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# The Role of Idiomatic Expressions in Improving Communicative Competence among Selected Students of Higher Institutions within Maiduguri

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**Abstract:** *This study is aimed at examining the role of idiomatic expression in improving selected higher institution students' use of English Language by enhancing effective communication among the students and with the use of idiomatic expressions. The study adopts Noam Chomsky's theory of Competence and Performance. The study covers thirty (30) students of three (3) selected higher institutions (Ramat Polytechnic, Borno State University and College of Agriculture) within Maiduguri. Ten (10) students are selected from each school with tables used to show their grades in oral and written tests. The study reveals that the students of the three schools exhibit good oral and written skills using idiomatic expressions with minimal amount of differences realised in terms of performance between the oral and written tests. It can be concluded that students are good in using idiomatic expressions regardless of the expressions being oral or written.*

**Key words:** *Idiomatic expression, Competence, Performance*

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## INTRODUCTION

Idiomatic Expression are expressions whose individual meaning are different from the meaning as a whole. They are often used to express feelings in an unusual way. These are used by students in higher institution either spoken or written as this will effectively develop their communicative competence.

This study is aimed at examining the role of idiomatic expression in improving selected higher institution students' use of English Language by enhancing effective communication among the students and with the use of idiomatic expressions using Noam Chomsky's theory of Competence (what one knows) and Performance (what one can do). Idiomatic Expressions are not only meant to equip the student with effective means of communication but also help in developing other skills of language learning. It is one of the sub-topics in English Language. The study related competence to performance by assessing students' actual performance with their theoretical knowledge of the Idiomatic expressions.

The study covers thirty (30) students of three (3) selected higher institutions (Ramat Polytechnic, Borno State University and College of Agriculture) within Maiduguri. Ten (10) students are selected from each schools.

The study is significant because it is designed to find out whether differences exist between students' competences (what they know about English Idiomatic expressions) and performance (what they can do with English Idiomatic expression). The study will also be important because it is designed to find out whether differences exist between students' competences (what they know about English Idiomatic expressions) and performance (what they can do with English Idiomatic expression).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section consists of a review of some literature on the Concept of Idiomatic Expression and studies on Idiomatic Expressions.

### **The Concept of Idiomatic Expressions**

The term "Idiomatic Expression" is an expression whose individual meaning is different from the meaning as a whole. It can also mean two or more words with meaning other than the actual meaning. They are often used to express feelings in an unusual way. These are used in spoken and written form as an effective means of communication. Examples are as follows:

1. Hit the hay - go to bed
2. Tie the knot - get married
3. Kill two birds with one stone - solve two problems with one effort
4. A piece of cake – very easy
5. Beating around the bush – not going straight to the point
6. Driving me bananas – making me go crazy
7. Get over it – forget about the past
8. Hang out – spent time with friends
9. Make a key decision - make an important decision
10. Knocked on my heels - surprised

It is obvious that the idiomatic expressions above all have a different meaning to their literal meaning.

### **2.2 Studies on Idiomatic Expressions**

Several studies have been carried out on idioms in language. For example, Al-khada (2015) in his paper titled "Towards Idiomatic Competence of Yemeni English as a Foreign Language Undergraduate" investigates the recognition, comprehension and English idiomatic usages of Yemeni EFL students. Specifically, the paper dwells on how idiomatic competence of 63 sophomores sample and English proficiency which is carried out at English department University of Taiz. Questionnaire and idiomatic test are used to collect the data for the study. It is found that students with higher score in idiomatic test performed better than their fellow students with low score in listening and speaking skills test. The researcher concluded by giving suggestions.

Liotas (2015) is another study on idiomatic expression that dwells on pragmatics. The paper is aimed at studying how ESOL class Rooms develop idiomatic competence. The paper adopts an integrated theoretical framework for the analysis. The findings show that idiomatic learning process needs to go with the learning process of the English language to achieve a social relevance and communicative reality in idiomatic expressions among students.

In another study on idioms, Khonbi & Sadeghi (2017) investigates the instructional affects teaching idioms have on idiomatic competence of learners. Four modes of teaching (sentence, short movies, use of role-playing and definition) are used to test the effect of teaching idioms. Forty-seven (47) learners of English language from two language schools are tested to find out the knowledge of their idioms. In one month, one hundred (100) idioms are taught to the students. The findings reveal that there are significance differences among the four (4) idiomatic teaching modes. Role playing increase learner's attention and interest which makes it easy for them to interpret idiomatic expression.

