

EVALUATING PROFICIENCY IN USING IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN ACADEMIC
WRITING BY THIRD-LEVEL SECOND-LANGUAGE ENGLISH STUDENTS AT A
SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

by

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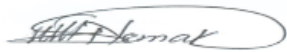
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DECLARATION

I, *Munyadziwa Sylvia Nemakhavhani* (Student Number: 9423923), hereby declare that this dissertation, titled "*Evaluating Proficiency in Using Idiomatic Expressions in Academic Writing by Third-Level Second-Language English Students at a South African University*," submitted for the Master of Arts in English Language Teaching (ELT) at the University of Venda, hereby submitted by me, has not been submitted previously for a degree at this or any other university and that it is my work in design and execution and that all reference materials contained herein have been duly acknowledged.

Signed:



20/01/2025

NEMAKHAVHANI MUNYADZIWA SYLVIA

DATE

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to:

- My husband, Nemakhavhani Azwihangwisi, has always been motivating and supportive in every step I have undertaken. May the Lord protect you.
- My sons, Ndamulelo and Mufhatutshedzwa, and my daughters, Livhuwani and Mudalo, for your immeasurable sacrifice. I would not be here without you.
- To my mother, Thaba Tshinakaho Catherine. I am here because of your prayers and moral and physical support. May God prolong your life.
- To my late father, Thaba Wilfred Matamela. May your lovely soul rest in eternal peace.

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- Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the participants for their willingness to participate in this study. This study would not have been possible without their invaluable contribution. Thank you.

He deserves the highest honour

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

DHET	: Department of Higher Education and Training
ESL	: English Second Language
L2	: Second Language
MICASE	: Michigan Corpus in Academic Spoken English
PEST	: Post-School Education and Training
SPSS	: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UHDC	: University Higher Degree Committee

ABSTRACT

Academic writing in higher education poses various challenges for South African students learning English as a second language. The students' limited competence to use idiomatic expressions effectively is a significant challenge. This study evaluated third-level second-language students' proficiency in using idiomatic expressions at a South African university. The population for this study comprised 104 third-level English major students at the University of Venda. Systematic sampling was used to obtain 104 participants for quantitative data collection because it gave all members of the larger population an equal chance of participation. Purposive sampling was utilised to select 20 participants for collecting qualitative data based on the study objectives and what the researcher hoped to find. The study adopted a mixed-method approach to collate the findings from each of them. For quantitative research, the researcher administered a questionnaire in the form of a standardised test using multiple-choice and fill-in-the-gap tests to collect data from students. For qualitative research, students wrote an administered academic task in essay form to gain a deeper understanding of their proficiency with idiomatic expressions. The study used Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27 Software to analyse quantitative data because of its feasibility. For qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed because it packaged and used codes from students' transcripts. The study found that students were incompetent in using idiomatic expressions since no question recorded 100% of the correct entries, although some were competent. The implication of this study is that English third-level students struggle with understanding and applying idiomatic expressions effectively indicating that idioms are challenging for learners due to their inherent non-literal meanings and cultural contexts. However, the study limitation was a time factor since the study was conducted only within the stipulated period. Teaching idiomatic expressions should be enhanced by incorporating varied teaching strategies to foster students' engagement and deepen their understanding.

Keywords: *Academic writing, English second language, figurative language, idiomatic expressions, paradigm, proficiency*

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a detailed background of the study, the problem statement, the aim of the study, research objectives, research questions, the significance of the study, the delimitations of the study, definitions of key operational terms, the organisation of the study, and a summary.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Students who register for an English Second Language (ESL) are expected to write thought-provoking ideas in their academic writings, incorporating idiomatic expressions to enhance their communicative competence. Considering this, most students face difficulties in using idiomatic expressions in academic writing. Effective communication is a cornerstone of human interaction, and language is fundamental. Marpaung (2019) states that language allows individuals to express themselves and convey their intentions, fostering the exchange of fresh ideas. Likewise, Herman and Cook (2019) underscore the significance of language as an integral communication component, asserting that meaningful interaction would be complicated without it. Furthermore, language is indispensable for facilitating effective communication among people.

The global recognition of the English language is due to its widespread use in international business, technology, and science (Carkin, 2005; Ababneh & Al-Momani, 2011). In South Africa, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) has designated eleven official languages, including previously marginalised Indigenous languages, which have been granted equal status with English and Afrikaans. Ramani, Kekana, and Modiba (2007) assert that English is the most prominent medium of instruction at South African universities. However, despite this progress, English

remains the dominant language in formal settings; Parmegiani and Rudwick (2014) argue that although few speakers are truly proficient.

Murray (2010) enunciates that proficiency in English encompasses grammatical knowledge and the ability to effectively communicate across different contexts, including mastering vocabulary and idiomatic expressions essential for academic success. As a result, university students studying English must have a solid understanding of various language constructs such as grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and idiomatic expressions (Murray, 2010). Proficiency in these grammatical elements is crucial for students to communicate effectively in written and spoken formats. Furthermore, Ngoge (2023) postulates that students show enhanced performance when idioms are presented within a contextual framework. This implies that contextual learning improves idiomatic proficiency and contributes to overall academic performance. Subsequently, failure to comprehend idiomatic expressions can negatively impact academic performance and written discourse.

In addition, an idiom is an expression, word, or phrase whose figurative meaning is conventionally recognised by native speakers. Furthermore, McCarthy and O'Dell (2010) elaborate that idioms are fixed expressions, implying that their meanings cannot be deduced from the individual words that make them up. Idioms are a fundamental aspect of English vocabulary and play a significant role in attaining native-like fluency, as articulated by Nation and Meera (2002).

Nadeem and Almowalad (2022) highlighted the importance of mastering English idioms for English as a second language students in their quest for language proficiency. Lundblom and Woods (2012) added that proficiency in English idioms can enhance academic performance in spoken and written communication, facilitating language acquisition. Additionally, a solid grasp of idioms is vital for improving the linguistic skills necessary for effective academic writing among second-language students (Soto-Jurado & Garcia-Ponce, 2021).

Khoirunnisa (2002) posits that idioms are linguistic expressions or phrases encompassing various cultural elements, including religious beliefs, culture-specific

items, superstitions, and various ideologies from different societies and nations. Al-Kadi (2015) maintains that learning idioms is important to gain a deeper insight into a language's cultural nuances. Students may fully appreciate the language's cultural and historical contexts if their familiarity with idiomatic expressions is expanded. The culture of a language is often encapsulated in its idiomatic phrases. Therefore, mastering a language involves its cultural understanding. Thus, learning idioms is essential for anyone aiming to excel in a foreign or second language; the more idioms one knows, the more natural their command of English is attained. Therefore, this suggests that a strong grasp of idiomatic expression enhances overall language competence.

This understanding is crucial because idioms often convey meanings that may not be immediately apparent from the individual words. Furthermore, Ellis (1997) maintains that the ability to comprehend and use idioms in L2 is a significant indicator of language proficiency. It is clear, therefore, that idiomatic expressions are fundamental to effective communication in both academic and non-academic contexts.

In a study by Al-Kadi (2015), Yemeni EFL undergraduate students were evaluated for their ability to recognise, comprehend, and use English idiomatic expressions. The findings indicated that these students possessed limited idiomatic competence. Similarly, research by Mohdeb and Kauoache (2022) aimed to identify commonly used idiomatic expressions in the academic writing of EFL students, revealing that their familiarity with and application of theoretical and practical English idioms remains insufficient. Furthermore, Al-Khawaldeh, Al-Momani, and Bani-Khair (2016) conducted a study that explored the use of English idioms by Arab students in their academic writing. The results highlighted a significant deficiency in idiomatic competence among these students and limited awareness of the most frequently used idioms.

Nadeem and Almowalad (2022) conducted a study in Saudi Arabia to explore Saudi students' challenges in learning English idioms. They aimed to identify effective strategies to help students better understand idiomatic expressions. The study found

that many students struggled when acquiring and comprehending idioms. Correspondingly, Tran (2013) studied language students' figurative idiomatic competence and their perception of idiom learning in an EFL context in Vietnam. The results indicated that the participants had poor idiomatic competence.

Immelman and Cooper (2023) conducted a meticulous and comprehensive study to investigate the use of lexemic idioms (phrasal verbs) by undergraduate students at the esteemed University of Pretoria in their writing. The study findings indicated that non-native speakers of English face challenges in using multi-word combinations, as they tend to gravitate towards using one-word alternative verbs instead. Although idiomatic expressions play a crucial role in academic writing, research on the proficiency of South African university students in this aspect is limited. Hence, there is a pressing need to further evaluate students' idiomatic expression proficiency in academic writing at South African universities.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The findings from the previous studies conducted in other countries except South Africa regarding the use of idiomatic expressions by university students indicated that numerous English second language (L2) students face difficulties in understanding and using idioms appropriately in written discourse. It is worthwhile for students to demonstrate their language proficiency and ability to use specialised vocabulary by incorporating idiomatic expressions effectively to enhance their meaning in academic writing activities. Students who register for L2 are expected to write thought-provoking academics incorporating idiomatic expressions to enhance their communicative competence. Considering this, most students face difficulties in using idiomatic expressions in academic writing. However, there seems to be no extensive investigation or relevant research on using idiomatic expressions in academic writing by university L2 students studying English as a major module in South Africa. Hence, this study evaluated third-level English L2 students' proficiency using idiomatic expressions in academic writing at a South African university.

1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to evaluate third-level English L2 students' proficiency in using idiomatic expressions in academic writing at a South African university.

1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following were the objectives of the study:

1. To identify the idiomatic expressions used by third-level English L2 students in academic writing at a South African university.
2. To describe types of idiomatic expressions used by third-level English L2 students in academic writing at a South African university.
3. To evaluate the extent to which third-level English L2 students are proficient in using idiomatic expressions in academic writing at a South African university.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What types of idiomatic expressions are used by third-level English L2 students in academic writing at a South African university?
2. How do third-level English L2 students use idiomatic expressions in academic writing at a South African university?
3. To what extent are third-level English L2 students proficient in using idiomatic expressions in academic writing at a South African university?

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The results of this research are intended to significantly contribute to the field of English language education by assisting university-level English students in improving their proficiency with idiomatic expressions and enhancing their writing competencies.

The findings may also inform the development of strategies to incorporate idiomatic expressions into academic writing more effectively.

The researcher plans to share these results with fellow English educators at the university level. These insights can underscore the importance of teaching idiomatic expressions in language instruction and help tailor courses to address students' needs better, ultimately enriching their writing lessons. Also, this study can inspire future researchers to investigate related topics, generating further valuable insights.

1.8 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Parmaxi's (2023) postulated that delimitation is characterised as establishing the parameters of the research area. The study was conducted at the University of Venda in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The study evaluated proficiency in academic writing by third-level English L2 students. During the assessment, 99 participants completed the administered questionnaires with standardised idiom tests to match idioms with their meanings and a gap-fill test. Additionally, twenty (20) students wrote essays evaluated using a document to measure their proficiency in idiomatic expressions.

The study deliberately confined itself to this research domain and refrained from extending beyond the scope of the research question. This deliberate approach aimed to facilitate a thorough analysis of the research topic, yielding pertinent and actionable findings within the specific research context.

1.9. DEFINITION OF OPERATIONAL TERMS

1.9.1. English Second Language

Schmitt (2010) asserts that a second language is learned by individuals—both children and adults—who have prior knowledge of at least one other language. This indicates that acquiring a second language occurs in students with existing linguistic experience. Ogbodo, Otaguruagu, and Ogenyi (2015) emphasise that a second language occupies

a secondary position within an individual's language abilities. English as a second language involves the use of English by speakers with different native languages, often consisting of students who are not native English speakers and are learning to communicate effectively in both spoken and written English. Hence, this study evaluated the proficiency of third-level L2 students at a South African university in using idiomatic expressions in academic writing.

1.9.2. Academic Writing

As delineated by Dehkordi and Allami (2012), academic writing abilities include finding, evaluating, organising, and elaborating on ideas based on relevant information while articulating these ideas in one's own words. Important aspects of academic writing consist of arranging concepts effectively, formulating a clear thesis statement, composing coherent sentences, and enhancing the essay through editing, which involves proper punctuation (Ahmed & Alamin, 2012). Al Fadda (2012) posits that academic writing can be seen as a cognitive process that originates from mental engagement. Giridharan (2012) further supports this notion by stating that students' educational background, proficiency in a second language, and cognitive development all play a role in their academic writing capabilities. This suggests that academic writing content results from thoughtful consideration and intellectual effort, underscoring the importance of cognitive skills in creating high-quality academic work.

1.9.3. Figurative Language

Figurative language is a special category of linguistic meaning that differs from literal language or meaning. In defining figurative language, the researcher underscores its distinct nature in contrast to literal language. For example, Markert and Hahn (2020), Palguna, Juniarta, and Candra (2021), and Roberts and Kreuz (1994) highlight that figurative language employs various figures of speech to convey meanings that are not immediately apparent. Gibbs (1994) elaborates on this by categorising figurative language as a specific linguistic meaning that separates it from literal interpretations. This implies that figurative language, like metaphors and idioms, is more complex than literal language. Understanding the different meanings and complexities requires special skills and thought processes. This complexity highlights the researcher's

acknowledgment of the diverse and nuanced ways figurative language functions in communication.

1.9.4 Idiomatic Expressions

Idiomatic expressions are groups of words with an established meaning unrelated to the meanings of the individual words. Melina (2023) asserts that an idiomatic expression is a word or phrase that conveys a figurative meaning typically recognised by native speakers. This meaning is distinct from the idiom's literal interpretation of the individual words. In essence, idioms do not reflect the exact meaning of the words themselves; instead, they embody a more profound, implied significance (Mirza o'g 'li, & Mahsud Abdug'affor, 2024). This highlights the uniqueness of idioms in a language, as they often cannot be understood simply by analysing the words that make them up. This study also examined third-level ESL students' proficiency in using idiomatic expressions within academic writing at a South African university.

1.9.5 Proficiency

Murray (2010) defines proficiency as a language user's mastery of formal and functional aspects of language, allowing them to express and comprehend meaning accurately, fluently, and appropriately across various contexts. Rubio and Hacking (2019) state that a proficient language user can easily navigate different contexts. Furthermore, Ocampo (2021) highlights the significance of understanding the nuances of language use—possessing knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical rules and identifying the appropriate contexts for their application. This perspective shapes the objective of this study, which sought to evaluate how third-year ESL students at a South African university incorporate idiomatic expressions in their academic writing. Eventually, the researcher argues that assessing this dimension of language proficiency is crucial for understanding how students engage with and utilise language within academic contexts.

1.10 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The study is divided into five chapters, and it sought to evaluate third-level English students' proficiency in using idiomatic expressions in academic writing at one of the South African universities.

Chapter One: Introduction and Background of the Study

This chapter provides the introductory remarks of the study, including an introduction of the topic, background, problem statement, aim and objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, definition of operational terms, delimitation of the study, and organisation of the study that is at the fore of this study. Besides, it guides the reader to understand the content of this study easily.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter reviews the literature on idiomatic proficiency among university students and outlines the foundational theories underpinning this study. It discusses the Linguistic Cognitive Theory of Idioms proposed by George Lakoff (1980) and the Theory of Idioms by McCarthy and O'Dell (2010).

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

This chapter presents the research methodology employed to conduct the study. It also outlines and describes the research paradigm, research design, research setting, research participants, instruments, data collection methods, and data analysis technique. The sampling procedure and ethical considerations are also presented in this chapter.

Chapter Four: Presentation and Analysis of Data

This chapter deals with data presentation, analysis of data collected from students' English essays and the findings of the study, and interpretation of the research findings.

Chapter Five: Synthesis, Recommendations, and Conclusions

This is the final chapter of the study. It presents an overview of the study, a summary of the significant findings of the research, conclusions, the implications of the results of this study in the educational field, and recommendations for future research and current practice.

1.11 SUMMARY

This chapter explored the motivation and background of the study. The following chapter examines the literature review and theoretical framework related to the problem of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the literature review dealing with idiomatic expressions and figurative language, types of idioms, the importance of idioms, findings of the previous studies on the use of idiomatic expressions, and the theoretical framework.

A literature review analyses the research conducted on a particular academic topic, theme, or subject to highlight gaps and recommend directions for future studies. This process entails reviewing previously published works to accomplish specific research goals that past studies have not explored (Chigbu, 2023). The researcher in this study intends to examine how earlier scholars have investigated the use of idiomatic expressions in university-level written academics.

2.2 FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Figurative language consists of expressions that do not adhere to their literal meanings. Gibbs (2023) explains that figurative language is a unique linguistic meaning that contrasts with literal language. This form of expression is commonly used to create striking imagery, stir emotions, or highlight ideas in ways that literal language cannot accomplish. Loveana et al. (2021) further emphasised that mastering figurative language is essential for students to convey their meanings effectively in English. For instance, English idioms are phrases with figurative meanings that differ from their literal interpretations, making them challenging to grasp. These idiomatic expressions are commonly used in everyday conversation, yet they can pose difficulties for non-native speakers.

Moreover, using figurative language, including idioms, significantly enhances academic writing among tertiary students. Figurative language helps engage the reader by making writing more vivid and interesting while compactly presenting ideas and opinions about different subjects (Vuorinen, 2022). For instance, using an idiom like *breaking a leg* conveys encouragement in a culturally resonant way, drawing readers into the presented narrative and argument. Figurative language uses words or expressions that convey meanings distinct from their literal interpretations. This form of communication enriches discourse by providing vivid imagery and emotional depth, facilitating a clearer understanding of complex concepts (Pradopo, 2010). This suggests that figurative language enhances communication by using words and expressions beyond literal meanings.

Idiomatic expressions are deeply embedded in cultural contexts, reflecting a language community's values, beliefs, and historical backgrounds. Their use in writing not only showcases linguistic proficiency but also conveys an understanding of cultural nuances, which can resonate with readers and create a shared understanding (Wang, 2019). This implies that integrating idiomatic expressions into academic writing demonstrates the writer's familiarity with the language and its cultural context, enriching the text and potentially making it more persuasive. This cultural relevance can foster the connection between the writer and the reader, enhancing the overall impact of the academic text.

Considering this, figurative language, especially idiomatic expressions, plays a crucial role in academic writing for tertiary students. It enhances engagement, clarity, cultural relevance, depth, and creativity while requiring careful application to avoid overuse.

2.3 IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS

Several definitions of idioms have been proposed by English linguists, grammarians, lexicographers, and pedagogues. McCarthy and O'Dell (2017) posit that idioms are classified as a part of figurative language with ambiguous linguistic elements that students are exposed to while learning a new language. This means idioms are fixed expressions whose meaning is unclear from noticing the individual words. Furthermore, Lubis (2018) postulates that idiomatic expressions are fixed expressions that are not equivalent in other languages since speakers of one language may have different cultural experiences. In other words, this implies that every language has its

idiomatic expressions and different cultural backgrounds. Consequently, knowledge and understanding of idioms reflect the cultural background of a language.

