

## Attitudes, Difficulties and Strategies in Learning English Idioms: A Case Study of EFL Students at Ghor University

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### ABSTRACT

Idioms are an important part of learning English vocabulary and fluency; however, they are often overlooked in EFL classrooms, especially where language instruction focuses on grammar and literal vocabulary. This study examined the attitudes of EFL students at Ghor University toward learning idioms, the difficulties they faced, and the strategies they used. To achieve the research objectives, a descriptive research design was employed. Data were collected from 78 EFL students using a questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS version 26. The results indicated that students held a positive attitude toward the importance of learning idioms but faced difficulties such as unfamiliar words, inadequate classroom instruction, ineffective cultural courses, the absence of direct equivalents in Farsi, and limited experience in using them. To overcome these challenges, they used strategies like translating idioms into Farsi, using keywords, practicing English outside class, and guessing meanings from context. The study suggests that EFL instructors in similar contexts could integrate idioms into classroom activities using interactive and practical strategies to support learning. However, these findings provide a useful insight into the experiences of students at a single institution and may not be generalizable to other contexts. Therefore, any teaching suggestions should be considered carefully.

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### Introduction

Vocabulary plays a central role in learning a foreign language. Al-Khasawneh (2019) states that “the degree of success for learning any language depends on the amount of vocabulary a learner possesses.” (p. 24). According to Al Qunayeer (2021), it is the key to foreign and second language comprehension, and the degree of success in learning a foreign language depends largely on one’s vocabulary size. Over time, vocabulary teaching has shifted from teaching isolated word lists to teaching chunks of language, which are regarded as more beneficial and natural in language acquisition (Ababneh & Al-Momani, 2011). These chunks are often

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referred to as idioms. According to O'Dell and McCarthy (2017), "idioms are fixed combinations of words whose meaning is often difficult to guess from the meaning of each individual word" (p. 6). For instance, the phrase "raining cats and dogs" has nothing to do with animals but simply means "raining heavily."

According to Samani and Gholampour (2024), "idioms are considered as [sic] one of the beauties of every language which spiritualize and colorize that language" (p. 217). One such language is English, which is particularly rich in idioms (Brenner, 2011). Idioms are frequently used in both spoken and written discourse. Researchers emphasize that mastery of idioms is essential for language learners. For example, Wang et al. (2023) note that idioms are fundamental for second language learners who wish to achieve native-like fluency. Similarly, De Caro (2009) argues that without idioms, English would lose much of its richness and diversity. Nation and Meara (2002) further highlight that idioms form an important part of vocabulary knowledge, and mastering them is essential for EFL learners to achieve proficiency comparable to that of native speakers. In fact, mastery of idioms is widely regarded as a key indicator of EFL/ESL learners' overall proficiency. As Khan and Can Daşkin (2014) point out, since idioms constitute an integral part of figurative language, they should not be overlooked or delayed in instruction, as their use enhances learners' communicative competence. Thus, idioms should be prioritized in language curricula due to their prevalence in everyday communication.

In Afghanistan, English is taught as a foreign language from Grade 4 through university. However, figurative language, especially idioms, remains neglected in classroom instruction. This may be due to linguistic and cultural differences between English and Afghan languages, the structural complexity of idioms, or traditional emphasis on grammar and isolated vocabulary rather than on figurative language. Furthermore, idioms are not systematically integrated into the curriculum and appear only sporadically in textbooks.

Despite numerous studies on EFL learners' attitudes, difficulties, and strategies in learning idioms worldwide, research in Afghanistan is still very limited, especially concerning EFL students at Ghor University. According to Hu and Chen (2007), research needs to be conducted in diverse cultural contexts to obtain comprehensive insights into a topic. In fact, without knowing the difficulties students face and the strategies they use in learning idioms, instructors may find it challenging to design effective teaching approaches, and learners may continue to have trouble learning them.