Similarly, Adam (2015), like the present study, examines the role played by Idioms in improving communicative competence in English as a foreign language learners of a Judanease University. The paper highlights idioms of EFL as basic unit of language. The researcher together with twenty-one (21) lecturers interviewed the students. Forty-seven (47) students are given pre-test and post- test on idiomatic expressions. The result of the tests shows that there is a significant difference in the two (2) tests given. The post-test indicates a rise in the student's performance after studying the idioms from a given syllable. It is concluded that communicative skills of students have improved as a result of teaching idioms to the students.

Sheriff (2020) is also a study on idiomatic expression like the above studies reviewed. The study evaluates competence and performance in idiomatic expressions using fifty (50) ND1 students of Ramat Polytechnic Maiduguri. The study tries to find out if the good performance exhibited by these students in GNS 101 Examination would reflect their actual performance in using idiomatic expression in realistic situations. The students were subjected to actual performance tests using twenty idiomatic expressions in oral and written tasks. The result derived from the two tests were compared using percentages, means score, standard deviations, correlation co-efficient and t-test. It was found that there is a significant difference exists between the two tests. It was concluded that the results derived from the GNS 101 examination could not be defended upon to make valid statements on the students' actual performance in idiomatic expression.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Tests of thirty (30) students of the three (3) selected higher institutions (Ramat Polytechnic, Borno State University and College of Agriculture) are presented as data. Twenty minutes is given to each student (ten minutes for oral test and ten minutes for written test) to collect the data. The tests are analysed using Noam Chomsky's theory of Competence and Performance. Tables are used to show students' performance and teacher's remark on idiomatic expressions in oral and written tests. The data is presented and analysed below.

**Table 1 (10 ND 1 Students of Ramat Polytechnic)**

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Oral test</b>	<b>Written test</b>	<b>Remark</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>61</b>	

From the table above, ten students of ND 1 (Nutrition Dentistry) Ramat Polytechnic are shown to have carried out both oral and written test of idiomatic expressions. Nine of the ten students were good in both tests. Only student one was excellent. The ten students score a total of seventy-seven marks in the oral test while a total of sixty-one marks was recorded in the written test with not much difference in terms of performance between the two tests.

**Table 2 (10 Part 1 Students of Borno State University)**

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Oral test</b>	<b>Written test</b>	<b>Remark</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Good</b>

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<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>60</b>	

Table two above shows ten part one students of Languages and Linguistic department, Borno State University who carried out oral and written test of idiomatic expressions. Nine of the ten students were also good from both tests. Only one student was excellent. The ten students score a total of seventy-five marks in the oral test while a total of sixty marks was recorded in the written test with very little difference seen in terms of performance between the oral and written tests.

**Table 3 (10 ND 1 Students of College of Agriculture)**

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Oral test</b>	<b>Written test</b>	<b>Remark</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>57</b>	

In table three above, ten ND1(General Studies) students of College of Agric also carried out oral and written test of idiomatic expressions. Eight of the ten students were good from the two tests. Two students were excellent. The ten students score a total of sixty-seven marks in the oral test while a total of fifty-seven marks was recorded in the written test with a little difference in terms of performance between the oral and written tests realised.

## **DISCUSSION**

Thirty students were selected to carry out both oral and written tests from three selected schools namely, Ramat Polytechnic, Borno State University and College of Agric with ten students from each school. It is obvious from the analysis that all the students of the three schools performed well in both their tests. Their grades are either good or excellent. Ten students of ND 1 (Nutrition Dentistry) Ramat Polytechnic carried out both oral and written test of idiomatic expressions with nine of the students good from both tests while only one student was excellent. A total of seventy-seven marks in their oral test was recoded while a total of sixty-one marks was recorded in their written test. Ten part one students of Languages and Linguistic department, Borno State University also carried out oral and written test of idiomatic expressions with nine of the students good from the tests while one student was excellent. A total of seventy-five marks in their oral test was recoded while a total of sixty marks was recorded in their written test. Another ten ND1(General Studies) students of College of Agric similarly conducted oral and written test of idiomatic expressions with eight of the students good from the tests while two students were excellent. A total of sixty-seven marks in their oral test was recorded while a total of fifty-seven marks was recorded in their written test. All the schools have little differences in terms of performance between the oral and written tests.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the students of the three schools and their ability to communicate in oral and written medium using idiomatic expressions were good with considerable amount of differences realised in terms of performance between the oral and written tests. It can also be concluded that students are good in using idiomatic expressions regardless the expressions being oral or written.

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