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Investigating the Challenges and Strategies of Thai University Students in Mastering English Idioms

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ABSTRACT

Background: The acquisition of English idiomatic expressions is a critical aspect of language proficiency that unquestionably contributes to the improvement of effective communication skills. A number of studies have been conducted in the field of English idioms; however, there are still unanswered questions in this area. Since learning English idioms is a complex process, further investigation is needed, especially among students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the specific educational milieu of a university setting.

Purpose: This study investigated the attitudes of Thai university students towards the importance of learning English idioms. In addition, it examined the challenges faced by these students in learning and comprehending English idioms, along with the effective strategies employed to overcome the difficulties.

Method: This study adopted a descriptive research design involving 50 fourth-year English major students (12% male, 88% female) from a university in southern Thailand. A survey questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale adapted from Orfan (2020) was used to collect the data from the participants.

Results: The findings demonstrated that Thai university students had a positive attitude towards the importance of learning idioms and recognized the critical role they play in successful communication in English. Nevertheless, they faced various challenges when learning English idioms. They reported that idioms were challenging to grasp when taken out of context, and they faced difficulties due to their limited knowledge and cultural background. The participants in the study also reported utilizing different strategies to learn and comprehend idioms, such as guessing the meaning of idioms, using descriptive definitions in English, and memorization.

Conclusion: This study offers valuable insights for both educators and researchers, serving as a foundation for the development of more efficient language teaching methodologies and promoting cross-cultural understanding in language acquisition.

KEYWORDS

Communication skills, English idioms, learning difficulties, learning strategies, Thai students

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INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of idioms confers significant advantages upon language learners, contributing to the enhancement of language proficiency and communicative competence (Bortfeld, 2003; Erman & Warren, 2000; Nation & Meara, 2002). Extensive research has been dedicated to investigating English idioms across diverse contexts. However, the focal point of the majority of these studies has been the examination of native English speakers' abilities to comprehend idiomatic expressions, primarily among children

and adolescents in Australia and South America (Nippold & Taylor, 2002; Qualls & Harris, 2003). A subset of studies has also explored age-related discrepancies in processing and interpreting idioms among adults in Southern California (Hung & Nippold, 2014) and Caucasian middle- and late-adulthood participants (Szepietowska & Filipiak, 2021). Regarding EFL/ESL students, Aljabri (2013) conducted a meticulous analysis of various factors that could potentially influence the comprehension of English idioms, including familiarity, transparency, and context involving male students in

Saudi Arabia. Additionally, a handful of studies have delved into the challenges faced by students in learning and comprehending English idioms, aiming to identify effective pedagogical approaches that enhance their comprehension and utilization of idiomatic expressions in the contexts of Indonesian, Afghan, and Vietnamese students (Arifuddin et al., 2020; Orfan, 2020; Phan et al., 2022; Saleh & Zakaria, 2013).

The field of English idioms has been the subject of a number of studies; however, there are still questions that have not been answered in this area. The vast majority of research has been carried out in settings other than Thailand, which is something that should be taken into consideration. According to Hu and Chen (2007), in order to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, it is necessary to conduct research in a variety of cultural settings. As EFL learners, Thai students may also encounter numerous challenges, particularly in understanding and mastering idiomatic expressions. Asri and Rochmawati (2017) have emphasized that idioms pose significant difficulties for EFL students because they are figurative and culturally specific. Consequently, the learners often resort to avoiding idioms in conversation, despite their usage being indicative of advanced English proficiency (Liu, 2008). Thus, more research is required to gain a better understanding of this intriguing and intricate issue.

