A Comparative Study of the Effectiveness of Two Strategies of Etymological Elaboration and Pictorial Elucidation on Idiom Learning: A Case of Young EFL Iranian Learners

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of etymological elaboration, pictorial elucidation, and integration of these 2 strategies on idiom learning by L2 learners. A total number of 80 homogeneous intermediate learners studying English at 3 language institutes in Isfahan, Iran, were selected. The intermediate participants were selected as the result of administering an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) to them. Then, the participants were divided into 4 groups of equal size, that is, control, etymological, pictorial, and etymological/pictorial groups. Before the experiment, all the participants took a pretest to ensure their unfamiliarity with the idioms. The idioms that were known even by 1 participant were crossed out, and finally 30 idioms were chosen for instruction. Then, the experimental groups received their relevant treatments during 15 sessions, whereas the control group learners learned idioms through definitions and example sentences. After the implementation of the experiment, the 4 groups, once again, sat for a test (i.e., the immediate posttest) to see whether the treatments had improved idiom learning. Finally, the data were analyzed by an independent samples *t* test and one-way between-groups ANOVA. Results showed that all the 3 strategies significantly improved the participants' idiom learning. Results also pointed to the fact that the etymological elaboration/pictorial elucidation strategy was the most effective strategy on idiom learning.

Keywords: etymological elaboration, idiom, pictorial elucidation

1. Introduction

According to Hudson (1980) as well as Reisi Gahroei and Tabatabaei (2013), "language is at the center of human life and the ability to learn a language is among the greatest mental achievements of humankind" (p. 102). According to Olivares-Cuhat (2010) and Horwitz (2008), learning an L2 depends on a series of factors, such as (a) cognitive factors (language aptitude, learning styles), (b) affective factors (attitudes, motivation, and anxiety), (c) metacognitive factors (use of language learning strategies), and (d) demographic factors.

Therefore, use of language learning strategies is one of the important factors, which influences learning and is related to this study. According to Tabatabaei and Mirzaei (2014), "many teachers believe that different teaching methods play important roles in the quality of learning, especially learning a second or foreign language" (p. 45). On the other hand, language is composed of different components. Figurative language and idioms are important components of any language. Honeck (1997) points that figurative language is a language that means one thing literally but is taken to mean something different. Typically, an idiom has conventional meaning which cannot be realized through the meaning of its individual words (Gibbs, 1994).

On the other hand, studies on the use of idioms in the speech of adult native speakers have revealed that about 70% of their speech consists of idiomatic expressions (Altenberg, 1990; Becker, 1975; Coulmas, 1979; Cowie, 1992; Moon, 1998). Moreover, Pollio, Barlow, Fine, and Pollio (1997 as cited in Ren Dong, 2004) showed that the avoidance of metaphor in daily life is impossible. They found that "an average native speaker uses about 5 metaphors per minute, 300 per hour, and more than 1,000 metaphors per day at the rate of a 4-hour speaking daily" (p. 30).

Due to the widespread use of idiomatic expressions in daily conversations and in order to develop speech fluency, L2 learners need to learn how to use idiomatic expressions appropriately (De Caro, 2009; Oppenheim, 2000), but

these expressions often pose particular problems to L2 learning (Cooper, 1998; Fong, 2006; Steinel, Hulstijn, & Steinel, 2007). For solving these problems, L2 researchers and instructors have presented some strategies to instruct idioms, such as L2 definitions, etymological elaboration, pictorial elucidation, L1 explanation, rote memorization, and so forth (Abbasi & Zarei, 2013).

Boers (2001) states that associating an idiom with its etymology and origin has been shown to enhance retention. On the other hand, Fotovatnia and Khaki (2012) point out the pedagogical value of pictures for the teaching of both meaning and form of decomposable idioms.

However, quite few studies have measured the effects of etymological elaboration and pictorial elucidation on idiom learning. Moreover, there is almost no research on investigating learning idioms by integration of etymological elaboration and pictorial elucidation strategies. For example, in Guo (2008), etymological elaboration and rote memorization were compared, and there was no attention to pictorial elucidation on idiom learning.

