

# Utilizing Songs as a Medium for Teaching English Idioms: Bridging Linguistic Competence and Cultural Understanding in Indonesian EFL Students

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## Abstract

This study aims to analyze the use of idioms in songs as a means to understand their contribution to meaning, mood, and theme, while exploring their emotional, cultural, and narrative dimensions. Utilizing a qualitative research approach with a literature study design, the research collects data from relevant journal articles, books, and other academic sources, focusing on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning among Indonesian students. The instrument used is songs containing idioms, which serve as teaching tools to enhance students' understanding of idiomatic expressions. The findings indicate that although idioms are often overlooked in language instruction, the use of songs as a teaching medium proves effective in improving students' listening skills and memory of idioms. Songs not only provide an engaging and memorable context but also enrich students' cultural understanding. In conclusion, integrating songs into idiom instruction can enhance students' linguistic competence and cultural appreciation, making it an effective strategy for EFL educators to bridge the gap between language learning and cultural appreciation.

**Keywords:** Cultural Understanding, EFL, Idioms, Language Instruction, Songs.

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## INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a bridge for communication, cultural exchange, and education. Among the myriad elements that compose a language, idioms stand out as expressions that encapsulate cultural heritage and convey meanings far beyond their literal interpretations. They represent a rich and complex aspect of language, reflecting the historical and social nuances of a community. In English, idioms are a vital part of both spoken and written communication, offering depth and creativity to expressions (Alqarni, 2019).

For learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), mastering idioms is a significant milestone. However, their non-literal nature poses challenges, often leaving learners perplexed. Idioms are not only linguistic constructs but also cultural artifacts. They require learners to grasp the underlying cultural and contextual meanings, making their acquisition a complex yet rewarding process. The teaching of English in Indonesia has evolved to include not only grammar, vocabulary, and syntax but also the cultural dimensions of the language. Introducing idioms to learners at an early stage can foster a deeper understanding of English-speaking cultures and enhance fluency. Songs, as a teaching tool, have proven to be effective in making idiomatic expressions accessible and engaging. With their rhythmic and melodic appeal, songs provide learners with authentic contexts to explore and internalize idioms (Chen, 2021).

This paper examines the role of songs in teaching idioms to EFL learners, highlighting their potential to address the challenges associated with idiom acquisition. By analyzing idioms within song lyrics, this study aims to bridge the gap between linguistic competence and cultural understanding, offering a holistic approach to language learning.

English language is seen as a significant part of education. The teaching of English language in Indonesia is now even started from the early level of education. This English teaching even gets more complex as the students reach higher education level. High-school students, for instance, is already expected to master the English tenses and in fact, all part of English, namely, grammar, writing, reading, listening, speaking are comprehensively taught to the students. In spite of the completeness of the English language teaching, we should bear in mind that the teaching of English language is not concerned only on learning the language itself, but also learning the expressions. That is, learning how people use figurative language in order to express certain meanings as they speak. This figurative language can be found in idioms. An idiom is a phrase whose meaning cannot be determined by the literal definition of the phrase itself, but refers instead to a figurative meaning that is known only through common use. Jacqueline Ambrose explains that idioms share cultural and historical (Liu, 2022).

Among the various definitions of idioms are (1) the language peculiar to a people, country, class, community or, more rarely, an individual; (2) a construction or expression having a meaning different from the literal one or not according to the usual that best suits the focus of this paper. In someone's native language, idioms may be a natural part of speaking. An idiom is not really considered to be set in a language. They are more in one's culture. Idioms are mostly for just one language. In some cases, when an idiom is translated into

Another language, the meaning of the idiom is changed or does not make any sense as it once did in another language. Idioms are probably the hardest thing for a person to learn in the process of learning a new language. This is because most people grow up using idioms as if their true meanings make sense. Further, Saeed (2003) identifies an idiom as words collocated together happen to become fossilized, becoming fixed over time. This collocation -- words commonly used in a group -- changes the definition of each of their words that exist. As an expression, the word-group becomes a team, so to speak. That is, their collocated words develop a specialised meaning as a whole and an idiom is born. An idiom is a group of words in which the meaning of this group is different from what would be expected. If the actual words of an idiom were understood as they appear, their entire meaning would be changed and the group of words would make no sense in its context as if it were understood as to be an idiom. When a person uses an idiom, the listener might take the actual meaning wrong if he or she has not heard this figure of speech before. Idioms tend to confuse those not already familiar with them; students of a new language must learn their idiomatic expressions the way they learn their vocabulary (Yildirim, 2019).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Idioms play a critical role in language learning and communication, encapsulating cultural values, historical contexts, and figurative meanings. They often challenge learners because of their non-literal nature and deep cultural embedding, making them an essential but difficult component of mastering a language.