Liu et al. (2023) postulate that idiomatic expressions are conventional expressions that have a meaning distinct from the meaning of the constituent words. An idiom is an expression comprised of multiple words with a non-literal meaning. In other words, the individual words in an idiom do not convey the intended meaning of the expression. For example, the phrase *break the ice* does not mean to break the ice literally but to initiate social contact. Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen (2021) concur that idiomatic expressions are lexical combinations with a specified meaning that diverges from the meanings of the individual words. The descriptions above depict idiomatic expressions as expressions whose meaning cannot be inferred from the individual words.

Makkai (2013) also stated that an idiom is a complex lexical item. It is a phrase whose meaning could not be deduced from the meaning of the morphemes that comprised it. This definition demonstrates that an idiom is a complex lexical item whose definition could not be deduced from its parts. Besides, idioms could be used and comprehended contextually when used correctly (Fathma et al., 2020). It means that the meaning of an idiom cannot be lexically comprehended.

Although numerous definitions exist for idiomatic expressions, they all concur with two unequivocal characteristics. Namely, expressions have a fixed word order that implies they are socially acceptable and that it is impossible to deduce the meaning of an idiom by merely examining the individual words it comprises (Saberian & Fotovatnia, 2011).

2.4 IMPORTANCE OF USING IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN ACADEMIC WRITING

Idiomatic expressions play a significant role in academic writing, making academic texts more engaging and easier to understand. They are also crucial for improving the expressiveness and clarity of academic writing. For instance, idioms like *lay the groundwork* or *stand on the shoulders of giants* clarify complex ideas and connect them to established knowledge, thus enhancing the reader's comprehension and interest.

Idiomatic expressions enhance and authenticate language, enabling speakers or writers to convey nuanced and creative representations of complex ideas and feelings (Cooper, 1999). This signifies that idiomatic expressions play a significant role in improving language by adding depth and authenticity. They enable writers or speakers to express complex ideas and emotions more nuanced and creatively, suggesting that language is not just a tool for communication but also a means of artistic expression. This implies that using idioms can improve communication by making it more vivid and relatable, allowing for a richer interaction between speakers.

Lundblom and Woods (2012) further highlighted the importance of understanding idioms. They suggested that idioms are commonly used in academic settings, and failing to understand them can adversely affect students' academic performance, written composition, reading comprehension, and vocabulary as they advance in age and grade level. This suggests that idiomatic expressions play a significant role in academic contexts and that students need to grasp their meaning to succeed. It implies that as students progress through their education, a lack of understanding of idioms could hinder their performance across various areas, including academic achievement, writing skills, reading comprehension, and vocabulary development. It underscores the importance of teaching and learning idioms to support students' success in learning institutions.

When language learners avoid using idioms, their speech and writing can become overly formal and rigid, lacking the fluidity characteristic of native speakers. Researchers such as Watson (1998) and Gibbs (1995) support this idea and argue that students may sound foreign without idioms and cannot be considered fully competent speakers or writers. Hence, mastering idioms is essential for language learners who aspire to be fluent.

A study by Lontas (2017) assessed students' understanding of idioms, revealing that many students possess moderate idiomatic competence. The findings indicated that while students could recognise and understand some idiomatic expressions, their proficiency in using them appropriately in context was less developed.

Boers, Eyckmans, Kappel, Stengers, and Demecheleer (2006) highlight that idiomatic phrases are valuable to language students because they enable communicators to fully encode and decode the meaning of a conversation accurately in both spoken and

written discourse. This competence is important in academic writing, where clarity and precision are paramount. This implies that idiomatic phrases are crucial in language acquisition and communication. By mastering and using these formulaic expressions, L2 students can effectively interpret the nuances of conversations and express themselves more clearly in their academic texts or writings.

The English language is especially abundant in idioms, a distinctive feature of its linguistic system. Mäntylä (2004) notes that idioms provide several unique characteristics that differentiate English from other languages, emphasising their significance. Idioms convey a variety of meanings and are vital for effective communication. The effective use of idioms in written discourse plays a significant role in enhancing communicative effectiveness. Research indicates that idioms enrich language and serve as vital tools for conveying nuanced meanings and cultural references. Consequently, they contribute to the adaptability of English in comparison to other languages, as these elements are closely related.

Kaya and Yilmaz (2018) investigated how well students learning Turkish as a foreign language utilised idioms they learned in class during their writing exercises. The study results indicated that they used 20 different idioms and mostly preferred to use highly analysable idioms while writing. In contrast, moderately analysable and unanalysable idioms were preferred less often.

Prihantoro, Leonard, and Tiara's (2021) study underscored that integrating idioms into academic writing can significantly enhance clarity and impact. The authors claim that idioms infuse the text with colour and expressiveness, which can help convey complex ideas more effectively. They found that native English authors used idioms more frequently than non-native writers, suggesting that idioms play a crucial role in making academic discourse more engaging and relatable.

Simpson and Mendis (2003) researched idiomatic expressions in academic speech, revealing that mastery is frequently linked to native speaker fluency. They identified that idioms serve multiple functions in academic discourse; for instance, they emphasise points and facilitate smoother transitions between ideas. Furthermore,

their examination of a specialised corpus demonstrated that while idioms are applied across different academic fields, their frequency of use varies.

Idioms are a significant element of English vocabulary, and for students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), mastering these expressions is essential for achieving proficiency comparable to native speakers (Nation & Meara, 2002). Many educators argue that students' proficiency in using idioms effectively is a key measure of their overall language skills in EFL/ESL contexts. Since idioms are integral to figurative language, they cannot be overlooked. Therefore, using idiomatic expressions can greatly enhance the communicative abilities of EFL students (Khan & Daşkin, 2014). Shirazi and Talebinezhad (2013) concur that a better understanding of idioms is required for proficiency and accuracy in English, and ignorance of idioms will lead to many misunderstandings. In addition, Saleh and Zakaria (2013), then Belousova (2015), concur that the understanding and fluency of idioms can be seen as a sign of language proficiency because it can be an effective way to help students improve their communication skills in the context of real life.

Al-Houiti (2020) contended that language lacking idioms is dull since idioms are essential for effective communication. The assertion is backed by research conducted by Nadeem and Almowalad (2022), which indicates that incorporating idiomatic expressions can improve one's English vocabulary development and overall language skills. Comparatively, a solid grasp of idiom is often viewed as a key indicator of language proficiency. Idioms are significant for English L2 to achieve effective communication. Similarly, familiarity with a wide range of idiomatic expressions will foster a deeper understanding of figurative expressions in language. Thus, it is a necessity that all speakers of the English Language become aware and proficient in using English idiomatic expressions as they are considered a big part of English language proficiency to be able to use idiomatic expressions when communicating in the English Language.

Vo (2020) postulates that it is crucial for students to learn idioms to fully understand and engage with the culture of the language they are studying. In alignment with this, Liu (2008) also asserts that idiomatic expressions greatly enrich a student's

comprehension of the culture and history behind a language. So, mastering a language requires linguistic abilities and a deep understanding of the cultural nuances embedded within idioms. This implies that idioms are indispensable in foreign or L2 proficiency. Besides, Belousova (2015) highlights that the capacity to understand and use idioms effortlessly indicates a person's language proficiency. Therefore, an extensive knowledge of idioms enhances fluency and leads to more natural-sounding English.

Recent research has shown that idiomatic expressions, or multiword phrases, are essential for language learning, use, and comprehension (El-Dakhs et al., 2022; Schmidt, 2010). Corresponding to Kamilevich (2023), the ability to use idiomatic expressions is a crucial and integral part of mastering English. Furthermore, Lysanets and Bieliaieva (2023) emphasised that grasping and employing these expressions is key to effective communication. This understanding facilitates clear self-expression and enhances interactions by incorporating cultural context into conversations. Consequently, it is important to include instruction on idiomatic expressions in language learning programmes to cultivate proficient speakers who can navigate both formal and informal situations effectively.

Lysanets and Bieliaieva (2023) further suggested that grasping and employing idiomatic expressions is vital for achieving communicative competence. Equally important, idioms are significant for effective communication in academic environments and can affect several aspects of academic success, such as writing skills, reading understanding, and vocabulary growth. Also, incorporating idioms into written work indicates a strong proficiency in English and familiarity with the language, both of which are crucial for improving students' academic performance.

Furthermore, Wray (2000) asserts that mastering idioms is crucial for effective language education and achieving a command equivalent to that of a native speaker. Therefore, having a robust understanding of idiomatic expressions is linked to a high level of proficiency in the language (Boers et al., 2006; Howarth, 1998; Ohlrogge, 2009; Weinert, 1995; Yorio, 1989). This is particularly important for EFL students, who need to grasp idiomatic phrases to communicate like native speakers (Schmitt, 2013). Comprehending and correctly using idiomatic expressions reflects a thorough

understanding of a foreign language. Consequently, accurately understanding and utilising idioms is a significant marker of native-like language proficiency and fluency.

The frequent occurrence of idioms in everyday language has made the conception of idioms by English students vital. Thus, idioms have a significant pragmatic role in the language because learning a language is not simply developing a linguistic system and familiarising oneself with the meaning of each word (Thyab, 2016)

The thoughtful use of idiomatic expressions can effectively highlight a writer's unique style. By deliberately selecting idioms that align with their personal voice, writers can convey their personalities and perspectives with enhanced clarity (Howarth, 2019). Incorporating idioms into writing enhances its vibrancy and improves clarity, making it more engaging. Moreover, Lontas (2017) points out that idioms assist learners in encountering and comprehending the intricacies of natural human language. Furthermore, they offer a deeper understanding of the creative expressions of human thought and the progression of language over time. This suggests that the mindful incorporation of idiomatic expressions allows writers to show their distinctive writing style and imaginative academic writings. Also, it enhances creativity, enriches the text, and strengthens the connection between the writer and the reader, ultimately leading to impactful written texts that are both engaging and authentic.

2.5. TYPES OF IDIOMS

Ghazala (2003) and Fernando (1996) categorise idioms into three main types: *pure*, *semi-idioms*, and *literal expressions*. In contrast, Makkai (1972) argues that idioms can be classified into five primary types: *full idioms*, *pure idioms*, *semi-idioms*, *proverbs*, and *various popular expressions, including semi-proverbial phrases and catchphrases*. Additionally, Makkai (1972) differentiates between *idioms of encoding*, which are decipherable, and those of *decoding*, which are not easily recognised. He further breaks down decoding idioms into two categories: *lexemic* and *sememic*. Contrary to Ghazala (2003), Fernando (1996), and Makkai (1972), McCarthy and O'Dell (2010) classified idioms into eight different types: *Verb + Object/Complement*, *Binomial*, *Trinomial*, *Proverb*, *Simile*, *Cliche*, *Euphemism*, and *Fixed expressions*.

2.5.1 THREE MAIN TYPES OF IDIOMS: Ghazala (2003) and Fernando (1996)

(a) PURE IDIOMS.

Claudia (2020) asserts that a pure idiom is a conventionalised, non-literal multiword expression whose meaning cannot be understood by adding up the meanings of the words that make up the phrase. In other words, a pure idiom is an expression whose meaning cannot be translated by translating the words one by one.

The features of pure idioms include non-literal meaning, which means that the meaning of these idioms cannot be deduced from the individual words that compose them. For example, the expression *spills the beans* is a pure idiom because its real meaning has nothing to do with beans. Pure idioms have a fixed structure that should not be altered without losing meaning. For instance, the idiom between *a rock and a hard place* as its structure cannot be altered. Furthermore, pure idioms are based on cultural context. For example, the idiom *kicks the bucket* has nothing to do with the literal kicking of the bucket but can be understood based on its cultural context. (Fernando,1996). Equally, the structure of these idioms in paragraphs cannot be altered. Hence, they are referred to as pure idioms. The figurative meaning of this idiomatic expression has to do with revealing the secret.

A study by Simpson and Mendis (2003) explored idioms within the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English, identifying 238 distinct idiom types. The research findings indicated that pure idioms are relatively uncommon in spoken academic contexts, suggesting the necessity for targeted instruction to increase students' familiarity with these expressions. Also, Avelina (2022) conducted a qualitative research study examining the various types of idioms present in English textbooks. The findings indicated the presence of 35 distinct idioms, with pure Idioms being identified as the most prevalent category within the examined texts.

(b) SEMI IDIOMS

Semi-idioms are defined by a mixture of literal and figurative meanings, which allows their meanings to be partially understood from their parts. Nikulina (2020) observes that semi-idiom consists of literal and figurative meanings. These expressions usually originate from fields or terminologies while conveying idiomatic meanings in broader contexts, underscoring their dual nature. similarly, a semi-pure idiom incorporates at least one literal element and one element that is not literal, permitting variations in phrasing. Correspondingly, Fernando (1996) maintains that semi-idiom expressions

containing literal and non-literal meanings are often derived from specific terminologies. Semi-idioms have at least one constituent that carries a non-literal subsense while also including literal constituents. This classification allows for a nuanced understanding of idiomatic expressions in various contexts.

break the ice; this expression can be interpreted literally (e.g., breaking ice on a lake) or figuratively (e.g., *initiating conversation*). The interpretation often depends on the context surrounding the context.

Semi-idioms have partial compositionality, meaning they can often be partially deduced from their components, unlike pure idioms, where the meaning is opaque. For instance, *a white lie* is a lie that is told to be polite or to stop someone from being upset by the truth. Semi-idiom interpretation is characterised by contextual dependence, making them somewhat flexible in usage compared to pure idioms. This contrasts with pure idioms, which have meanings that are not easily inferred. For instance, the term *white lie* signifies *a small, harmless deception*. Another example is the phrase, *foot the bill*, meaning *to cover the cost*. Here, *the foot* is used figuratively, *while the bill* is used literally, conveying the idea of paying for something.

Semi-idioms have a fixed structure with variability. This means that while semi-idioms generally maintain a fixed structure, may allow for limited variations in form without losing their core meaning. This contrasts with pure idioms, which cannot be altered at all. Other examples include *dark horse*, a racing term and an idiomatic expression for someone who surprises others. These idioms often reflect cultural contexts or specific situations in which they are used, enhancing communicative effectiveness.

(c) LITERAL IDIOMS

Literal idioms are expressions where the figurative meaning closely aligns with the literal interpretation of the words used. Unlike traditional idioms, which often have meanings that cannot be deduced from their components, literal idioms maintain a direct correlation between their literal and figurative senses.

Literal idioms, such as "*on foot*" or "*the contrary*," are semantically simpler than the other two categories of idioms, which makes them easier to grasp, even for individuals unfamiliar with these expressions. These phrases qualify as idioms because they are entirely fixed in form or allow only limited variations. Fernando (1996:37) distinguishes

the challenge of clearly differentiating between these three types of idioms. Fernando (1996) claimed that a literal idiom has invariant or restricted variation. Compared to the two types above, literal idioms are easier to understand and transparent because the meaning of literal idioms is close to literal meaning.

Examples of literal idioms include the following: *Every man and his dog*: This phrase suggests that everyone is included in a situation, and it can be understood literally (*referring to people and their pets*) and figuratively (*indicating a large group*). Again, *head over heels*: While this phrase can be used literally to describe someone falling over, it figuratively means *being infatuated or deeply in love*. Moreover, the idiom, *in hot water*, is an idiomatic expression that can be used to refer to being in literal hot water (like a bath) but is commonly used to mean *being in trouble*. Another example is, I love you from *the bottom of my heart*.

A study by Vuorinen (2022) examined how Swedish university students used literal, semi-literal, and pure idioms in their academic writings, highlighting the impact of their exposure to English-speaking environments. The study findings revealed that students with limited exposure to idioms mentioned in the preceding sentence primarily used literal and semi-literal idioms, while more experienced students employed a wider range of pure idioms. This indicates that greater exposure to the language leads to greater comfort in using idiomatic expressions, emphasising the role of exposure and practice in language proficiency.

Furthermore, in his book, '*Idiom in Structure in English*' Makkai (1972: 25) classified idioms into two categories:

2.5.2 TWO TYPES OF IDIOMS: Makkai (1972).

(a) Idioms of Encoding (identifiable)

Everaert (2017) posits that idioms of encoding are linguistic expressions with discernible meanings, making them relatively transparent for speakers. Their meanings can be inferred by analysing the meanings of their parts, even for those unfamiliar with the idiom. Encoding idioms have several key characteristics. They are often transparent, allowing their meanings to be inferred from the literal definitions of their words, which aids understanding for students and non-native speakers. These idioms are easily identifiable, enabling listeners to grasp their meanings based on

context. They are common in everyday language and recognised by native speakers as standard expressions.

Makkai (1972) argues that idioms of encoding are unique lexical combinations with precise meanings, best identified through comparisons of different languages using appropriate prepositions. Additionally, encoding idioms have a fixed grammatical structure; any modifications can lead to a loss of meaning and sound unnatural. They also rely on context for clarity, especially in more complex sentences.

Therefore, (*at*) is used instead of (*with*) in the English expression; “*Drive at 70 m.p.h*”(not drive *with* as in French). The idiom of encoding means that the idiom is identifiable. The idiom of encoding is those idiosyncratic lexical combinations with a transparent meaning. This idiom is easy to identify with the hearer or figure out the point even if the listener does not know that idiom. This suggests that certain phrases are culturally or linguistically specific but can convey meaning effectively.

Examples of idiomatic expressions include phrases like “*answering the door*,” which means responding to someone *at the door*. Another example is *wide awake*, which indicates being fully alert and can be interpreted from its parts. Additionally, “*break the ice*” has a figurative meaning associated with easing social interactions, yet its literal interpretation is also evident.

(b) Idioms of Decoding (non-identifiable)

Makkai (1972) distinguishes between the idiom of decoding and the idiom of encoding. The idiom of decoding refers to expressions whose meanings may be obscure or hard to discern. These idioms consist of misleading phrases that cannot be understood by relying only on conventional language rules that have been learned separately. If someone is not already familiar with these idioms, they will not be able to grasp their meanings. For instance, “*kick the bucket*” signifies to die while “*I am broke*,” indicating I have no money.

Makkai (1972) asserts that idioms of decoding refer to those nonidentifiable and misleading lexical expressions whose interpretations could not be comprehended based on only learned linguistic conventions. In other words, the meaning of decoding

idioms is not predictable. Expressions such as “**beat about the bush**” and “**fly off the handle**” are examples of these idiomatic expressions. A study by Vuorinen (2022) examined using idiomatic expressions in academic writing by Swedish university students. It assessed the influence of time spent in English-speaking environments on their use of idioms, including semi-idioms. The results indicated that students with more than six months of experience in these settings utilised more idioms than those without experience.

Decoding idioms are further divided into two types. Those are lexemic and sememic idioms (Makkai 1972: 135-179). Lexemic idioms collate with the familiar part of speech (verbs, nouns, prepositions, and adjectives), and they are composed of more than one minimal free form, each lexicon of which can occur in other environments as the recognition of a mono lexicon lexeme. These idioms are divided into four types. They are *phrasal verbs, tournure, phrasal compounds, and pseudo idioms*.

