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The Effect of Peripheral Learning Applied in English Instruction on English Idioms Learning

Inst. Mehmet Gezer

Inst. Burcu Şen

Assist. Prof. Dr. Bülent Alcı

Yıldız Technical University, Faculty of Education, Education Sciences, İSTANBUL

ytu.mehmet.gezer@gmail.com

burcusenmetu@gmail.com

bulent_alci@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to determine the effect of peripheral learning on English idioms whether differs to gender or not. The subject group of this research includes 43 female students and 68 male students, in total 111 students at Yıldız Technical University School of Foreign Languages. As for method, dependent and independent groups t-test is used. Before carrying out the research, pre-test which is prepared by the help of two experts and consists of 25 multiple choice questions is applied on the students. During the research period, posters about the idioms hang on the classrooms' walls for a month. Moreover, focus group interview is applied to collect data about peripheral learning on English idioms learning. Subsequently, post-test is applied and the results of the pre-test & post-test are analyzed via t-test. Data analysis is determined and the conclusion is declared.

Key Words: Peripheral learning, English idioms learning, Success

1. Introduction

English, for many reasons, has become one of the most important requirements in a lot of fields such as education and business. Though it is not the language with the largest number of native or first language speakers, it has become lingua franca, which is described as a language used to help people who do not speak the same mother tongue communicate. People mostly learn a second language used as a means of communication among the speakers of other languages (Harmer, 2001).

In our modern age, English as a second/foreign language plays a key role to educational systems. Speakers not only state their purpose in speaking but also use the language appropriately for the person whom it is intended for (Finocchiaro, 1989). People who learn a second language might have different needs, competences and cognitive skills in accordance with their ages. Young learners acquire the second language through play; however, adults expect a greater use of abstract thought. Adult learners can engage with abstract thought but can be critical of teaching methods because of the previous learning experiences (Harmer, 2001).

In English language teaching, methods, practical realization of an approach, play an important role to help students acquire the target language. Suggestopedia is one of these methods widely used in English

courses. Harmer (2001) states that Suggestopedia, developed by Lozanov, sees the physical surroundings and atmosphere of the classroom as of vital importance. In terms of practicability, pictures help the students connect new terms. Pictures make three crucial contributions to language teaching. First of all, via pictures verbalism is avoided in teaching. Secondly, in creating contexts pictures are of paramount importance. Lastly, changing the contexts with the help of the pictures provides the students with a variety of opportunities to use the given structures (Buell, 1953). When students walk into an attractive classroom at the beginning of a course, it may help to get their motivation for the process going on. When they come to an unattractive place, motivation may not be initiated in this way. With a meaningful context, students may understand the meaning of many structures which they have not mastered (Lightbown, & Spada, 2003).

In order to facilitate learning, pictures or graphics in the form of flashcards, large wall papers, photographs or illustrations have always been used (Harmer, 2001). In Suggestopedia, target structures are presented passively in the form of attractive, colorful posters which display structures and paradigms. The posters are put up before the forms are emphasized in class (Bancroft, 1995). This technique, Peripheral learning, is based on the idea that human beings perceive much more in our environment than that to which human beings consciously attend. By putting posters about the target language on the classroom walls, students will absorb the important facts effortlessly (Freeman, 2000). In this way, students get the structures peripherally and semi-consciously. In communication, vocabulary is really more important than grammatical structures (Davies, 2000). Peripheral learning can be applied to idioms which are hard to decide where and when to use as inseparable parts of English. English has a great variety of idioms that derive from the culture of the community. Those kind of culture-oriented expressions add a lot to the value of the language they originally come from. Thus, acquiring the expressions like idioms which reflect the culture of a nation takes a highly important place in the educational environment. It is effective to present English idioms accompanied by visual stimuli that illustrates the idioms (Wu, 2008). As it can be inferred, pictures are more than mere entertainment (Zyzik, 2009). According to Anglin et al. (2004, as cited in Szczepaniak, & Lew. 2011) "The realization of the vital role of perception in picture interpretation comes from research in visual representations. How we view the picture depends at least to some extent, on our cognition: we actively construct the meaning in the picture" (p.331). Though they are used by native speakers, not most of them are understood well enough. Therefore, it is, of course, understandable for a student learning English as a second language not to know what an idiom means and in what situations it may be used.

