TeThe Use of Conceptual Metaphors to Teach Idiomatic Expressions to ELF high school

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my family, especially to my dad who could see me start but not finish. And to Jam, who is always by my side, even when it is hard.

- Karoll Andrea Cárdenas Rey

I dedicate this project to my parents and sisters, who always support me during its development.

- Paula Juliana López Flórez

In dedication to my family and friends, that I love and to whom I am deeply grateful for all the support and love shown throughout my life.

- Nohora Janeth Almeyda Rey

Gratefulness

It is an honor to highlight the help, support and collaboration of Professor Silvia Andrea Tarazona during the development and application of this research project.

We feel grateful with the collaboration of the high school students and teacher, who were always very attentive with our necessities in the development of the project.

Tabla de Contenido

Pág.

Table List

List of Annexes

Abstract

Title: The use of Conceptual Metaphors to teach Idiomatic Expressions to ELF high school students.[1]

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Key Words: Conceptual metaphors, Idiomatic expressions, teaching strategies, translation, EFL.

Description: Idiomatic expressions are common expressions used in everyday English language, hence the importance for a learner to acquire them in order to enhance better communication. However, they represent a challenge to EFL students due to the fact that the meaning of most of the idioms cannot be literally inferred from the words that constitute them. The problem is that these expressions are limitedly taught in Colombian public schools, and when they are taught, it is done through rote learning. Diverse studies have shown the effectiveness of categorizing idiomatic expressions considering the conceptual metaphor theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). That is why, the purpose of this study is to put into practice strategies for teaching English idiomatic expressions through the use of conceptual metaphors to sixth-grade EFL Learners. The results revealed that teaching through literal pictures and miming the real meaning of the idiomatic expression taught, was the most successful, useful and meaningful strategy for both teachers and students.

[1] Degree work.
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Resumen

Título: El Uso de Metáforas Conceptuales para Enseñar Expresiones Idiomáticas en Inglés como Lengua Extranjera a Estudiantes de Secundaria.[3]

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Palabras Clave: Metáforas conceptuales, expresiones idiomáticas, estrategias de enseñanza, traducción, ILE.

Descripción: Las expresiones idiomáticas son expresiones comunes que se utilizan diariamente en el idioma inglés, de ahí la importancia de que el alumno los adquiera para mejorar la comunicación. Sin embargo, estos representan un desafío para los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera, debido a que el significado de la mayoría de los modismos no se puede inferir literalmente de las palabras que los constituyen. El problema es que estas expresiones limitadamente se enseñan en las escuelas públicas colombianas, y cuando son enseñadas, se hace mediante el aprendizaje de memoria. Diversos estudios han demostrado la efectividad de categorizar expresiones idiomáticas considerando la teoría de la metáfora conceptual propuesta por Lakoff y Johnson (1980). Por eso, el propósito de este estudio es poner en práctica estrategias para la enseñanza de expresiones idiomáticas en inglés mediante el uso de metáforas conceptuales a estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera de sexto grado. Los resultados revelaron que enseñar a través de imágenes literales e imitar el significado real de la expresión idiomática enseñada, fue la estrategia más exitosa, útil y significativa tanto para profesores como para estudiantes.

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Introduction

Idioms or idiomatic expressions are a large part of the knowledge of language that we have nowadays (Chenguang, 2006). These expressions are a variety of informal language, and what separates them from other expressions is the nonlogical nature they have. This means that most of the idioms that exist, however not all of them, have no relation between their linguistic meaning and the literal words that compose them (Glucksberg & McGlone, 2001). Moreover, the use of conceptual metaphors to teach idiomatic expressions have been presented lately, as a recommended method to complement more traditional ways, such as repetition, to teach difficult vocabulary.

Following the idea, this project took the collaboration of students from sixth grade to teach them idiomatic expressions in English through the use of conceptual metaphors. With the implementation of this study, we sought to identify the challenges of teaching idiomatic expressions in an EFL classroom, also, to discover the strategies that better work regarding conceptual metaphors, to place which ones can be more useful and successful to teach them, as well as to highlight the importance of conceptual metaphors to teach them in the classroom. The procedures were divided in three stages: a diagnostic exam, implementation of strategies using conceptual metaphors, and a follow-up exam to measure the progressive learning of the idiomatic expressions. In the project, we found out that teaching through literal pictures and miming the real meaning of the Idiomatic expression taught, was the most successful, useful and meaningful strategy for both teachers and students.

Context of the problem

Idiomatic expressions are commonly used in everyday language; they can appear in daily conversations, when reading a text or watching a movie. Therefore, they are essential for proficient communication in any language, especially when a person is in the process of learning a new one (Elkilic, 2008, as cited in Samani, 2012). Idiomatic expressions may represent a challenge for non-native speakers because, in addition to the fact that those expressions are linked to cultural factors that may be unknown to the student, their meaning cannot be literally inferred from the words that compose it (Caillies & Butcher, 2007). For instance, the meaning of the idiom 'to break a leg' cannot be related directly to the words that are formulated, which literally mean to fracture a part of the body, but metaphorically, it refers to wishing good luck to someone.

Furthermore, our interest comes from the problematic process of teaching and learning idioms. In fact, according to our experience as foreign language students and English teachers, some schools in Bucaramanga do not have a process on teaching these useful expressions. The importance of the idioms for a non-native speaker comes from the need to improve the foreign language and seek a better fluency. Also, the use of idiomatic expressions have a big influence in the acquisition of a foreign language, since it can be a way to provide the students with finer conditions to improve their communicative skill in a real life context (De Caro, 2009).

In other words, it is necessary to implement our project to find out which strategies show positive results when teaching idiomatic expressions through conceptual metaphors. This in order to be able to point out better ways to approach the teaching of important parts of language such as Idiomatic expressions.

In view of this, the necessity to find the appropriate methods to improve the teaching of idiomatic expressions in EFL is generated, through conceptual metaphors. According to Chen & Lai (2013), conceptual metaphors allow learners to create a connection between two ideas; this facilitates the process of finding the meaning behind an idiom by relating "existing and universal knowledge with unfamiliar and specific knowledge" (p.16). Although in theory the results of using conceptual metaphors to teach idiomatic expressions are successful, the problem arises when this is not put into practice.

Research Questions

Considering the above-mentioned ideas, four research questions are presented:

1. Are conceptual metaphors considered a meaningful tool to teach idiomatic expressions to EFL high school students?

2. What are the most problematic challenges that students face when learning idiomatic expressions in English?

3. Which strategies are the most useful to teach and learn idiomatic expressions through conceptual metaphors?

4. Do high school teachers consider idiomatic expressions particularly challenging to teach?

Justification

The adoption of idiomatic expressions in English learners can be advantageous in terms of fluency, natural use of the language and be seen as an optimal domain signal of the foreign language (Hoang, 2014). In other words, the knowledge about conceptual metaphors can foster a better understanding and communication in oral and written texts, because when encountering an idiomatic expression in a reading or conversation, the idiom can make the conversation flow or obstruct it.

However, the majority of conceptual metaphors can be confusing to foreign language learners, as occurs in the case of idiomatic expressions. This is due to the fact that the words that compose them cannot be understood in a literal way, but be interpreted by its figurative meaning. For example, if the idiom '*let the cat out of the bag'* is taken literally, it is understood that there is a trapped feline animal, but when it is understood by its figurative meaning, it refers to giving away a secret. Consequently, idioms are difficult to master because such structures tend not to have straightforward meanings. They generally depend on the context in which they occur, and they convey meanings that common words may not substitute. This necessarily requires a good command of cultural and linguistic proficiency (Al-kadi, 2015).

This topic is relevant because it cannot be considered that a person has an optimal proficiency in English without managing idiomatic expressions since they are included in every known language (Boers, 2008). As stated before, unfamiliarity with the meaning behind an idiomatic expression can obstruct and hinder communication. Hence the importance of

implementing them in the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL), in order to get a high-quality level of competence. However, these elements are minimally taught in schools, certainly idiomatic expressions are taught late or not taught at all in institutes and just taken up until university (Khoshniyat, & Dowlatabadi, 2014). In fact, taking into account the *Suggested English Curriculum for Colombia[5],* the topic of idioms is included only in the topics taught in 11th grade (MEN, 2016)[6]. This shows, being 11th grade the last year of high school education in Colombia, that the amount of time and importance given to idioms is neglected in public schools. This lack of language dominance is easily perceived in the results from the English Proficiency Index for Schools (EF EPI)[7], in which Colombia occupies the 77 position out of 100 countries in the world ranking from 2018-2019. This categorizes the country in a very low level in English.