This study addresses this gap by examining students' attitudes towards idioms, identifying the challenges they face, and investigating the strategies they use to master them. The findings are expected to inform EFL teaching practices and curriculum development in Afghanistan. In addition, the findings may offer insights for EFL instruction in other contexts where idioms are often overlooked. They could also serve as a reference for teachers and researchers seeking to

improve idiom teaching and enhance students' language skills. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the overall attitudes of EFL students at Ghor University toward learning English idioms?
2. How do they perceive the importance of learning English idioms?
3. What difficulties do they encounter in learning English idioms?
4. What strategies do they employ to learn and master English idioms?

## **Literature Review**

### ***Idioms***

Numerous definitions of idioms are found in the literature. According to Ymeri and Vula (2025), an idiom can be defined as a group of words that forms a unique expression, conveying a meaning that cannot be deduced from the individual meanings of the words themselves. Likewise, Noveck et al. (2023) define an idiom as a figurative expression composed of multiple words whose meaning cannot be readily inferred from the individual words. These expressions are often culturally rooted and carry figurative meanings that have developed over time. For example, the phrase "break the ice" has nothing to do with ice but actually means "to initiate conversation in a social setting." Additionally, Mitsis (2004) describes them as nonliteral expressions, ranging from ordinary collocations to fixed and metaphorical ones, and finally to idioms with fully abstract meanings. Following this, Al-Kadi (2015) emphasizes that idioms cannot be translated literally, since their meanings are not predictable from their constituents' normal meanings, particularly in cases where idioms are rooted in historical, political, or socio-cultural contexts. Overall, an idiom refers to a phrase or expression that usually conveys a figurative, non-literal meaning; however, certain idioms become figurative while still preserving their literal sense as well (Karimova, 2021).

### ***Strategies for Learning Idioms***

According to Kennedy (2008), there is no perfect strategy, either for students or for teachers, with respect to the study of idiomatic expressions, despite the numerous published methods available to EFL learners. However, some strategies have been suggested in the literature to aid EFL learners in acquiring idioms effectively.

One commonly employed approach is to rely on the learner's native language. Cieślicka (2015) noticed that when learners are unable to recognize idioms in the target language, they tend to rely on idioms in their native language and attempt to deduce the meaning of the expression through this lens. Thus, similarities between languages play a key role in the acquisition of idioms in the target language, as they make the figurative meaning of comparable expressions more accessible and easier to grasp. However, when idiomatic expressions are different from those in the learner's native tongue, additional time is needed to understand them. Irujo (1986) argues that a learner's first language (L1) can assist

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second language (L2) learners in understanding idioms that have equivalents in their first language. Conversely, idioms that lack similar or equivalent expressions in L1 pose challenges for L2 learners.

Memorization is another frequently used strategy. Because the figurative meanings of idioms generally cannot be understood from the literal meanings of their words, rote learning becomes necessary. This method is particularly effective for learners who already possess a good command of the target language (Ding, 2007). Repeated exposure in varied contexts is also crucial. Nation (2001) emphasizes that a single encounter is inadequate; learners must meet idioms across varied contexts to achieve a more profound understanding of their use. Likewise, Karlsson (2019) highlights that frequent exposure increase learners' ability to understand and use idioms fluently in communication.

In addition, guessing meaning from context is also a productive strategy (Zyzik, 2009). Liu (2008) and Webb (2007) say that knowing the context can often help students understand idioms more quickly. Nevertheless, Boers and Lindstromberg (2008) highlight that this approach has limitations, as learners may sometimes overestimate their understanding. Finally, some researchers regard etymological elaboration as useful strategy for learning idioms. In this approach, learners explore the literal origins of idiomatic expressions, which can enhance their understanding and enable them to use idioms more fluently (Haghshenas & Hashemian, 2016).