- **LEXEMIC IDIOMS**

Makkai (1972) proposes that lexemic idioms are phrases or expressions that convey meanings that extend beyond the literal interpretations of their individual words. Consequently, this classification allowed Makkai (1976) to delineate various subgroups of idioms. Specifically, lexemic idioms encompass phrasal verbs, tournures, irreversible binomials, phrasal compounds, and pseudo-idioms. Similarly, Jannah and Arham (2023) concurred that these idioms can be classified into several types, including phrasal verbs, irreversible binomials, and tournure idioms. Each of these categories contains identifiable elements that contribute to the intended meaning. Furthermore, lexemic idioms represent the most prevalent variety of idioms because they incorporate recognisable components of speech, such as verbs, nouns, adjectives, and prepositions which facilitates their integration into sentences.

These idioms consist of multiple minimum free forms, with each lesson capable of appearing in different contexts as part of a monotonic lexeme, reflecting a certain level of awareness. They can be found in various academic settings, such as academic writings, lectures, and business reports. The implication is that the skills or knowledge associated with these elements are essential for effective communication and understanding in both academic and business environments. It accentuates the need for students to engage with and be proficient in these areas to succeed in their studies

or careers. These lexemic idioms are also identifiable in artistic mediums, including literature, film, and music (Jannah & Arham, 2016).

In a study conducted by Azeez (2023) on using idiomatic expressions in spoken English among students, it was found that they predominantly used three types of idioms: phrasal verb idioms, tournure idioms, and irreversible compound idioms. Among these, phrasal verb idioms were the most frequently used. This trend suggests that students may prefer phrasal verb idioms, leading to frequent use and greater exposure than tournure and irreversible compound idioms. This underscores the importance of incorporating idiomatic expressions into teaching to enhance effective communication.

(a) Phrasal Verb Idioms

Makkai (1972) defines a phrasal verb as a combination of a verb and a particle, which can be an article (such as *a, an, the*), a preposition or adverb (such as *up, in, out*), or an affix (including prefixes like *un-* or *in-* and suffixes like *-ness*, or *-ly*). The American Heritage Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs (2005) supports this definition, stating that phrasal verbs consist of a regular verb paired with a preposition or adverb that together convey a specific meaning that cannot be easily inferred from the literal meanings of the components. For instance: *take off* means *leave the ground*. This indicates that understanding phrasal verbs requires more than just knowledge of the individual words; it involves grasping the unique meanings that arise from their combinations. This highlights the complexity of language learning, as students may struggle with phrasal verbs that do not translate directly into their native languages. It emphasises the importance of context and usage in mastering phrasal verbs for effective communication.

Also, a phrasal verb idiom combines a verb proper and a morphologically invariable particle that functions as a single unit lexically and syntactically (Darwin & Gray, 1999; Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik, 1985). Cowie and Mackin (1993) consider the phrasal verb a combination of a verb and particle functions as a single unit of meaning. Similarly, Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) assert that phrasal verbs consist of two parts functioning as a single verb. Therefore, it is sometimes called a two-word verb (Siyanova & Schmitt, 2007). Besides, the phrasal verb is the most common term

used by the pedagogic circles, including reference materials such as textbooks, course books, and dictionaries (Kamarudin, 2013).

Kamarudin (2013) surveyed teachers and students using corpus analyses of phrasal verbs. The study focused on students' understanding of phrasal verbs, perceptions of vocabulary teaching, and the treatment of phrasal verbs in Malaysian reference materials, such as textbooks and two dictionaries. The study found that students' understanding of phrasal verbs is average.

Another study by Yasuda (2012) investigated how understanding orientational metaphors related to adverbial particles affects Japanese EFL students' ability to learn phrasal verbs. The study compared traditional teaching methods with a cognitive linguistic approach. Results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group, suggesting that awareness of conceptual metaphors helps students choose the correct adverbial particle, especially when idioms are not fully internalised. Fostering an understanding of metaphors is a valuable strategy in language instruction, especially for students struggling with phrasal verbs. It enhances their ability to infer idiom meanings based on the words' conceptual metaphors. This awareness encourages students to independently decipher unfamiliar idioms before consulting a teacher or dictionary (Boers, 2004).

(b) Tournure Idioms

Pramono (2020) identifies tournure idioms as verb phrases with at least three lexicons or words. He categorises them based on structural requirements, such as the necessity for definite or indefinite articles and including the word "it" in some forms. Liu (2017) describes tournure idioms as expressions that are not only structurally complex but also culturally significant, requiring contextual understanding for proper interpretation. This suggests that tournure idioms are not only intricate in their structure but also hold cultural importance, making it essential to understand the context in which they are used to understand their meaning entirely. This emphasises the need for cultural insight and contextual knowledge to appreciate these expressions fully.

Tournure idioms are the most significant subset of lexemic idioms, typically consisting of at least three words and predominantly involving verbs. They convey metaphorical meanings and often include articles and prepositions as integral components. Furthermore, tournure idioms are distinguishable by their intricate structure,

metaphorical significance, and incorporation of articles and prepositions. These distinct attributes differentiate them from other idiomatic expressions, highlighting their potential as a valuable area for linguistic exploration (Makkai, 1972). Makkai (1972) further identified several categories within tournure idioms based on their structural components, i.e. idioms include a verb followed by a direct object.

Makkai (1972) further describes a tournure as a lexemic idiom with at least three lexons, which may include the articles "*the*" or "*a*." These idioms operate within specific morphotactic frameworks without adding further meanings, which can lead to misunderstandings. Tournures are common verb-based idioms, often phrased with three or more words. For instance, *blow a fuse* means to become very angry. The main lexons include "*a*," "*the*," and any singular or plural forms, while the articles and numbers are non-representative. The form contains the compulsory definite article, For example: *to do a guy*' means to disappear secretly, the compulsory indefinite article, an irreversible binomial introduced by a preposition (*to be at seven and eight*' means to be confused and at odds), a direct object and further possible modifiers follow the primary verb (*'to build castles in the air*' means to make impossible plans), the leading verb is not followed by the direct object but by the preposition, plus a noun or nothing (*'to dance on the air*' means to get hanged), and the leading verb is '*be*' (*'to be above board*' means being out in the open and honest).

Diantri, Kusumo, and Yosephin (2023) directed a study applying the theories of Makkai (1972) theory to investigate the meanings, features, and educational benefits of idiomatic expressions in English teaching. They identified a total of 54 lexemic idioms, categorised into different types: 3 verb idioms, 26 phrasal compound idioms, 4 irreversible binomial idioms, 19 tournure idioms, and 2 phrasal verb idioms.

This signifies a diverse range of idiomatic expressions in English, each serving unique functions and characteristics. The classification of these idioms suggests their potential role in enhancing language instruction, offering insights into how idiomatic language can enrich vocabulary and comprehension for students. Understanding these idioms can also provide teachers with tools to make English teaching more effective and engaging, as idiomatic expressions are often integral to conversational language.

Arsiandi (2023) studied the classification and meaning of idiomatic expressions in Gita Wirjawan's speeches on economic growth based on Makkai's (1972) theory. The study identified 20 idiomatic expressions: 15 lexemic (including 10 phrasal verbs, 2 tournure idioms, and 3 phrasal compounds) and 5 sememic idioms (2 proverbs, 1 quotation, 1 understatement, and 1 hyperbole). This study highlights how classifying idiomatic expressions improves students' understanding of complex language use. Therefore, it can be concluded that effective classification of idiomatic expressions is crucial for developing language compression skills.

(c) Irreversible Binomial idioms

Binomial idioms consist of two words, which are separated by the conjunction. The word orders in this structure are fixed. Mollin (2014) states that binomials are pairs of words that are linked together and share the same grammatical category, such as *high and dry* (without resources), and '*Romeo and Juliet*' (institutionalised or traditional symbols of ideal love or symbol of true love). Such expressions are frequently found in everyday conversation and include different word classes. Due to their fixed structure, research shows that irreversible binomials are processed distinctly compared to reversible pairs (Hamze (2024)). This difference can affect how language students acquire these expressions, as they might have to memorise combinations rather than infer meanings from the individual parts.

Authari (2022) piloted a study to analyse the types of idiomatic expressions found in "Kingsman: The Golden Circle" and to interpret their connotative meanings. The study's findings revealed that the movie features a variety of idioms, with phrasal verbs being the most prevalent. These results suggest that Kingsman: The Golden Circle uses a variety of idiomatic expressions, which adds depth to the dialogue and characters' interactions.

(d) Phrasal Compound Idioms

Phrasal compound idiom contains primarily nominal, comprising adjective plus noun, noun plus noun, or adverb plus preposition. Examples include the following, '*blackmail*' (any payment forced by intimidation) and '*bookworm*' (a person committed to reading or studying).

(e) Incorporating Verb Idioms

Incorporating verb idioms has four forms. Those are *noun-verb*, *adjective-noun*, *noun-noun*, and *adjective-noun*. Incorporating verb idioms are separated by (-). The noun-verb '*sight-see*' means 'visiting famous places in a city or country. Adjective-noun, '*blackmail*' means 'the crime of demanding money from a person by threatening to tell somebody else a secret about them'. Noun-noun, '*bootleg*' means 'made and sold illegally'. Adjective – verb, '*whitewash*' means 'an attempt to hide unpleasant facts about somebody/something'.

(f) Pseudo-Idioms

Pseudo-idioms are categorised according to their semantic characteristics. Grant (2003) explains that these are idiomatic phrases in which at least one part lacks its own independent meaning. This phenomenon is described as a *polytechnic lexeme*, where one or more of its components (lexons) are valid words but do not function as independent lexemes in other contexts unless they are classified as banned lemons. A typical example of a pseudo-idiom is "*chit-chat*," which refers to "*small talk*" (Makkai, 1972).

Makkai (1976) defines pseudo idioms as compound words or phrases in which one of the constituents is a cranberry morpheme or one or more lexons are banned (e.g., *chit-chat*). Examples of these idiomatic expressions include the following: *chit-chat*, *hanky-panky*, and *helter-skelter*, in which *chit*, *hanky*, and *skelter* are the cranberry morpheme. They are also referred to a category of expressions called polytechnic lexemes. In these expressions, one or more of the individual parts, although they can be used as words in a grammatical sense, do not act as independent lexemes in different contexts unless they are categorized as *banned lemons*. A notable example of this is the term *chit-chat*, which indicates casual conversation (Makkai, 1972).

This class includes all lexemic idioms, one of which constitutes a cranberry morpheme. The idiom may include one or more banned lexons since some members of this class occur in other classes, such as irreversible binomials and phrasal compounds. It is a "polylexonic lexeme," one or more of whose constituent lexons, despite being morphotactically permissible words, are not simultaneously realisations of independent lexemes in another environment as well, unless they are banned lexons." An example of this category is *chit- chat* meaning "small talk". (Makkai, 1972). Pseudo-idioms can mislead or misinform an unwary listener.

Pseudo-idioms are characterised by several key features that distinguish them from traditional idioms.

For example, cranberry is a bright red acid berry produced by any plant of the genus *Oxy coccus*, as stated in the Oxford Dictionary. The *phrase* ‘*make a cranberry face*’ means ‘the face becomes red’.

- **SEMEMIC IDIOMS**

Sememic idioms are deeply rooted in a community's cultural beliefs and values (Makkai (1972). Their unique nature poses significant challenges for direct translation into other languages, as doing so often results in losing the idiom's intended meaning. This intricacy highlights the importance of understanding the cultural context behind these expressions to convey their true essence accurately. For example, proverbs and familiar quotations are typical sememic idioms with significant cultural weight. Sememic idioms reflect cultural nuances that often do not translate well into other languages. This illustrates the complexity of language and the deep connections between culture and expression (Mantyla,2004)

In addition, sememic idioms are distinguished from other idioms by their non-compositional meaning. This suggests that the meaning of a sememic idiom cannot be inferred from the meanings of its words. Their examples include the following: the proverb, *a bird in hand is worth two in the bush*, conveys an idea about valuing what one has over what one might gain, which is not apparent from the literal meanings of the words involved. Besides, many sememic idioms consist of fixed phrases that do not permit alterations in their structure. This lack of flexibility reinforces their recognition as established expressions within a particular language or culture. This suggests that most idioms are rigid in form, consisting of set phrases that cannot be changed without losing meaning. This lack of flexibility indicates that these idiomatic expressions are well-established within a language or culture, making them easily recognisable and understood by speakers. Therefore, this underscores the importance of preserving the original form of idioms to maintain their intended meaning and cultural significance.

Makkai (1972) asserted that a polylexemic construction whose aggregate literal meaning is derived from its constituent lexemes functions as the realization of an unpredictable sememic network, a sememic idiom. Makkai (1972) further posits that

sememic idioms convey pragmatic meanings related to a particular culture. These are classified into proverbial, idiomaticity in institutionalised understatement, and idiomaticity in Institutionalised hyperbole. The discussion encompasses various categories of idiomatic expressions, which can be classified as follows:

Proverbs are traditional sayings that express general truths or advice, like *“A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.”* Familiar quotations evoke specific imagery, exemplified by phrases such as *“Not a mouse stirring.”* Baseball-related idioms, such as *“Having two strikes against one,”* draw on the sport's language to illustrate concepts. Expressions of institutionalised politeness, like *“May I...?”* help facilitate courteous interaction, while idioms of institutionalised greeting include standard phrases such as *“How do you do?”* or *“So long.”* Additionally, idioms of institutionalized understatement convey modesty, as in *“I wasn’t too crazy about him,”* whereas idioms of institutionalized hyperbole use exaggeration for emphasis, such as *“He won’t even lift a finger.”*

Sememic idioms encompass proverbs and similar sentence-length structures; thus, they hold less relevance in the current discourse. Conversely, lexemic idioms consist of multiple minimal free forms and can often create misconceptions for unsuspecting listeners. A study using the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) analysed the frequency and distribution of idioms, including sememic types. It found that idioms were more prevalent in interactive discourse than monologic contexts, suggesting sememic idioms are important in facilitating communication and engagement in academic settings.

(a) Proverbial Idioms

Proverbial idioms are established expressions within a language that convey meanings beyond their literal definitions (Makkai, 1976). This indicates that these idiomatic phrases are frequently used and carry meanings that are not directly related to the individual words they contain. Essentially, they express ideas or concepts that surpass their literal interpretations, enriching language and allowing for more nuanced communication. For instance, *“too many cooks spoil the broth”* implies that involving too many people in a task can lead to a less favourable outcome. Likewise, the saying *“do not count your chickens before they are hatched”* serves as a caution against making assumptions about future results before they occur. Furthermore, the

expression "*birds of a feather flock together*" demonstrates how individuals with similar interests, ideas, or values tend to gather in groups.

(b) Idiomaticity in Institutionalised Understatement

Institutionalised understatements are conversational expressions designed to soften the impact of blunt and direct statements (Makkai, 1976). The implication is that there are more specific, accepted ways of speaking within certain institutions or social contexts that aim to make blunt statements less harsh or confrontational. These conversational expressions are used to maintain politeness, reduce the potential of offense, or manage sensitive topics more delicately. Essentially, it highlights how language can be shaped by societal norms to promote smoother communication. These statements describe situations in a way that makes them seem less significant, serious, or negative than they are. Examples include idiomatic phrases like "*It wasn't the smartest move*" or "*I wasn't too crazy about it.*" These conventional expressions serve to mitigate the harshness of a direct statement.

(c) Idiomaticity in Institutionalised Hyperbole

Ghazala (2003) accentuates that idiomaticity involves the metaphorical dimension of idioms, which is vital for comprehending their meanings. He observes that idiomatic expressions possess fixed forms and meanings that cannot be altered, highlighting their recognised status in language use. This suggests that understanding idioms requires recognising their metaphorical meanings, as these meanings help convey the ideas behind the expressions. Conceptual metaphor is clearly a powerful tool for helping students understand a great deal of idiomatic language. Equally, Lakoff (1987) points out that a significant portion of our thought processes is metaphorical, which includes idiomatic expressions. Hyperbole frequently employs these conceptual metaphors, allowing speakers or writers to express complex ideas clearly and concisely through exaggerated language. In essence, idiomatic expressions are consistent in their usage and cannot be modified without losing their intended significance.

Furthermore, McCarthy and O'Dell (2010) classified idioms into **eight types**. They made a syntactic classification of English idioms according to their possible combinations. They claimed that idioms are classified into **eight types**. The classification goes as follows:

2.5.3 EIGHT TYPES OF IDIOMS: McCarthy and O'Dell (2010)

(a) Verb + object/complement:

These expressions are idiomatic phrases combining a verb with a complement (noun, adjective, or adverb) to convey a specific meaning. They differ from other idioms as they are often used to describe actions or states and are commonly found in everyday language. Examples include *taking a break*, which means *pausing an activity for a short time*, and *putting up with*, which means *tolerating* something. Another example is *killing two birds with one stone*, which means achieving two objectives with a single action or simultaneously.

A study conducted by Fathma, Nurlela, and Yusuf (2020) revealed two types of idiomatic expressions present in the students' essays, which were based on the framework proposed by Michael McCarthy and Felicity O'Dell (2010). Specifically, they identified "A cup of tea," categorized as a Compound idiom, and "Drop your jaw," classified as a Verb + object/complement (and/or adverbial). Moreover, the research aimed to investigate the types of idiomatic expressions employed by the students in their English essays and to evaluate their comprehension of these expressions.

(b) Binomial (word + and + word)

According to McCarthy and O'Dell (2010), binomial idioms obtain their meaning from pairs of words typically connected by the conjunctions "*and*" or "*or*." These expressions have a specific structure and word order that must remain unchanged to preserve their meaning. Common in the English language, binomial idioms can improve the richness and precision of essay writing. For instance, "*black and white*," which means something is clear-cut and distinct, should always be used in that specific order, as "*white and black*" sounds odd and is not considered correct. Additional examples are "*rough and ready*," which refers to something crude or unsophisticated, and "*more or less true*," indicating that something is accurate to a certain degree.

Moreover, binomials are often found in everyday language, and their widespread use helps writers communicate ideas clearly and concisely, enhancing the conversational style of their essays.

(c) Trinomial (word + word + and + word)

They are like binomials, in which three words are linked by coordinating conjunctions

Examples:

- Cool, calm, and collected (Relaxed, in control, not nervous.)
- It takes a lot of sweat, tears, and blood to run a business (Hard work)

(d) Simile (as + adjective + as or like + a noun):

They are used when making comparisons. Always include words such as ‘as’ or ‘like’

Examples:

- as dry as a bone (Very dry indeed.)
- as cold as ice (extremely cold)
- as slender as a shovel (extremely thin)

(e) Proverbs

McCarthy and O'Dell (2010) suggest that proverbs are concise statements that reflect shared human experiences and provide advice and warnings. They are easily memorable and applicable in various contexts. Additionally, proverbs embody traditional wisdom passed down through generations, offering guidance and life lessons while reflecting cultural values and norms that reveal societal beliefs. For example, the proverb *actions speak louder than words* highlight the importance of actions over mere promises or declarations. Similarly, Akande and Mosobalaje (2014) describe proverbs as meaningful phrases rich in values. These expressions convey messages best understood by those familiar with the relevant oral traditions. Furthermore, they encapsulate the collective wisdom of a community and serve as tools for education, information, and counsel.