In addition to this, the lack of teaching of idiomatic expressions in public schools in Bucaramanga (considering primary, secondary, and high school) are noticeable based on our previous experiences. This is because either it was completely ignored in the choice of content for the class, or because its teaching was insufficient to get a good proficiency in English. This gap, regarding the teaching of English in Colombia, has led us to question ourselves about how to improve the implementation and instruction of idiomatic expressions, specifically using conceptual metaphors in an EFL high school class. Certainly, it can be said that the fact of learning through conceptual metaphors will supply us with a systematic approach to help us

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[5] Currículo Sugerido de Inglés para Colombia: This document is a tool that seeks that students reach a level of English that allows them to communicate, interact and share knowledge, and at the same time enhance their human and professional capacities (2014).

[6] Ministerio de Educación Nacional Colombiana (Ministry of National Education of Colombia).

[7] Índice del EF English Proficiency (EF English Proficiency Index): The EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) is the ranking of the English skills of countries or regions around the world.

teach these idiomatic expressions; in fact, conceptual metaphors facilitate the process of acquiring knowledge for language learners (Kömür & Çimen,2013). This research project presents the effect of conceptual metaphors to teach idiomatic expressions in a secondary school context, located in the city of Bucaramanga, Colombia.

In order to reinforce the area of English Language Teaching (ELT), it is necessary to relate a group of strategies that can help educators to teach idiomatic expressions through the use of conceptual metaphors in their classes of EFL, in terms of facility, usability, and flexibility. It has been found that the use of conceptual metaphors has a positive effect in the learning of these expressions, making it easier for English learners, who have developed their metaphorical awareness, to remember idiomatic expressions (Thyab, 2016; Hung, 2019). Moreover, it is necessary to state that the strategies that will be used in the project will be designed by taking into account the different theories of conceptual metaphors, such as systematic mapping and image schemas.

Based on Boers et al (2009), Pictorial Elucidation ended up being "that when verbal input has to compete for the learner's attention with pictorial elucidation, it is the latter that is likely to be best retained by the learner and possibly so at the expense of the former" (2009, p. 11) this concept refers to the association between language and a picture through a visual representation that can be a drawing.

In this project, we aim to contribute to the field of studies of conceptual metaphors from the area of pedagogy and didactics in EFL teaching to know how vocabulary can be better taught, in this case specifically idiomatic expressions, by enforcing and comparing these

strategies (images, videos, and acting) in order to identify the ones that worked better or more successfully. Considering all the stated arguments, we have determined that carrying out this research is relevant to show the importance of teaching idiomatic expressions, help students to have a better proficiency in the language related to the teaching of idiomatic expressions in EFL.

Objectives

In order to achieve the above-mentioned intentions, some general and specific objectives were placed.

General Objective

- To explore conceptual metaphor-based strategies for teaching idioms to EFL 6th grade students by implementing classroom activities involving conceptual metaphors.

Specific Objectives

- To highlight the usefulness of conceptual metaphors to teach idiomatic expressions in an EFL high school classroom.

- To discover which strategies are more useful to teach and learn idiomatic expressions through conceptual metaphors.

- To identify the challenges regarding the learning of idiomatic expressions among EFL high school students.

- To point out the challenges high school teachers have when teaching idiomatic expressions.

1. Theoretical Framework

In order to have a wider comprehension of our research matter, it is important to consider the following sections which provide this study with a strong theoretical basis.

1.1 Conceptual Metaphors

The most important and well-known theory about this area is the one given by Lakoff and Johnson (2008), the authors posit that Conceptual Metaphors are used in everyday life as these expressions help people to communicate. According to them, one single domain of experience can be easily understood in terms of another domain by using metaphors (p.172). In other terms, a person can relate two completely different statements in order to convey the same meaning. By this, what they inferred was that understanding does not take place in terms of isolated concepts but in terms of entirely different domains of experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008; p. 117). For example, the fact that we can understand life in terms of directionality, two different domains, by using the expression ''I'm without a direction in life''.

Furthermore, conceptual metaphors are characterized by several features. In fact, the via in which we communicate is through our language that is composed of ideas, which connect a concept from the source domain with one from the target domain (Clausner & Croft, 1997; Lakoff, 2014). Based on this idea, it is found as the first feature of conceptual metaphors that the the mappings are partial, this means that the mental mapping task is not a simple duplicate operation. For instance, the target and source domains' structure will be different (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Also, all maps of metaphors are hierarchically organized (Lakoff, 1993). This

means that the derivations of the main metaphor acquire their structure. For example, if the source domain of mapping is WAR (Defending) a derivation of that domain can be ARGUMENT (Maintaining one's opinion). It can be seen that even when the two domains are different, those actions are related and organized.

Moreover, conceptual metaphors are also culturally constrained, although a mapping of a metaphor can appear to be universal; the majority of them are cultured-based and reflected on the specific context in which they are used (Kövecses, 2005). Additionally, all mappings are unidirectional (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). This means that maps can only occur from the source to the target, or from the main metaphor to the derivations. The only examples of bidirectional tend to be the ones that involve the same two domains. For example, 'animals are people' (My dog said hi) and 'people are animals' (Her boyfriend is a dog).

Additionally, the most important feature of metaphors is that they are, allegedly, automatically, they are omnipresent in our everyday conversations and can be produced unconsciously (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Torda 2014). Following these ideas, the use of the metaphorical maps is an automatic action, as well as natural and unconscious (George Lakoff, 1993). To rephrase it, when we produce an idiomatic expression, we do not stop to think about the figurative meaning because it is a mechanized process.

Additionally, Steen (2008) presented a theory of two different types of metaphors: Deliberate and non-deliberate. The difference between these two metaphors is that the direct metaphors (deliberate) are characterized by a distinctive linguistic form: that it recalls a source domain (Steen et al, 2010, p. 786-787). In other words, it is virtually impossible to understand and interpret these metaphors without creating a conscious process of comparison. For example,

in the expression *'She is busy as a bee',* the comparison created between a person, who is working hard, and an animal, who is known to be always busy doing its labors, is easily perceived.

On the other hand, the indirect metaphors (non-deliberate) are the ones that have been the most important tenets during metaphor research, they are used and understood in most cases unconsciously. This type of metaphor is used mostly without any kind of "awareness of its dependence on cross-domain mapping" (Steen et al, 2010). Indeed, it has been argued by experts that it is through categorization and not through comparison, the case of direct metaphors, that these indirect metaphors are resolved (Gentner and Bowdle 2001, 2008; Glucksberg 2001, 2008). For instance, in the metaphor *'America is a melting pot',* there is not a clear comparison between its two concepts, but the understanding of one idea in terms of another.

1.2 Conceptual Metaphor to Teach Idiomatic Expressions

Idioms are "a group of words in a fixed order that have a particular meaning that is different from the meanings of each word on its own." (Cambridge dictionary, n.d., definition 1). In other words, the meaning of an idiomatic expression cannot be inferred from the literal words that compose it, that is why it is necessary to know in advance its specific meaning which can be unpredictable. (Glucksberg, 1993, cited in Cacciari & Tabossi, 2014; Strakšiene (2009, as cited in Asri & Rochmawati, 2017). This explains why the use of idiomatic expressions has been a problematic situation for many English learners.

Although they are difficult to acquire, it is important for students to learn them in order to display a better performance in the language (Ambrose, 2003). However, idiomatic expressions are usually taught through rote memorization methods in which there are no "associations between forms and meanings" (Chen & Lei, 2013, as cited in Asri and Rochmawati, 2017). Thus, in order to find a successful method of teaching idiomatic expressions, conceptual metaphors were proposed as one of the solutions, because "learning vocabulary as categories provide a framework for lexical organization, and organized vocabulary is known to be easier to learn than random lists" (Pérez, 2017).