The present investigation seeks to bridge the gaps in the literature by scrutinizing the perspectives of Thai tertiary students towards the acquisition of English idioms. This study endeavors to delve into the complexities associated with comprehending and learning these phrases by Thai university students, as well as the difficulties they may encounter during the process. The research also aims to identify the most effective strategies that students may utilize to facilitate their understanding of English idioms. The findings of this study hold significant potential to benefit pedagogical practices in English language education. The insights and recommendations gleaned from this research could assist English language teachers in developing and implementing innovative and targeted teaching strategies that focus on English idioms. By doing so, students will have the opportunity to enhance their communication skills and fluency in English, both of which are essential for academic and professional success in today's interconnected world. The study is guided by the following research questions:

- (1) How do Thai university students perceive the importance of learning English idioms?
- (2) What are the sources of difficulties encountered by Thai university students in learning and understanding English idioms?
- (3) What strategies do Thai university students commonly use to learn English idioms?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Idioms

The literature contains numerous definitions of idioms, illustrating their diverse nature. Larson (1984) astutely described idioms as strings of words whose meaning goes beyond that of their individual parts. This insightful observation underscores the idea that idioms cannot be understood through a strictly literal interpretation; instead, one must grasp their figurative or symbolic connotations (Grant & Bauer, 2004; Cieřlicka, 2015; Littlemore & Low, 2006). According to Alexander (1987), idioms are multiword units that require comprehensive learning along with a deep comprehension of related sociolinguistic, cultural, and pragmatic usage patterns. This nuanced explanation suggests that idioms go beyond mere linguistic constructs and are significantly influenced by sociocultural and pragmatic factors (Türker, 2019). The contrast between these viewpoints highlights the complexity and depth of idiomatic expressions, underscoring their significance in language and human communication.

Similarly, Richards and Schmidt (2013) identified idioms as expressions that function as a single unit and whose meaning cannot be derived from their constituent parts. This underscores the idea that idioms cannot be deconstructed into individual words or phrases, and their meanings are not directly linked to their component elements. Furthermore, Al-Kadi (2015) proposed that idioms are expressions that cannot be literally translated, as their meanings cannot be predicted from the usual meanings of their constituent parts. This particularly applies to idioms with political, historical, or socio-cultural backgrounds, as their meanings are strongly influenced by the context in which they are used. In essence, idioms represent a complex linguistic phenomenon that demands a nuanced understanding of both their linguistic and sociocultural context to fully grasp their meaning.

Learning Idioms

The acquisition and proficient use of idioms play a significant role in the effective communication of EFL learners. The ability to use idioms in natural and conversational language is essential to facilitating fluency and authenticity in communication (Tadayyon & Ketabi, 2014). Learning idioms enhances foreign language learners' understanding of the culture of the target language, thereby broadening their knowledge of the target society's values, beliefs, and norms (Dobrovól'skij & Piirainen, 2021; Glucksberg, 2001). Additionally, Liu (2017) notes that the accurate use of idiomatic expressions by EFL learners indicates their level of communicative competence. Therefore, the acquisition and proper use of idiomatic expressions by EFL learners not only enhance their language proficiency (Al-Mohizea, 2017) but also enable them to interact effectively and appropriately in different social contexts.

EFL learners face a plethora of challenges when learning and comprehending idiomatic expressions. These difficulties may stem from the varying degrees of formality associated with different idioms, as well as the presence of literal equivalents for many idiomatic expressions. As noted by Al-Khawaldeh (2016), these factors may lead to uncertainty in determining whether to interpret idioms figuratively or literally in specific contexts. Additionally, EFL learners may struggle with the arbitrary nature of idioms, which are non-literal phrases whose meanings cannot be inferred from the literal meanings of their constituent words (Aljabri, 2013). As highlighted by Hussein et al. (2011), this can present significant obstacles for EFL students in their attempts to learn and comprehend idiomatic expressions. Cultural differences can also play a role in the difficulty EFL learners face in acquiring idiomatic expressions, as some idioms are heavily dependent on cultural knowledge for their interpretation (Türker, 2019; Orfan, 2020). In light of these challenges, it is crucial for EFL instructors to design pedagogical strategies that take into account the complexity of idiomatic expressions and the diverse factors that affect their acquisition and comprehension.