Therefore, this present study measured the differential effects of three strategies on idiom learning: (a) etymological elaboration, (b) pictorial elucidation, and (c) integration of etymological elaboration and pictorial elucidation.

1.1 Etymological Elaboration

According to *Collins CoBuild Idioms Dictionary* (2002), etymology is the study of the origins and historical development of words. Ross (1969) points, etymology is briefly defined as the scientific study of the origins and history of the changing meanings and forms of words.

The significant role of etymology in L2 vocabulary learning has long been embraced by researchers in the literature. Zolfagharkhani and Ghorbani Moghadam (2011) focus on the impact of etymology instruction on vocabulary learning of Iranian EFL upper- intermediate learners. The results of their study revealed that the participants receiving treatment (introducing prefixes, suffixes, roots, and origin of the words) in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group, which followed its normal education.

Returning to idioms, associating idioms with information about their origin and source domains is called *etymological elaboration*. Etymological elaboration, as a pedagogical approach in L2 idiom instruction, has been of particular interest in L2 research, and its effectiveness has been examined by Boers, Demecheleer, and Eyckmans (2004) with several large-scale studies. One study involved two groups, of which one experimental group who received the literal, original usage of the target idioms, whereas a control group from the same population served as a comparison one that was not given access to the etymological information of the same material. A posttest and a delayed posttest were administered. The scores revealed that the experimental group acquired significantly more idioms than the participants in control group did.

According to a conducted study by Reisi Gahroei and Haghverdi (2012), the effect of teaching the etymology of idioms on the quality of L2 idiom learning was examined. To this end, 60 intermediate students were divided into two equal experimental and control groups. The control group was taught 30 idioms conventionally using synonyms and antonyms. The experimental group received the treatment and they were taught the idioms through the presentation of idioms etymology. The results have shown that there was a significant difference between two groups. The experimental group outperformed the control one.

1.2 Pictorial Elucidation

Showing pictures is another useful mode of idiom presentation. Using visual illustrations or asking students to generate images for pairs of words has been found to increase the likelihood that the imagery system will be activated and the input remembered (Clark & Paivio, 1991).

According to Boers, Lindstromberg, Littlemore, Stengers, and Eyckmans (2008), pictorial elucidation is a process of stimulating an association between a language and an image through the use of schematic drawings or pictures.

Zarei and Salimi (2012) found evidence supporting the effective role of pictures in L2 vocabulary recognition and production. They compared the effectiveness of three methods of vocabulary presentation: pictures, songs, and the keyword method on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary recognition and production. The results showed that the group instructed through picture had the best performance.

Returning to idioms, the application of visual images in teaching idiomatic expressions resulted in successful learning among male and female language learners (Gorjian, Pazhakh, & Naghizadeh, 2012). It is suggested that EFL learners intending to promote their retention of idiomatic expressions, study pictorial idioms books in which

those idioms have been visualized (Zhang, Wang, Wu, & Huo, 2011; Zhang, Yan, Wei, & Wu, 2010).

Vasiljevic (2012) suggests that pictorial elucidation based on learner-generated drawings can promote acquisition of meaning and form of L2 idioms. During the vocabulary treatment, the students performed better on the test of productive idiom knowledge, and the scores on both the receptive and productive posttests were higher when the students generated their own drawings for the target expressions than when visual support was provided by the instructor.

In a similar attempt, Saffarian, Gorjian, and Bavizadeh (2013) investigated the effect of visual images on EFL learners' retention of body idiomatic expressions. For this study, two groups randomly assigned as experimental and control groups. The experimental groups received instruction regarding visualizing the situations in which body idioms were presented respectively, whereas the control groups were taught the same idioms but the instruction was in form of giving definition of each idiom. After an interval of ten days from the end of the treatment, the four groups took a similar posttest to see whether learners recall body idioms and to find out whether idioms retention has taken place through visual images. *t*-test analysis showed that applying visual images had a significant effect on learners' retention of body idiomatic expressions, and the male and female experimental groups outperformed the control groups.