Indeed, the results of a study conducted by Chen & Lai (2013), in which it was noted that "the participants were schematizing the concepts when producing idiomatic expressions" (p. 18), shows the validity of categorizing idioms. Therefore teaching expressions using conceptual metaphors is an effective technique to implement in the EFL context, because it allows us to organize idioms that appear to have unrelated meanings, but which can actually be classified into groups to facilitate their understanding (Boers, 2003 as cited in Pérez, 2017).

As a matter of fact, according to Li (2010) conceptual metaphors can be used in idiom teaching to improve teachers' metaphorical competence also, to cultivate students' metaphorical awareness, and to provide input about relevant cultural backgrounds. First of all, she points out that due to the continuously language change, idioms evolve, and it is necessary for teachers to be able to categorize the new ones that are not included in Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) list, which although it is still an insightful and useful list, many authors have "reinforced some of the metaphorical categories proposed by...[them] almost 30 years ago"(Luodonpää-Manni, & Viimaranta, 2010). Secondly, the author points out that metaphors are not only poetic language

but are used in daily life and it is important that students go beyond the theory that is learned in class and be autonomous with their learning process. Finally, she affirms that it is not enough to simply teach the metaphors as a set of vocabulary, students need to receive cultural background input that helps them to understand the production of metaphors in language, because they are linked to a cultural context that varies depending on the student's background.

1.3 Metaphors as a Cognitive Tool

Lakoff and Johnson affirmed that Metaphors are cognitive tools (1980), because they approached metaphors as a mental process, in which a concept can be understood by being related to another. In fact, "in Lakoff and Johnson's theory of image schemes, the emphasis is on the consideration of metaphorical conceptualization, the formation of ideas about the unknown object" (Kiseleva & Trofimova, 2017).

 Ringmar (2008) stresses on it saying that "they help us organize the world in a particular manner, since metaphors help us make sense of the confusing multitude of things which surrounds us by telling us not what things are, but rather what things are like". Following this idea, conceptual metaphors function as both a process and a product. First, the cognitive process in which a domain is understood, this is the same process aspect of metaphor. Second, the conceptual pattern that results from the process is the product aspect (Kövecses, 2017).

Trčková (2015) synthesizes the three main characteristics of cognitive theory, by taking into account the research done by experts on the subject. The first characteristic is that human beings use metaphors to form an idea of real life and express intangible thoughts in words. Secondly, although most of the time it is believed that the use of metaphors is reduced only to

embellish the language in poetic works, they are also used in everyday conversation to enhance communication. The third one refers to the definition of metaphor, in which it is emphasized that they help us to understand a concept in allusion to another.

As a result, considering all the statements proposed in this section, we can infer that metaphors play an important role as cognitive tools when acquiring new knowledge.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The decision of using a mixed-method on this research project comes from the necessity of answering both of the types of perceptions when researching: qualitative and quantitative. Tachakkori and Creswell defined the mixed study method as a "research in which the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or a program of inquiry" (2007, p.3). On one hand, the qualitative research method will be used during the analysis of the teacher's interview and the observation report, according to Palmer and Bolderston, "Qualitative research is an interpretative approach, which attempts to gain insight into the specific meanings and behaviours experienced in a certain social phenomenon through the subjective experiences of the participants" (2006). On the other hand, based on Apuke (2017), the quantitative research method "deals with quantifying and analyzing variables in order to get results. It involves the utilization and analysis of numerical data using specific statistical techniques to answer

questions like who, how much, what,   where, when, how many, and how". This method was used to analyze the grades obtained in the diagnostic exams and the follow-up exams.

According to Cameron (2009), a sequential design is the one in which one type of data is used to create a data collection instrument based on that data. Furthermore, the diagnostic exam was used as an instrument to create the other exams in order to collect the necessary data. Therefore, the sequential design was chosen for the research since the principal instruments of data collection was 1). a diagnostic exam, from which results helped us to create strategies to teach idiomatic expressions. Based on those results, we applied 4 strategies to teach idiomatic expressions and also 2). a follow-up exam (for each). In this way, the follow-up exams gave us the final results with which the students were analyzed. To not bias the results, the exams followed the same structure, they contained multiple choice questions, being the 'Idiomatic expression' located in the question section.

Miller affirms that "The idea of experimental design is to ensure that the data emerging at the end of an experiment are relevant to the prediction being tested and not contaminated by outside factors" (2005). The difference between this definition and our project is that the results do not confirm or deny any prediction but show the effectiveness and practicality of the strategies while putting in practice activities, tasks in classes, questioning the students, etc. One positive part of an experimental design, it allows us to control some variables (such as noise, organization, clear observation, explanation of the idiomatic expressions according to the strategies, scheduling, etc) and follow the plans for the project. The results of the exams supported which strategy seems to be the most successful.

2.2 Participants

To develop this research project, we considered a co-ed[8] group of 30 6th graders, aged between 10 and 13 years old. In order to avoid the localization of the participants, it is only necessary to clarify that they belong to one public school in the city of Bucaramanga, Colombia. This school provides subjects with an emphasis on technology and it provides English lessons to its students from preschool to eleventh grade, with an hourly intensity of one hour of English per week in primary school, which increases to 3 in secondary school. This population was selected thanks to the facility to work with them due to our practicum process in the current semester of the university. In this grade is implemented the Way to go! sixth grade book and workbook, which makes part of the English Area Plan from secondary school, this one is formulated based on the *Suggested English Curriculum for Colombia* and the *'Derechos Básicos de Aprendizaje de Inglés'* (Basic English Learning Rights), both documents proposed by the Colombian Ministry of Education (2016). However, as the students are underage, a consent form will be sent to their parents or legal tutor in order to allow us to work with them. The teacher in charge of that grade will also be aware of the planned strategies and the activities that will be developed with the students.

2.3 Data collection Instruments and Stages Executed

In the first stage of the project, we applied a short diagnostic exam to assess a student's capacity of understanding idiomatic expressions in English by inferring and recognizing their

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[8] Co-ed: "Of or relating to an education system in which both men and women attend the same institution or classes" (American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, n.d.).

meanings. Afterwards and taking into account the results of the former diagnostic exam, we designed activities to do during the classes, using the conceptual metaphors to create strategies in order to start teaching the chosen idiomatic expressions. After the application of each teaching strategy using conceptual metaphors, students were exposed to 3 follow-up exams during the whole project with the aim of measuring their learning process of idioms.

During the project, the researchers applied 1 diagnostic exam, 1 lesson based on translation and its corresponding exam, then the application of 3 strategies and 3 follow-up exams in order to follow the effectiveness of each of the strategies that were put in practice. The development of the process was selected in this way, in order to prove that the students did not have knowledge about idiomatic expressions, and how the strategies can help them to learn about it.

Furthermore, a field journal was used to collect further information observed by the three researchers such as the motivation of the students, their response to each strategy and to the class in general and annotations about the difficulties we can perceive. As the last data collection tool, interviews were made to the English teacher and some students, to find out which are the challenges the students have when learning idiomatic expressions and how difficult does the teacher find to teach this type of expressions. The interview included questions that allow us to know if idiomatic expressions are an important element in the process of learning English, how they should be taught, based on the teacher's perspective.

3. Results

Before presenting the results, it is significant to emphasize the two major concepts that comprise this project which are Conceptual Metaphors and Idiomatic Expressions. Conceptual Metaphors "are part of our knowledge of how people talk about abstract concepts, and play a role in our comprehension of figurative expressions about these concepts" (Li, 2010), while Idiomatic Expressions are "often defined as sequences of words involving some degree of semantic idiosyncrasy or non-compositionality. That is, an idiom has a different meaning from the simple composition of the meaning of its component words" (Fazly, Cook & Stevenson, 2009, p.1-2)

Additionally, another important definition we need to point out are the strategies, these can be divided between learning strategies and teaching strategies. It is said that "*learning strategies* is used in a very broad sense to identify a number of different competencies that researchers and practitioners have postulated as necessary, or helpful, for effective learning and retention of information for later use" (Weinstein & Underwood, 1895, p.245). On the other hand, teaching strategies are…"methods and techniques that a teacher will use to support their pupils or students through the learning process; a teacher will choose the teaching strategy most suitable to the topic being studied" (Anilkumar, 2021).