### ***Related Studies in the World***

Numerous studies have investigated the views, challenges, and strategies that students encounter in learning English idioms. For instance, Apridayani et al. (2024) examined the challenges and learning strategies employed by Thai university students when learning English idioms. The study, which involved 50 fourth-year English majors in southern Thailand, found that the learners viewed idioms positively and appreciated their importance in effective communication. However, they also faced problems, particularly when idioms were presented out of context or required cultural background knowledge. To address these challenges, participants reported using strategies such as guessing meanings, applying descriptive definitions in English, and memorization. Similarly, Alfaqara (2021) explored the experiences of Jordanian EFL students at Mutah University. The results indicated that students held strong positive attitudes toward idioms but faced difficulties such as the absence of equivalent idioms in their first language, lack of cultural knowledge, and difficulty interpreting figurative meanings. They also used various strategies, including memorization, dictionary use, and guessing from context.

In the Saudi context, Nadeem and Almowalad (2022) carried out a study on undergraduate students at King Abdulaziz University and found that learners experienced considerable difficulties in acquisition and comprehension of idioms. The results also revealed that idioms were often neglected in the classroom

despite their importance for fluency, leaving students to rely heavily on their own strategies. Among the most commonly reported strategies were guessing the meaning of idioms from context, translating them into the first language, breaking them into smaller parts to infer meaning, and practicing idioms outside the classroom environment. Finally, Ta'amneh (2021) investigated the strategies and difficulties of learning English idioms among university students at Taibah University. The study showed that learners struggled with idioms but commonly employed strategies including predicting meaning, translation, guessing from context, using verbal and visual cues, and consulting dictionaries.

### ***Related Studies in Afghanistan***

Research on English idioms in the Afghan EFL context is very limited, with only one study conducted by Orfan (2020), who examined Afghan EFL learners' attitudes, difficulties, and strategies in learning idioms. The study found that students faced challenges due to a lack of cultural knowledge, insufficient equivalents in their first language, and limited exposure to context. It also showed that learners used various strategies, such as memorization, contextual guessing, and consulting dictionaries, to comprehend and retain idioms effectively.

### ***Idioms in the Afghan EFL Context***

In Afghanistan, English is taught as a foreign language. Between 1985 and 2004, it was first introduced as a subject starting in the seventh grade. At present, however, English instruction begins in the fourth grade and continues through the university level. From 2001 to 2008, English proficiency was not required for employment in governmental organizations, but it has now become a prerequisite even within public sectors. In addition, hundreds of private English language centers and several private educational institutions are now operating in Afghanistan. With the arrival of international non-governmental organizations, interest in learning English for personal and professional advancement has grown considerably. People with good command of English communication skills often find employment as managers, translators, interpreters, or drivers with international organizations. Furthermore, in certain ministries, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, employees frequently deal with correspondence in English received from foreign embassies and international institutions (Alamyar, 2017).

Although English has gained importance in Afghanistan, idioms, a key part of language learning, have not received much attention. Idioms play a vital role in communication, as they reflect cultural values, add fluency, and make speech sound more natural. Without idiomatic competence, learners may communicate accurately but still lack the ability to express themselves naturally in real-life contexts. However, researchers with experience teaching Afghan university students have observed that idiom instruction remains a neglected area in the EFL classes. They are usually taught randomly and without a systematic approach.

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Moreover, in the English Language and Literature curriculum, idioms appear only sparingly, mostly in listening and speaking courses or in reading and writing classes. They are also not given consistent attention, largely due to the traditional emphasis on grammar and formal aspects of English at the expense of developing idiomatic proficiency. As a result, Afghan learners often have difficulty using idioms appropriately, which negatively affects their overall English proficiency. Given these gaps, further investigation is needed to better understand the challenges EFL learners at Ghor University face and the strategies they use in learning English idioms. This study is novel because it focuses on a context that has not been previously explored and provides insights that may inform idiom teaching in similar EFL settings.

## **Method**

### ***Research Design***

This study employed a quantitative descriptive design to examine the research problem. The descriptive approach was used to provide a clear picture of participants' views and experiences without manipulating any variables. Data were collected through a 30-item questionnaire that explored participants' views on the importance of idioms, the challenges they faced in learning them, and the strategies they used. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations.