Other examples include the following: *where there is a will, there is a way*. A popular idiomatic expression used to encourage someone. It means that if people are determined enough, they will achieve what they want, even if it is challenging; *Chew something over*, and *A bird in hand is worth two in the bush*.

(f) Clichés

A cliché refers to a phrase or opinion used so often that it lacks original thought. While clichés are common in everyday language, they can irritate readers in literature because they suggest the writer is not being creative. Many people have repeated these expressions, causing them to lose their impact and meaning. Often, individuals use clichés without even realizing it; for instance, some might recite the well-worn saying, *“Every cloud has a silver lining,”* when they cannot think of anything better to express their sentiments. Similarly, people use phrases like *“let us face it”* when addressing an uncomfortable reality that requires a straightforward approach.

(g) Euphemisms

Euphemisms are expressions employed in written and spoken communication to enhance style and facilitate understanding. Individuals widely use them when discussing frightening events, such as war, illness, or death. An anthropological viewpoint suggests that mentioning a name could invoke the divinity whose strength one had to confront. Moreover, euphemisms enable us to navigate taboos; instinctively, we may feel that using a euphemism maintains a safe distance from the taboo. Additionally, euphemisms can elevate the perceived value of specific terms; for instance, we might choose *“educator”* instead of *“teacher”* or *“attorney”* rather than *“lawyer.”* Ultimately, we frequently resort to euphemisms to address socially challenging topics to express in direct terms (Alkire, 2002)

They are selected to avoid offending others or discussing topics that could be viewed as unpleasant. McCarthy and O'Dell (2010) state that euphemisms act as idioms designed to preserve politeness by replacing words that might be seen as offensive and by softening the dialogue around sensitive or uncomfortable issues (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2010, p. 28). This implies that euphemisms are indirect phrases that replace direct or harsh remarks.

Euphemisms possess specific characteristics, one of which is abstraction. In this context, euphemisms are used to soften uncomfortable truths. For example, when discussing someone's death, one might say that they have *"gone to a better place,"* which helps make the reality of the situation easier to accept. Additionally, another characteristic is litotes, wherein the use of double negatives serves to downplay a statement. For instance, when someone remarks that *"the rose is not unattractive,"* they employ litotes to create a milder impression.

Moreover, in the case of mispronunciation, individuals might intentionally mispronounce certain words, such as *"jeez"* or *"frigging,"* to reference vulgar terms indirectly, thereby avoiding explicit language. To further lessen the impact, euphemisms often transform an offensive noun into an adjective; for example, saying *"That decision makes him look foolish"* is gentler to express *"He is stupid."*

Euphemisms play a significant role in enriching and facilitating engaging conversations. For instance, people often use *"passed away"* instead of directly saying *"to die."* Similarly, when someone says, *"Powder my nose,"* they are politely indicating that they need to use the restroom to avoid saying unpleasant words. Furthermore, the expression *"a bone of contention"* highlights a topic that causes disagreement.

(h) Fixed statements

Fixed statements refer to idiomatic expressions with fixed structures commonly used across different cultures and languages without much variation in wording or meaning. Examples of fixed statements include *"so far, so good,"* which means things are going well up to this point. These expressions have become deeply ingrained in everyday language, serving as linguistic shortcuts that convey meaning efficiently. While their origins may be lost to history, they continue to be used and easily understood by native speakers. While each type of idiom has its distinct characteristics, there are some shared characteristics. For example, all types rely on figurative language and necessarily require contextual relevance. Understanding is required for accurate interpretation.

Different types of idioms can convey similar meanings despite employing distinct linguistic structures. The classification system proposed by McCarthy and O'Dell (2010) offers valuable assistance to language students and users in navigating the complexities associated with idiomatic expressions. This system facilitates the

management and comprehension of these often-intricate phrases, which may pose challenges due to their figurative meanings. By distinguishing the patterns and structures inherent in various idioms, individuals can enhance their comprehension and usage skills. Such proficiency enables them to communicate more fluently and accurately across diverse social contexts.

Commonly encountered in casual conversations, situational expressions, often referred to as idiomatic expressions fulfil multiple functions, including the issuance of commands, the expression of emotions, and the formulation of polite requests. For instance, the phrase "*good riddance*" expresses relief at someone's departure, while "*take it easy*" implies a sense of relaxation and cannot be altered without altering its intended meaning. These expressions significantly contribute to conversation dynamics, aiding in the maintenance of dialogue flow and facilitating smoother interpersonal interactions.

However, in this study, the researcher classified idioms using McCarthy and O'Dell's (2010) Theory of Idioms to group the idiomatic expressions produced by the participants in their essay writing.

2.6 FINDINGS FROM PREVIOUS STUDY ON THE USE OF IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS

The researcher investigated multiple relevant studies on how well English L2 students utilise idiomatic expressions in their academic writing. The analysis revealed that certain studies are directly related to this research topic, offering evidence of the effective use of idiomatic expressions by proficient ESL students in their academic writings. Different techniques were used to analyse, evaluate, and measure the students' proficiency in incorporating idioms into their writing.

Mantyla's (2004) study examined how native and non-native speakers recognise and interpret English idioms. It focused on the impact of idiom characteristics, the consensus among native speakers about their meanings, and the recognition abilities of L2 learners. The participants included 36 British and 144 Finnish university students

studying English. Data was collected through a questionnaire featuring 65 idioms and a background survey on their language experiences. The results indicated that Finnish students find English idioms challenging but perform better with idioms with direct Finnish equivalents.

Flor (2018) explored the widespread identification of idiomatic expressions in academics authored by non-native English speakers. The results indicated that idiomatic expressions are frequently employed in EFL academics. Again, Alhaysony (2017) conducted a case study using a questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, and the vocabulary level test to measure students' English proficiency in Saudi University EFL Students, investigating strategies and difficulties in understanding English idioms. The results showed that students encountered difficulties in comprehending idiomatic expressions. It was said that students tried to interpret idioms' meanings by predicting and figuring out an idiom in an equivalent one from their language. The results further indicated that low-proficiency students faced more difficulties than high-proficiency students.

Using a Quasi-Experimental Design, Fausia (2018) conducted a study involving 14 intermediate classes at Cambridge English College (CEC). The research aimed to determine the use of idiomatic expressions to improve students' ability to write recounted text. The study's findings showed that using idiomatic expressions effectively improved students' ability to write recount text. Also, Fathma, Nurlela, and Yusuf (2020) investigated the use of idiomatic expressions in English academics written by 4th-semester students of the English Department at Universitas Sumatera Utara. The objective of the study also aimed to assess the students' understanding and proficiency in utilising these expressions. The results of the research demonstrated that most students are not well-versed in the usage of idioms. Out of a small sample of seven students, only two could successfully incorporate idioms into their academic writing and only one student exhibited a strong grasp of idiomatic expressions.

Using a questionnaire to collect data from 210 students at Takhar University, Orfan (2020) studied the attitudes of Afghan undergraduate EFL students toward the significance of learning English idioms. The study also aimed to identify the sources

of difficulties that the students faced while learning and understanding idioms, as well as the strategies they used to overcome them. The main findings of the study displayed that Afghan undergraduate EFL students held a markedly positive attitude toward the value of learning idioms. The study also depicted that EFL students encountered many difficulties in learning and understanding them, which resulted mainly from a lack of cultural knowledge behind idioms, a lack of similarities for English idioms in their first language, and a lack of context.

Al-Houiti (2020) investigated English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' knowledge of frequently used idioms and the effect of learner-related factors. Results show that Kuwaiti EFL students have difficulty comprehending common idiomatic expressions. Additionally, the study aims to determine whether students' knowledge of idioms is linked to age, year of study, and/or Grade Point Average (GPA). A statistically significant difference in knowledge of frequently used idioms was evident when GPA was considered.

Orfan (2020) explored the students' attitudes towards the importance of learning idioms, the difficulties students face when learning idiomatic expressions, and the strategies used to learn and understand them. The findings indicated that participants had a positive attitude towards learning idioms but faced difficulties due to inadequate exposure to cultural norms, insufficient equivalents for English idioms in their native tongue, and inadequate contextual understanding. They used multiple strategies to comprehend idioms.

Vuorinen (2022) assessed the extent of comprehension of English idioms among university students in Unguja to establish if this would enhance their proficiency in English, and the results indicated that the respondents' performance in idiom comprehension was below average. In addition, Anjarini and Hatmanto (2021) conducted a study to explore the challenges encountered by EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students in comprehending English idioms and the strategies they utilise in this process. The findings identified that the principal challenge was the disparity between idioms' meanings and their constituent words' meanings. This difficulty is exacerbated by the infrequent usage of English idioms and a notable deficiency in educational practices that address their teaching.

Saleh and Zakaria (2013) conducted a research exploring the abilities of Libyan undergraduate students learning English as a foreign language, particularly in their recognition, comprehension, and use of English idioms in writing. The findings from the pre-test indicated that the students made errors due to negative transfer, overgeneralisation, the influence of their mother tongue, and limited exposure to fixed expressions. However, the post-test results demonstrated notable improvement in their use of fixed expressions and significantly reduced errors.

Vo and Nguyen (2020) examined how well teenage students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Vietnam understand standard English idioms. Specifically, the assessment consisted of 50 idioms taken from commonly utilized English proficiency test materials and lists compiled by Grant (2007) and Liu (2003). Consequently, the descriptive statistics revealed that the students had a limited comprehension of idiomatic expressions. Similarly, in a separate study, Mohdeb and Kauoache (2022) focused on assessing the cultural knowledge of second-year English students at the University of Jijel, concentrating on their understanding of idiomatic expressions. As a result, the findings indicated that these students lacked the ability to effectively and persuasively integrate idioms into their writing, which is essential for enhancing the quality of their academic work.

Using an evaluative test to assess EFL students' comprehension and a questionnaire to investigate the problems and difficulties they face when learning idioms, RahmtAllah (2024) also conducted a study aimed to examine the understanding of English idioms among EFL students at the university level. The study involved 85 Saudi female undergraduate English majors at the Department of English Language and Literature, College of Languages and Humanities, Unaizah, at levels seven and eight. The study results indicated that the students had sufficient knowledge of idioms and were familiar with idiomatic expressions. However, the results also revealed that some students had difficulties learning idioms.

Furthermore, Jabboori and Jazaa (2013) analysed native and non-native speakers' competence and use of English idiomatic expressions. The study included 12 native English speakers: six had bachelor's degrees, and six had secondary school diplomas. It also involved 12 non-native speakers, including six PhD holders in English and six with master's degrees in linguistics and English. To obtain the results, a

multiple-choice test of idiomatic expressions was administered. Participants were asked to underline, identify, and clarify these idioms and explain which aspect of idioms (syntactic, pragmatic) they used to identify the appropriate idiom and its meaning. The results indicated that English native speakers were relatively better at answering questions regarding idiomatic expressions.

Al-Mohizea (2017) conducted a mixed-method research, including think-aloud protocols for data analysis. A test was used as a data collection instrument to assess how Arabic-speaking EFL students understand body-part idioms using a cognitive linguistics approach. It examined how factors like similarity to their first language (L1) and idiom transparency influenced by language proficiency affected their performance. Results showed a significant correlation between language proficiency and idiom comprehension scores. Additionally, the degree of similarity to L1 and the idioms' transparency were significantly related to performance.

Ngoge (2023) adopted a mixed-method approach and a descriptive research design to assess the extent of comprehension of English idioms among university students in Unguja and establish if this would enhance their proficiency in English. The researcher used questionnaires and cloze tests to collect data from 180 respondents from three universities in Zanzibar: the State University of Zanzibar, Sumait University, and Zanzibar University. The findings showed that the respondents' performance in idiom comprehension was below average.

Al-Kadi (2015) explored how Yemeni English as a Foreign Language (EFL) undergraduate students identify, understand, and apply English idioms. The objective was to assess whether there is a relationship between students' English proficiency and their ability to use idiomatic expressions. The research involved 63 sophomore students from the Department of English at the Faculty of Education at Taiz University. Data were collected using idiom tests and a questionnaire to answer the research questions. The results revealed the main difficulties the students encountered and the strategies they employed to address these issues.

Fathma and Yusuf (2020) investigated the presence of idioms in students' academics and interviews to evaluate their comprehension of idiomatic expressions. The findings indicated that fourth-semester English Department students at Universitas Sumatera Utara had limited familiarity with idioms, as five out of seven students did not incorporate any idioms into their academics, and six showed inadequate understanding of these expressions.

Saric (2022) analysed first-year graduate students who had been studying English for 15 years and were evaluated on their understanding of food-related idioms using a multiple-choice test. The goal was to determine their ability to correctly match idioms with their meanings and use them in sentences. The findings revealed that the students had a strong grasp of idioms, achieving accuracy rates of 77% and 71% on the respective tasks.

Among a group of 22 idioms, the students matched the majority successfully but faced challenges with *"to go pear-shaped,"* where their accuracy was only 33%. They managed to match *"full of beans"* and *"to put all one's eggs in one basket"* correctly 50% of the time. Conversely, they demonstrated excellent familiarity with *"a piece of cake"* and *"a big cheese,"* scoring 97%, as well as with *"to take something with a pinch of salt"* and *"to be as alike as two peas in a pod,"* where they scored 90%. Overall, the students exhibited strong receptive knowledge of idioms.

2.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The participants in this study are third-year English major students who are expected to demonstrate proficiency in language skills before graduating and moving on to either postgraduate studies or the workforce. In this context, Cognitive Linguistics Theory is particularly important, as using idiomatic expressions in students' academic writing enhances their writing by adding depth and richness.

The theoretical framework delineates how pertinent theories are applied to elucidate and scrutinise the collective data. The conceptual framework of this study is underpinned by the Cognitive Linguistics Theory of idioms, as postulated by Lakoff (1980), and the idioms theory of McCarthy and O'Dell (2010).

Originating in the late 1980s, this perspective has been greatly influenced by the work of prominent scholars like Lakoff and Gibbs (1980). It now serves as the primary framework for most linguists when analysing idiomatic expressions. From this angle, idioms can be more thoroughly examined, as the figurative meanings of their parts contribute to the overall metaphorical interpretation of the entire phrase (Gibbs, 2017, p. 40). Rather than merely being perceived as fixed or unchanging structures, idioms are seen as manifestations of our conceptual systems, emphasizing their conceptual significance rather than just linguistic aspects.

The terms *cognition*, *cognitive approach*, and *cognitive linguistic approach* refer to the active mental processes that trigger more effective and long-lasting comprehension or memorising of language units in linguistics (Lakoff, 1980). A careful study of language units, separately or as a unit, denotes a cognitive linguistic approach. This approach analyses a language item inside out; that is to say, versatile points of the unit are to be studied.

Lakoff (1980) suggests that the cognitive mechanism of idioms involves deriving their meanings through the interaction of their individual components and relevant contextual factors. To put it another way, understanding idioms can be compared to taking raw materials and transforming them into a final product, with the idiom's meaning representing that result. The cognitive linguistic perspective offers a distinctly different approach to understanding idioms.

Also, it is important to realise that figurative meanings of idioms often arise from their literal interpretations through cognitive processes that link different conceptual domains, such as the source domain (literal meaning) and the target domain (figurative meaning). This means that the meanings of idioms are rooted in our broader understanding of the world (Kövecses & Szabó, 1996, p. 330). In addition, if this claim is true, we can rely on this knowledge to make sense of the meanings of various idioms, and to understand their motivation. When processing an idiom, speakers map the conceptual domain evoked by the idiom's lexical structure (source) onto another conceptual domain (target) that underlies that idiom's lexicalised meaning (Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen 2010: 74). The claim emphasises that understanding an idiom involves more than just knowing the words; it requires recognising the deeper

meanings and associations that those words convey in a different context. For example, the words evoke a specific image in the idiom kick the bucket. However, the underlying meaning relates to death, the conceptual domain mapped onto the idiom.

Interestingly, idiomatic expressions have figurative meanings that result from the entailments of their underlying conceptual metaphors. This implies that idiomatic expressions are not to be taken literally. Instead, their meanings are shaped by broader concepts and metaphors that inform how language is understood. This further suggests that to grasp the meaning of an idiom fully, one must recognise the metaphorical ideas it embodies and the cultural context in which it arises. As such, they cannot always be replaced with their literal counterparts (Benczes 2002: 22). Metaphor and metonymy are commonly used in everyday language. Idioms can be connected to our conceptual structures, and these conceptual metaphors help us understand them. A classic example is the idiom to *spill the beans*, which means *unintentionally revealing a secret*.

Also, both Guo (2019) and Hung (2019) advocate for a cognitive linguistic approach, confirming that understanding the conceptual metaphors and imagery underlying idioms can greatly facilitate students' comprehension and memorisation. These studies present experimental results supporting the effectiveness of this approach, indicating that students who engage in cognitive-based learning activities demonstrate better idiomatic competence. Guo (2019) emphasises that idioms should be taught within a cognitive framework emphasizing their meanings and origins. This approach allows students to grasp the underlying concepts rather than merely memorising phrases. Ngoc (2017), Aydin (2019), and Zarei (2020) agree that cognitive linguistics helps students acquire linguistic expressions without having to memorise sentence structures. This approach enhances their understanding of idiomatic phrases, leading to more accurate interpretations, and fosters a greater appreciation for effective teaching strategies.

Equally important, cognitive approaches play a significant role in assisting students with interpreting ambiguous idioms. These approaches facilitate the construction of meaning through an integrated process that engages the components of the idioms (Al-Otaibi, 2019; Vandehey, 2019). Consequently, they enhance learning outcomes in foreign language acquisition (Hajjalizadeh & Mohseni, 2016) and promote a deeper comprehension of the original meanings of idioms (Wang, 2020). This suggests that a deeper understanding of idioms not only aids in language acquisition but also helps students grasp the nuances and original meanings behind these expressions.

Moreover, advocates of Cognitive Linguistics, such as Boers (2008), Vasiljevic (2015), and Colston (2021), emphasised that this theoretical framework provides a viable approach to achieving a more structured and profound perception of figurative language, such as idiomatic expressions. They advise that students be familiar with idioms' literal underpinnings and their correlation to their figurative meanings. By doing so, students may develop a more positive attitude towards idiom acquisition, which could enhance their proficiency in assimilating figurative multiword expressions like idioms into their bilingual lexicon. Ultimately, this could lead to an elevated level of second language proficiency.