Several strategies have been suggested in the literature to aid EFL learners in acquiring idioms effectively. One such strategy is exposure to idiomatic expressions in context. Karlsson (2019) points out that the more often EFL learners are exposed to idioms, the better their chances of comprehending and using them fluently in their communication. It is not sufficient for learners to encounter idioms just once. Instead, they should experience them in diverse contexts to develop a deeper understanding of their usage (Nation, 2001). Another approach that may prove helpful is guessing the meaning of idioms from context (Zyzik, 2009). According to Liu (2008) and Webb (2007), contextual knowledge can facilitate the comprehension of idioms quickly. However, Bors and Lindstromberg (2008) suggest that this method can have its drawbacks, as learners may overestimate their comprehension of the idioms. Memorization is another strategy that EFL learners can employ to learn and comprehend idiomatic expressions. This technique is deemed effective, especially when learners have prior knowledge of the target language (Ding, 2007). Furthermore, SelvaRaj and Hua (2019) argue that students require more contemporary, effective, and efficient methods of idiom acquisition.

Previous Studies

Over the years, there have been several investigations into the comprehension and usage of English idioms. A notable example is the research conducted by Saleh and Zakaria (2013), which examined the difficulties experienced by Libyan students in learning English idioms, as well as the techniques they used to grasp their meanings. The researchers employed a questionnaire to collect data from a sample of forty Libyan students studying different fields. The study established that a lack of cultural familiarity with idioms and

limited exposure to them were the major hindrances to EFL students' comprehension and usage of idioms. Furthermore, the results revealed that the most frequently adopted approach by students to comprehend idioms was to guess from context. Similarly, Smadi and Alrishan (2015) conducted a study to explore the methods utilized by graduate students of English language and literature in translating English idioms into Arabic. The study involved collecting data from 90 students enrolled in Yarmouk University's master's program in translation. The findings showed that the participants primarily translated English idioms into Arabic using direct translation and paraphrasing. These findings highlight the challenges that students face when learning idiomatic expressions, especially those that are culture specific. The use of direct translation and paraphrasing could result in inaccurate translations and poor comprehension, which could negatively impact communication in both academic and non-academic settings. Moreover, Arifuddin et al. (2019) examined the level of idiomatic expression mastery among hospitality and tourism students in Indonesia. It showed the low level of the students' abilities in mastering idiomatic expressions due to no idiomatic expressions teaching and a lack of familiarity with strategies for understanding idiomatic expressions. This study suggests improvements in the quality of English language teaching, especially in hospitality and tourism education. Furthermore, Orfan (2020) conducted an extensive investigation among Afghan EFL students to explore their attitudes towards learning idioms, the difficulties they encountered while acquiring idiomatic expressions, and the strategies they used to cope with these challenges. The research findings indicated that the students exhibited a positive outlook on the significance of mastering idiomatic expressions in English. However, they faced various challenges in comprehending and utilizing these expressions, primarily due to a lack of cultural knowledge that underlies idioms, a dearth of equivalents for English idioms in their native language, and an unfamiliarity with the vocabulary used in idioms. To overcome these obstacles, the students resorted to a range of strategies, such as integrating idioms in sentences, predicting their meanings, and using English idioms for effective communication outside the classroom setting. The study highlights the significance of providing ample opportunities to Afghan EFL students to practice using idioms both inside and outside the classroom.

A recent empirical investigation carried out by Anjarini and Hatmanto (2021) unveiled an array of challenges faced by Indonesian students in comprehending English idioms. Specifically, the findings demonstrated that the learners perceived the process of deciphering the meanings of English idioms and distinguishing them from ordinary English phrases as an arduous task. Among the factors identified as contributing to this difficulty was a lack of adequate classroom discussions on English idioms, which resulted in insufficient exposure and practice for the students. Nonetheless, the study revealed that the students devised several strategies to facilitate their comprehension of English idioms.