In order to report the results obtained during the application of the research project, we will start by presenting the structure selected for each of the exams, the results given by the students outcome when they took the diagnostic exam, and then the grades obtained after the

application of a Translation Method exam, followed by each of the 3 follow-up exams, taking into account the respective strategy used in the 3 of them. In second place, we will analyze the perceptions of the practitioners when putting in practice the strategies, this will be achieved based on the journal written during the implementation of the strategies for teaching the idioms. Furthermore, the perceptions from the journal include a consideration of the students' motivation, their attitude, and their difficulties. Last but not least, we will report the answers gotten in the student's questionnaire and teachers' interviews, one from a sixth grader teacher and the second one from a eleventh grader teacher.

The structures of the five applied exams (diagnostic exam, Translation Method exam, follow-up exams 1, 2, and 3) followed the same line in order to avoid bias or inequalities. In the first place, all the exams were designed in Google forms, as it was easier to check the answers, keep all the exams in a single and accessible place, and have trouble-less access to the answers at any time when any of the researchers needed to. The tests started by asking for the complete students' name and the grade, this just to confirm that the answers were not invented and had real participants. Moreover, to protect the personal information of the participants considering the processing of personal data policies, their name will be kept private. Then, the students could find the instructions, in which the researchers made clear that the exam would not affect the student's grade in the subject of English, hence, they would not have the necessity to use the internet, a dictionary or any tool in order to translate the idioms. Taking this into account, the researchers consider that the results of the exams are completely real and based only on the knowledge the students acquired during the classes. After that, they could find the 'exercises', the evaluated idiomatic expressions were located in the question section, these questions were

merely composed of the idiomatic expressions. For example, one of the questions could have been "It's raining cats and dogs". Following the question, the students could find a set of 4 options that worked as answers. In order to make the exam understandable for students with a low English level, the answers were written in Spanish and were designed as simple phrases all related to a word from the chosen idiomatic expression.

The exercises were composed of a set of 5 questions about 5 idiomatic expressions learned during the class in the case of the Translation method and follow-up exams. On the contrary, the results from the idioms evaluated during the diagnostic exam, were solely based on the previous knowledge of the students about idiomatic expressions.

Table 1

Average in the grades obtained in the follow-up exams according to each strategy applied

Stage	Strategy	Summation	Number of answers	Average
1	Diagnostic exam	32	17	1,88
2	Translation Method Exam	47	17	2,76
3	Follow-up exam A	64	15	4,26
4	Follow-up exam B	56	16	3,5
5	Follow-up exam C	57	16	3,56

Nota: The differences in the number of answers was determined by the attendance of the students in classes, and their participation, as they were free to leave the research project at any moment.

In order to get a global perspective of the students' knowledge about Idiomatic expressions in English, the researchers applied a diagnostic exam. In this first exam, 10 idiomatic expressions were assessed. Furthermore, each of the questions included a multiple choice of answers composed of 4 possible phrases, one of which described perfectly the idiomatic expression(See Annex A). For this first exam, the researchers decided to evaluate a combination of the selected topics of idiomatic expressions chosen for each of the follow-up exams. In fact, the topics were Idiomatic expressions that included food words, Idiomatic expressions that included body parts and Idiomatic expressions that included weather words. The principal reason for the selection of these topics for the idiomatic expressions was because they had some relation with the topics in the curriculum given by the school. In fact, the researchers took this decision in order to avoid the interruption or interference with the normal course of the classes.

Moreover, the idioms selected for this first stage, the diagnostic exam were: 1. **to be all ears** (pay a lot of attention to what is being said) and there were four options for students to choose from, being a)*'Tener las orejas grandes / Ser orejón'* (to have big ears/ big-eared), b) *'Escuchar atentamente a alguien'* (listen carefully to someone), C)*Murmurar en las orejas de alguien* (Murmuring into someone's ears), D) *'No querer escuchar lo que dice una persona'* (Not wanting to hear what a person is saying); being the letter B the correct answer chosen by 88,2% of students, followed by letter C with being chosen by 11,8% and finally A and D with 0% each.

Then we had, idiom number two: **it's a piece of cake** (to say that something is very easy to do) with the following four options: A)*comer pastel* (to eat cake); B)*algo es fácil de hacer* (something easy to do); C)*algo que parece un pastel* (something that looks similar to a cake);

D) *algo que se disfruta mucho* (something that is very enjoyed). In this question, the answers were more diverse with A being chosen by the 29,4% of students while the 17,6% answer B, followed by C which was chosen by the 35,3% and the last one was D with a 17,6% proportion of the election. It is an important thing to specify that the correct answer was B.

Thirdly, we have the idiomatic expression: **to see eye to eye** (to agree with someone or something), and the four options were A)*Verse frente al espejo* (see yourself in front of the mirror); B)*Mirar fijamente a los ojos* (to stare into the eyes); C)*Evadir la mirada de alguien* (avoid someone's gaze); D)*Estar de acuerdo con alguien* (to agree with someone). Being D the correct answer that was chosen by 11,8% of the students, C by the 5,9%, B by the 70,6% and A was chosen by the 11,8% of the participants. To continue,for the idiom **it's raining cats and dogs** (it is raining too hard) were given the next four options: A)*Está lloviendo muchísimo*(it's raining a lot); B)*Está lloviendo suave* (it's raining soft); C)*Tener muchos gatos y perros* (To have many cats and dogs); D)*Disfrutar la lluvia* (to enjoy the rain). In this question, the most chosen answer was C with a percentage of election of 70,6%, followed by answer A, which is actually the correct answer, elected by the 23,5% of the students, while answer D was chosen by 5,9% and lastly B with 0%.

The following idiomatic expression is **to break a leg** (to wish good luck to somebody), composed of A)*Romperse una pierna* (to actually break a leg); B)*Desear suerte a alguien* (to wish good luck to somebody); C)*Tener la pierna rota* (to have a broken leg); D)*Perder el control* (to lose control). In this question the correct answer was the most voted one, which is B with a percentage of 47.1, followed by answer A with a percentage of 23,5%, continuing with answer D with a percentage of 17,6% and ending with C with a percentage of 11,8%. In the sixth

question, we have the idiom to **bad-mouth** (to criticize or say bad things about someone or something), with the available answers being A)*Tener mal aliento* (to have bad breath); B)*Tener la boca seca* (to have a dry mouth); C)*Hablar muy rápido* (to talk fast); (D) *hablar mal de alguien* (to say bad things about someone). In this exercise, there was a tie between answers A and D, both with a percentage of 41,2%, being D the correct one. Then, we have answer B which was chosen by 11,8 % of students while answer C was chosen by 5,9%.

Additionally, we encounter: **it is not my cup of tea** (to say that something is not my like), composed of the following answers, A)*Me gusta mucho el té* (I really like tea); B)*Que algo no es de mi agrado* (something that I don't like); C)*Tengo un pocillo de té* (I have a cup of tea); D)*Ese no es mi té favorito* (this is not my favorite tea). Although the correct answer was B, it just had 23,5 percentage of election, behind the answers A and D which were chosen by the 29,4% and the 35,3% respectively, meanwhile answer C were just chosen by the 11,8%.

Then we have idiom number seven which was **to pull someone's leg** (to joke with someone), followed by the correspondent answers proposed which were A)*Ser fastidioso con alguien* (Being annoying with someone); B)*Ser bromista con alguien* (Being a joker with someone); C)*Abrazar la pierna de alguien* (to hug someone's leg); D) *Hacer cosquillas en la pierna de alguien* (Tickling someone's leg). In this case answer A was chosen by 35,3% of the participants, B by 29,4%, C by 23,5% and D by 11,8% of the students, where B was the correct one. To continue we have the idiomatic expression **to be the lesser of the two evils** (to choose the least worst),and the four options for students to choose from are: A)*Ser el menos peor entre dos cosas* (To be the least worst of two things); B)*Ser muy malgeniado*(to be very grumpy); C)*Ser un villano* (to be a villain); D)*Ser el más grande de todos* (to be the biggest of all). Being

the letter A the correct one chosen by the 58,8% of the students, followed by answers B and C that were tied with 17,6% of the election and then answer D chosen by 5,9% of the participants. Finally, we have the idiom **to be as cool as a cucumber** (to be very relaxed), with the following four options, A)*Tener frío por estar en la nevera* (Being cold from being in the fridge); B)*Estar muy tranquilo y relajado* (Be very calm and relaxed); C)*Estar cansado y no querer moverse* (Being tired and not wanting to move); D)*Tener mucha energía*(to have a lot of energy). Being B the correct answer and the most chosen answer by the 47,1% of the students, followed by answer A by the 35,3%, then answer D by the 11,8% and finally answer C chosen by the 5,9%.