Lakoff's (1980) Cognitive Linguistic theory of idioms delves into the connection between idioms and students' pre-existing knowledge regarding these expressions. The implication of Lakoff's (1980) Cognitive Linguistic theory on idioms is that idiomatic expressions rely heavily on students' prior knowledge and experiences. Therefore, by incorporating Lakoff's theory into academic writing, students can enhance their language proficiency by using idiomatic expressions and effectively conveying their ideas. Consequently, understanding the cognitive basis of idioms allows students to use their prior knowledge effectively when employing these figurative expressions in their writing. This theory is pertinent to this research, as it enables the researcher to evaluate if third-level English students are proficient in using idiomatic expressions in their academics, drawing from their prior knowledge of idioms. It also facilitates an evaluation of how students use idioms in their writing.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggested that the way people think about their experiences shapes both the formation and understanding of language. This research project will utilise a cognitive linguistic perspective to examine a pair of idioms from two different languages that, while structurally distinct, carry the same meaning. A cognitive approach is fitting because the main objective of the study is to uncover the underlying reasons for how language is constructed. The areas of metaphor and metonymy are especially relevant in the context of idioms, as they frequently employ various forms of imagery in their expressions. In addition to examining the metaphorical and metonymic factors that contribute to the meanings of these idioms, the research will also investigate potential embodied motivations. The aim of this study is to enhance and support previous research in the area and to encourage further exploration of the cognitive and conceptual aspects of idioms. Gaining a deeper insight into the cognitive connections between idioms in various languages could also improve comprehension for L2 students.

McCarthy and O'Dell's (2010) taxonomy present a comprehensive classification system for idiomatic expressions with eight distinct categories. These categories encompass verb + object/complement, similes, binomials, trinomials, proverbs, euphemisms, cliches, and fixed expressions. The framework serves as a valuable tool for the researcher to categorise the different types of idiomatic expressions used and comprehend the idiomatic expressions used by students in their academic writing. Additionally, it evaluates their utilisation in written essays by third-level ESL students.

2.8 SUMMARY

Chapter 2 presented the literature review and theoretical framework based on Lakoff's (1980) Cognitive Linguistics Theory of Idioms with special reference to understanding the conceptual metaphors and imagery underlying idioms that can significantly facilitate students' comprehension and memorisation.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN, RESEARCH PARADIGM, AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research design, research paradigm, and research methodology used in the study and explains how data were collected and analysed.

Furthermore, this chapter provides a more comprehensive insight into the ethical considerations that form the basis of the interactions between researchers and participants.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGMS

The word *paradigm* has its roots in the Greek term *paradeigma*, which means ‘pattern’. The researcher views research paradigm as an essential framework connecting theoretical and practical approaches. The term was first coined by Kuhn in 1962. A paradigm is a philosophical approach to understanding (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Paradigms signify central viewpoints or ideologies (Perera, 2018). Research paradigms consist of a shared set of beliefs and agreements among scientists regarding the understanding and resolving of different issues (Perera, 2018). They serve as the foundation of the research plan, shaping not only what is studied but also how the findings are interpreted.

Okesina (2020) posits that a paradigm determines what should be examined, the methods of investigation, and the analysis of results, thereby underscoring its critical role in research design. This underscores that choosing an underlying framework in a study is pivotal in guiding the overall research process. Specifically, the selection of research questions and methodologies is influenced by the chosen paradigm, which, in turn, significantly impacts the conclusions drawn by the researchers. Ulz (2023) concurs, stating that the beliefs and assumptions inherent in these paradigms are invaluable, directing the entire research process and greatly influencing the outcomes.

These frameworks assist researchers in exploring three fundamental inquiries regarding ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Perera, 2018). They can be classified into several categories, such as positivism, interpretivism, post-positivism, critical theory, constructivism, and pragmatism, which all work together in a complementary manner.

One of the key research paradigms is positivism, which asserts that knowledge is only valid if it can be verified through sensory experience (Bryman, 2012). This approach maintains an objective perspective in research and emphasises collecting verifiable facts through quantitative methods. Positivists distinguish between scientific statements that can be tested and confirmed empirically and normative statements that cannot be validated through sensory means. Therefore, they argue that only

scientific statements belong to the legitimate field of scientific inquiry (Bryman, 2012). As a result, researchers who focus on quantitative methods typically follow the principles of positivism and use quantitative tools to obtain objective outcomes in their research.

The interpretivism paradigm offers a contrasting epistemology to positivism by claiming the existence of multiple realities. Advocates of this approach criticise applying the scientific or positivist model to social research (Bryman, 2012). Interpretivist social scientists emphasise the subjective meanings behind social actions (Taylor & Medina, 2011). Consequently, they aim to understand and further interpret social phenomena. Qualitative researchers employ interviews, focus groups, and participant observation to gain deeper insights and explain their findings, aligning themselves with the interpretivism research paradigm.

Constructivism, also known as social constructivism, posits that individuals aim to comprehend their surroundings by forming subjective interpretations of their experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The constructivist approach focuses on understanding participants' viewpoints regarding the examined situation and interpreting the significance they assign to their reality. Jean Piaget is a prominent figure in this field, advocating for the concepts of assimilation—where new experiences are integrated—and accommodation, where cognitive frameworks are adjusted based on these new experiences to facilitate assimilation (Riegler, 2011).

The capacity to build knowledge about reality is central to the philosophy of social constructivism. From students' perspective, constructivists assert that genuine learning happens when individuals uncover information through hands-on experience and active involvement, unlike traditional classroom settings where teachers merely lecture (Adom, Yeboah & Ankrah, 2016). People derive meaning through their interaction with their surroundings, shaping their understanding of reality, reinforcing the idea that reality is constructed socially.

Moreover, the constructivist paradigm stands apart from positivism and interpretivism by claiming that reality emerges from human interactions with the actual world. This perspective is founded on the belief that knowledge is created through these interactions, highlighting the social nature of knowledge development. It dismisses the

idea of a singular method for acquiring knowledge and instead promotes a multifaceted approach.

Pragmatism is a paradigm that does not adhere to a single philosophical stance (Creswell, 2007). It proposes setting aside the strict divide between positivism and interpretivism, acknowledging that reality can be singular and multiple. Pragmatism employs various methods to address specific research issues and values objective and subjective knowledge, focusing on what works. (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 41). It includes quantitative and qualitative research designs, forming the basis for the mixed methods approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Pragmatists adopt a pluralistic perspective without limiting themselves to one philosophical framework.

By employing mixed methods, pragmatism allows researchers to gain a deeper insight into the phenomena they study. This approach is often favoured by social science researchers (Morgan, 2007; Creswell & Creswell, 2018) due to its flexibility in selecting methods, techniques, and procedures that align with specific aims and requirements of research. It is particularly beneficial in real-world scenarios that tackle complex social issues, making it the most popular paradigm for mixed research methods (Pole, 2007).

Researchers adopting a pragmatist viewpoint can identify the most effective methods or strategies to address their research questions (Creswell, 2007). Feilzer (2010, p. 14) highlights that pragmatism goes beyond the quantitative/qualitative divide, alleviating conflicts between paradigms by concentrating on whether the research has successfully fulfilled the researcher's requirements. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) assert that pragmatists focus on topics that interest them and hold personal significance, using suitable methods to explore their research problems.

In this study, the researcher chose a pragmatist approach, which is crucial for gathering a wide range of data to respond effectively to the research questions. This approach is ideal as it employs a mixed-methods design, blending different research paradigms. By incorporating qualitative techniques, the researcher can gain insights into situations through exploratory data obtained from tools like participant document

analysis in the form of students' academic texts, while quantitative methods offer objective results using questionnaires. Overall, pragmatism offers a flexible and practical framework for social research, allowing the researcher to address complex problems effectively and contribute to meaningful social change.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design is vital in creating a solid framework for any study. The choice of research approach plays a crucial role in the research design process, as it significantly impacts the collection of pertinent information (Sileyew, 2019). This process encompasses researchers' methodologies to gather empirical data and tackle their research questions (Bhandari, 2023). Additionally, Creswell (2014) described research design as a systematic method for collecting and assessing data to answer the research question or test the hypothesis. Singh (2022) provides an in-depth overview of research design and paradigm, categorising scientific research projects into three distinct types: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory, each characterised by specific objectives.

3.3.1 Explanatory Research Design

In exploring research designs, the researcher finds the explanatory research design a powerful tool for uncovering the underlying reasons and mechanisms connected to various subjects. It clarifies the causal factors and outcomes associated with a phenomenon (Nayak & Singh, 2021). This approach enhances our understanding and provides broader insights into the topic. It is considered valuable, especially when a researcher identifies a problem and has a descriptive understanding but wishes to delve deeper into its causes. This design makes it easy to transcend mere descriptions and actively investigate the reasons behind the issue.

It is also regarded as an explanatory sequential design encompassing two interactive phases. The initial process starts with the collection and analysis of quantitative data to establish the preliminary results where these quantitative findings shape the second phase and incorporate qualitative research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017; Shorten & Smith, 2017; Wisdom & Creswell, 2013).

In this methodology, a researcher investigates a specific quantitative finding in greater detail and enhances it with qualitative data (Wisdom & Creswell, 2013).

3.3.2 Exploratory Research Design

Researchers often turn to exploratory research when they find themselves with insufficient knowledge about a topic or when current theories do not sufficiently address a given phenomenon. Nayak and Singh (2021) highlight that engaging in exploratory studies can deepen the researcher's understanding of the phenomena under examination. This research design is exceptionally freeing, allowing researchers to venture into new areas and discover fresh insights.

3.3.3 Descriptive Research Design

McCombes (2023) underscores that descriptive research aims to accurately and systematically represent a population, situation, or phenomenon. This type of research addresses key questions about what, where, when, and how without attempting to investigate the underlying reasons for these occurrences. When employing a descriptive research design, various methods can be used to analyse one or more variables effectively. As asserted by Dehalwar and Sharma (2023), the primary goal of this design is to delineate the characteristics, behaviours, or phenomena associated with a specific group or situation.

The researcher effectively employed a mixed-method approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies to address the research questions comprehensively and deeply understand the research subject. Regarding methodology, quantitatively, the researcher administered questionnaires with multiple-choice closed-ended and gap-fill test questions, completed under the researcher's supervision. Qualitatively, the researcher assigned students the essay topic *A Time I Discovered a Secret* under supervision. They were allocated 30 minutes to draft their academic task, which was subsequently collected for evaluation. The main objective was to analyse the academic task for the various idiomatic expressions and the extent to which they were used among English third-level students and their contextual application within the narrative.

The explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach was employed because it enables the combination of quantitative and qualitative data. This method allows the researcher to first gather and analyse quantitative data before moving on to qualitative data collection to provide further insights into the findings. By adopting this approach, the researcher achieved a more thorough understanding of the research issue and addressed any complexities that emerged from the initial quantitative results.

In this study, the researcher aimed to achieve the objectives by carefully examining students' questionnaire responses and thoroughly assessing their academic performance. This methodology is crucial, as it supports a detailed exploration of students' use of idiomatic expressions and offers specific feedback that promotes academic development. Initially, data was collected and analysed quantitatively, concentrating on student performance in multiple-choice and gap-fill questions. This was followed by a qualitative analysis of essay assignments, focusing on the use of various idiomatic expressions. This mixed-methods strategy allowed for a comprehensive analysis of linguistic proficiency.

3.4 RESEARCH APPROACH

Dawson (2019) points out that the research approach serves as the foundational principle guiding the research process and influences the choice of methodology. This suggests that researchers must be thoughtful about their research approach because it shapes the entire study. When a researcher chooses to use both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the research design qualifies to be mixed. This approach enables researchers to systematically structure a study that ensures validity and reliability while effectively addressing the aims, objectives, and research questions (Jansen & Warren, 2020). Furthermore, the research approach articulates and clarifies the methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (McCombes, 2022). Jansen and Warren (2020) assert that there are three research approaches: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method approaches. In this study, the researcher employed a mixed-method research approach, which combined the quantitative and qualitative research approaches because they have complementary functions.

3.4.1 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

The quantitative approach relies on measurable or numerical data. As Mohajan (2020) stated, quantitative research involves systematically investigating phenomena using statistical, mathematical, or computational methods. Additionally, Taherdoost (2022) asserts that the quantitative research approach entails the application of numerical values derived from observations to explain and describe the phenomena reflected in the observations. Leavy (2022) states that quantitative research is an approach that emphasises a wide scope, statistical analysis, and the ability to generalise findings. This method seeks to ensure objectivity, control, and accurate measurement by utilising structured and standardised techniques.

3.4.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

Cleland (2017) states that qualitative research aims to understand individuals' experiences in a clear, accessible, and analytical manner. This approach addresses research questions through a set of procedures, often involving observing various populations and conducting in-depth interviews or focus group discussions (Corner et al., 2019). In contrast to quantitative research, which relies on numerical data to test hypotheses, qualitative research seeks to provide rich and comprehensive descriptions of phenomena using non-numerical data (Oranga & Matere 2023).

3.4.3 MIXED-METHOD RESEARCH(MMR)

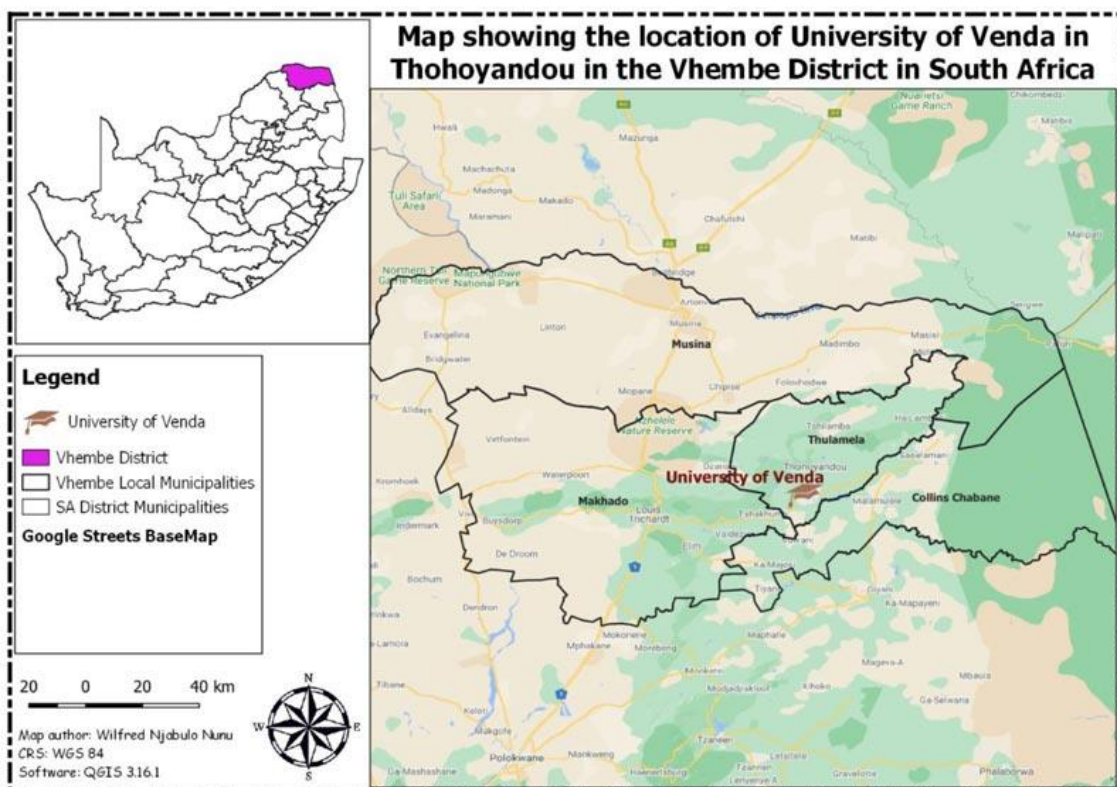
Sharma et al. (2023) assert that a mixed research approach involves integrating quantitative and qualitative research methods within a single study. In agreement, Saraswati (2023) emphasises that mixed methods of research (MMR) incorporate both qualitative and quantitative approaches to achieve a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of a research problem. Furthermore, combining these two prominent research paradigms helps mitigate the limitations inherent in each method, ultimately enhancing the reliability and validity of the research findings (Hafsa, 2019).

3.5 POPULATION AND SETTING

3.5.1 RESEARCH SETTING

The setting of a research study pertains to the physical, social, or experimental context in which the research is carried out. This encompasses location, period, population, and environmental factors (Fonseca, 2023). Selecting the appropriate research setting is vital, as it can significantly affect the study's findings' feasibility, generalisability, and relevance. The study was conducted at the University of Venda in the Limpopo Province of South Africa.

Figure 3.1: A cartographical representation of Thohoyandou, showing the geographical location of the University of Venda.



Source: Geographic Information System (GIS), Thohoyandou Map

3.5.2 POPULATION

Thorough research necessitates a robust sample and a representative population. The research population also referred to as the target population, encompasses the entire group or set of individuals, objects, or events that encompass specific characteristics of interest to the researcher. It represents the larger population from which a sample

is drawn (Thomas, 2023). Keith (2023) further clarifies that a population represents a complete set of items from which data is gathered, while a sample refers to a subset of this population. Essentially, it emphasises the importance of defining who or what is being studied to ensure the research is focused and relevant. This study focused on all third-level English major students from the Department of English at the University of Venda in 2023. The inclusion criteria outline the specific characteristics or attributes that prospective research participants must possess to be eligible for inclusion in the study (Nikolopoulou, 2022). Third-level students were selected based on their experience and exposure to English and expected familiarity with figures of speech, such as idiomatic expressions, compared to students at lower levels.

3.6 SAMPLING AND SAMPLING PROCEDURE

As accentuated by Zickar and Keith (2023), sampling procedures are vital for selecting study participants. These procedures involve precisely defining the parameters to be measured in the research. According to Thomas (2023), sampling is the process of choosing a sample from a larger population of interest, which enables researchers to gather data and make informed inferences. Sampling aims to obtain a sample that accurately represents the population, reflecting its key characteristics, variations, and proportions. By analysing the sample, researchers can conclude and make predictions about the larger population with a certain degree of confidence. Furthermore, studying a sample allows researchers to gather data more efficiently and cost-effectively than if they were to study the entire population. Various sampling methodologies, including random, purposive, convenience, cluster, and stratified sampling, offer unique applications and advantages for effective data collection.

To comprehensively understand the research topic, the researcher decided to employ an integrative approach that combines quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. The researcher used simple random sampling techniques alongside purposive sampling to facilitate this process to ensure a rigorous and effective data collection strategy. The population for this study included all English students enrolled at the University of Venda. The sample comprised 104 third-year English major students selected from this population through purposive sampling.