In addition, Boers, Piquer Piriz, Stengers, and Eyckmans (2009) suggest that pictorial elucidation helps learners comprehend and remember the meaning of L2 idioms.

Totally, the findings of this study might be beneficial for those that deal with teaching and learning of idioms, and they might help such people to choose one or both of these strategies to teach or learn idioms. Moreover, materials developers may also take advantage of the finding of this study. They can develop idiom books with pictures or related etymologies or both of them.

1.3 Research Questions

Based on what was mentioned above, the following research questions were posed to be pursed in this study:

1)   Does the etymological elaboration strategy in idiom instruction significantly improve Iranian intermediate EFL learners' idiom learning?

2)   Does the pictorial elucidation strategy in idiom instruction significantly improve Iranian intermediate EFL learners' idiom learning?

3)   Does the etymological elaboration/pictorial elucidation strategy in idiom instruction facilitate Iranian intermediate EFL learners' idiom learning?

4)   Which of the three strategies (i.e., etymological elaboration, pictorial elucidation, and etymological-elaboration/pictorial-elucidation) in idiom instruction is the most effective on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' idiom learning?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

In line with the abovementioned research questions, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

$H_{01:}$ The etymological elaboration strategy in idiom instruction does not significantly improve Iranian intermediate EFL learners' idiom learning.

$H_{02:}$ The pictorial elucidation strategy in idiom instruction does not significantly improve Iranian intermediate EFL learners' idiom learning.

$H_{03:}$ The etymological elaboration/pictorial elucidation strategy in idiom instruction does not facilitate Iranian intermediate EFL learners' idiom learning.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Based on the accessibility and because one focus of this study was using the etymological elaboration strategy and this strategy is related to origins of idioms or, in other words, it is related to the culture of an English-speaking country, choosing participants from nonnative backgrounds may reduce possible cultural bias in data collection. Therefore, 115 L2 learners were selected from three different English language institutes in Isfahan, Iran. All the learners were female whose ages ranged from 16 to 24 years (with an average age of 20). Then, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered to the learners to select homogeneous students in terms of proficiency. The selected learners were those whose scores were among 60-75 as the intermediate level. The rationale behind choosing the participants at the intermediate level was to have the required competence in

understanding metaphorical language. Therefore, 87 L2 learners were qualified. However, 80 homogeneous learners were assigned to serve as the participants. The rationale for such selection was to divide the participants into equal four groups (i.e., 20 participants for each group). Etymological group (EG), pictorial group (PG), etymological/pictorial group (EPG), and control group (CG) were the groups of this study.

2.2 Materials

For choosing idioms, different sources were used based on the different criteria. First, *Collins CoBuild Dictionary of Idioms* (2002) was the major source of this study, and most idioms were selected among those idioms that had star (as high-frequency idioms) in this dictionary. Second, because of the level of the idioms and their examples, they were checked in *English Idioms in Use* (2002, the intermediate level). Third, the etymology or origins of the idioms should have been considered. Among of the idioms, only those were selected that had appropriate cultural origins. The most origins of the idioms were found on the Internet, and some of them were found in the previous studies. Fourth, the pictures of the idioms were extracted from the Internet, *101 American English Idioms* (Collis, 1987), *Pictorial Dictionary of Slang and Idioms* (Mirhassani & Alipour, 2005), and *Idioms Organizer* (Wright, 1999). Then, the 30 selected idioms were presented by using PowerPoint software during the term.

Moreover, three types of tests employed for this study were as follows:

First, a language proficiency test (OPT; Allan, 2004) was used to homogenize the participants.

The second test was the teacher-made pretest, which included 80 items (i.e., 40 idioms in both multiple choice and fill in the blanks format). The intention of this test was to be sure that the idioms were unfamiliar to the participants.

The third test was the teacher-made posttest, which included 30 items. The intention of the posttest was to evaluating idiom learning of the participants in the different groups. In addition, the reliability of the posttest was 0.70, calculated via KR-21 formula, and it was moderate considering the scope of the study.