### ***Context and Participants***

The participants in this study were 78 undergraduate EFL students, selected from a total population of 98 students enrolled in the English Language and Literature Department at Ghor University, Afghanistan. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula, and participation was voluntary. The sample included students from the EFL program (third, fifth, and sixth semesters). A simple random sampling method was employed to ensure that every student had an equal chance of selection and that the sample accurately represented the population. Students' names were written on slips of paper, mixed thoroughly, and drawn randomly. This process ensured fairness, minimized bias, and provided transparency in participant selection. Ethical considerations were also observed, and participants' confidentiality was maintained throughout the study.

### ***Research Instruments***

A questionnaire was used to gather data for this study. The instrument was designed after in-depth review of the literature, with items adapted from previous studies (e.g., Alfaqara, 2021; Alhaysony, 2017; Apridayani et al., 2024; Orfan, 2020). Some items were revised to improve clarity and better suit the context of English Department students. The questionnaire consisted of 30 items divided into four sections. The first section gathered participants' demographic details. The second and third sections focused on eliciting participants' attitudes regarding the

importance of learning idioms and the challenges they encountered in doing so. Responses in these sections were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). The final section examined the strategies students employed to learn and understand idioms, also using a five-point Likert scale (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = frequently, 5 = very frequently).

## Validity

### Face Validity

To assess the face validity of the questionnaire, three language experts reviewed the questionnaire items to determine whether they effectively measured learners' challenges and strategies in learning and understanding English idioms. The experts evaluated each item for clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness. Based on their feedback, the questionnaire was revised, adding or removing items as necessary. Their insights helped refine the questionnaire and enhance its face validity prior to full-scale data collection.

### Content Validity

To quantify content validity, 10 subject-matter experts evaluated the questionnaire items based on Lawshe's (1975) Content Validity Ratio (CVR). This method calculates the degree of agreement among a panel of language experts regarding the necessity of each item for measuring the target construct. The CVR was calculated as follows:

$$CVR = \frac{N_e - N/2}{N/2}$$

where  $N_e$  is the number of experts who rated the item as "essential" and  $N$  is the total number of experts. CVR values range from -1 to +1, with higher values indicating stronger content validity. In this study, all items achieved CVR values of 0.75, which indicates strong consensus among experts regarding their necessity and relevance.

## Reliability

**Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients**

Subscale	N	$\alpha$
Attitudes toward the Importance of Learning English Idioms	9	.77
Difficulties in Learning and Understanding English Idioms	8	.71
Strategies for Learning and Understanding English Idioms	13	.793
<b>Overall Reliability</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>.758</b>

### Data Collection Procedure

Data for this study were gathered through a structured questionnaire in five stages. First, the questionnaire was designed and validated by three subject-matter experts to ensure clarity and relevance. Second, a sample of 78 students

was selected from a population of 98 using a simple random sampling method. Third, students were assured that their participation in the study was voluntary. Fourth, the questionnaire was administered during regular class sessions over two weeks, and completed responses were reviewed for accuracy and completeness. Finally, the collected data were organized, coded, and prepared for analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Survey data were analyzed quantitatively. Responses from the Likert-scale items were coded and entered into SPSS software for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were calculated to examine participants' views on learning idioms, the difficulties they faced, and the strategies they employed. The analysis was based on valid responses for each item to account for occasional missing data.

### **Results**

#### ***Overall Attitudes of EFL Students toward Learning Idioms***

A total of 78 students participated in the study. However, some participants did not respond to all items; therefore, the number of valid responses per item ranged from 75 to 78. The overall mean and standard deviation were calculated using the 75 respondents who completed all nine items (listwise  $N = 75$ ). The results of the descriptive analysis indicate that the overall mean score of participants' attitudes toward the importance of learning English idioms was 4.33 ( $SD = 0.41$ ). This suggests that students in the EFL classes at Ghor University held positive attitudes toward the importance of learning idioms.