Farrell and Jacobs (2010) state "Language is a system for the expression of meaning" (p.59). In terms of fluency and naturalness in language, knowing the meaning of an idiom places an undeniable part in communication. Hussein, Khanji and Makhzoomy (2000) mention that the use of idioms is a vital part of cultural expression. Expressions like idioms are generally culture bound. Consequently, they indicate a fact in one culture that does not make sense universally and when every single word is analyzed in terms of meaning, those separate words do not give the same meaning as the whole sentence gives (Dorian). According to Kovecses and Szabó (1996), idioms are linguistic expressions whose overall meaning cannot be guessed from the meanings of separate words. Idioms, for both practical and theoretical reasons, are one of the most difficult areas for both students and teachers to learn and teach. Idioms are commonly considered as a particular set of the larger group of words.

Idioms, in nature, are not linguistic but conceptual. That is to say an idiom is not just a particular phrase special in relation to meanings of its separate words. Idioms, either in oral or written discourse, are often inevitable, which makes it a must in language programs to help students develop their communicative skills. When a person learns idioms in English, s/he takes English out of its superficial printed form into the natural form which helps the speaker use culture-oriented expressions more appropriately. Hence, both teaching and learning English as a second/foreign language should lend itself to such kind of colorful instructions (De Caro, 2009).

2. Method

2.1. Research Model

In this research, dependent (paired) and independent pre-test & post-test designs were used. In dependent pre-test & post-test design, independent variable is applied to the group which is selected randomly. In addition, pre-test is carried out before the independent variable is applied. Then, independent variable is implemented and post-test is carried out. Finally, the effect of the independent variable is analyzed (Karasar, 2010). Furthermore, in independent pre-test & post-test design, the same procedure is applied for different two groups. Then, these two groups are compared.

2.2. Subject Group

The subject group was 111 students at Yıldız Technical University School of Foreign Language, Basic English Department. The group was chosen randomly from B level students. While 68 of the students were male, 43 of them were female. The research was carried out at eight classes which were selected randomly (Appendix A).

2.3. Instrument

2.3.1. Achievement Test (Quantitative)

In this research, in order to determine the results of the pre-test&post-test of the students' level of the familiarity with English idioms, an achievement test of 25 multiple choice questions was applied. For the face validity of the test, opinions of two experts, a domain expert and a language teacher, were obtained. Cronbach-Alpha reliability of the achievement test was calculated as $r=.73$.

2.3.2. Focus Group Discussions on Idioms (Qualitative)

A focus group is an organized (but flexibly structured) discussion which includes six to ten participants. It generally lasts one to two hours. The purpose of focus group discussion is to collect information on a particular research topic (Winch et al., 2000).

2.4. Experimental Process

At the beginning of the research, the research was designed as experiment group and control group. However, this research design could not be carried out because of the curriculum at Yıldız Technical University School of Foreign Languages. During the experiment, posters were used as materials (Appendix B).

25 idioms were used on these posters with pictures. In the first step of the research, pre-test was applied to the students. No explanation was made before or during the pre-test. In the second step, posters which include 25 idioms hung on the classrooms' walls. Finally, post-test was applied to the students. Pre-test & post-test included 25 multiple choice questions (Appendix C). After these two tests, focus group interviews were carried out with the students who participated in the research process. Randomly, students were chosen for the focus group interview. Data was collected from both pre-test& post-test assessments and focus group interviews.