2.3 Procedure

2.3.1 Phase One

According to this study, 15 sessions in five weeks (i.e., 3 times a week) and about 15 min to the end of each session was assigned to teaching idioms beside the lesson plans of these three institutes. In each session, two idioms were taught. That is, 30 idioms were taught totally.

On the other hand and before starting the term, the learners were tested via the OPT for their homogeneity and those whose scores were among 60-75 were selected as the intermediate level. In addition, they were given a pretest three days before the treatment. Therefore, the idioms were known even by one participant were crossed out and finally 30 idioms among 40 idioms, which designed in pretest, were chosen for instruction. Hence, the researcher was completely sure that the participants hadn't learnt these 30 idioms in advance.

2.3.2 Phase Two

After pretest, the participants were divided to four equal groups. Then, each group received its relevant treatment.

- Etymological Group (EG): The teaching of the idioms included a definition and a short paragraph of etymological information on the origin of each idiom, followed with an example sentence taken from dictionary or other sources that before mentioned. Then, the participants tried to give more examples.

- Pictorial Group (PG): The teaching of the idioms included a definition and a related picture to each idiom instead of etymological information, followed with an example as same as examples in EG. The participants gave some examples by the idioms too.

- Etymological/Pictorial Group (EPG): The teaching of the idioms included a definition, a short paragraph of etymological information on the origin of each idiom followed with the related picture, and an example. In this group, the participants gave more examples.

- Control Group (CG): The idioms were taught just by definition of the idioms and an example for each idiom. Then, the participants made sentences in which the idioms were used.

2.3.3 Phase Three

After five weeks of instruction of the idioms in 15 sessions, the experimental period came to the end. The posttest was run two days after it, that is, in the 16th session. Of course, for the test, the participants were not

announced in advanced and they did not know they were going to take part in this test. Twenty-four hours prior to the testing day, they were asked to participate in a 120-min class instead of a 90-min class. In other word, the posttest was administered immediately after their 16th session and it lasted 30 min. Almost all the participants finished the test before the due time, and just one asked for some extra minutes to finish the last question. In addition, in order to encourage the participants to answer the tests seriously, they were told the test scores were part of their final scores for the last course. Finally, the scores of the experimental groups were compared to the scores of the control group to investigate the effects of these strategies on idiom learning.

2.4 Data Analysis

To test the research hypotheses and answer the research questions, the data obtained from the study were analyzed using the SPSS (version 21), independent samples *t* test was used to find answers to the first three research questions, and one-way between-groups ANOVA was conducted to find an answer to the last research question of the study.

3. Results

3.1 Results of the First Research Question

To find an answer to the first research question, the scores of the EG and CG learners were compared through independent samples *t* test. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the comparison of the posttest scores of the two groups:

Table 1. Descriptive statistic results comparing posttest scores of the EG and CG learners

	Groups	*N*	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	*Std.* Error Mean
Posttest	EG	20	16.7500	5.01445	1.12127
	CG	20	11.6000	3.93901	.88079

As it is clear, the EG learners (M $_{posttest}$ = 16.75) managed to outscore the CG members ($M_{posttest}$ = 11.60). Besides, the significance or insignificance of the difference between the posttest scores of the EG and CG learners could be determined in Table 2:

Table 2. Independent samples *t* test results comparing posttest scores of the EG and CG learners

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		*t* Test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F.	*Sig.*	*t*	*df*	*Sig.* (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Posttest	1.49	.22	3.61	38	.001	5.15	1.42	2.26	8.03

According to Table 2, there was a statistically significant difference on the posttest scores for EG (*M* = 16.75, *SD* = 5.01) and CG (*M* = 11.60, *SD* = 3.93), *t*(38) = 3.61, *p* = .001 (two-tailed). This is so because the p value was smaller than the specified level of significance (i.e., .05). The conclusion to be drawn from this part would be that the EG learners were better than CG learners in terms of learning idioms.