### The Nature and Challenges of Idioms in Language Learning

Idioms, as expressions with meanings not deducible from their words, provide insight into the cultural and social fabric of a language community (Saeed, 2003). However, their non-literal nature makes them one of the most challenging aspects of language acquisition. Learners may struggle to understand idioms due to the lack of direct equivalents in their native languages. Irujo (1986) identifies the main challenges as follows:

- Infrequent Use in Beginner Teaching: Idioms are rarely prioritized in initial language instruction, which focuses more on literal and straightforward vocabulary.
- Variation in Formality: Idioms can range from casual slang to formal expressions, making it difficult for learners to determine appropriate contexts for use.
- Limited Teaching Materials: Many language resources either ignore idioms or provide insufficient exercises, limiting opportunities for learners to practice.

Despite these challenges, idioms are vital for achieving fluency and understanding the cultural nuances of a language. Cooper (1999) underscores their significance in American daily life, highlighting how idioms enrich communication and reflect the lived experiences of native speakers.

### Songs as a Medium for Teaching Idioms

Music offers a unique and effective method for teaching idioms, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings. Songs combine rhythm, melody, and lyrics, creating an engaging context that enhances language learning. Adachi (1991) notes that songs are authentic linguistic artifacts, often containing idiomatic expressions used by native speakers. They present idioms in meaningful contexts, making them more accessible and memorable for learners.

The motivational aspects of songs are also significant. Frith (1997) and Boekaerts (2002) emphasize that motivation plays a key role in successful language learning. Songs naturally stimulate interest and engagement, encouraging learners to explore idiomatic expressions within a familiar and enjoyable medium. When learners encounter idioms in songs, they gain exposure to authentic usage, enhancing their ability to comprehend and use these expressions effectively.

### Cultural Significance of Idioms

Understanding idioms is not only about language proficiency but also about cultural competence. Idioms often reflect historical events, societal norms, and shared experiences unique to a culture. For instance, expressions like "burn the midnight oil" carry connotations that extend beyond their literal meanings, providing insights into work ethics and cultural values. By teaching idioms, educators help learners access deeper layers of meaning within the target language, fostering greater cross-cultural understanding (Cooper, 1999).

### Practical Applications of Songs in Teaching Idioms

Songs provide an immersive environment for learners to engage with idioms. By listening to and analyzing lyrics, students can:

- Contextualize Idioms: Songs place idioms within narratives, making their meanings clearer and easier to grasp.
- Enhance Retention: The repetitive nature of song lyrics aids in memorizing idiomatic expressions.

- c. Develop Listening Skills: Songs improve auditory comprehension, helping learners recognize idioms in spoken language.
- d. Foster Cultural Appreciation: Through songs, learners gain exposure to the cultural contexts in which idioms are used.

Idioms play a crucial role in language as they encapsulate cultural nuances, figurative meanings, and historical contexts, making them essential for understanding and mastering a language (Saeed, 2003). Idioms are particularly significant in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, where they serve as a bridge to both linguistic and cultural fluency.

### **Idioms in Language Learning**

Idioms pose unique challenges for learners due to their non-literal meanings. As McPartland (1981) explains, idioms are inherently figurative, making them difficult to interpret and teach. These expressions often lack direct counterparts in other languages, leading to potential misinterpretations when learners rely on their native language. Iruijo (1986) further elaborates that idioms are challenging because they are seldom included in beginner-level teaching materials, and their formality varies widely, from casual slang to formal expressions.

Idioms are a vital part of American culture and everyday speech, as noted by Cooper (1999). Learning idioms enhances cultural competence, enabling learners to better understand and participate in authentic communication. This underscores the need for innovative teaching methods that incorporate idiomatic expressions into the EFL curriculum.