In general, for the idiomatic expressions number 1, 5,6,9 and 10 the correct answers were the most chosen one, while for the questions number 2,3,4,7 and 8 the correct answers had a low percentage of election.In this Diagnostic exam, it can be perceived that 17 students completed the evaluation and sent their answers to the researchers. Adding all the seventeen grades, being 0 the lowest and 5 the highest, the summation was 32 points out of 85. Taking this information into account, the average score resulted from the diagnostic exam was 1,88. Comparing the results obtained from this first exam with the exams that followed (Translation method exam, follow-up exams 1, 2, and 3), these results or grades presented the lowest number of acerted answers. Bearing this information in mind, the researchers considered that the strategies to be applied in the teaching of idiomatic expressions could be, as a first perspective, very nutritious for the students. As the student's had to take the exam by online matters, due to the current pandemic situation (Covid-19), there was a possibility that they would use the internet, dictionaries or translation tools to complete the exam. However, taking into account their results, it can be inferred that they based their answers only on the knowledge obtained by the classes.

Furthermore, they were instructed to be as honest as possible, as this evaluation would not affect their grades at school and it was an important project for their teachers, who are also the researchers in charge of this paper.

Next to this, the first strategy used was the application of a Translation Method at the moment of teaching the chosen idiomatic expressions. To develop this strategy, the teacher in charge of the class showed to the students some slides where the idioms were written and two pictures with literal meaning. The role of the teacher consisted in asking the students what they could infer from the pictures and the words, giving them clues and related words. Since the topic of the idioms was related to the topic of the current class at that moment, the students already knew the words in the idioms. After that the teacher gave an explanation of the meaning of each one of the 5 idioms in the student's native language, in this case Spanish. Following this step, the teacher gave examples of situations in which the idiomatic expressions could be used or could take place.

The idiomatic expressions selected for the exam of this first strategy (See Annex B), the Translation method, were: **to be all ears** (to listen to someone carefully), and the options the students had were A) *Murmurar en las orejas de alguien* (to murmur into someone's ear); B) *Tener las orejas grandes/Ser orejon* (To have big ears/Being big eared); C) *Escuchar atentamente a alguien* (To listen to someone carefully); and D) *No querer escuchar lo que dice una persona* (to not want to listen to someone). The option A was chosen by 11,1% of the students, then the option B and the option D had a tie with 5,6% each, finally option C, which was the right answer, had results of 77,8% students choosing it.

Additionally, for the second idiom **get out of my face** (telling someone to go when they are being annoying), the next four options were given: A) *Decir que alguien se vaya cuando está siendo fastidioso* (telling someone to go when they are being annoying); B) *Decir a alguien que venga rápido* (telling someone to come quickly); C) *Decir a alguien que es muy divertido y agradable* (telling someone that is very funny and likeable); D) *Decir a alguien que no debe usar tanto maquillaje en la cara* (telling someone that they shouldn't wear so much make-up in the face). In this question, the most chosen answer was A with a percentage of election of 72,2%, followed by the answers B and D, these options had a tie of 11,1% for each one. Finally, answer letter C was the least chosen with 5,6%. The actual right answer was letter A, which was also the most chosen.

The following idiomatic expression is **to see eye to eye** (to agree with someone), composed of the possible answers A) *Verse frente al espejo* (to watch yourself in front of the mirror); B) *Evadir la mirada de alguien* (to avoid someone's gaze); C) *Mirar fijamente a los ojos* (to see someone directly to their eyes); D) *Estar de acuerdo con alguien* (to agree with someone). In this question answer 0% of students chose option A, followed by option B as the second least chosen with 11,1% of recurrence, then, letter D, which was the right answer, and had a recurrence of 22,2%, the most chosen option was letter C, which was chosen by the 66,7%.

Additionally, we encounter: **to follow your nose** (to follow your instincts), composed of the following possible answers, A) *Oler algo muy delicioso* (To smell something very delicious); B) *Seguir tus instintos* (To follow your instincts); C) *Tener comezón en la nariz* (To have an itchy nose); and D) *Seguir lo que dicen tus padres* (to follow what your parents say). In this case, the correct answer, which was letter B, was the most chosen one with a recurrence of 61,1%,

followed by option C, which was chosen by 22,2% of students, then we have option A with a recurrence of 11,1. Finally, the least chosen answer was letter D with only a 5,6% of students choosing it.

Then we have the fifth and final idiom which was to **bad mouth** (to talk badly about someone), followed by the correspondent answers proposed which were A) *Hablar mal de alguien* (To talk badly about someone); B) *Tener mal aliento* (To have a bad breath); C) *Hablar muy rápido* (to talk too fast); and D) *Tener la boca seca* (To have a dry mouth). In this case answer A was chosen by 50% of the participants, B by 44,4%, C by 0% and D by 5,6% of the students, where A was not only the correct answer but also the most chosen one.

It is also necessary to highlight that during this week of English classes, the topic was parts of the face. In the exam made after the explanation, 17 students answered the test, the summation of the complete answers from all of the 17 students was 47, and the average grade was 2,76 points. As in this stage the students got some input, the results ended up being slightly higher than the results from the Diagnostic exam. However, taking into consideration that in the majority of schools in Colombia, grades under 3,0 are not considered successful or accepted as enough to pass an exam, what was achieved with this strategy does not show relevance in learning Idiomatic expressions. However, based on Balfaqeeh, these results were not shocking since idiomatic expressions are problematic to translate and it is very tough to find the appropriate word that expresses the real meaning for each of the words that compose the idiom, even more to make those equivalents mean the same thing the original phrase does (2009, p.6).

Following the process, the second group of idiomatic expressions were taught through showing literal pictures based on the idiom and the teacher acting the real meaning. This strategy

was applied based on the students' behaviour, their attitudes and their preferences when taking English classes. They like active classes and kinesthetic activities, for that reason, they enjoy when the teacher makes exaggerations in their expressions in order to explain the vocabulary, idioms or topics to the students. However, since the first strategy was mostly based on images, the mimicking and acting was used as a secondary tool to help students to grasp the idiomatic expression in a more complete way (See Annex C). To explain the results obtained in this stage, we decided to call it 'follow-up exam A', in this section, 15 students answered and sent their exams. The expressions used were: firstly, the idiom **to lose your head** (to think in many things and so not know how to solve them), had the four following options to choose from, A) *Dejar caer la cabeza* (to drop your head); B)*Pensar muchas cosas* (to think many things); C)*Estar calmado* (to be calm); D)*Quedarse calvo* (to go bald). In this third question the most chosen answer was letter B with a recurrence of 53,3%, followed by option letter D which was chosen by 40% of students. After that, letter C was chosen by 13,3% of students and option letter C was not chosen by any (0%) of the students. Then, we have the idiomatic expression **to have a finger in every pie** (to be very busy because you make many things), with the following options, A)*poner las dedos en la comida* (putting your toes in food); B)*odiar el pie* (hating your foot); C)*comer demasiado* (eating too much); D)*estar en muchas actividades* (being in too many activities). In this case answer D was chosen by 86,6% of the participants, A by 13,3%, B and C by 0%, where D was not only the correct answer but also the most chosen one.

To continue we encounter **the idiom to bite your tongue** (to close the mouth when you want to say something just because is better not to do it), followed by the next options A)*comerse la lengua* (eat your tongue); B)*no decir algo que quiere*s (not say something you

want);C)*comer carne frita* (eat fried meat); D)*decir groserías* (to swear).The correct answer, which was letter B, was the most chosen one with a recurrence of 80%, followed by option A, which was chosen by 20% of students, while C and D were not chosen by any student.