3.2 Results of the Second Research Question

To find an answer to the second research question, the posttest scores of the participants in the PG and those of the CG learners were compared via independent samples *t* test (see Table 3):

Table 3. Descriptive statistic results comparing posttest scores of the PG and CG learners

	Groups	*N*	Mean	*Std*. Deviation	*Std*. Error Mean
Posttest	PG	20	17.9500	5.79905	1.29671
	CG	20	11.6000	3.93901	.88079

On the posttest, the mean score of the PG ($M = 17.95$) was more than the mean score of the CG ($M = 11.60$). To check the statistical (in)significance of these differences between the posttest scores of the two groups, one needs to consult the *Sig*. (2-tailed) column in Table 4:

Table 4. Independent samples *t* test results comparing posttest scores of the PG and CG learners

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		*t* Test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F.	*Sig.*	*T*	*df*	*Sig*. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Posttest	1.46	.23	4.05	38	.000	6.35	1.56	2.26	3.17

Based on the information in Table 4, there was a statistically significant difference in posttest scores for PG ($M = 17.95$, $SD = 5.79$) and CG ($M = 11.60$, $SD = 3.93$) because of $t(38) = 4.05$ and $p = .000$ (two-tailed). Thus, it could be inferred that the PG learners outweighed the CG learners with regard to learning (i.e., posttest) of idioms.

3.3 Results of the Third Research Question

To find an answer to the third research question, the posttest scores of the participants in the EPG and CG were compared by means of independent samples *t* test. Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics for the posttest of the EPG and the CG learners:

Table 5. Descriptive statistic results comparing posttest scores of the EPG and CG learners

	Groups	*N*	Mean	*Std*. Deviation	*Std*. Error Mean
Posttest	EPG	20	23.4000	4.21026	.94144
	CG	20	11.6000	3.93901	.88079

As Table 5 depicts, on the posttest, the mean score of the EPG ($M = 23.40$) was far greater than the mean score of the CG ($M = 11.60$). To determine the statistical significance of these differences between the posttest scores of the EPG and CG group, one needs to check the *p* value under the *Sig*. (2-tailed) column in the *t* test Table 6:

Table 6. Independent samples *t* test results comparing posttest scores of the EPG and CG learners

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		*t* Test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F.	*Sig.*	*t*	*df*	*Sig.* (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Posttest	.13	.71	9.15	38	.000	11.80	1.28	9.19	14.41

As could be seen in Table 6, there was a statistically significant difference in posttest scores for EPG (*M* = 23.40, *SD* = 4.21) and CG (*M* = 11.60, *SD* = 3.93) inasmuch as *t*(38) = 9.15 and *p* = .000 (two-tailed). Hence, it could be understood that the EPG learners had better performances than the CG learners in connection with learning of idioms.

3.4 Results of the Fourth Research Question

The last research question of the study was intended to unfold which of the strategies used for idiom instruction was the most effective strategy. To achieve this aim, one-way between groups ANOVA was conducted for the comparison of the posttest scores of the four groups (see Table 7):

Table 7. Results of one-way ANOVA for comparing CG, EG, PG, and EPG mean scores on the posttest

	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*Sig.*
Between Groups	1407.250	3	469.083	20.391	.000
Within Groups	1748.300	76	23.004		
Total	3155.550	79			

As could be seen in Table 7, there was a statistically significant difference in the posttest scores for CG (*M* = 11.60, *SD* = 3.93), EG (*M* = 16.75, *SD* = 5.01), PG (*M* = 17.95, *SD* = 5.79), and EPG (*M* = 23.40, *SD* = 4.21) because the *p* value under the *Sig.* column was less than the specified level of significance (i.e., .000 < .05).

