elusive idiomatic expressions. Fully aware of the students' struggles and mostly quiet pleas for help, the teachers pointed to the need to go the extra mile in encouraging the students and giving the extra encouragement with giving them free rein in struggling to sustain a conversation class, providing help in unlocking difficulties when needed, starting with activities with greater guidance and proceeding later on with more pronounced independence given to the students. This also

includes giving the students IEs which are challenging but at the same time not too far from their competence level, making sure to start from where students are and then work on taking the students to an improved competence level without undue stress and anxiety.

Coming to the fore from the shared insights of the teachers as documented were ideas that pointed to the teachers' amenability to use the context of intensive IE instruction across curricula to accomplish the following tasks that, in turn, find their appropriate pegs in the motivational model in learning: preventing breakdown in communication which makes ESL students ill at ease (*confidence - desire to feel competent and in control - attributions, expectancies, self-efficacy*); counteracting the de-motivation of the students brought about by the innate complexity of idiomatic expressions as they appear ubiquitously in reading materials (*satisfaction - desire to feel good about oneself - intrinsic motivation, extrinsic incentives, equity*); providing a wide variety of exercises to enhance the students' learning of IEs *(attention - need for stimulation & variety - curiosity, boredom, arousal)*; and contextualizing IEs in course-specific content *(relevance - desire to satisfy basic motives - needs, motives, attractions).*

Along the same vein, an illustration of the informant-teachers' acknowledgment of the attention aspect of the model (*attention - the need for stimulation & variety - curiosity, boredom, arousal*) is seen in the statement—"I teach idiomatic expressions (so) that this would help you get the attention of your audience, not to impress them but of course to let [the audience] know that you are knowledgeable [of] the topic you are [discussing]" (PET3).

With the learning of idiomatic expressions made more efficient through the motivational model, instances of a breakdown in oral communication attempts by the students may be prevented and replaced with successful and confidence-enhancing experience in the use of the English language. The motivational model of learning also satisfies the need for a teaching-learning model where students are spared from boredom owing to the innate difficulty of the subject matter. Since the motivational model makes sure the students are sufficiently stimulated and made to feel in control, the challenging nature of idiomatic expressions may be played down and made less severe by the same students' acknowledgment of the relevance of idiomatic competence to their prospective professional success.

While many of the teachers named particular techniques and activities which they have proven to be effective in facilitating the assimilation of the meanings and appropriate contextual use of the IEs, a pervading belief in an eclectic mix of activities seem to be the common paradigm by which delivery of idiom-related content is proven tenable for the teachers interviewed. Noting the level of difficulty innate in idioms, a stimulating variety of techniques is in order if the diverse groups of ESL learners of IEs are to participate in sessions with sustained interest.

The wide spectrum of real-life situations where idioms are used and the wide variety of learner types among the students make for a fitting rationale for favoring the combination

of a wide array of a methodology by which to make the classroom cater to the needs of learners as much as possible. With a variety of teaching methodologies put to use by the teachers, the respective strengths of the students are put to play, and for the same learners' advantage. This due acknowledgment of the learners' multiple intelligences is in harmony with the four pegs of the motivational model for learning—attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction. This being so, the consideration of the students' multiple intelligences is another apt measure, especially with lessons like IEs in which all the students' resources should be maximized.

With the acknowledgment of the multiple intelligences of the students, a variety of techniques as those advocated by the interviewed teachers may be used, gleaning precepts and procedural insights from such earlier researches as Cooper (1999), Lennon (1998), Nesi, Levorato, Roch, & Cacciari (2004), Prodromou (2003) and Zyzik (in Tran, 2013). Skill areas for further improvement among ESL learners, such as listening, will also be addressed more effectively. As declared by the teacher-informants, this has to be in the context of intensive and extended instruction on idiomatic expressions and appropriately informed by principles relating to multiple intelligences and their pedagogical implications.