In the fourth question we encounter the idiom **to be an old hand** (to be expert in something), where we have the next available answers A)*ser muy bueno en algo* (being very good at something); B)*estar anciano* (being old); C) *tener una sola mano* (having only one hand); D)*tener las manos viejas* (having old hands).In this case, the correct answer, which was letter A, was the most chosen one with a recurrence of 86,6%, followed by option D, which was chosen by 6,6% of students, then we have option B with a recurrence of 6,6. Finally, we have the answer C with a 0% of students choosing it.

Finally, we have the idiomatic expression **to pat on the back** (to congratulate yourself) with the following options A)*darse palmadas en la espalda* (pat yourself on the back); B)*felicitarse a uno o a alguien más* (congratulate yourself or someone else); C)*tener dolor de espalda* (have back pain); D)*hablar a espalda de los demás* (talk behind the back of others). The option A was chosen by 26,6% of the students, then the option C and the option D had a tie with 6,6% each, finally option B, which was the right answer, had results of 60% students choosing it. The results of this third exam showed a total summation of 64 points. That being the case, it is possible to observe an extreme change when comparing these results with the results given by the diagnostic exam which was of 32 (17 answers) and the translation method exam which was of 47 (17 answers). In fact, the average grade obtained after the implementation of this strategy was 4,26.

In addition, the second strategy applied consisted in showing the idiomatic expression written on a slide, mimed by the teacher and then explained only in English. However, in contrast to the first strategy, which also included mimicking, the acting part in this strategy was the principal method for teaching the idiomatic expressions.. Furthermore, due to the low grade results during the translation method strategy, the researchers decided to try to give the oral explanation of the idioms using the English language. During this application, the topic for the class was food. Taking that into account the chosen idioms related to food words were: **the apple of one's eye** (to be the person that someone loves very much), the 4 possible answers the students had were A) *Amar mucho las manzanas* (to love apples a lot); B) *Tener los ojos en forma de manzana* (to have apple shaped eyes); C) *Ser la persona que alguien ama mucho* (to be the person that someone loves); and D) *Ser la persona que alguien odia mucho* (to be the person that someone hates). The option A was chosen by 22,2% of the students, after that, the option B was chosen by 5,6% of students. Furthermore, option C was not only the right answer but also the most chosen one with a 72,2% of recurrence, while option D was not chosen at all by any of the students.

Additionally, for the second idiom **cool as a cucumber** (to be calm and at ease) the 4 options were: A) *Comer muchos pepinos* (to eat a lot of cucumbers); B) *Estar tranquilo y calmado* (to be calm and at ease); C) *Tener frío todo el tiempo* (to be cold all the time); D) *Vestirse cool y sobresalir* (to dress cool and stand out). In this question, the most chosen answer was B with a percentage of election of 55,6%, followed by the answer D, which was chosen by 33,3% of students. Finally, answers letter C and B were chosen by the same percentage of

students with a recurrence of 5,6% each.   was the least chosen with 5,6%. The actual right answer was letter B, which was also the most chosen.

The following idiomatic expression is **to see eye to eye** (to agree with someone), composed of the possible answers A) *Verse frente al espejo* (to watch yourself in front of the mirror); B) *Evadir la mirada de alguien* (to avoid someone's gaze); C) *Mirar fijamente a los ojos* (to see someone directly to their eyes); D) *Estar de acuerdo con alguien* (to agree with someone). In this question answer 0% of students chose option A, followed by option B as the second least chosen with 11,1% of recurrence, then, letter D, which was the right answer, and had a recurrence of 22,2%, the most chosen option was letter C, which was chosen by the 66,7%.

Additionally, we encounter the third idiomatic expression: **not my cup of tea** (that something is not of my liking), composed of the next 4 possible answers, A) *No querer comer o beber nada* (not wanting to drink or eat anything); B) *Desear tomar té todo el tiempo* (to want to drink tea all the time); C) *Estar dispuesto a hacer actividades físicas* (be willing to do physical activity); and D) *Que algo no es de mi agrado o gusto* (that something is not of my liking). The most chosen option in this follow-up exam 3 was letter D, which was also the right answer, with 77, 8% of students choosing it. Moreover, letter A had a recurrence of 22,2%, while letter B and C presented recurrences of 0% percent both.

The final idiom that was evaluated in this fourth exam was **to have a sweet tooth** (to love eating candy and desserts), followed by the correspondent answers proposed which were A) *Amar comer comida salada* (to love eating salty food); B) *Tener caries* (to have cavities); C) *Amar comer dulces y postres* (to love eating candy and desserts); and D) *Tener un diente con cara* (to have a tooth with a face). In this case answers A and D were chosen by 5,6% of students

each, option letter B was chosen by 11,1% of students and option letter C was chosen by 77,8% of students. Furthermore, letter C was the correct answer.

Moreover, for this third exam, the researchers received and analized 18 answers, which showed a total summation of 56 points. Bearing that in mind, this exam had a better outcome comparing it with the results from the diagnostic exam (32 points and 17 answers) and the translation method exam (47 points and 17 answers). However, the results obtained from the Follow-up exam A, which took place after the image and mimic strategy were higher (64 points and 15 answers).

In the last exam, what we are going to call "Follow-up exam C", the strategy consisted in showing to the students two GIFs[9], one of them showing the literal meaning of the idiomatic expression and the other one showing the real meaning (See Annex E). The idiomatic expressions chosen for this strategy were: firstly, **it's raining cats and dogs** (it is raining too hard), A) *Llueve suavemente* (it mizzles); B) *Llueve demasiado fuerte - tormenta* (It rains too hard - storm); C) *Lloverá en unos minutos* (It will rain in a few minutes); D) *Llovió hace unos minutos* (It rained a few minutes ago). Being B the correct answer and the most chosen option by students with 81,3 percentage of election, followed by A which was chosen by 18,8% while answers C and D got 0%. Then we have the idiom, **to make a storm in a teacup** (to see or do problems where they are not), in which the available answer were A) *Hay una tormenta* (there's a storm); B) *Tomar una taza de te* (to have a cup of tea); C) *Ver y hacer problemas donde no los hay* (To see and do problems where there are none); D) *Resolver problemas* (to solve problems),

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[9] GIF: "a type of computer file that contains a still or moving image. GIF is the abbreviation for "Graphic Interchange Format"" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

were the correct answer was C, being chosen by the 75% of the students; then we have the option B chosen by 25% meanwhile answer A and D got 0%.

Additionally, we have the idiomatic expression **to break the ice** (to stop the uncomfortable silence), where the options given were A) *Romper el silencio incómodo* (to stop the uncomfortable silence); B) *Picar hielo* (to crush ice); C) *Congelarse* (to freeze); D) *Comer hielo* (to eat ice). In this third question the most chosen answer was letter A with a recurrence of 75%, followed by option letter B which was chosen by 18,8% of students. After that, letter B was chosen by 6,3% of students and option letter C was not chosen by any (0%) of the students. It is important to mention that the correct answer was letter A, which was also the most chosen answer.

Furthermore, the next idiomatic expression was **have the head on the clouds** (To be distracted). The 4 options available for this question were A) *Volar* (to fly); B) *Estar atento* (to be aware/to pay attention); C) *Estar distraido* (to be distracted) and D) *Viajar* (to travel). The results of this question showed that letter C, which was the right answer, was the most chosen with 81,3% of recurrence, also, letter A was chosen by 12,5% of students, option letter B was chosen by 6.3% of students and finally letter D was chosen by 0% of students.

The last evaluated idiom was **to be on cloud nine** (To be really happy). In this case the 4 possible answers the students had were A) Estar demasiado feliz (to be really happy); B) Estar triste (to be sad); C) Estar enamorado (to be in love) and D) Estar preocupado (To be worried). Letter A was the right answer and also the most chosen option with a 43,8% recurrence, followed by letter C and letter B who tied up with 25% each. Finally, option letter B was chosen by 6,3% of students. These expressions were selected because the topic for the week in the English

classes was the weather. The results for this strategy appeared to be very similar and almost equal to the ones obtained in the previous strategy, 16 students answered the test, the summation got 57 points, with an average of 3,56.

In order to analyze the results obtained before, it is important to consider not only the students' grades, but the students' behaviour, attitudes and expressions when learning idiomatic expressions. It can be said that at the same time, it is relevant to mention that the students were not only analyzed by the researchers during the application of the strategies, but also answered a short questionnaire in which they could express their perspective based on the English classes received by the practitioners (researchers-teachers)(See Annex F).