To find out where exactly the differences among the four groups lay, the Tukey post-hoc test was conducted (see Table 8):

Table 8. Results of the Tukey post-hoc test for comparing CG, EG, PG, and EPG mean scores on the posttest

Groups		Mean Difference	*Std.* Error	*Sig.*	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CG	EG	-5.15*	1.51	.006	-9.13	-1.16
	PG	-6.35*	1.51	.000	-10.33	-2.36
	EPG	-11.80*	1.51	.000	-15.78	-7.81
EG	CG	5.15*	1.51	.006	1.16	9.13
	PG	-1.20	1.51	.858	-5.18	2.78
	EPG	-6.65*	1.51	.000	-10.63	-2.66
PG	CG	6.35*	1.51	.000	2.36	10.33
	EG	1.20	1.51	.858	-2.78	5.18
	EPG	-5.45*	1.51	.003	-9.43	-1.46
EPG	CG	11.80*	1.51	.000	7.81	15.78
	EG	6.65*	1.51	.000	2.66	10.63

| PG | 5.45* | 1.51 | .003 | 1.46 | 9.43 |

In the top row, it could be seen that the CG (M = 11.60) was significantly different from all the experimental groups of the study, giving rise to the immediate conclusion that different types of treatments employed in the current research study were, indeed, effective. In addition, among the experimental groups, there was not a significant difference between EG (M = 16.75) and PG (M = 17.95); however, EPG learners' mean score (M = 23.40) was significantly higher than those of EG and PG.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The current study investigated the effect of etymological elaboration pictorial elucidation and etymological elaboration/pictorial elucidation strategies on improvement of learning of L2 idioms. Moreover, this study sought to investigate which one of these strategies of teaching idioms yields better results in improving L2 learners' idiom learning.

4.1 Addressing First Research Question

To answer the first research question, the posttest scores of the etymological group were compared to the control group's scores.

The results showed that the etymological elaboration strategy did have a significant impact on learning of idioms. Therefore, the first null hypothesis was rejected, and the following directional hypothesis is put forward:

H_{04}: The etymological elaboration strategy in idiom instruction significantly improves Iranian intermediate EFL learners' idiom learning.

Now, it is better to compare the findings related to the first research question to other related studies.

Firstly, the findings related to the first research question are consistent with a number of studies, which were reviewed in background.

The effect of the etymological elaboration strategy on idiom learning was examined by Boers, Demecheleer, and Eyckmans (2004) with several large-scale studies. One of their studies involved two groups, of which one experimental group who received the literal, original usage of the target idioms, whereas a control group from the same population served as a comparison one that was not given access to the etymological information of the same material. The scores from posttest revealed that the participants who had received the etymological information acquired significantly more idioms than the participants in control group did. Therefore, the findings are in line with the present study.

In addition, Bagheri and Fazel (2010) explored the role of etymological elaboration strategy in Iranian learners' comprehension and retention of idioms. The treatment was given to 50 advanced EFL learners in experimental and control groups. The results of their study were in line with this study and confirmed that etymological elaboration enhances idiom learning. Finally, Baleghizadeh and Mohammad Bagheri, (2012), Boers (2001), Boers, Eyckmans, and Strenger (2007) confirmed the significant role of etymological elaboration in idiom comprehension and indicated that etymology enhanced the learners' performance, which are in agreement with the findings of the first question of this study.

Moreover, Noroozi and Salehi (2013) investigated potential impacts of the etymological elaboration and rote memorization on the learning of the English idioms by Iranian EFL learners. Sixty students of the Iranmehr Language School were selected among a total number of 100 based on their performance on a Nelson proficiency test. Prior to the study, an idiom achievement test was administered to the learners in both groups to make sure that they did not know the idioms at the outset. Subsequently, the participants in the experimental group received the idioms with the relevant etymological elaborations, whereas those in the control group were asked to memorize the same idioms without the etymological elaborations for 15 sessions. The results revealed that elaboration of idioms was significantly more effective than learning the same idioms by rote memorization.

4.2 Addressing Second Research Question

The compared results from the scores of the pictorial and control groups showed that the pictorial elucidation strategy had a significant effect on the learning of idioms.

Hence, the second null hypothesis was also rejected and the following directional hypothesis comes forward:

H_{05}: The pictorial elucidation strategy in idiom instruction significantly improves Iranian intermediate EFL learners' idiom learning.