This study aimed to evaluate third-level English ESL students' proficiency in using idiomatic expressions in academic writing at a South African university. The probability sampling method was used to randomly select the participants because it allowed every learner to participate in the study. According to the population sampling norm, the study was conducted on 20 students, constituting 20% of the 104 targeted participants. For feasibility, the sample size was then reduced to 20 students, representing 20% of the population. The sample size selected to participate in a qualitative strand was a subset of the participants who participated in the quantitative study. Since one of the purposes is also to amalgamate different results into a complementary picture of the issue being explored (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), the size differential should not be a big issue. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) state that having a small size in the qualitative component and a larger size in the quantitative component supports researcher in getting in-depth qualitative exploration and rigorous quantitative examination of the issue.

3.7 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

An instrument serves as a tool in the research process, facilitating the identification of relevant phenomena in investigations designed to validate or refute specific hypotheses (Rachman et al., 2024). Research instruments include tools such as tests, surveys, questionnaires, or even checklists (Oben, 2021). For this study, the researcher used questionnaires to collect the biographical information from the participants. The researcher also administered standardised multiple-choice and fill-in-the-gap tests and documents in the form of students' essays. Questionnaires served as a valuable data collection tool, enabling the efficient gathering of information from many participants. This method allows researchers to quantify responses and discern patterns or trends within the data. Additionally, questionnaires are cost-effective and can be conveniently distributed online or in person.

The researcher also examined students' essays to enhance the quantitative approach to derive qualitative insights into their thoughts and perspectives. This examination offers a deeper understanding of individual reasoning, creativity, and critical thinking skills, thereby enriching the context of the quantitative data collected from the

questionnaires. By integrating these two methodologies, the researcher achieved a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. This blended approach also allows for a broader and more nuanced exploration of the study.

3.7.1 QUESTIONNAIRE

Ranganathan and Caduff (2023) define a research questionnaire as a data collection tool consisting of questions to collect information from respondents and thus learn about their knowledge, opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour. Thus, questionnaires are frequently used instrumentally as a standardised and standardising tool to ask participants questions. Bryman (2008) emphasized that a questionnaire serves four basic purposes: to collect appropriate data, to make the data comparable and suitable for analysis, to ensure that the questions are engaging and varied, and to minimize bias in formulating and asking questions. Typically, there are two types of questionnaire questions: open-ended and closed-ended.

Including a closed-ended questionnaire in the study presents various benefits. This approach is an effective way to gather data, particularly when the researcher knows the specific variables to measure, and the responses expected from participants. Closed-ended questions play a crucial role in survey design by offering a limited set of options for respondents (Martino, Shaller, Schlesinger, Parker, Rybowski, Grob, Cellury & Finucane 2017). This format helps collect measurable data, allows for comparisons, and aids in conducting statistical analyses. Furthermore, closed-ended questions are typically simpler for participants to complete and for researchers to evaluate, which is why they are often favoured in surveys.

The questionnaire used for the quantitative part of the study was divided into two sections:

Section A: Participants' demographic information

The questionnaires administered to the students were deemed suitable, enabling the researcher to gather essential biographical information about the participants. Per established guidelines, all participants were instructed to respond to closed-ended questions, providing relevant personal background details. This section was designed to collect demographic information, including age, gender, primary language, educational level, and interest in learning the English language. Participants were

asked to indicate their choices by marking a cross or a tick in the specified area. This method was implemented to enhance the understanding of the students being studied.

SECTION B:

(a) MULTIPLE CHOICE CLOSED-ENDED QUESTIONS

In this section, the researcher utilised administered standardised tests and a memorandum to implement a quantitative research approach. Participants were instructed to select the most accurate option from five (5) multiple-choice responses to the closed-ended questions. The participants were not expected to elaborate further, as they could select correct responses from the meanings presented in the column. The test aimed to identify idiomatic expressions already known by the participants in the study. The students' responses were scored out of twenty (20), with the highest possible mark being twenty (20) and the lowest possible mark being 0.

(b) GAP-FILL TEST

In the second part of the test, participants completed a gap-fill task by placing ten (10) idiomatic expressions in a contextual setting. This allowed the researcher to assess the participants' ability to use these expressions appropriately.

3.7.2 DOCUMENT (STUDENTS' ESSAYS)

In the academic essay titled *A Time I Discovered a Secret*, the researcher aimed to evaluate students' proficiency in using idiomatic expressions. Each student's mastery of these idioms was assessed through a detailed scoring rubric in the appendix. The process also included the researcher's focus on the correct usage of idiomatic expressions and the students' proficiency to impeccably integrate these expressions into their writing while also evaluating their overall effectiveness and creativity. This approach allowed the researcher to gain insights into the students' academic writing skills and competence to enrich their narratives with idiomatic language.

3.8 MEASURES OF QUALITY CONTROL

The quality of data obtained in research is predominantly determined by the validity of the instruments used and the data collection methods chosen. This is because research instruments serve as tools to convert facts into data. Therefore, if the instrument is valid and reliable, the data obtained will reflect the facts or situations

observed during the data collection and analysis. To attain valid and reliable data, the researcher must ensure that the measurement procedures and instruments have acceptable levels of validity and reliability before implementing the study (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2005). Therefore, validity and reliability are the two vital concepts in measurement.

3.8.1 QUANTITATIVE DATA: Validity and reliability

(i) Validity

Babie (2014) defines validity as the extent to which an empirical measure accurately represents the concept it is intended to assess. This definition emphasises the significance of precision in measurement, ensuring that research instruments are employed correctly and appropriately for their designated purposes. A valid tool successfully fulfills its intended function by measuring what it is designed to evaluate. Repke, Birkenmaier, and Lechner (2024) affirm that validity is the extent to which a scientific study or a specific measure captures what it is supposed to measure. In other words, the researchers draw the conclusions they intend to draw or measure what they intend to measure. Therefore, evaluating the validity of methods and measures is essential for producing accurate findings.

In this study, the researcher created a test to evaluate the proficiency of third-level L2 students in idiomatic expressions. To enhance the validity of the assessment, the University Higher Degree Committee (UHDC) carefully reviewed and validated the interpretation of the questionnaire items before their finalisation. The instruments were utilised accurately and specifically for their intended purposes throughout this research.

(ii) Reliability

Middleton (2021) highlighted that in research, the term reliability pertains to the consistency of a study or measurement tool. It reflects the stability and dependability of the measurements obtained. A reliable test or instrument guarantees that a respondent can receive the same score upon repeated testing, provided that no external factors influence the results (Segal & Coolidge, 2018). To ensure the reliability principle in this study, the researcher conducted multiple analyses of the students'

academic tasks. Furthermore, participants not involved in the main study but with similar characteristics were asked to complete the questionnaire.

3.8. 2 QUALITATIVE DATA: Trustworthiness

Shufutinsky (2020) defines trustworthiness as the degree to which a study warrants attention and the extent to which its findings can be trusted to reflect the experiences of the participants accurately. The trustworthiness of qualitative data relies on multiple factors, including the rigor of the research design, the credibility of the data sources, and the transparency of the data collection and analysis methods (Thatcher, 2010). Several measures were implemented to enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative data regarding students' written tasks. This means that trustworthiness fosters a better understanding of the participants being studied and ensures that the voices of participants are accurately presented.

(ii) Credibility

In qualitative research, credibility is crucial, as it defines the validity and trustworthiness of a study's findings and interpretations. Shufutinsky (2020) highlights that credibility is key to ensuring the research is robust and reliable. For researchers, establishing confidence in the truthfulness and accuracy of the data, the analysis, and the conclusions is essential for maintaining the overall integrity of the study. Simons(2002) characterise credibility as a multidimensional concept, encompassing the perceiver's evaluation of the communicator's relevant knowledge, honesty, and good intentions toward the perceiver. In this study, one effective strategy the researcher found to enhance credibility was sharing the study's findings with participants. Listening to participants helps strengthen the connection between their lived experiences and the research outcomes.

(i) Dependability

In exploring dependability within this research, the researcher has come to understand that it is fundamentally about the stability and reliability of both the process and the findings. Bengtsson (2016) states that the researcher values the critical importance of establishing trustworthiness and repeatability in the study. It is essential that the study

can be conducted consistently, with results that others can replicate in the field. To enhance the dependability of this study, the researcher provided a comprehensive description of the research design. This includes detailing the aim of the study, the research questions that guided the inquiry, the methods employed for data collection, and the procedures followed for data analysis. By being transparent about these elements, the researcher aimed to foster confidence in the findings and ensure that others can follow in the researcher's footsteps if they replicate the research.

(ii) Conformability

Confirmability refers to objectivity, the potential for equivalence between two or more independent people about the data's accuracy, relevance, or meaning. Nowell et al. (2017) say that to maintain an audit trail, having multiple researchers independently analyse the data and conducting member checks can strengthen confirmability. It is achieved through peer debriefing, member checking, and reflexive journaling. Researchers should demonstrate that personal biases and preconceived notions influence the conclusions drawn from the data as little as possible. To improve confirmability, the researcher critically reflected on the participants' assumptions and values that can influence the process and interpretations. The researcher described data collection methods and analysis techniques in the report to ensure conformability.

(iii) Transferability

Transferability is all about whether the insights gained from a study can be meaningfully applied to different situations or settings outside of where the original research took place (Shufutinsky, 2020). It raises questions about the relevance of the findings across varying contexts and populations. While qualitative research may not lend itself to broad statistical generalisation, it still has the power to deliver valuable insights that resonate in similar environments (Shufutinsky, 2020). To boost transferability, the researcher made it a point to consider the biases, assumptions, and perspectives of the participants involved. Understanding how these factors influenced both the research process and the outcomes was crucial in ensuring that the findings could be relevant in various contexts.

3.9 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection is a crucial process involving systematically gathering and measuring information on important variables. This enables researchers to address their research questions effectively. Whang, Roh, Song, and Lee (2023) underscored that data collection also plays a key role in testing hypotheses and evaluating outcomes. The researcher employed a comprehensive methodology for this study, integrating various quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques, including students' administered questionnaires and written texts. Such a thorough methodology ensures the reliability and validity of the research findings.

Research ethics require that researchers obtain appropriate permission from relevant authorities before initiating a study. Accordingly, the researcher sought and received formal approval from the lecturer of a third-level class to collect data from the participants during the final 20 minutes of each session. Upon securing this permission, paper-based questionnaires and an English idiom test were diligently distributed to all students in the classroom.

3.10 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis involves transforming collected data into meaningful information. Various techniques, such as modelling, are used to identify trends, relationships, and conclusions that aid the decision-making process (Start, 2006).

To determine the types of idiomatic expressions used in academic writing by third-level English L2 students, the researcher used the theory of idioms proposed by Michael McCarthy and Felicity O'Dell (2010) to categorise them.

The researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Science Software (SPSS) to obtain the study's results. The programme was utilised to reveal the statistics as follows:

Questionnaire, Section A: Background information was analysed in percentage and frequency.

Questionnaire, Section B: Knowledge of meanings of idioms was analysed based on frequency, percentage, and mean value.

English idioms test: The responses provided by the participants to 20 different idioms were manually reviewed by the researcher. Each accurate response was assigned a score of 1 point, while inaccurate responses received 0 points. If a participant selected multiple choices or did not select any, they were awarded 0 points for that item. The total possible score was 20 points. SPSS Version 27 was used for analysis because it offers advanced statistical capabilities, user-friendly interfaces, and comprehensive data management tools. These features facilitate thorough data analysis, ensuring accurate results and reliable insights for our research. Figures and tables were also used to analyse data subsequently.

Norris, Nowell, White, and Moules (2017) posit that every research contains data, and the absence of severe and relevant data analysis has implications in terms of the reliability and trustworthiness of the research process. The researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 for the quantitative data due to its ability to effectively manage huge datasets with multiple variables (Rahman & Muktadir, 2021). La Trobe (2020) posits that statistics can be described as a mathematical procedure to interpret the required information from the data collected, especially using a group of samples from a representative population.

Quantitative analysis is a statistical method for analysing numerical data collected online or offline, polls, questionnaires, and surveys, or by considering pre-existing statistical data more mathematically with computational techniques. The analysed findings further generalise across different groups or explain a phenomenon (Mujis, 2010; Babbie, 2020). This study collected and examined the standardised tests written by the participants. The idiomatic expressions used in a gap-fill task were compared with the responses for the meanings of idioms selected out of five options in a matching test. Those responses were classified as correct and incorrect by the researcher.

In qualitative research, document analysis was used to support the ideas and evidence gathered from written academics to support the researcher's claims. A thematic analysis was employed to analyse qualitative data by grouping responses provided by the respondents into various themes according to the study's objectives.

Thematic analysis, as elucidated by Braune and Clarke (2006), entails identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data. Their six-phase guide presents a valuable

framework for conducting theme analysis, encompassing familiarity with the data, generation of codes, theme generation, theme review, definition and naming of themes, and writing.

(a) Familiarisation

In this study, the researcher delved into the data by thoroughly reading and re-reading the written tasks while taking brief notes. Furthermore, the researcher closely examined the data to identify common themes, topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly. This allowed her to familiarise herself with the entire body of data and understand the depth and breadth of the information collected from students regarding their proficiency in using idiomatic expressions.

(b) Coding

The coding process entails dividing actual data into smaller, more manageable components that can be classified and examined for patterns and themes. The researcher systematically organised the data and drew meaningful connections. Important segments of the text were highlighted and annotated with labels that corresponded to the research question, aiding in a deeper understanding of the fundamental concepts and ideas. Furthermore, the researcher documented all idiomatic expressions used by each participant, without regard to their category.

(c) Generating Themes

Developing themes involves carefully classifying related codes to identify meaningful patterns that offer valuable insights into the research question. This process requires the researcher to exercise analytical judgment and have a deep understanding of the data. During this phase, the researcher transformed the categories identified in the coding process into more abstract themes, creating a rich interpretative context for the data set.

(d) Reviewing Themes

The researcher thoroughly explored the patterns and connections among the codes after completing the data coding process. She assessed the data linked to each code to see if it was supportive. If the analysis appeared to be lacking, the researcher returned to the data to find any missing elements.

(e) Defining and naming Themes

In this phase, the researcher created a description and narrative description of each theme, including its significance to the broader study question. The themes perceived as important were grouped and named to make the analysis process easier and clearer.

(f) Reporting

The researcher provided a clear and engaging summary of the findings of the research both within and across themes. The written report presents the collected data in a more understandable way.

3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Bhandari (2022) defines ethical considerations as a set of principles that guide research design and practices. Thorough and acceptable research necessitates a rigorous adherence to ethical and human-friendly processes. Therefore, research ethics plays an indispensable role. This part of the study addressed the issues of permission, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, avoidance of harm, and respect.

The researcher sought approval to conduct this study by presenting the proposal at the departmental level within the Department of English, Media Studies and Linguistics. Following this, the proposal was reviewed and approved by the University of Venda Higher Degree Committee (HDC). Once approved, the researcher secured ethical clearance, which granted authorisation to proceed with data collection in the field.

The study commenced following approval from the University Higher Degree Committee. Ethical clearance was sought from the university's Research Offices. To conduct the study within the Department of English, Media Studies and Linguistics, the researcher submitted a formal application letter. Following this, authorisation to proceed with the study was granted by the University's Ethical Clearance Committee and endorsed by the Dean. This granted permission facilitated the recruitment of research participants.

3.11.1 Informed consent

Informed consent is a vital ethical responsibility for researchers working with human participants. It indicates ethical research practices, as participants must voluntarily agree to participate. Adam (2000) states that researchers provide a consent form that participants read and sign before enrolment in the study. In this research, the researcher presented a comprehensive explanation to the participants regarding the research plan, including its objectives, advantages, and possible drawbacks (Creswell, 2014). The consent form was designed to confirm that potential participants were fully aware of the study's nature and could voluntarily choose whether to participate.

Considering this, the participants in this research were third-level English L2 students. The participants were provided with full information about the research: objectives, aim, advantages, and possible disadvantages, as well as the purpose of this study so that the research process operated transparently.

3.11.2 Voluntary Participation

Trochim (2023) accentuated the essential role of voluntary participation in research and emphasised the importance of ensuring that participants are neither coerced nor pressured into participating in a study. Instead, they should be invited to assist the researcher. In this study, the researcher made it clear that participation was entirely voluntary, not an obligation and informed the participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, without the need to provide a reason and without facing any negative consequences from the researcher or other participants.

3.11.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality refers to protecting raw data and only publishing aggregated results that cannot be traced to an individual or an organisation. Confidentiality means not including any personal and identifying information given by participants from data collection (Confidentiality and Anonymity of Participants-SAGE Research Methods, 2021). Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. Confidentiality in this study was maintained by not revealing the participants' personal information when reporting the study. Using codes was an effective method for protecting the confidentiality of research participants. In this study, the researcher ensured that all

the writing samples were encoded with numbers instead of students' names to maintain the confidentiality of the participants.

3.11.4 Anonymity

The principle of anonymity is a foundational standard in research that ensures participants' identities remain confidential throughout the study (Trochim, 2023). Bhandari (2022) elaborates that pseudonymisation is an alternative method where researchers substitute identifying information about participants with pseudonyms. To achieve this in the study, the researcher ensured that the names and identification of the participants were confined between them and not mentioned anywhere else in the study. For instance, the findings of the research were recorded in such a way that participants could not be identified. Also, the study did not discuss the participants' information, ensuring their identities remained undisclosed throughout the research process. Furthermore, the consent letters explained explicitly that participants' identities would be protected through pseudonyms.

3.11.5 Avoidance of Harm to Participants

In social sciences, research participants can experience physical and psychological harm (Trochim, 2023). Acknowledging this, the researcher took on the ethical responsibility to avoid placing participants in situations that might cause such harm during the study. Participants were informed about the possible impacts of the study. Additionally, the researcher ensured that participants were not required to cover any costs associated with the study, as this would constitute economic exploitation and be considered unethical.

3.12 SUMMARY

Chapter 3 presented an overview of research design, data collection, and analysis methodologies. It elaborates on the research methodology, paradigms, research approach, target population, sampling and sampling methods and criteria, research instruments, measurement controls, data collection strategies, data analysis processes, ethical considerations, and the overall structure of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research findings and engages in a discussion based on data collected from questionnaires and the analysis of participants' written tasks. The data analysis and interpretation were conducted in two distinct phases. The researcher used tables and figures/graphs, providing comprehensive numerical details to enhance comprehension and facilitate a clearer understanding of the collected data and its interpretations.

The data analysis aimed to shed light on the following research topic: 'Evaluating proficiency in the use of idiomatic expressions in academic writing by third-level second-language English students at a South African university' and its related research questions:

The first part, derived from the questionnaire results, focuses on quantitative data analysis from ninety-nine (99) third-level English major students. The participants responded to multiple choice closed-ended questions on idioms and gap-fill tests. The researcher included detailed tables and graphs with all the numerical data to comprehensively overview the quantitative information. The second approach involves analysing twenty written essays from the participants to obtain a more comprehensive, qualitative understanding of the results. The document also presented findings from prior research and literature, aiming to establish correlations and identify gaps in previous studies. The researcher thoroughly reviewed standardised tests and academic writings in line with the research questions indicated below:

1. What types of idiomatic expressions are used by third-level English L2 students in academic writing at a South African university?
2. How do third-level English L2 students use idiomatic expressions in academic writing at a South African university?
3. To what extent are third-level English L2 students proficient in using idiomatic expressions in academic writing at a South African university?