In the first application, the diagnostic exam, the students were a little confused as they did not know what Idiomatic expressions were about. To solve this problematic situation, we clarified to the students that they are what we call "dichos" or " refranes" in Spanish. Adding examples such as "de tal palo tal astilla", "rompete una pierna", or "el que menos corre, vuela", etc. As soon as they got the significance of the topic in practice, they appeared with new opinions and examples. It is important to highlight that after putting in practice each strategy with each idiom, the students were asked to confirm the meaning of the expressions, in order to see if the words that compound them gave some kind of data and information, and if they understood the idea. As Maisa and Karunakaram mentioned, "The best way to teach idiomatic expressions (IEX) is to treat them as new items and try to encourage the learners to guess their meaning from situation and context" (2013, p.9)

In the questionnaire applied to the students, we received 18 answers. In the first sections of the document, it was asked 'How did you feel in the English classes', all of them agreed that

they liked, enjoyed and/or learned a lot of topics and vocabulary. The second question considered what they liked the most of the English classes, in which they made emphasis in well-prepared classes, the energetic attitude when explaining, technological tools such as games, videos, slides, and more. On the contrary, it was also asked what they liked the least of the English classes, in which the 100% of the respondents agreed that 'nothing' was the final and concrete answer. In addition, with the purpose of collecting more information about the students' responses facing the learning of idiomatic expressions, a journal was written by the researchers concerning the students' attitudes, expressions and participation when explaining and presenting the idiomatic expressions. What was most meaningful about teaching was the fact that the students wanted to participate during the class by raising their hands and trying to translate the expressions in order to be sure of understanding what was being explained. However, the only situation that could limit our research was the fact that we could not see if all the students were paying attention as some of them had their camara off and were quiet for a considerable time during the class.

As all perspectives are important when developing a research project, we wanted to consider if English teachers as individuals teach idiomatic expressions, if they would or not, and how it should be done. For instance, it is not only important to consider the answers gotten by the teacher that is in charge of them at school, but to reinforce the data collected by applying the same interview to a teacher of eleventh grade. It is important to say that the teachers were free to answer the question in English or Spanish, written or spoken. The interviews applied were basically composed by the following questions:

- When teaching English, do you commonly teach Idiomatic expressions? Why/Why not?

- Why is it important to teach Idiomatic expressions?

- What is the most challenging fact when teaching Idiomatic expressions?

- Which teaching strategies would you use to teach Idiomatic Expressions?

The first interview applied corresponded to the sixth grader teacher. It is a little weird that the teacher affirms teaching Idiomatic expressions in Class: "obviously, I teach idiomatic expressions in a contextualised way because it is a part of language", but when we as practitioners asked the students if they knew any of these expressions, they were confused. However, she agrees with the importance of using and learning idiomatic expressions, as it contributes with the reinforcement of the language: "I think a language is a tool for communicating so the students must know and use idiomatic expressions in an updated way into a constantly changing world".

Based on the teacher whose identity we will not mention, comments that "in   my opinion, Idiomatic expressions change daily according to the changing world so we will have new   expressions in a short time". This quote expresses what is the most challenging fact when teaching idiomatic expressions based on the teacher interviewed. Otherwise, in the position of teaching idiomatic expressions in the classroom, the teacher recommends that: "I would use a matching strategy with images,definitions and I will introduce them with a video or a reading".

In the second interview, which was answered by an eleventh grader teacher. Affirms that when teaching, he sometimes dedicates time to teach Idiomatic Expressions. Otherwise, he

highlights that this application can not be done directly but indirectly. It means that he does not like to dedicate a class to teach only Idioms, as it can be a vocabulary class in which the students will only learn the words for a short period of time. While, if he teaches idioms in an implicit way, he knows that the learning will be meaningful for the students (See Annex H) . And we cite directly from his words: "Si los utilizo en el desarrollo de actividades que van orientadas a mejorar las habilidades de los muchachos de la lengua, en la parte receptiva y en la parte productiva. Pero no quiere decir que 'hoy es una clase de *idioms* in an isolated way', no. Pienso que deben estar inmersas dentro del desarrollo de algunas actividades".

In the application of the interview, the teacher highlights the importance of learning idiomatic expressions. He mentions that learning and using this type of sentences, helps the students to understand the culture of countries where English is their L1. He says literally that: "la utilización de 'idioms' pueden ayudar a mejorar las habilidades conversacionales y eso también le puede mostrar a los hablantes nativos que la persona entiende la parte cultural, el significado cultural y el contexto cuando los utilizan".

In addition, the teacher interviewed tells that the most challenging part of teaching idiomatic expressions is the fact of explaining how some expressions are similar to the L1 (in this case Spanish) but mean different things, that sometimes the words that compound the expression do not mean anything similar to the real message, etc. Directly from his words: "a veces coinciden pero a veces es totalmente diferente a la de nuestro idioma, a nuestro L1". To reinforce his opinion, he explains it by giving an example, that casually was also used in the questionnaires and the strategies applied to the students, "un 'idiom' es una expresión con un significado figurativo que a veces difiere del significado literal, por ejemplo cuando uno dice

"it's raining cats and dogs", si lo vemos en la parte literal no tiene sentido, entonces pienso que da una amplitud al mensaje y la manera en que el oyente o el lector recibe el mensaje".

Based on the teacher, he says that the most useful strategies to teach idiomatic expressions are doing reading, listening and speaking activities, using flashcards, games, play-roles, etc. We cite: "yo pienso que hay muchas maneras de enseñar 'idioms', pienso que en la parte de lectura, utilizando historias de manera visual, utilizando conversaciones, la utilización de los 'idioms' de manera regular en el salón de clase, en juegos, flashcards".

Comparing both of the teachers' opinions, it is shown that idiomatic expressions are important for teachers but to teach them is a real challenge thanks to its complexity in meaning and the changes that they soffer during time. However, we could find that the teachers interviewed do not coincide opinions in the use of strategies to teach idiomatic expressions. The first of them concludes in the idea of teaching idiomatic expressions explicitly and the second will teach them implicitly inside topics defined in the Colombian curriculum.

Finally, grouping all the information gathered, it can be concluded that the importance of idiomatic expressions is recognized by teachers and students (when they know about them), but all the opinions agree that it needs a lot of effort to teach and learn them. As a big amount of them can not be inferred by the verbs, words, and particulas that compose them.

4. Conclusions

As explained in the previous section, we can infer that schools in Colombia are not centered or focused on teaching Idiomatic expression neither in primary school nor high school.

Otherwise, in an attempt to give importance to this type of 'vocabulary' when learning English as a foreign language, we put in practice three strategies that could work to help the students in learning idioms, and help the teachers to find out which strategy ends up being the most flexible, useful and/or successful. It is possible to say that all the strategies seem to be worthy, but only one of them is more recommended than the other ones according to the results obtained. Following these ideas, it can be assumed that the teachers' attitude is one of the most influential factors when teaching a foreign language. Apart from this, the selection of the pictures used are very important as it is known that information first comes through the eyes, then new input is perceived by sounds (teacher's explanation).

Otherwise, the others strategies can not be set apart, as some of their aspects can be added or mixed with the strategy A, for example the use of GIF pictures, some translation when needed, the use of mimics when possible, etc. The strategies just mentioned were a little limited because the classes were given online, if not, other strategies such as the use of drawings, teamwork acting, paintings, etc, could be applied. Based on Maisa and Karunakaram, "Teaching idioms with specific strategies can help the learner to understand and produce idioms" (2013, p.9).

As stayed in the previous sections, we can conclude that what was found in the application of the strategies and the responses obtained in the interviews, they have a lot of concordances and agree in the importance and the variety of strategies when learning idiomatic expressions. Apart from that, the teaching of these sentences should be more implemented as school, in order to keep updated to the students on the advances of English as a foreign language.