3. Findings

The aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness of peripheral learning on English idioms learning. To measure the effectivity of this method, t-test was used as statistical method. Therefore, pre-test was applied to the students before hanging the posters on the classroom walls. Next, English idioms posters hung on the classroom walls. Then, after a month, post-test was applied to the same students. Here are the statistical results of the research.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

		N	Minimum	Maximum	\bar{X}	SD
Pretest		111	24.00	84.00	54.66	15.21
Posttest		111	32.00	92.00	62.19	15.14
Female	Pretest	43	28.00	84.00	56.74	15.17
	Posttest	43	32.00	88.00	62.69	14.88
Male	Pretest	68	24.00	84.00	53.35	15.19
	Posttest	68	32.00	92.00	61.88	15.41

111 students participated in this research. 43 of these students are female students and 68 of them are male students. The highest score in pre-test is 92.00 and the lowest score is 24.00 among all the students. There is an increase in both female and male students' mean scores, minimum and maximum scores on post-test. On the other hand, standard deviation changes between 14.88 and 15.41. To be able to measure t-test, the distribution of the scores should be analyzed too. Thus, nonparametric tests are applied.

Table 2: Nonparametric Tests

		Sig
Pre-test		0.60
Post-test		0.21
Female	Pre-test	0.50
	Post-test	0.71
Male	Pre-test	0.84
	Post-test	0.52

The significance level is p 0.05.

In table 2, the results of nonparametric tests are shown. In general, pre-test scores distribution is $p=0.60 > 0.05$ and post-test scores distribution is $p=0.21 > 0.05$. Therefore, the scores are distributed normally. The distribution is normal also in female and male groups. T-test results and the analysis of them are shown in “Table 3: T-test results” below.

Table 3: Paired T test results

	Gender	N	\bar{X}	S	T	df	p
Test		111	62.19	11.26	7.04	110	.00
Test	Female	43	62.69	9.25	4.21	42	.00
Test	Male	68	61.88	12.33	5.70	67	.00

The significance level is p.01

It is clear that there is a significant difference between pre-test and post-test results for the whole group ($t(110) = 7.04, p=.00 < .01$). Moreover, in terms of female students’ test results, there is a significant difference between pre-test and post-test results ($t(42)= 4.21, p=.00 < .01$). Male students’ results also show that there is a difference between pre-test and post-test results ($t(67)= 5.70, p=.00 < .01$). Last but not least, the difference is in favor of post-test for each group above. Female and male students’ results are compared in table 4.

Table 4: Independent T test results

	Gender	N	F	\bar{X}	S	T	df	p
Pre-test	Female-Male	43	.00	female 56.74	15.17	1.14	89.58	.25
				male 53.35				
Post-test	Female-Male	68	.12	female 62.69	15.41	.27	109	.78
				male 61.88				

The significance level is p.01. Levene test significance level is p.05.

Levene test results show that independent t test is not valid for female and male students’ pre-test results ($F=.00 < .05$). For post-test results, there is not equality in terms of variance homogeneity between female and male groups. However, there is variance homogeneity for post-test between female-male results ($F=.12 > .05$). Then, female-male independent t test results are analyzed. That’s to say, there is not significant difference between female and male post-test results too ($t(109)=.27 p=.78 > .01$).

According to the t-test results, peripheral learning is effective on English idioms learning for this subject group. However, English idioms learning via peripheral learning doesn’t differ in terms of gender.

3.1. Focus Group Discussions on Idioms

Our research which is titled as “The Effect of Peripheral Learning Applied in English Instruction on English Idioms Learning” includes eight classes of around twenty-three. The students from these classes were chosen randomly for the focus group discussions. Three out of twenty-three students from each class attended the focus group discussion in one class, in total 24 students.

The following research questions were asked to the students:

1. What do you think of the visuals about the idioms on the walls in the classrooms?
2. What are the impacts of the visuals on idioms learning?
3. How many idioms did you study and how many of them did you use in daily life?
4. What do you think of the different structures' being presented in the classrooms?