More so, it goes without saying that for reflective practice to be possible among ESL teachers, and for the same teachers to be able to dispense their responsibilities in safeguarding the emotional well-being of students. At the same time, they struggle to approximate native-like English proficiency; the syllabi and curricula would have to be substantially improved. The improvements would have to include more time apportioned and poured into the intensive teaching of IEs for all the other improvements to tenable. This claim's merit was proved in such studies as Hussein, Khanji and Makzoomy, (2000); Johnson (1991); Nippold, Moran & Schwarz (2001); Qualls & Harris (1999); Qualls, O'Brien, Blood, & Hammer (2003); Nesi, Levorato, Roch & Cacciari (2004). These previous studies are particularly important considering the role of IE study in ascertaining the maximization of benefits from the students' learning in terms of comprehension and academic achievement in general.

More to the point, the approach as described in Rhalmi (2009) and Hernandez (2013) as requiring less emphasis on the learning of specific grammatical rules, more on acquiring native-like facility and pronunciation, and on using language in day-to-day contexts, with minimal focus on formal structures lends itself well to the steps recommended by the teacher interviewees.   These were the suggested steps that targeted the development of the productive and receptive macro skills in the language more than grammar: promoting of knowledge on idiomatic expressions given improving the listening skills of the students; injecting the use of IEs as an expository device in compositions; utilizing IEs through role-plays; fostering the use of IEs as a rhetorical device to enhance speech. A very low level of inclusion of idiomatic expressions was seen in the syllabi analyzed. This was confirmed in the professed actual practice of the teachers. Indeed, although the teachers indicated an openness to a variety of techniques for the development of idiomatic competence among the students, the limitations set by the syllabi in terms of time allotment and the general low

importance these syllabi assigned to idiomatic expressions as evidenced by these structures' being negligible among the topics included.

With such a very low inclusion in the syllabi and as echoed in the actual practice of the participating practitioners in the field of teaching, it was not unpredictable that the students in the small provincial school fared rather poorly in the pre-intervention measurement of their idiomatic competence. Logically proceeding from this, the intervention that consisted of intensified instruction on idiomatic expressions contextualized in communicative teaching set up (CLT) saw the students' post-intervention scores considerably higher.

The confirmation of the causative relevance of intensive instruction on IEs to increased idiomatic competence was furthermore confirmed through the various pronouncements of the teachers in terms of the role of IEs in promoting a higher level of comprehension, and ultimately, communicative competence. These statements summarily pointed to support to the teaching of idiomatic expressions using various modalities and with due consideration of pedagogical principles that are visited in such models relevant to education such as the Motivational Model for Learning, Reflective Practice, Multiple Intelligences, and the previously mentioned Communicative Language Teaching. There was a general sense of agreement that a single model does not, in and of itself, serve the needs of all stakeholders in the ESL students' acquisition of idiomatic competence. An eclectic mix of modalities and methodology coupled with a deep sense of understanding of the circumstances attending the students' learning process makes for a conducive arrangement for the achievement of communicative competence through the specific dimension of idiomatic competence. More so, greater inclusion in the syllabi and much more time allotted for IEs also make likely the success of students in conquering the challenge of near-native English competence.

Noteworthy in the analysis of statements given in the interview of teacher-informants as regards the same teachers' opinions on the role of idiomatic competence in the development of comprehension and ultimately, competence in the target language was the over-all congruence of the responses with the theme reflected in the work of Laufer (1997). The work emphasized that idiomatic expressions serve as a stumbling block and a potent barrier to effective communication. This is especially true when one is not familiar with these lexical features because of their inherent difficulty from the perspective of ESL learners, owing to the expressions' non-literal meanings, the complexity of possible structural permutations, and their being ubiquitous in reading materials.

It is gleaned from the analysis of the interview transcripts as well that it is of paramount importance to capitalize on intensive instruction on idiomatic expressions to enable the ESL learners to effectively assume the bipartite communicative role of efficient encoder and decoder of the intended meaning. More so, the interview with the teachers revealed they subscribe to the ideas presented by Buckingham and Burke, both cited in Tran (2013). These works pointed to the precept that knowing more about idiomatic expressions increases the idiomatic competence aspect of the students' communicative ability that brings

forth effectiveness in sending and receiving meaning through the use of fixed figurative expressions or idioms while engaging in conversations in the target language.

In this light, enhancing instructional materials so that they facilitate the transfer of learning proceeding from the promotion of knowledge on idiomatic expressions in the classroom to the learners' higher-order comprehension in real-life communication would help the ESL learners in coping with the challenge of highly figurative language predominating communication outside the classroom and characterizing the communicative productions of native speakers of English.

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