4.2 PARTICIPANTS' BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION (QUANTITATIVE)

To commence the presentation of the results, firstly, the demographic information of the participants was presented using pie charts and bar graphs.

The biographical information was included to establish respondents' conformity with the standards set for the quantitative validity and reliability of the study. While the findings of the study may not directly address the research objectives, the researcher's observations can nonetheless enhance the confidence and credibility associated with the expected answers. The biographical information was obtained from a study involving third-level English major students at the University of Venda.

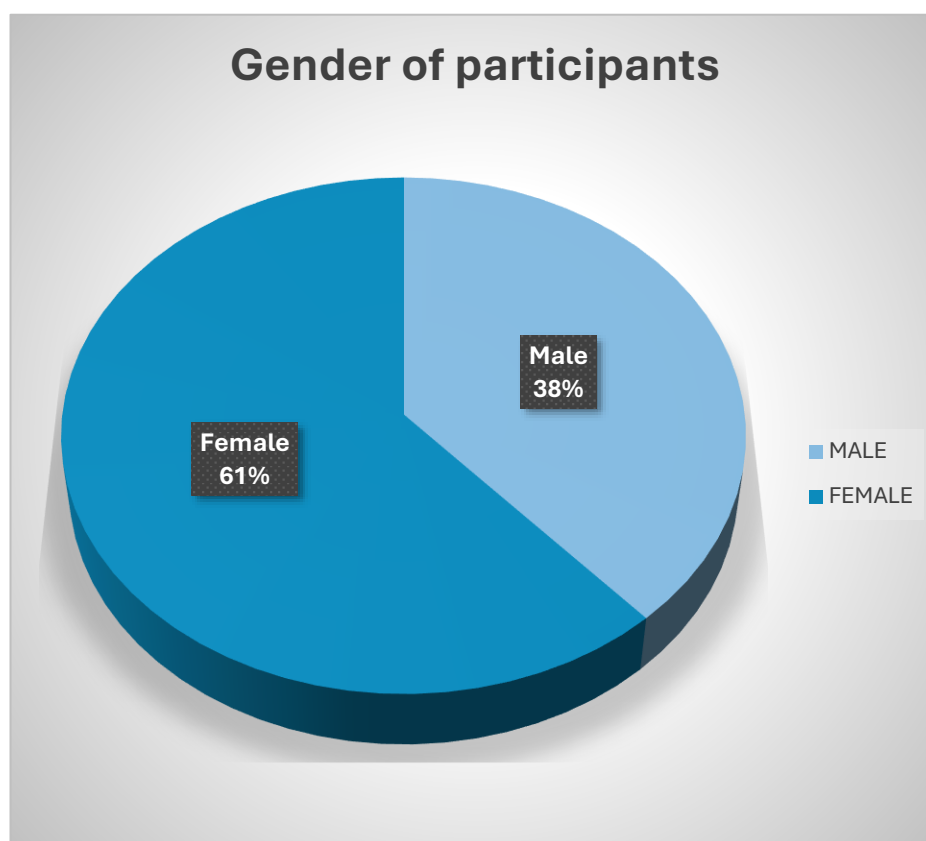


Figure 4.2.1: Respondents by gender (n=99)

Figure 4.2.1 illustrates the gender distribution of the 99 participants who responded to the survey. Of these, the majority were females, accounting for 62%, while males made up the remaining 38%. Of the 104 participants, 99 responded, representing 95% of the total sample. It is important to note that the study findings were influenced by the voluntary nature of participation and the deliberate selection of participants to satisfy the purposive sampling procedure, which relies on the researcher's judgment to gather valuable information for the study's objectives. The study's results revealed a higher representation of female students than male students.

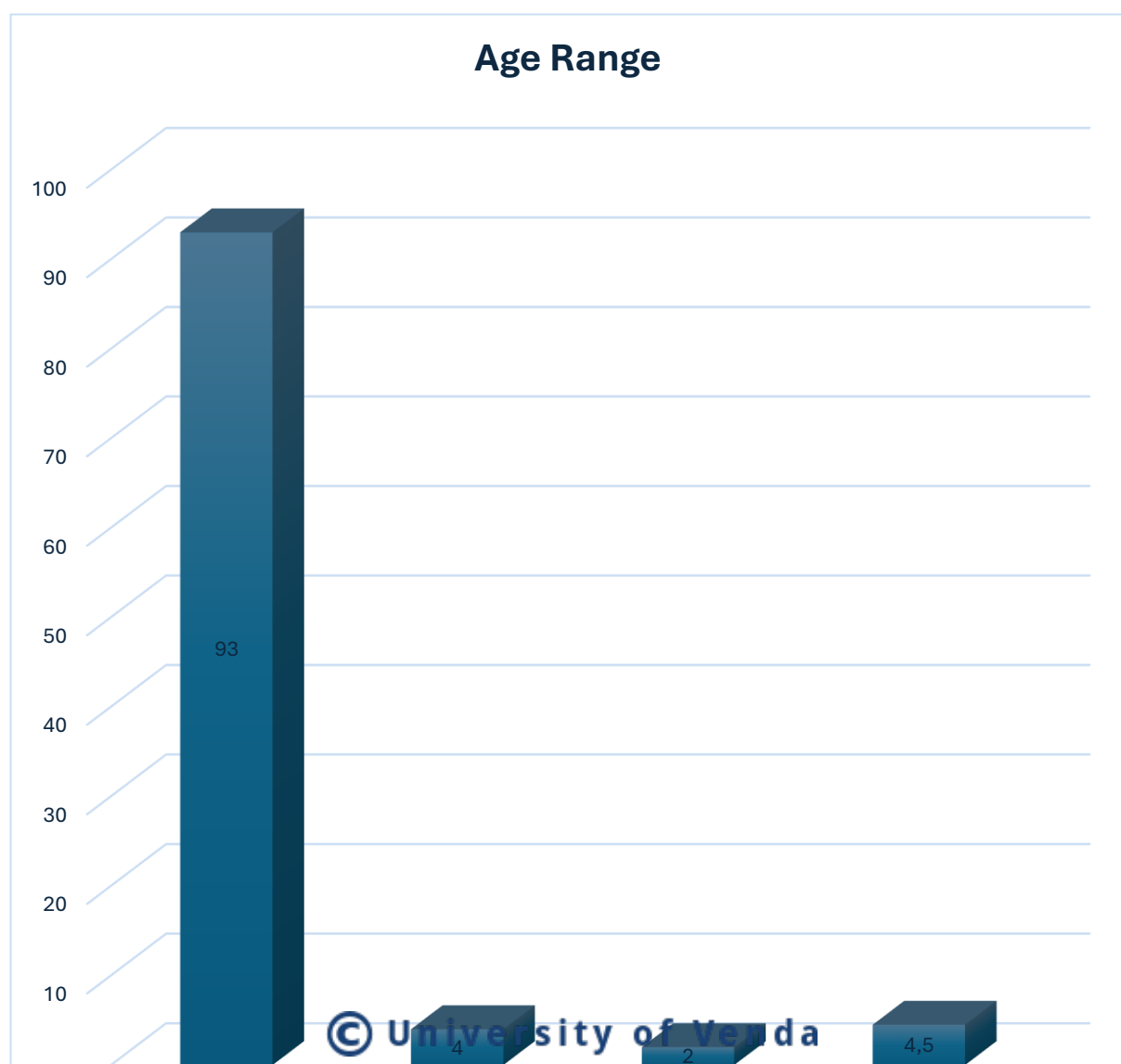


Figure 4.2.2: Respondents by age (n=99)

The data presented in Figure 4.2.2 indicates that most respondents were in the 20-25 age group, amounting to 93% of the total sample. Nevertheless, while a smaller number, four were in the 26-30 age group, and only two (2) participants were 36 or older. These demographic trends align with the anticipated age distribution of students accessing Post-School Education and Training (PEST), as most students are projected to enrol in various programmes and complete their studies within this age range (DHET-PEST,2021). The results are consistent with the predefined criteria used to assess the suitability of participants based on specific characteristics for their inclusion.

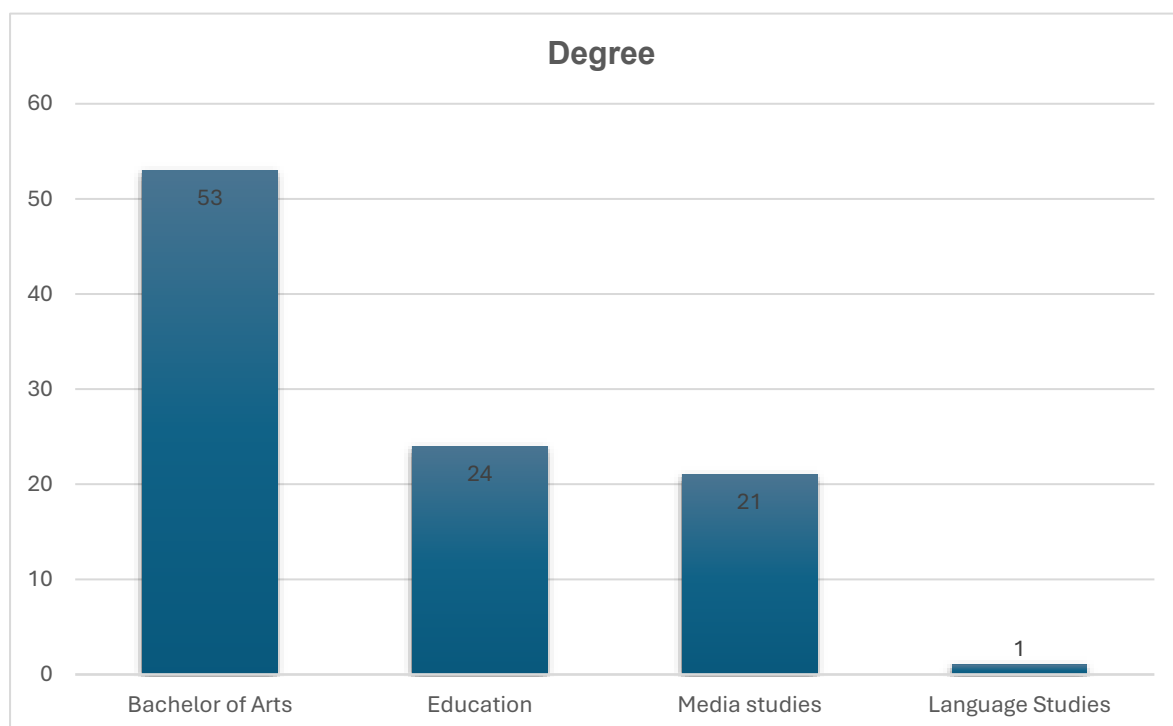


Figure 4 2.3: Respondents by degree (n=99)

Figure 4.3.2 reveals that most respondents, totalling 53 and amounting to 53.5% of the respondents, were enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts programme, followed by 24 respondents, or 24,2%, who were pursuing studies in Education, while 21 respondents, accounting for 21,2%, were in Media Studies. Finally, just one student, representing 1%, was found to be enrolled in the Language Practice programme. Most respondents opted for a BA degree, likely owing to its versatility. This programme offers a comprehensive education that enables students to explore a range of disciplines. This interdisciplinary approach equips graduates with a diverse skill set that is highly valuable across various industries, enhancing their appeal as candidates in a competitive job market.

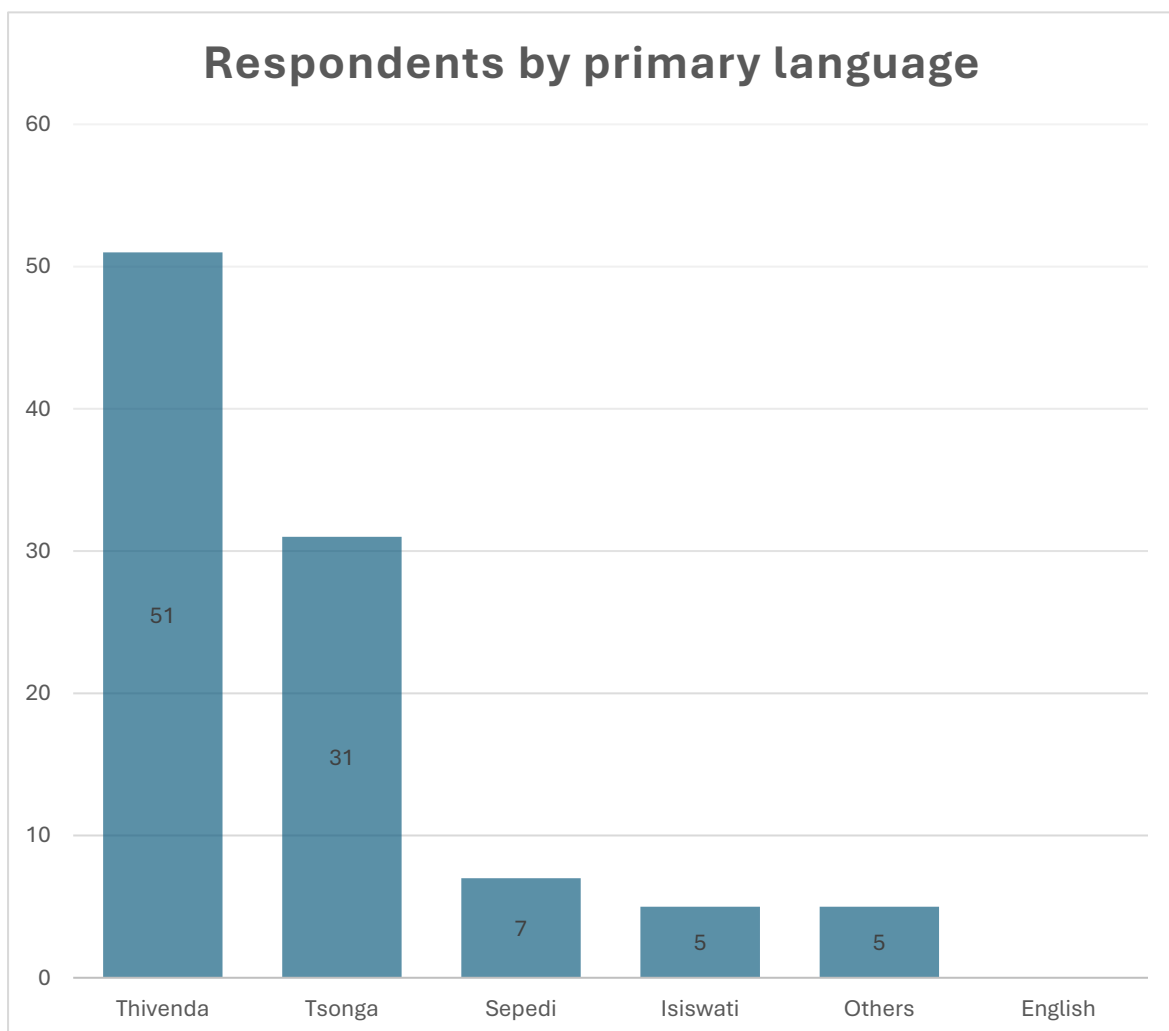


Figure 4.2.4: Respondents by primary language (n=99)

Figure 4.2.4 illustrates that none of the respondents identified as English speakers. Moreover, 5 respondents reported that they do not speak any of the primary languages listed, which may include Shona, Isizulu, Northern Sotho, or others. Additionally, among the respondents, there were 5 students who spoke Siswati and 7 who spoke Sepedi. In contrast, Xitsonga-speaking students accounted for 31 participants, while the majority, comprising 51 respondents, were Tshivenda speakers. This higher representation of Tshivenda (51 respondents) and Xitsonga (31 respondents) can be explained by the geographical location of the University of Venda, which is predominantly inhabited by the Vhavenda and Tsonga populations. Thus, the increased participation of individuals from these ethnic groups is likely linked to this demographic context.



Figure 4.2.5: Respondents who enjoy learning English (n=99)

In Figure 4.2.5, the data shows that the majority (94), accounting for 94,9% of respondents, positively perceive learning English, while the remaining 6% do not find the module enjoyable. The high satisfaction with learning English may be due to the compulsory status of English as a medium of instruction in South African universities (Ramani et al., 2007).

4.3 DATA ON IDIOMS CONTENT-RELATED QUESTIONS

This section is directly relevant to the research on the proficiency of third-level English major students at the University of Venda in using idiomatic expressions in academic writing. The study employed a mixed-method approach, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data for this study. The integration of the two approaches enabled the researcher to address different dimensions of research questions more comprehensively. The subsequent sections provide detailed information on how each method was employed and the specific evidence it yielded.

4.3.1. RETURN RATE OF THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Instrument used	Administered	Collected	Percentage
Answered questionnaire	104	99	95
Written essays	1	20	100

The researcher asked permission from the third-level class lecturer to collect the data from the participants for the last 20 minutes of class. The paper-based questionnaires and the English idiom test were distributed to all the students in the classroom. The

questionnaire and the English idiom test were in English. It was strictly prohibited to consult any form of dictionary during the investigation. The participants were limited to completing the questionnaires and the controlled or administered English idiom test within thirty minutes.

From a sample of 104 questionnaires distributed to third-level English students at the University of Venda, 99 were deemed suitable for usability, constituting 95% of the total, and subsequently included in the computation of the results. The remaining five questionnaires were excluded from the analysis due to non-attendance, non-responses, and substantial missing data. Consequently, the final sample size utilised for results interpretation comprised 99 questionnaires, resulting in a 95% response rate, exceeding the 70% threshold considered necessary for acquiring the requisite data for analysis.

4.3.2 QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

In this section, the data analysis is enhanced with detailed tables that include comprehensive numerical information, as mentioned earlier in the introduction of this chapter.

PHASE ONE: QUANTITATIVE INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

SECTION B: CONTENT-RELATED QUESTIONS

Table 4.3.2.1: *Performance of University of Venda English L2 third-level students on food idioms.*

1.1	Questions on food idioms and its meaning	No. of students	Correct Responses	% Correct Responses	Incorrect responses	% Incorrect responses
1	<i>Cry over spilled milk √Get upset over something that has happened and</i>	99	72	72%	27	27%

	<i>cannot be changed</i>					
2	<i>Hard nut to crack</i> √ <i>Difficult to understand</i>	99	47	47%	52	52%
3	<i>Put all of one's eggs in one basket</i> √ <i>Rely on one single thing</i>	99	56	56,5%	43	43%
4	<i>Spill the beans</i> √ <i>Reveal the truth</i>	99	69	69%	30	30%
5	<i>Handed to someone on a silver platter</i> √ <i>Receive something without working for it</i>	99	43	43%	56	57%

Table 4.3.2.1. illustrates the performance of 99 respondents on administered multiple-choice questions on food-related idioms. In Question 1, most respondents, amounting to 72%, proficiently paired the idiom ***cry over spilled milk*** with its meaning ***to get upset over something that has occurred and cannot be changed***. This high percentage of respondents' performance suggests a strong understanding and familiarity with the idiom among students, highlighting their engagement with English language nuances. This finding corroborates Cowie et al.'s (1983) assertion that the accurate and appropriate use of English idiomatic expressions is one of the

distinguishing marks of a native command of the language and a reliable measure of proficiency of foreign students.