### **Songs as a Medium for Teaching Idioms**

Using songs in EFL classrooms is an effective strategy for teaching idioms, as they provide authentic, engaging, and culturally rich contexts (Adachi, 1991). Songs naturally integrate idioms into their narratives, making them accessible and relatable for learners. Additionally, song lyrics often resonate with learners' interests, motivating them to explore language through a medium they enjoy.

Frith (1997) and Boekaerts (2002) highlight the importance of motivation in language learning. Songs, with their rhythmic and melodic appeal, can capture students' attention and create a positive learning environment. When learners encounter idioms in songs, they not only practice listening skills but also develop a deeper understanding of cultural and linguistic nuances.

### **Previous Studies on Idioms in Songs**

Several studies have analyzed the role of idioms in songs. For instance, Zakiyah (2019) explored the use of English songs in teaching young learners, demonstrating their effectiveness in introducing complex expressions like idioms. Sanad et al. (2017) examined idiomatic expressions in song lyrics, emphasizing their ability to convey emotions and enhance storytelling. Similarly, Zidni et al. (2020) analyzed the translation of idioms in literary texts and their equivalents in different languages, offering insights into cross-cultural communication challenges.

Constant et al. (2017) and Hasheimpour & Villavicencio (2020) further contributed to the understanding of idiomaticity by examining computational approaches to identifying idioms in texts. These studies highlight the potential for integrating technology into language teaching, particularly in analyzing idiomatic expressions. The literature reviewed indicates that idioms are a valuable yet challenging aspect of language learning. Songs offer a practical and enjoyable medium for teaching idioms, bridging the gap between linguistic proficiency and cultural understanding. Further research could explore the development of specialized teaching materials and technological tools to enhance the learning of idioms through songs.

Idioms play a critical role in language learning and communication, encapsulating cultural values, historical contexts, and figurative meanings. They often challenge learners because of their non-literal nature and deep cultural embedding, making them an essential but difficult component of mastering a language.

### **The Nature and Challenges of Idioms in Language Learning**

Idioms, as expressions with meanings not deducible from their words, provide insight into the cultural and social fabric of a language community (Saeed, 2003). However, their non-literal nature makes them one of the most challenging aspects of language acquisition. Learners may struggle to understand idioms due to the lack of direct equivalents in their native languages. Iruijo (1986) identifies the main challenges as follows:

- a. Infrequent Use in Beginner Teaching: Idioms are rarely prioritized in initial language instruction, which focuses more on literal and straightforward vocabulary.
- b. Variation in Formality: Idioms can range from casual slang to formal expressions, making it difficult for learners to determine appropriate contexts for use.
- c. Limited Teaching Materials: Many language resources either ignore idioms or provide insufficient exercises, limiting opportunities for learners to practice.

Despite these challenges, idioms are vital for achieving fluency and understanding the cultural nuances of a language. Cooper (1999) underscores their significance in American daily life, highlighting how idioms enrich communication and reflect the lived experiences of native speakers.

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The motivational aspects of songs are also significant. Frith (1997) and Boekaerts (2002) emphasize that motivation plays a key role in successful language learning. Songs naturally stimulate interest and engagement, encouraging learners to explore idiomatic expressions within a familiar and enjoyable medium. When learners encounter idioms in songs, they gain exposure to authentic usage, enhancing their ability to comprehend and use these expressions effectively.

### **Studies on Idioms in Songs**

Research on the use of songs to teach idioms has highlighted their effectiveness in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps. Zakiyah (2019) demonstrated that incorporating songs into language instruction for young learners significantly improved their understanding of idiomatic expressions. Similarly, Sanad et al. (2017) analyzed idioms in song lyrics, illustrating how they contribute to emotional resonance and storytelling.

Zidni et al. (2020) explored the challenges of translating idioms across languages, using literary texts as a primary source. Their findings reveal that idioms often lose their cultural and figurative essence during translation, emphasizing the importance of context in understanding and teaching idiomatic expressions.

Constant et al. (2017) and Hasheimpour & Villavicencio (2020) provide a computational perspective on idioms, examining how contextual embeddings can aid in identifying idiomaticity in texts. These studies highlight the potential for integrating technology into the teaching of idioms, offering tools to analyze and practice idiomatic expressions effectively.