**Table 2. Overall Attitudes of EFL Students toward Learning Idioms**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Overall Attitude	75	4.33	0.41

#### ***Importance of Learning Idioms***

The initial nine items in the questionnaire were intended to elicit participant responses regarding the importance of learning English idioms. Overall, students held positive attitudes toward learning idioms. As shown in Table 3, most of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with all the statements, indicating that they recognized how important idioms are in English classes. For instance, the highest level of agreement was reported for teaching idioms in English classes ( $M = 4.64$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ), followed by using idioms to improve speaking skills ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ), learning idioms for effective communication ( $M = 4.24$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ), and using idioms to improve writing skills ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ). For the other items, participants reported slightly but still positive agreement. Idioms were also viewed as helpful for comprehending the target culture ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ) and listening materials ( $M = 4.26$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ), as well as for understanding everyday language ( $M = 4.38$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ), making oral presentations more fluent and natural ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ), and comprehending reading texts ( $M = 4.13$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ).

**Table 3. EFL Students attitudes toward the Importance of Learning English Idioms**

No	Statements	Mean	SD
1	Teaching idioms is important in English classes.	4.64	.67
2	Learning idioms is essential for me to communicate effectively.	4.24	.75
3	Knowing idioms enables me to understand everyday language better.	4.38	.79
4	Knowing idioms helps me better comprehend the target culture.	4.33	.83
5	Learning to use idioms in written language is important for enhancing my writing skills.	4.35	.74
6	Understanding idioms is important for better comprehension of listening materials.	4.26	.95
7	Understanding idioms enables me to comprehend reading texts more effectively.	4.13	.85
8	Learning how to use idioms in oral communication is important for improving my speaking abilities.	4.43	.66
9	Using idioms during oral presentations enhances the naturalness and effectiveness of my speech.	4.17	.88
<b>Overall</b>		<b>4.33</b>	<b>0.41</b>

Note. Valid N (listwise) = 75.

### **Difficulties in Learning English Idioms**

The following eight items examined the types of difficulties students experienced in learning English idioms. Nearly three-quarters of the students (73%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statements designed to identify the main sources of difficulty in learning and understanding idioms (Table 4). The highest level of agreement was observed for the item stating that understanding idioms is difficult because they contain unfamiliar words (mean = 4.14, SD = 0.94). This was followed by items related to idioms not being properly addressed or taught in class (mean = 4.08, SD = 0.91), the absence of effective cultural courses (mean = 4.01, SD = 0.95), and the lack of direct Farsi equivalents (mean = 4.01, SD = 0.95). A slightly lower level of agreement was reported for the lack of experience dealing with idioms (mean = 4.00, SD = 0.87). Meanwhile, lower levels of agreement were noted in items concerning the exclusion of idioms from course syllabi (mean = 3.79, SD = 0.98), idioms appearing out of context (mean = 3.74, SD = 1.00), and limited cultural background knowledge (mean = 3.71, SD = 0.84).

**Table 4. Difficulties in Learning English Idioms**

No	Statements	Mean	SD
1	Idioms are difficult due to the absence of cultural knowledge behind them.	3.71	0.84
2	Idioms are difficult due to the lack of experience handling them.	4.00	0.87
3	Idioms are difficult since they are absent from English course syllabuses.	3.79	0.98
4	Idioms are difficult since they are poorly taught in class.	4.08	0.91
5	Idioms are difficult since the cultural courses I attended were ineffective.	4.01	0.95
6	Idioms are difficult since they contain unfamiliar words.	4.14	0.94
7	Idioms are difficult since many of them have no direct equivalents in Farsi.	4.01	0.95
8	Idioms are difficult when they appear without context.	3.74	1.00

<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.94</b>	<b>.50</b>
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Note. Valid N (listwise) = 72.

### ***EFL Students Strategies for Learning Idioms***

The final section of the included 13 items designed to gather data on the strategies learners employed to learn and understand idioms. The strategies were ranked according to their frequency of use, from most to least used, and EFL students in the English Department employed them to varying degrees.