For example, some participants reported utilizing online resources to explore the meanings of English idioms, while others relied on understanding the idioms' context and relating the idioms' meanings to their first language. These strategies can be considered practical and effective, as they assist learners in bridging the gap between their native language and the target language. Another recent study was conducted in Vietnam by Phan et al. (2022). The findings of the study indicated that a significant proportion of students encounter challenges in the process of acquiring, recognizing, and interpreting idiomatic expressions. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that there were no substantial disparities observed in the difficulties encountered by students with varying levels of proficiency.

In Thailand, the exploration of the challenges faced by students and the strategies they employ while learning English idioms has been relatively limited. However, an important study conducted by Ranong (2014) shed light on this crucial aspect by investigating non-English major students with varying English proficiency levels. The findings revealed a diverse array of techniques utilized to comprehend idioms, ranging from interpreting literal meanings and leveraging contextual cues to identifying key elements within the idiom phrases. Moreover, the nature of the idiom itself emerged as a pivotal factor influencing comprehension levels.

Despite the existing recognition of the significance of mastering English idioms, there remains an undeniable need for a better understanding of this intriguing subject, especially in the context of Thai EFL learners. Consequently, this research endeavors to address this gap in knowledge by delving into the obstacles faced by Thai English major students when learning English idioms and examining the strategies they employ. Such an inquiry promises to enrich the current literature on second language acquisition and, significantly, will offer valuable insights to educators in devising highly effective instructional approaches. By bolstering the scholarly foundation in this area, the study seeks to establish a compelling case for the importance of nurturing idiomatic competence in English language learners.

METHOD

Research Design and Procedure

This study adopted a descriptive research design to thoroughly investigate the attitudes of Thai university students towards the significance of mastering English idioms. Furthermore, it provided an analysis of the challenges faced by these students in learning and comprehending English idioms, along with the effective strategies employed to overcome them. The research procedure was carried out in four distinct steps: the development of precise research instruments, participant recruitment, the implementation of the instruments and data collection process, and ultimately, the

data analysis phase. By employing this approach, the study sheds light on the critical role of English idioms in the academic and social contexts of university students, making it a valuable contribution to the field of language education.

Context and Participants

The context of this study was an autonomous university located in the south of Thailand. A convenience sampling method was employed to select the participants. It is an ingenious non-probability technique specifically designed to identify research subjects that are readily within reach of the researcher (Given, 2008). This method, also referred to as accidental sampling, meticulously incorporates individuals from the target population who satisfy essential practical criteria, including effortless accessibility, proximity, availability during the designated timeframe, and a genuine enthusiasm to participate, thus ensuring the study's effectiveness (Dörnyei, 2007). The research objectives were explained to the participants prior to data collection. The participation was entirely voluntary, and it had no bearing on the participants' grades or academic results. 50 fourth-year English major students (12% male, 88% female) agreed to participate in this study by completing a consent form. They were aged between 21 and 23. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), these students possessed English competence levels A2-B2. These students have taken some courses related to English communication skills, such as English listening and speaking, varieties of English, a seminar on cross-cultural issues, etc. They were also taught by Thai and foreign lecturers. It was agreed that the participants' real names would be kept confidential and that they would be identified using pseudonyms.

Research Instruments

This study used a questionnaire to collect the data. It was adapted from Orfan (2020), which explored the acquisition of English idioms among Afghan EFL students. Some items were modified to make them more relevant and understandable to Thai university students. It comprised 24 items on a five-point Likert scale: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree), asking Thai students' about the importance of learning English idioms, their difficulties, and strategies for learning and understanding English idioms. The questionnaire items were translated into Thai and checked by native Thai speakers for their validity.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, the questionnaire was administered online using Google Form. The data were analyzed using a statistical program. First, the reliability of the questionnaire items was checked using Cronbach's Alpha. The analysis showed acceptable and high Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for each sub-scale and overall questionnaire items, as shown in Table 1.

Afterwards, descriptive statistics were used to determine the mean and standard deviation of the data to answer the research questions. The criteria for interpreting the mean values of the students' responses to the questionnaire were identified by the ratings (Oxford, 1990), as explained in Table 2.