### **Cultural Significance of Idioms**

Understanding idioms is not only about language proficiency but also about cultural competence. Idioms often reflect historical events, societal norms, and shared experiences unique to a culture. For instance, expressions like "burn the midnight oil" carry connotations that extend beyond their literal meanings, providing insights into work ethics and cultural values. By teaching idioms, educators help learners access deeper layers of meaning within the target language, fostering greater cross-cultural understanding (Cooper, 1999).

### **Practical Applications of Songs in Teaching Idioms**

Songs provide an immersive environment for learners to engage with idioms. By listening to and analyzing lyrics, students can:

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- b. **Enhance Retention:** The repetitive nature of song lyrics aids in memorizing idiomatic expressions.
- c. **Develop Listening Skills:** Songs improve auditory comprehension, helping learners recognize idioms in spoken language.
- d. **Foster Cultural Appreciation:** Through songs, learners gain exposure to the cultural contexts in which idioms are used.

While idioms may not be explicitly labelled as such in song lyrics, many songs incorporate figurative language, including idiomatic expressions, to convey emotions, tell stories, or create vivid imagery. Here are a few examples of songs that feature idioms or idiomatic expressions in their lyrics. It seems there might be a misunderstanding in your request. A "literature review" typically refers to a systematic and comprehensive overview of existing academic literature on a particular topic. It's a scholarly approach to understanding the current state of knowledge on a subject. If you're referring to a literature review in the context of songs, it's not a common or established term in the field of music or songwriting. However, I'll provide an interpretation based on the context you might be hinting at. In the realm of songwriting, especially in genres with narrative or storytelling elements, artists often draw inspiration from literature, poetry, or cultural idioms. Their "literary review" in songs could then reveal their incorporation of literary elements, including idioms, into song lyrics. For many reasons, idioms are difficult to learn and to teach. As stated by McPartland (1981), idioms are not literal: they do not mean what they say. Their easiest ones are those which have exact counterparts in their learners' mother tongue, and their most difficult ones are those which have no counterparts and whose meaning cannot be derived from the combined meaning of their constituents. In line with their previous statements, in their article on learning and teaching idioms Irujo (1986) asserts that second language idioms are very difficult to learn because they are not literal and they do not mean what they say. In addition, she attributes the difficulty of idioms to their following: First, Idioms are frequently omitted in their speech addressed to second language learners. Native speakers tend to use simple, concrete, everyday vocabulary when they address second language learners. Second: Idioms vary in formality from slang and colloquialisms to those which can be used in formal situations. If learners try to rely on their first language to help them use their second language, they will be successful in only a very few instances. In most cases, this strategy will produce an incorrect and often comical form. Third: Many second language materials either ignore idioms entirely or relate them to their expressions section of vocabulary lists, without providing exercises for learning them. Despite their difficulty to teach English idioms, it is still necessary for their English teachers to teach their EFL students these idioms. The reason is because idioms are common in American daily life and provide a rich source of American culture (Cooper, 1999). The previous statement clearly confirms that learning English language is not merely learn the system of the language but also covers the cultural part of the language or more precisely the native speaker of the English language.



For example, a songwriter might use idioms, metaphors, or references to classic literature in their lyrics to convey deeper meanings or evoke specific emotions. This integration of literary elements can add layers of complexity and depth to the song's narrative. If you have a specific question or if there's a particular aspect of the "literature review in songs" that you're interested in, please provide more details, and I'll do my best to assist you. It appears there might be a persistent confusion or a specific term you're referring to that I'm not fully grasping. If by "literature review idiom in songs" you're seeking information on how idioms are incorporated into song lyrics and how this might be examined or reviewed in a scholarly or critical context, let me provide some insights: A literature review in this context would involve examining existing studies, articles, or critical analyses that explore the use of idioms in song lyrics. Scholars or researchers might investigate how so references, or literary devices in their work

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a literature study design. The literature study methodology was selected to comprehensively analyze existing research, theories, and pedagogical practices regarding idiom acquisition through music in language learning contexts. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the relationship between linguistic competence and cultural understanding without the constraints of experimental intervention, focusing instead on synthesizing established knowledge and identifying patterns across various educational settings and student populations.