According to the data from the focus group discussion, idioms which are used commonly in our daily life are of great importance for getting the essential colloquial expressions. The data from the focus group allowed us to come to a resolution in favor of adopting peripheral learning in acquiring idioms. Students in the focus group say that kind of culture-related expressions enable students to communicate more effectively and willingly. The focus group mentioned the advantages of learning idioms as follows. Firstly, with idioms learning one can learn how to express him/herself more naturally and better in any conditions. Such culture-oriented expressions' hanging on the walls with colorful visuals aroused the interest of the students in the research and led them to guess and find the meaning of the idioms. According to the information from the study, the most interesting idioms were "it is raining cats and dogs" with the number of 15 students and "when pigs fly" with the number of 17 students. When asked the reason why the students liked these two idioms most, they said these idioms are the ones which they find more opportunities to use in daily life.

One of the students also stated that "Learning such kind of showy expressions really work well to take attraction and swagger". Another student mentioned the importance and efficacy of the peripheral learning in this way "One of our lecturers hung on the wall 'I could not catch that' and we used this expression all through the lesson. The focus group discussions also revealed that colorful visuals which helped the learners acquire what the idioms in the research mean. However, idioms teaching with colorful visuals hanging on the walls in the classrooms is not sufficient itself.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Suggestopedia which included peripheral learning technique was found as an effective language teaching method especially in vocabulary teaching:

According to Dr.Lozanov and his colleagues, the more words given, the better the students' memorization of vocabulary. Words are memorized, not in isolation, but in their 'real-life' context, i.e. in short sentences or phrases that are part of a given dialogue (Bancroft, 1975).

Moreover, the research done by Slyvia Ramirez showed that suggestopedia was an effective method on vocabulary teaching. Therefore, we thought that idioms are convenient research items both in the vocabulary field and in real-life context for peripheral technique. According to the research done by Szczepaniak and Lew, the effect of imagery was found as significantly effective on idioms learning. Hence, we decided to form our posters with imagery. Furthermore, since the posters were on the walls for a month and no explanation was uttered about these idioms, we aimed to assess the effect of peripheral learning on idioms with delayed retention of idioms (Szczepaniak, 2011) .

In this research, at Yıldız Technical University School of Foreign Languages, peripheral learning on English idioms was found as an effective technique for this sample group. According to the results of t-test analysis, female and male students' idioms learning via visuals differ. Male students' idioms learning thanks to peripheral learning shows more difference. Through the research, posters about the idioms hang on the classrooms' walls for a month. Besides, data about peripheral learning on English idioms learning is collected by the means of focus group discussion. The focus group discussion made us aware that the research could cover more common idioms which might have been on larger posters hung on the walls.

Besides the colloquial expressions like idioms, grammatical structures may be brought to classroom environment in this lovely and colorful way. To conclude, peripheral learning technique is applicable in idioms teaching.

Appendix A

Views of the Classes at Yıldız Technical University School of Foreign Languages



Figure 1. A View from a Class at Yıldız Technical University School of Foreign Languages



Figure 2. A View From a Class in which Peripheral Learning is Applied At Yıldız Technical University School of Foreign Languages

Appendix B

Figures of the Idioms in the Classes at Yıldız Technical University School of Foreign Languages





Appendix C

Pre&Post Test on English Idioms

YILDIZ TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES



December, 2011

PRE&POST TEST ON ENGLISH IDIOMS

Name: Class: B/BN Number:.....

IDIOMS TEST (30 min.)

Score:...../100 PTS.

Choose the correct meanings for each idiom below. (25x4 = 100 pts.)

1. Easy as pie.

- a. Something that is easy to make.
- b. Something that is not easy to make.
- c. Pie that is easy to make.
- d. Pie that is not easy to make.

2. To give someone a hand.

- a. To shake hands.
- b. To shake someone.
- c. To hand something.
- d. To help someone.

3. To go nuts.

- a. To like nuts.
- b. To eat nuts.
- c. To get angry.
- d. To get excited.

4. To kick the bucket.

- a. To dye.
- b. To die.
- c. To beat.
- d. To bear.