RESULTS

The Importance of Learning English Idioms

The primary focus of the initial inquiry was to delve into the perspectives of Thai university students concerning the significance attributed to the acquisition of English idioms. The analysis results, showcased in Table 3, illustrate

that a substantial majority of students hold the conviction that mastering English idioms holds paramount importance ($M = 4.39, SD = .46$). These findings undeniably advocate for the incorporation of English idioms as integral teaching materials within English courses ($M = 4.52, SD = .61$). The respondents also overwhelmingly expressed their belief that the acquisition of English idioms stands as a catalyst for enhancing their communicative prowess ($M = 4.44, SD = .70$), fostering a more profound comprehension of the target culture ($M = 4.40, SD = .60$), and navigating the intricacies of everyday language ($M = 4.36, SD = .61$). Moreover, the students' discernment extends to recognizing that mastering English idioms has the potential to elevate their speaking ($M = 4.32, SD = .68$), listening ($M = 4.44, SD = .64$), reading ($M = 4.44, SD = .64$), and writing proficiencies ($M = 4.22, SD = .76$).

Table 1
Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients

Sub-scale	N of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceptions on the importance of learning English idioms	8	.844
Difficulties in learning and understanding English idioms	8	.867
Strategies in learning and understanding English idioms	8	.778
Overall	24	.897

Table 2
Interpretation of the Mean Values

Responses	Mean values	Interpretation
Strongly disagree	1.00 – 1.49	Low
Disagree	1.50 – 2.49	Moderate
Neutral	2.50 – 3.49	Moderate
Agree	3.50 – 4.49	High
Strongly Agree	4.50 – 5.00	High

Table 3
The Importance of Learning English Idioms

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teaching English idioms in English classes is important.	4.52	.61
It is essential to encourage EFL students to learn idioms in order to communicate effectively.	4.44	.70
Knowing English idioms enables me to understand better everyday language.	4.36	.69
Knowing English idioms help me better comprehend the target culture.	4.40	.60
To improve my speaking abilities, I need to learn how to use English idioms in oral communication.	4.32	.68
It is important for me to understand English idioms in order to comprehend the listening materials better.	4.44	.64
Understanding English idioms enables me to comprehend reading texts more effectively.	4.44	.64
To improve my writing skills, I need to learn how to use English idioms in written communication.	4.22	.76
Overall	4.39	.46

Difficulties in Learning English Idioms

The subsequent inquiry sought to elicit candid reflections from students concerning the challenges they grapple with in the process of comprehending and assimilating English idioms. The discernments revealed that an overwhelming majority of participants encountered notable hurdles in understanding and internalizing English idioms ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 0.63$). As delineated in Table 4, the hurdles are intricately interwoven with three predominant factors. Primarily, the students underscored the formidable nature of mastering English idioms in the absence of contextual cues ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.86$). Additionally, they emphasized the formidable impediment posed by an insufficient acquaintance with the intricacies of these idiomatic expressions ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.82$). Equally salient was the revelation that the paucity of cultural context substantially contributed to the hindrances encountered in comprehending and embracing English idioms ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.73$).

Strategies to Learn English Idioms

The final research facet sought to illuminate the strategies adopted by Thai university students to navigate the terrain of learning and understanding English idioms. Evidently, a constellation of illuminating strategies surfaced, as conspicuously depicted in Table 5. Foremost among these was the commendable practice of intuitively inferring meanings from the context ($M = 3.92$; $SD = 0.96$). Simultaneously, the use of descriptive definitions in English was discerned as another indispensable tool in their arsenal ($M = 3.88$; $SD = 0.84$). Notably, a not-insignificant reliance on rote memorization as a means of assimilation was discernible ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.91$). It is worth accentuating that the least preferred method of engagement in this pursuit was participation in group dialogues ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.0$).