As Table 5 shows, translating idioms into Farsi (mean = 3.26, SD = 1.45) was the most commonly used strategy, followed by using key words (mean = 3.16, SD = 1.33), regularly revising idioms (mean = 3.14, SD = 1.26), memorization (mean = 3.13, SD = 1.43), and communicating in English outside the classroom (mean = 3.09, SD = 1.36). Strategies that were used moderately included guessing meaning from context (mean = 3.07, SD = 1.35), using descriptive definitions in English (L2) (mean = 3.04, SD = 1.31), and looking up unfamiliar expressions in the dictionary (mean = 3.04, SD = 1.27). Less frequently used strategies included flashcards (mean = 2.89, SD = 1.31), breaking idioms into parts to guess meaning (mean = 2.89, SD = 1.38), group discussion (mean = 2.81, SD = 1.49), watching English-speaking films (mean = 2.71, SD = 1.40), and using idioms in sentences (mean = 2.68, SD = 1.29).

**Table 5. Descriptive statistics of EFL Students Strategies for Learning Idioms**

<b>No</b>	<b>Statements</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
1	I learn idioms by using them in sentences.	2.68	1.29
2	I learn idioms by communicating in English outside the classroom.	3.09	1.36
3	I learn idioms through group discussion.	2.81	1.49
4	I learn idioms through flashcards.	2.89	1.31
5	I learn idioms by using descriptive definitions in English (L2).	3.04	1.31
6	I learn idioms with the help of key words.	3.16	1.33
7	I learn idioms by translating them into my L1 (Farsi) to understand their meaning.	3.26	1.45
8	I learn idioms through memorization.	3.13	1.43
9	I learn idioms by regularly revising them.	3.14	1.26
10	I learn idioms by breaking them into parts to guess their meaning.	2.89	1.38
11	I learn idioms by guessing their meaning from context.	3.07	1.35
12	I learn idioms by looking up unfamiliar expressions in the dictionary.	3.04	1.27
13	I learn idioms by watching English-speaking movies and films.	2.71	1.40
<b>Overall</b>		<b>3.01</b>	<b>0.74</b>

Note. Valid N (listwise) = 71.

### **Discussion**

The study aimed to examine EFL students' attitudes toward the importance of learning English idioms, the challenges they face in understanding them, and the strategies they use to learn and master them. The data analysis showed that students had a very positive attitude toward learning idioms. This suggests that

they recognize idioms as essential for language fluency and meaningful communication rather than merely memorizing vocabulary. These findings align with previous studies by Alfaqara (2021), Apridayani et al. (2024), Arab (2021), and Garg (2025), all of which reported similarly positive attitudes among EFL learners.

The research also demonstrated that EFL students were aware of the challenges involved in learning and understanding idioms. As shown in Table 4, all students reported difficulties in understanding idioms. The fact that all students reported difficulties suggests that understanding idioms is not just a small hurdle; it's a real obstacle in their language learning journey. These difficulties came mainly from unfamiliar words in idioms and poor instruction, which points to a need for more structured and supportive teaching. This finding is also supported by Alhaysony (2017) and Al-Kadi (2015).

The research further found that students faced difficulty because the courses they took were ineffective, and they had limited experience handling idioms. This indicates that learners were not given enough opportunities to practice idioms in the classroom. These findings are consistent with those of Shahidipour and Tahririan (2018), who reported that participants believed the cultural courses they had taken were insufficient.

Moreover, students also struggled with idioms that had no equivalents in their first language (Afghan formal languages) and the required cultural knowledge. This means that understanding idioms is not only a language challenge but also a cultural one, since learners need some background knowledge to make sense of expressions that do not exist in their native language. This is in line with the findings of Nadeem and Almowalad (2022), Orfan (2020), and Pimenova (2011), who also reported that EFL learners find idioms without native-language equivalents particularly difficult.