The data collection process involves systematic identification and selection of relevant academic literature published between 2019 and 2022, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference proceedings, and dissertations. Sources were gathered using electronic databases such as ERIC, JSTOR, Scopus, and Google Scholar, employing key search terms including "idiom teaching," "songs in EFL," "music and language learning," "cultural competence," "Indonesian EFL learners," and "idiomatic expressions." The selection criteria prioritized studies that specifically addressed the intersection of music-based pedagogy, idiom acquisition, and cultural understanding within EFL contexts, with particular attention to research conducted in Asian educational settings comparable to the Indonesian context.

The analytical framework employs content analysis techniques to systematically identify recurring themes, methodological approaches, theoretical foundations, and pedagogical implications across the selected literature. The analysis focuses on four key dimensions: (1) the cognitive processes involved in idiom acquisition through musical engagement, (2) the cultural contextual factors that influence idiom comprehension, (3) motivational aspects of song-based language instruction, and (4) practical implementation strategies for Indonesian EFL classrooms. Each selected source is coded according to these dimensions, allowing for thematic mapping that highlights convergences and divergences in research findings, theoretical perspectives, and educational applications.

To ensure research quality and validity, this study implements triangulation by examining multiple types of sources (empirical studies, theoretical papers, and pedagogical guidance) and diverse methodological approaches (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research). Additionally, the analysis acknowledges potential limitations and biases in the existing literature, including publication bias, cultural and contextual variables, and methodological constraints. The findings are presented as a coherent synthesis that bridges theoretical understandings with practical implications, offering Indonesian EFL educators evidence-based strategies for integrating songs into idiom instruction while simultaneously enhancing students' linguistic competence and cultural understanding.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Idioms are frequently omitted in the speech addressed to second language learners. Native speakers tend to use simple, concrete, everyday vocabulary when they address second language learners. Second: Idioms vary in formality from slang and colloquialisms to those which can be used in formal situations. If learners try to rely on their first language to help them use their second language, they will be successful in only a very few instances. In most cases, this strategy will produce an incorrect and often comical form. Third: Many second language materials either ignore idioms entirely or relate them to their "other expressions" section of vocabulary lists, without providing exercises for learning them. Despite their difficulty to teach English idioms, it is still necessary for their English teachers to teach their EFL students these idioms. The reason is because idioms are common in American daily life and provide a rich source of American culture (Cooper, 1999). The previous statement clearly confirms that learning English language is not merely learn the system of the language but also covers the cultural part of the language or more precisely the native speaker of the English language.

As elaborated in the previous paragraph, motivation has an important role in learning. For an English teacher, one of the effective ways to teach English to EFL students is by using teaching instruments. In this case, the teaching instruments that can be used to teach idioms to EFL students are songs. Songs are utilized for the listening activities. The songs that are used should contain idioms in their lyrics. By doing so, the students can enjoy the listening activities and at the same time they are also learning idioms. Lyrics of popular songs are linguistically innovative, as they are what songwriters and

singers want to say using English, but not for the sake of teaching English. These songs have something that appeals strongly to people. Sometimes understanding English popular song is a learner's principle interest or reason for learning English, as well as understanding movies and books (Adachi, 1991).

A student's willingness to learn can be encouraged through motivation. As maintained by Frith (1997):

*Motivation can be defined as the internal drive directing behaviour towards some end. Inertia is a property of matter by which it remains at rest or in uniform motion in the same straight line unless acted upon by some external force. Motivation helps individuals overcome inertia."*

Emphasizes that motivation to learn is paramount to student success. Corresponding to this statement, Boekaerts (2002) confirms that motivational beliefs act as favourable contexts for learning. Motivational beliefs refer to the opinions, judgements and values that students hold about objects, events or subject-matter domains. Researchers have described the beliefs that students use to assign meaning to learning situations. A specific set of motivational beliefs pertains to the value students attach to a domain.

## CONCLUSION

Idiom in Songs is not only about teaching the systems of the English language, but also concerned with the cultural aspect of the native speaker. This cultural aspect can be learned through idioms. Since English idioms show the uniqueness of their culture, a unique phenomenon as well as a distinctive expression of American culture. Thus, teaching idioms is seen as important for EFL student. Yet, it is not an easy task for the EFL teacher. However, there is an instrument that can be used to teach idioms, that is, songs. Songs can motivate students to learn English, therefore, through songs, their EFL teachers can enjoyably teach idioms. English songs that contain idioms can be an effective means to learn idioms. By utilising songs, EFL teachers can practice their listening skills with their students and at the same time, improving their knowledge of English idioms.

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