Some previous studies are also in line with the findings of the second research question of this study. For example, Boers, Piquer Piriz, Stengers, and Eyckmans (2009) suggest that pictorial elucidation helps learners comprehend and remember the meaning of L2 idioms.

4.3 Addressing Third Research Question

Considering the third research question, the other 20 selected participants in this group received the etymology and related pictures of the idioms simultaneously, and their scores were compared to the control group's scores.

Similarly, the results showed the integration of etymological elaboration and pictorial elucidation strategy had a significant effect on the learning of the idioms.

Thus, the third null hypothesis was also rejected, and the following directional hypothesis comes forth:

H_{06}: The etymological elaboration/pictorial elucidation strategy in idiom instruction facilitates Iranian intermediate EFL learners' idiom learning.

4.4 Addressing Fourth Research Question

As for the fourth research question, the statistical analysis of the related data revealed that among these three strategies (i.e., etymological elaboration, pictorial elucidation, and etymological-elaboration/pictorial-elucidation), there was not a significant difference between the etymological elaboration strategy and the pictorial elucidation strategy; however, the integration of these two strategies did have the most effect on the participants' idiom learning.

5. Implications of the Study

From the teaching point of view, idioms create special problems for L2 teachers and L2 idioms are not taught very well (Granger, 1998; Irujo, 1986). Therefore, the findings of the present study, firstly, can have notable implications for teachers. They can use multiple strategies in their idiom classes rather than applying a single strategy in teaching idioms in order to enhance their students' comprehension of idioms. Moreover, by knowing the advantages of etymological elaboration and pictorial elucidation in learning L2 idioms, teachers can use these strategies in their English classes.

Most of L2 learners, especially in language institutes, are not aware of what idioms are. They translate idioms word for word and cannot recognize the meanings of idioms; moreover, L2 learners cannot memorize every single idiom easily and keep them in their mind. Therefore, the present study, secondly, can have implications for L2 learners in order to use etymological elaboration, pictorial elucidation, or a mixture of different strategies instead of the traditional rote learning of idioms.

Thirdly, the findings can have implications for materials developers or textbook designers. They can develop idiom books, which are more comprehensible for learners through accompanying idioms by their etymologies or their related pictures or both of them according to learners' level, gender, interests, and culture.

6. Limitations of the Study

The present study such as many other studies was not without its limitations. First, the sample was small. Totally, 80 participants were selected for groups of this study. That is, for each group, 20 participants were assigned. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings must be treated more cautiously, as a small sample was included in the study.

The issue of L2 learners' level is the second limitation of this study. According to the different treatments in this study, intermediate learners might come up with more problems concerning the used etymological instruction rather than pictorial instruction. Moreover, the participants' level of proficiency, which was limited to intermediate, may be regarded as the other limitation of the study.

The final limitation of the study was the sex of the participants that was limited to female learners. As gender is an important variable in language learning, it can, of course, affect idiom learning; hence, the results of the present study may be different with male learners.

7. Suggestions for Further Research

The interpretations of the findings lead to several recommendations for further research. It is hoped that L2 researchers keep these suggestions in their mind and apply them to their forthcoming research studies.

According to Abbasi and Zarei (2013), there are some strategies (as mentioned in background) for teaching idioms. This study used only two strategies (i.e., etymological elaboration and pictorial elucidation). Future researchers can apply other strategies in teaching idioms. There seems to be a need to carry out further studies

that involve all of these strategies in order to make generalization about the most effective strategy of teaching idioms.

According to Trosborg (1985), L2 learners' ability to figure out the meaning of metaphorical idioms is correlated with their proficiency in an L2. Therefore, the L2 proficiency of learners is one of the important factors in learning idioms. It is hoped that further research can be taken into consideration the levels of L2 learners and examine this study on different proficiency levels.

L2 learners should be able to comprehend and produce L2 idioms in the four language skills (i.e., listening, reading, speaking, and writing). Therefore, measuring idiom comprehension and idiom production separately can be another recommendation for future research.

Finally, further research also can be done to compare the effect of these strategies on other areas of language such as collocation, vocabulary, proverbs, and so on.

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