Another difficulty was that idioms were not included in the course syllabi. This suggests that students' exposure to idiomatic expressions was limited, which made it harder for them to understand and use idioms effectively. This finding agrees with Alhaysony (2017), Al-Khawaldeh et al. (2016), and Anjarini and Hatmanto (2021), who also reported that students found it difficult to understand idioms when they were not included in the course syllabi.

The final source of difficulty for students was lack of context for idioms. It means that without clues, students found it hard to understand the meaning or use the idioms correctly. This concurs with Apridayani et al. (2024), who also found that learners had difficulty with idioms lacking context.

In addition, the findings indicated that EFL students relied on a range of strategies to learn and comprehend English idioms. The most prevalent strategy was translating idioms into Farsi. This is likely because students rely on their first language to understand and remember unfamiliar idioms more effectively. Interestingly, this contrasts with the results of Alhaysony (2017), who reported that this strategy was among the least frequently employed by Saudi EFL learners,

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indicating that strategy preferences can vary depending on cultural and educational context.

The second most frequently used strategy was the use of keywords. This possibly happened because many students had little exposure to idioms in real-life contexts, so they relied on familiar words within an idiom to figure out its meaning. The finding confirms what Al-Kadi (2015), Apridayani (2024), and Orfan (2020) have reported in their studies. The third widely used strategy was regularly revising idioms. This suggests that repeated practice is important for mastering idioms. However, this differs from Orfan (2020), who found revision to be among the least frequently used strategies, indicating that learning habits may vary across contexts.

The results also indicated a moderately high use of memorization and communication in English outside the classroom as strategies for learning idioms. Memorization may be preferred due to the traditional learning culture in Afghanistan, where rote learning is common. According to Ding (2007), memorization is an effective strategy for EFL learners to grasp and understand idiomatic expressions, especially when they already have some familiarity with the target language. Similarly, communicating in English outside the classroom gives students the opportunity to encounter idioms and use them in everyday life. The results partially disagree with Alhaysony (2017), who reported that outside-class communication was less frequently used. Notably, students rarely practiced idioms in sentences or watched English-language movies, even though research shows these approaches can be highly effective for learning idioms (Iranmanesh & Darani, 2018; Saraswati, 2024; Tabatabaei, 2013).

## **Conclusion**

This study investigated EFL students' perspectives on the importance of learning English idioms, the challenges they encounter in understanding them, and the strategies they employ to learn and master them at Ghor University. The results revealed that students generally held positive attitudes toward the importance of learning idioms. However, they faced several challenges in understanding idioms, primarily due to unfamiliar words, poor classroom instruction, the ineffectiveness of cultural courses, a lack of direct equivalents in Farsi, and limited experience with idioms. These results indicate that idioms remain a challenging aspect of language acquisition for EFL learners. The results also showed that learners employed various strategies to learn and understand idioms, with the most common being translating idioms into Farsi, using keywords, revising idioms regularly, memorization, and applying them beyond the classroom.

In light of these findings, it is recommended that instructors adopt strategies that go beyond L1-based approaches and rote memorization. Encouraging students to use idioms in meaningful contexts, both inside and outside the classroom, can enhance their understanding and retention. Providing

opportunities for regular practice, contextual exposure, and interactive activities, such as group discussions or the use of idioms in writing and speaking tasks, may help students overcome the challenges they face, including unfamiliar words, limited experience, and a lack of cultural knowledge. Implementing such approaches can support students in developing more effective communicative competence in English and enable them to use idioms accurately and confidently in real-life situations.

As with many studies, this research has several limitations. It focused only on EFL students at a single institution, which may restrict the generalizability of the results and their applicability to all EFL learners. Moreover, the study relied solely on a survey questionnaire for data collection, which may not have fully captured the depth of students' experiences and perspectives. Future studies could address these limitations by employing larger and more representative samples, incorporating mixed methods, and examining the effectiveness of various learning strategies. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to investigate how learners retain and apply idioms over time. Additionally, examining which teaching methods are most effective for idiom instruction and how students at different proficiency levels comprehend and use idioms would assist educators in designing more effective lessons.

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