In order to enhance the teaching of idiomatic expressions through conceptual metaphors in English as a foreign language at high school, Li recommends in first place that "If we want to apply the conceptual metaphor theory to idiom teaching and learning, we should improve teachers' metaphorical competence in the first place, for teachers are the practical implementer of the theory" (2010, p.208). In second place, the author confirms that "teachers should instruct students to command the analytical method of metaphors, cultivate their ability to think and learn independently" (2010, p.208). Last but not least, Xiuzhi Li presents a third proposal, debating the importance and the relevance of the cultural background when teaching and learning idiomatic expressions, "Different living environments, geographical locations, world views and religious beliefs etc are the main reasons that cause cultural differences of conceptual metaphors" (2010, p.208).

After stating and discussing the results, we would like to address the limitations presented through the implementation of this study. First of all, one considerable limitation was the current pandemic situation that has affected our everyday life in diverse areas, among these the one related to education, it's important to consider that to respect the protocol policies of health-care many institutions had to face closure and schools were not the exception, forcing students to learn from home through the use of technological devices, where students and teachers had to change the school and blackboard for the computer in their house. This represented a huge challenge for the educational system which had to quickly adapt to the situation, however, this was not an easy obstacle to overcome. It is at this moment when we notice the consequences of inequality, where not all students can access education. In fact, according to Tarkar (2020):

"Online teaching methods are adopted by the few private schools that are handful in taking online classes. In those schools children are taking classes online. On the other side low-income private and government schools have complete closure and not having the access to e-learning solution. It is disrupting the learning of students (p. 6).

Although most schools in Colombia provided online classes for public schools, some students could not resort to the use of a technological electrical device, be it a computer, tablet or cell phone to access these ones.

In addition, the methodology to assess students had to be modified in order to fulfill the new conditions of classes, and teachers had to use "online assessment tools for evaluation. Online assessment tools are not free from the limitations. There are various errors related to the measurement are reported in online assessment tools in comparison to the usual measurement" (Tarkar, 2020). In consequence, due to the present context in which we are carrying on this study we also have to implement the use of online tools to evaluate the students, however as stated before they might be prone to be sometimes unreliable.

Finally, we recommend conducting further research with the purpose of delving into the effects of the teaching of idioms using conceptual metaphors in the teaching of a foreign language, in which more variables such as other ages, grades, learning strategies, etc. would be taking into account in order to gather deeply understanding surrounding this matter. However, our current study indeed helps us to gain some insight about the importance of implementing the teaching of idiomatic expressions in an EFL context through the use of conceptual metaphors as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) stated by enforcing the use of diverse strategies, especially the ones related with visual aids.

Primary Sources

1. Interview made to the sixth grader teacher, considering the implementation, importance, challenges and strategies that take place in the classrooms when teaching English, specially idiomatic expressions (see Annex G).

2. Interview made to the eleventh grader teacher, considering the implementation, importance, challenges and strategies that take place in the classrooms when teaching English, specially idiomatic expressions (see Annex H).

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Annexes

Annex A: Diagnostic exam

To see the questionnaire, open the following link:

https://forms.gle/sxbH6LoKwXWjZpXt5

Annex B: Translation Method Exam

To see the questionnaire, open the following link:

https://forms.gle/mAecyGD4nzavy2jp9

Annex C: Follow-up Exam A

To see the questionnaire, open the following link:

https://forms.gle/3mCtLtHWuwg5NUfj9

Annex D: Follow-up Exam B

To see the questionnaire, open the following link:

https://forms.gle/N34VxDdgudc9VUJE6

Annex E: Follow-up Exam C

To see the questionnaire, open the following link:

https://forms.gle/pHj4D7oMz9xLSLNw5

Annex F: Students' perspective about the classes taken

To see the questionnaire, open the following link:

https://forms.gle/6pgu1j5uK6NiMSGH6

Annex G: Sixth Grader Teacher Interview

Interview to the sixth-grade students' teacher:

- When teaching English, do you usually/commonly teach Idiomatic expressions? Why/Why not?

Obviously, I teach idiomatic expressions in a contextualised way because it is a part of language.

- Why is it important to teach Idiomatic expressions?

I think a language is a tool for communicating so the students must know and use idiomatic expressions in an updated way into a constantly changing world.

- What is the most challenging fact when teaching Idiomatic expressions?

In my opinión ,Idiomatic expressions change daily according to changing world so we Will have new expressions in a short time.

- Which teaching strategies would you use to teach Idiomatic Expressions?

I would use a matching   strategy with images,definitions and I Will introduce them with

a video or a reading .

Annex H: Eleventh grader teacher Interview

Interview to the eleventh-grade student's teacher:

- When teaching English, do you usually/commonly teach Idiomatic expressions?

Why/Why not?

Pues yo pienso que es importante la enseñanza de expresiones idiomáticas, en este caso los

'idioms' son importantes enseñarlos de una manera gradual, dependiendo del nivel de los

estudiantes, de por sí siempre se van a ir enseñando, incluyendo expresiones idiomáticas durante

el proceso del aprendizaje de un idioma.

Si, en las clases suelo utilizar, pero es como un extra por lo menos en el colegio, con los

estudiantes de colegio público si se deben enseñar, y lo hago dependiendo del ejercicio que estoy

haciendo, si es un ejercicio de *Reading*, sí es un ejercicio de *Speaking*, donde tienen que hacer

conversaciones y esto, se pueden utilizar y lo utilizo con ellos, pero de una manera que sea

significativa, que represente algo para ellos, que enriquezca la parte de lectura, oral y de

escritura, que los acerque más a la cultura de la segunda lengua.

Si los utilizo en el desarrollo de actividades que van orientadas a mejorar las habilidades de los

muchachos de la lengua, en la parte receptiva y en la parte productiva. Pero no quiere decir que

'hoy es una clase de *idioms* in an isolated way', no. Pienso que deben estar inmersas dentro del

desarrollo de algunas actividades. Pero como digo que la clase de hoy es de *Idioms*, pienso que

así no funcionaría. O sea, de pronto puede ser que sí o puede ser que no, pero pienso que puede

ser más significativo cuando está dentro de otras actividades que desarrollan las habilidades de la

lengua.

- Why is it important to teach Idiomatic expressions?

Es importante porque especialmente en la parte hablada y escrita, la utilización de 'idioms'

pueden ayudar a mejorar las habilidades conversacionales y eso también le puede mostrar a los

hablantes nativos que la persona entiende la parte cultural, el significado cultural y el contexto

cuando los utilizan. Cuando una persona utiliza 'idioms', le está mostrando al hablante nativo

que es capaz de entender la forma de ver ellos también el mundo, y también demuestra que hay

un grado alto del manejo del idioma.

- What is the most challenging fact when teaching Idiomatic expressions?

Considero que el reto cuando se está enseñando y se está aprendiendo expresiones idiomáticas,

es cómo poder entender que algunas cosas que tenemos en nuestro idioma, en otro idioma se

dicen de manera diferente. Osea, a veces coinciden pero a veces es totalmente diferente a la de

nuestro idioma, a nuestro L1. Es como entrarse uno mismo en la mente en todo el manejo del

idioma de las maneras de ver las cosas cuando se utiliza una segunda o una tercera lengua. Como

lo dije anteriormente, un 'idiom' es una expresión con un significado figurativo que a veces

difiere del significado literal, por ejemplo cuando uno dice "it's raining cats and dogs", si lo

vemos en la parte literal no tiene sentido, entonces pienso que da una amplitud al mensaje y la

manera en que el oyente o el lector recibe el mensaje, es como que despierta los sentidos del

oyente y del lector.

- Which teaching strategies would you use to teach Idiomatic Expressions?

Bueno, yo pienso que hay muchas maneras de enseñar 'idioms', pienso que en la parte de lectura, utilizando historias de manera visual, utilizando conversaciones, la utilización de los 'idioms' de manera regular en el salón de clase, en juegos, flashcards. Considero a nivel personal, que lo importante es introducirlos o presentar los idioms de una manera que sea meaningful para los estudiantes. No solamente hacer un listado de expresiones idiomáticas, porque si solo se dan una listas de expresiones idiomáticas para memorizar, probablemente los estudiantes lo tengan por un momento pero no va a ser meaningful para ellos, lo importante es que ellos sepan cómo y cuándo utilizarlos, en que momento utilizar esas expresiones. Como decía, se pueden utilizar en historias, conversaciones, en juegos, que sean realmente significativo para los estudiantes.