PRE-TEST ON ENGLISH IDIOMS

5. To be like taking candy from a baby.

- a. Very easy to make.
- b. Very difficult to make.
- c. Very funny to make.
- d. Very enjoyable to make.

6. To be on the tip of one's tongue.

- a. To show one's tongue.
- b. To see one's tongue.
- c. To not remember something.
- d. To remember something.

7. To be in hot water.

- a. To swim in hot water.
- b. To drink hot water.
- c. To be in trouble.
- d. To be no trouble.

8. To look like a million dollars.

- a. To look very ugly.
- b. To look very attractive.
- c. To look very rich.
- d. To look very angry.

9. An apple a day keeps the doctor away.

- a. Doctors like apples.
- b. Doctors dislike apples.
- c. Apples are good for health.
- d. Apples aren't good for health.



PRE-TEST ON ENGLISH IDIOMS

10. A cat has nine lives.

- a. To make lucky escapes from dangerous situations.
- b. To make lucky escapes from nine cats.
- c. To make unlucky escapes from dangerous situations.
- d. To make unlucky escapes from nine cats.

11. Bad news travels fast.

- a. Bad news really likes quick travels.
- b. Bad news really dislikes quick travels.
- c. People like telling bad news quickly.
- d. People dislike telling bad news quickly.

12. Blood is thicker than water.

- a. Water is thinner than blood.
- b. Water is better than blood.
- c. Family ties are stronger than others.
- d. Family tie are less strong than others.

13. Love is blind.

- a. Darlings have eyesight problems.
- b. Darlings have hearing problems
- c. Darlings do not see their faults.
- d. Darlings do not like their faults.

14. It is raining cats and dogs.

- a. It is raining a lot.
- b. It isn't raining at all.
- c. Cats like rain.
- d. Dogs like rain.



PRE-TEST ON ENGLISH IDIOMS

15. Ignorance is bliss.

- a. When you know about a problem, you feel happy .
- b. When you don't know about a problem, you don't worry about it.
- c. When you tell someone a problem, you feel relaxed a lot.
- d. When you don't tell someone a problem, you feel relaxed a lot.

16. To bug someone.

- a. To make someone happy.
- b. To make someone sad.
- c. To make someone angry.
- d. To make someone excited.

17. A frog in someone's throat.

- a. To want to cough.
- b. To want to speak.
- c. To want to be silent.
- d. To want to eat.

18. To pull someone's leg.

- a. To make someone excited by telling nice news.
- b. To make someone shocked by telling a joke.
- c. To make someone upset by telling a problem.
- d. To make someone happy by telling a lie.

19. To ring a bell with someone.

- a. To forget something.
- b. To remind something.
- c. To explain something.
- d. To hear something.



PRE-TEST ON ENGLISH IDIOMS

20. When pigs fly.

- a. Something will never happen.
- b. Something happened before.
- c. Something happens regularly.
- d. Something will happen.

21. Stuffed shirt.

- a. A person who behaves very suspiciously.
- b. A person who behaves very informally.
- c. A person who behaves very cheerfully.
- d. A person who behaves very formally.

22. To be just the tip of the iceberg.

- a. To be a past experience about a problem.
- b. To be just a part of a bigger problem.
- c. To be an unexpected experience.
- d. To be a problem about an experience.

23. To wear someone's heart on someone's sleeve.

- a. To hide emotions or feelings.
- b. To show emotions or feelings openly.
- c. To see emotions or feelings.
- d. To discuss emotions or feelings.



PRE-TEST ON ENGLISH IDIOMS

24. To take something like a duck to water

- a. To learn how to do something very easily.
- b. To learn how to do something hard.
- c. To learn how to do something by someone.
- d. To learn how to do something by effort.

25. To put all someone's eggs into one basket.

- a. To depend on someone's faith.
- b. To not depend on someone or something.
- c. To depend totally on someone or something.
- d. To not depend on someone's faith.

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