Table 4

Difficulties in Learning English Idioms

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Idioms are difficult to understand due to a lack of cultural context.	4.22	.73
Idioms are difficult to comprehend due to a lack of knowledge with them.	4.26	.82
Idioms are challenging to learn because they are not included in the course syllabuses.	4.18	.77
Idioms are challenging to learn because they are not well taught in English classes.	4.04	.72
Idioms are difficult to learn because the cultural courses I took were ineffective.	3.52	1.09
Idioms are difficult to learn because they contain unfamiliar words.	3.90	1.03
Idioms are difficult to understand because they do not exist in my first language.	3.94	.95
Idioms are difficult to understand when there is no context.	4.30	.86
Overall	4.04	.63

Table 5

Strategies to Learn English Idioms

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
I learn idioms by constructing them into sentences.	3.76	.91
I make guesses about the meaning of idioms.	3.92	.96
I learn idioms by referring to key words.	3.76	1.0
To understand idioms, I translate the literal meaning into my first language.	3.76	1.0
I acquire idioms by having a conversation in English outside of the classroom.	3.72	.97
To learn idioms, I use descriptive definitions in English.	3.88	.84
I learn idioms by memorizing them.	3.82	.91
I learn idioms by participating in group discussions.	3.26	1.0
Overall	3.73	.60

DISCUSSION

The primary objective of the present investigation was to examine the perceptions of Thai university students concerning the relevance of acquiring English idiomatic expressions. Furthermore, this study aimed to identify the challenges that students face in comprehending and learning these complex linguistic structures, as well as the strategies employed to overcome these difficulties. To begin, the findings of this study demonstrated that Thai university students exhibit a highly positive attitude towards the importance of acquiring English idioms, which is in line with the results of previous research conducted by Orfan (2020) on Afghan EFL learners. Moreover, the current study revealed that Thai students recognize the essential role of mastering English idioms for effective communication. The finding aligns with the views provided by Liu (2017) and Tadayyon and Ketabi (2014), who carried out research with students from China and Iran.

The investigation provided further evidence that Thai undergraduate learners encountered various difficulties when attempting to comprehend and learn English idioms, consistent with the discoveries of previous studies among Indonesian and Vietnamese students (Anjarini & Hatmanto, 2021; Arifuddin et al., 2019; Asri and Rochmawati, 2017; Phan et al., 2022). Participants acknowledged that idioms were challenging to understand without context, and that their limited proficiency and cultural background posed significant obstacles. These findings align with previous research, including Saleh and Zakaria's (2013) and Smadi and Alrishan's (2015), which identified a lack of familiarity with idioms and minimal exposure as significant hindrances to Libyan and Jordanian students' ability to comprehend and use idioms. Mäntylä's (2004) study also supports these results, indicating that developing idiomatic knowledge is essential for mastering English idioms with accuracy and efficiency.

The outcomes of this study revealed that Thai university students utilized a range of techniques to comprehend and acquire English idioms, with the most commonly utilized techniques being conjecturing the meanings of idioms from the context. In addition, they employed descriptive definitions in English. This strategy involves breaking down idiomatic expressions into their constituent parts and providing detailed explanations in English. The last technique most frequently used was memorization. According to Ding (2007), memorization proves to be a highly successful approach for EFL learners in grasping and comprehending idiomatic expressions, particularly when they possess prior familiarity with the target language. Curiously, the method of participating in group discussions to learn idioms was the least frequently used strategy by Thai university students. These results partly corroborate Orfan's (2020) investigation, which observed that Afghan undergraduate students used memorization as the least effective approach for learning English idioms. The current findings lend credence to the significance

of implementing various pedagogical approaches to cater to the varying needs and preferences of learners.

Pedagogical Implications

The results of this study have substantial implications both within the study's specific context and on a global level. The positive attitude Thai students displayed toward the value of learning English idioms within the context of this inquiry emphasizes the significance of idiomatic knowledge in the process of language acquisition. This is consistent with prior research and emphasizes the widespread belief that acquiring proficiency in idioms is essential for effective communication. It indicates that educators in Thailand can utilize this optimistic mindset to develop more captivating and efficient instructional approaches that integrate idiomatic expressions, thus improving the language acquisition experience for their students.

Additionally, the study's identification of the obstacles encountered by Thai students, such as the requirement for contextual understanding and the influence of limited language skills and cultural background, offers valuable perspectives for language teachers. The results emphasize the significance of teaching methods that consider specific circumstances, cultural awareness, and the gradual incorporation of idiomatic expressions in language curricula. These strategies can be applied not only in Thailand but also in other global settings where English is instructed as a second or foreign language, aiding educators in customizing their instruction to tackle the specific difficulties faced by students. This may involve providing context-rich examples, cultural explanations, and targeted exercises to enhance idiomatic comprehension and usage.

Furthermore, the study illuminates the diverse strategies utilized by Thai students to acquire English idioms. The prevalence of strategies such as inferring meanings from context and memorization highlights the significance of offering students adaptable learning approaches. Educators and curriculum designers can draw inspiration from these strategies and integrate a variety of approaches into their teaching methodologies to accommodate the diverse needs and preferences of learners. By doing so, students will be able to apply these strategies autonomously and effectively (Apridayani, 2022). This reveals the importance of flexibility and adaptability in language instruction, not only in Thailand but also in global English language learning contexts with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

In the broader international context, this study contributes to the growing body of research on the acquisition and understanding of idiomatic expressions in English as a second or foreign language. By drawing parallels with studies from various countries, it reinforces the notion that idiomatic language is a universal challenge for language learners. This insight can guide the development of more effective teach-

ing materials, curricula, and language assessments that consider the common difficulties faced by learners worldwide. Moreover, the study demonstrates the significance of cross-cultural awareness in language instruction, as cultural background plays a significant role in idiomatic comprehension. It also highlights the importance of cross-cultural communication and exchange programs in exposing students to a variety of linguistic contexts and idiomatic expressions.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study indicated that Thai university students perceived the importance of English idioms as crucial for effective communication in English. They recognized that idioms are an essential aspect of the English language and are aware of the challenges involved in learning and understanding them. The students attributed the difficulties to a lack of context and cultural knowledge, highlighting the importance of cultural familiarity in interpreting idiomatic expressions. Furthermore, the study revealed that the students employed various learning strategies to comprehend and acquire English idioms. These strategies included figuring out the meaning of idioms from the context, using descriptive definitions in English, and memorizing them. This indicates that students are actively engaged in their learning and are willing to employ multiple approaches to enhance their understanding of idiomatic expressions.

While this study has unveiled several notable discoveries, it is imperative to acknowledge its inherent limitations. Firstly, the scope of this study was confined to investigating the perceptions of EFL students at a specific Thai university with a small sample size. Therefore, it may not be possible to generalize the findings to EFL learners in different educational or cultural settings. In fact, a comparative analysis of the perceptions of EFL students across various universities and countries with a larger number of participants would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.

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Future studies could explore a more extensive range of EFL students, including different proficiency levels, age groups, and cultural backgrounds. Secondly, while this study utilized a survey questionnaire to collect data, the addition of qualitative methods, such as individual or focus group interviews, could have provided deeper insights into the challenges and strategies of learning and comprehending English idioms. Thirdly, it is worth noting that this study primarily analyzed the collected data descriptively. Future investigations could greatly enhance the depth of understanding by adopting a mixed-methods approach that incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, along with various forms of data analysis. Such a comprehensive approach has the potential to shed more light on EFL students' perceptions and experiences of learning English idioms.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

None declared.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Aisah Apridayani: conceptualization; data curation; formal analysis; resources; supervision; writing – original draft; writing – review & editing.

Natthayos Chatwichit: investigation; methodology; project administration; writing – original draft.

Tiparoon Supanpong: investigation; methodology; project administration; writing – original draft.

Sukanya Kanto: investigation; methodology; project administration; writing – original draft.

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