Nevertheless, in Question 1, 27 respondents, representing 27%, struggled to competently match the idiom *cry over spilled milk* with its corresponding meaning. This poor performance might be attributed to a lack of familiarity with the idiomatic expression, ***cry over spilled milk***. Also, the idiom might not be commonly used in all cultural-linguistic backgrounds, leading to challenges in understanding. The findings contrast with Seran (2020), who conducted a study to determine students' English proficiency level of idioms and what appeared to be a challenge to comprehend. The instruments used to collect data were multiple-choice tests, completion tests, true-false tests, and questionnaires. The study's findings showed that the students' comprehension of idiomatic expressions was at a fair level.

For Question 2: ***hard nut to crack***: 52 respondents, representing 52%, demonstrated a significant misunderstanding as they struggled to show competency in accurately matching the idiom with its meaning: ***difficult to understand***. This suggests that students might have struggled with this idiomatic expression, which appears more abstract or complex. Only 47% of students exhibited fair competency in matching the idiomatic expression, a ***hard nut to crack***, with its corresponding meaning. These findings resonate with Ngoge's (2023), which revealed that the respondents generally struggled with understanding idiomatic expressions, performing below average in this area.

In Question 3, the majority of 56 participants, representing 56,5%, exhibited a moderate understanding of the idiom ***put all one's eggs in one basket***, which conveys the idea of ***(relying on a single thing or depending solely on one entity)***. They were competent in selecting the correct meaning of this idiom ***(put all one's eggs in one basket)***. This reflects a better understanding of this idiom but still highlights areas for improvement. However, 43 respondents, up to 43%, demonstrated limited mastery of the idiom, ***putting all one's eggs in one basket***. The complexity of the language might have caused this limited mastery, as idioms can be challenging to interpret for non-native speakers or those still mastering the language, as the literal

meaning often diverges from the idiomatic meaning. The study's findings align with Seran's (2020), which showed that the students' comprehension of idiomatic expressions was fair.

This finding is supported by Ramani, Kekana, Modiba and Joseph (2007), who emphasised the importance of language learning in the context of South African universities and highlighted the role of contextual understanding and exposure in the acquisition of language skills, which is also reflected in the recommendations for improvement regarding idiomatic expressions.

In Question 4, most respondents, amounting to 69%, showed their proficiency in correctly matching the idiom (***spill the beans***) with its corresponding meaning (***reveal the truth***). This can generally be considered an acceptable performance, indicating a good understanding of the idiom among the respondents. The findings show that this level of performance may be attributed to their prior knowledge and exposure to these idioms. The findings support Kisner's (1994) assertion that EFL students' ability to use idioms proficiently or fluently is often connected to their exposure to them in diverse contexts.

It is concerning that 30% of respondents had difficulty selecting the correct meaning of the idiom from the available options. This reduced performance may be linked to a lack of background knowledge and limited exposure to these formulaic expressions. This finding aligns with Rafieya's (2018) assertion that a strong positive correlation exists between language students' familiarity with target language formulaic sequences and their overall proficiency in the language. He emphasized that a solid grasp of idiomatic expressions is crucial for students seeking to enhance their language fluency.

Question 5, ***handed to someone on a silver platter***, had a highly incorrect meaning of this idiomatic expression. The response rate was 57%, indicating that students may not have fully grasped its meaning, as idioms carry meanings that differ significantly from their literal interpretations. Students not regularly exposed to this idiomatic expression may struggle to select the correct meaning. As a result, this unfamiliarity led to misconceptions, as seen in the incorrect interpretation of the idiom in question.

The findings are congruent with those of Grant (2007) and Liu (2003), who showed that students had minimal idiomatic knowledge.

In summary, the data indicates an adequate performance rate of 57% and an understanding of food idioms of third-level English major students at the University of Venda. However, students might not have fully grasped the material. This lack of understanding resulted in unfamiliarity with idiomatic expressions, insufficient contextual comprehension, ineffective teaching methods, and cognitive overload. This finding is incongruent with the study conducted by Saric (2022), which examined the familiarity of thirty first-year graduate students with food-related idioms. The results demonstrated that these students had a strong comprehension of idioms.

Table 4.3.2.2: Performance of University of Venda English third-level students on animal idioms

1.2	Questions on animal idioms	No. of students	Correct Responses	% Correct Responses	Incorrect responses	% Incorrect responses
1	Hold your horses √Wait and be patient	99	37	37%	62	62,6%
2	Take the bull by its horns √Face a challenge or danger boldly	99	53	53,5%	46	46%
3	Let the cat out of the bag √Reveal a secret	99	74	74,7%	25	25%

4	Kill two birds with one Stone √Get two things done at once	99	67	67,6%	32	32%
5	Smell a rat √Begin to suspect a trickery	99	50	51%	49	49%

Table 4.3.2.2 illustrates the performance of 99 respondents in multiple-choice questions on animal-related idioms. In Question 1, it is concerning that a minority (37) of respondents, amounting to 37%, demonstrated a low level of performance by being competent in matching the idiom (**hold your horses**) with its corresponding meaning (**waiting and being patient**). Again, of the entire population (99), 53 participants, resulting in 53,5%, demonstrated moderate mastery of the idiom **take the bull by its horns** in Question 2. This idiom means **facing a challenge or danger boldly**. This moderate performance of students regarding matching idioms related to animals with their corresponding meanings might have resulted in a lack of prior exposure and familiarity with these formulaic expressions. These findings contrast the assertions made by Boers et al. (2006) and Ohlrogge (2009) that non-native speakers proficient in employing formulaic language in both spoken and written discourse are perceived as more competent. The participants could proficiently match idioms with their meanings to demonstrate mastery of these formulaic expressions. Furthermore, Mantyla's (2004) research supports these conclusions, emphasising that familiarity with idioms is vital for accurately and efficiently mastering English idiomatic expressions.

In Question 3, the idiom **let the cat out of the bag**, the accuracy rate was the highest, with the majority (74) of the respondents, amounting to 75%, demonstrating mastery in responding to this idiom. This level of proficiency indicates that students are effectively learning and retaining concepts related to figurative language. Their strong

performance suggests that students have a solid grasp of this idiomatic expression, as they accurately identified its meaning: to reveal a secret. This result contrasts with the findings of Saleh and Zakaria (2013), who identified a lack of cultural familiarity with idioms and limited exposure as significant obstacles to EFL students' understanding and usage of idioms.

In Question 4, 67 participants, or 68%, successfully matched the idiomatic expression **"kill two birds with one stone"** to its correct meaning: to accomplish two tasks simultaneously. This level of proficiency may stem from a robust comprehension of these formulaic expressions, which are crucial for students' success. These findings align with the insights of Shirazi and Talebinezhad (2013), who argue that a deeper understanding of idioms is essential for achieving proficiency and accuracy in English usage.

While most participants demonstrated proficiency in matching idioms to their corresponding meanings in questions 1, 2, 3, and 4, 49 participants—representing 49%—struggled to correctly identify the meaning of the idiom (**smell a rat**), which means **(to begin to suspect trickery)** in question 5. Despite having six options available for this task, 49% of participants were incompetent in making the accurate connection for the idiom **smell a rat**. This implies that the limited level of figurative idiom competence might have been caused by inadequate attention received during the learning process. This low level of figurative idiomatic competence in this question might be attributed to inadequate attention received in foreign language teaching (Tran, 2012 & Vasiljevic, 2011). Hence, the participants confused its meaning with option E, **odd or suspicious**, instead of proficiently matching it with its corresponding option A, **beginning to suspect trickery**. Similarly, Lakoff's (1980) Cognitive Linguistics Theory of idioms maintains that inadequate exposure to metaphorical exposure that underpins the idiomatic expression **smell a rat** might have been attributed to a lack of familiarity with the specific metaphorical associations that link sensory experiences to cognitive evaluation.

The results indicate that most respondents possess a good grasp of animal idioms and their meanings, as the overall performance rate is 57%. This suggests that at least most of the respondents are familiar with these expressions, demonstrating a solid

understanding of figurative language. Additionally, this points to a potential need for improved educational approaches or activities aimed at boosting idiomatic comprehension for those who struggled. Ultimately, these findings could guide the development of teaching methods or curricula emphasising language and idiomatic phrases. The findings are supported by RahmtAllah's (2024) results that indicated that the students had sufficient knowledge of idioms and were familiar with idiomatic expressions.

Table 4.3.2.3: Performance of University of Venda English L2 students on colour idioms

1.3	Questions on colour idioms	No. of students	Correct responses	% Correct responses	Incorrect responses	% Incorrect responses
1	<i>Born with a silver spoon in one's mouth</i>	99	37	37%	62	63%
2	<i>Roll out the red carpet</i>	99	65	66%	34	34%
3	<i>Out of the blue</i>	99	69	70%	30	30,3%
4	<i>Golden opportunity</i>	99	71	72%	28	28,2%
5	<i>Black sheep</i>	99	48	48,4%	51	52%

The data presented in Table 4.3.2.3 show that the majority, 59%, of participants demonstrated adequate mastery of colour-related idioms by administering multiple-choice or closed-ended questions. Question 1, the idiom ***born with a silver spoon in one's mouth***, meaning ***born into a rich family***, had the lowest comprehension rate of 37%, indicating a significant gap in understanding this expression among students. The respondents' competency in selecting this idiom's appropriate meaning was low.

A lack of exposure to this idiomatic expression or insufficient contextual learning might have caused this. This finding is incongruent with Karlson's (2019) assertion that increased exposure to idiomatic expressions enhances EFL students' ability to understand and use them fluently in written communication.

However, it is concerning that 66% of respondents exhibited poor mastery of selecting the corresponding meaning for the idiom, ***born with a silver spoon in one's mouth***, in Question 1. This suggests that the participants lack familiarity with these idioms, as many of them are opaque, which means that their meanings cannot be inferred from the individual words. This implies that even if students frequently encounter idiomatic expressions in media or educational materials, they may still lack a deep understanding of their meanings. These results are consistent with prior research conducted by Saleh and Zakaria (2013) and Smadi and Alishan (2015), which identified a lack of familiarity and limited exposure as significant barriers to students' comprehension and effective use of idioms. This assertion is further supported by Lundblom and Woods (2012), who emphasised the importance of understanding idioms as fundamental components in academic contexts.

Question 2, the idiomatic expression, ***roll out the red carpet***, meaning ***treating someone like royalty***, had a high correct response rate of 66%. The respondents proficiently selected the correct response to match its meaning. The implication might be that students are more likely to be familiar with this idiom. These findings confirm Abu-Joudeh's (2021) results, emphasising that exposure to these formulaic expressions influences comprehension.

Question 3, featuring the idiom ***out of the blue***, meaning ***unexpectedly***, also attained the highest correct response rate, with 69 respondents, amounting to 70%, responding correctly. The students demonstrated exceptional ability to identify the idiomatic expressions' meanings in both questions. This suggests that students' competence with this idiomatic expression might have resulted from its frequent appearance in everyday contexts, media, and educational materials. This finding is supported by Nadeem and Almowalad's (2022) suggestion that using idiomatic expressions can enhance English vocabulary acquisition and overall language proficiency. This reflects the solid grasp that third-level ESL students have of this idiom, demonstrating a comprehensive understanding of its nuances and applications.

In Question 4, students achieved the highest response rate of 72%, with 71 respondents showing a strong understanding of the idiom **golden opportunity**, which **refers to the perfect chance**. Most students accurately identified the meaning of this idiom, indicating that a significant number have a solid comprehension of idiomatic expressions and how to use them. Additionally, the high performance may be attributed to the relevance of such idioms in academic settings where students encounter them regularly. These findings are consistent with those of Qadr and Madhat (2020), who demonstrated a noteworthy connection between knowledge of idioms and language proficiency.

Nevertheless, there were 28 incorrect responses, which amounts to a 28% error rate, indicating that some students encountered difficulties in proficiently providing the intended meaning of this idiom from the options given. It is plausible that (**golden opportunity**) is not as intuitive for them or is encountered less frequently in their everyday language or educational resources. For example, students might have confused golden opportunity with other idiomatic expressions related to opportunity. This poor performance might have resulted in a lack of exposure and necessary skills to negotiate meaning in the teaching and learning idioms. The findings of this study corroborate those of Grant (2007) and Liu (2008), who emphasised the importance of teaching figurative idiomatic expressions comprehensively alongside the skills required for negotiating meaning.

Question 5 included the idiomatic expression **black sheep**, referring to **an odd or bad family member**, and achieved 48, amounting to 48.4% accurate answers. Students exhibited fair mastery of this idiom in matching its meaning. This misinterpretation of the appropriate meaning of the idiom black sheep might have resulted from cultural differences or lack of exposure. However, the significant number of incorrect responses from 51 respondents, constituting 52% of the sample, raises concerns about potential inadequacies in their understanding and exposure to this idiom. Also, this discrepancy may have been caused by misinterpreting the idiom's meaning. These findings correspond with Ngoge's (2023), who discovered that respondents demonstrated below-average performance in understanding idiomatic expressions in a cloze test. This might have resulted in an absence of experience dealing with idioms and an absence of a broad context for a given idiom (Pimenova, 2011).

The general performance rate for understanding colour idioms is around 58%, reflecting a moderate level of comprehension among students. This indicates that while certain idiomatic expressions are recognised more readily, a substantial gap in understanding needs attention. It is anticipated that recommendations will be made regarding teaching strategies to help EFL teachers introduce their students to English colour idiomatic expressions.

Table 4.3.2.4 Performance of University of Venda English L2 students on body part-idioms

1.4	Questions on body idioms	No. of student s	Correct respons es	% Correct respons es	Incorrec t respons es	% Incorrect response s
1	Cry your heart out √Cry very hard	99	70	71%	20	29%
2	Cost arm and a leg √Very expensive	99	67	68%	32	32%
3	Makes my blood boil √Make me angry	99	33	33%	66	67%
4	Pull one's leg √Joke or tease someone	99	45	45%	54	55%
5	Get something off one's chest	99	56	57%	43	43%

	√ Tell someone your secret					
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Table 4.3.2.4 illustrates the performance of 99 respondents in multiple-choice questions on body-part-related idioms. Out of the participants, 70, or 71%, showed a strong ability to understand the idiom's meaning in Question 1: **cry your heart out**, which refers to **crying intensely**. This indicates that the students' successful performance may stem from their familiarity with and comprehension of the idiom. These results differ from those found in Alhaysony's (2017) study, which indicated that students faced considerable challenges in understanding idiomatic expressions. Nevertheless, a minority (29) of students, which amounted to 29%, were incompetent in selecting the appropriate meaning of the idiom **cry your heart out**. The low level of performance in this question might be attributed to a lack of exposure and familiarity with the idiom in an English classroom. These findings correspond to the findings of Arifuddin et al. (2019), who found low levels of students' ability to master idiomatic expressions due to no idiomatic teaching and a lack of familiarity with strategies for understanding idiomatic expressions.

Again, the idiom **cost an arm and a leg** in Question 2 achieved a high accuracy rate, with 68% of responses corresponding with their meaning. Respondents demonstrated competency in matching the idiom with its corresponding meaning. This suggests that students understand this idiom strongly because they demonstrated proficiency in matching it with its corresponding meaning. This is supported by the findings of the study conducted by Almohizea (2017) using a mixed-method approach to examine the comprehension of body-part idioms by Arabic-speaking EFL students from a cognitive linguistics perspective. The results of the study showed that the idiomatic expression, **cost an arm and a leg**, might be more commonly encountered in everyday language, which could explain this excellent performance.

Even though most participants provided the correct answer to Question 2, a small percentage, specifically 32%, it is concerning that respondents exhibited low-level mastery of the idiomatic expressions, **cost an arm and a leg**, and gave an incorrect

response. This finding supports what Levorato and Cacciari (2002) maintain: that competent users of figurative language need a lengthy process and are closely associated with the ability to reflect on language as a complicated cognitive and interpersonal phenomenon. This perspective is also supported by Jabboori and Jazza (2013:21), who argued that familiarity with idioms significantly impacts non-native English speakers' understanding and interpretation of idiomatic expressions. They further emphasised that familiar idioms are more readily recognised by both native and non-native speakers of English compared to those that are unfamiliar.

The results presented in Table 4 indicate that 54,7% of participants demonstrated moderate mastery in a multiple-choice question assessment focused on body-part-related idioms. Overall, students at the University of Venda performed well in the test, demonstrating a high level of competency in most idiomatic expressions. These results highlight the effectiveness of the current teaching methods and offer opportunities for improvement to enhance the full integration and practical use of idiomatic language.

The high scores on the closed-ended or multiple-choice questions concerning idioms related to food, animals, colours, and body parts can be attributed to ESL students' familiarity with these expressions. This familiarity likely stems from their exposure to such idioms throughout their studies. In particular, the proficiency of third-year ESL students in these idioms is linked to a module offered in the English Department, where they are expected to demonstrate a strong understanding of figures of speech, including idioms. As a result, their familiarity with the usage and meanings of these idioms has greatly enhanced their comprehension.

Table 4.4 Students' Responses to the Gap-Fill Test

The students' responses to the gap-fill or completion test with the most appropriate idioms varied. Therefore, it could be identified how far the students comprehended the test, although there were empty spaces in each sentence. Some items were answered proficiently and even excellently by students in this test. The data are presented in Table 4.4.1 below.

Table 4.4.1: Performance of University of Venda English L2 students on gap-fill test (n=99)

Question No.	Number of Students	Correct Responses	Total Percentage	Incorrect Responses	Total Percentage
1	99	63	64 %	36	36%
2	99	71	72%	28	28 %
3	99	47	47%	52	53%
4	99	55	56%	44	44%
5	99	60	61%	39	39%
6	99	37	37%	62	63%
7	99	41	41%	58	59%
8	99	68	69%	21	21%
9	99	58	59%	41	41%
10	99	70	71%	29	29%

All 99 students responded to the gap-fill test. The table above presents how they performed on each fill-in-the-gap question. The data in Table 4.4.1 shows the number of students and their correct and incorrect responses across ten levels, along with the corresponding percentages. In Question 1, ***stop being a dreamer! _____ and look at the problem more seriously***, 63 respondents, amounting to 64%, were proficient enough to fill in the gap with the most appropriate idiom, ***down to earth***, to complete the sentence. Recognising and proficiently using idiomatic expressions such as ***down to earth*** often stems from exposure to English in various contexts, including media and education. Students who engage with English-language content outside the classroom may better understand idioms, which can enhance their performance on such assessments. Research indicates that idiomatic expressions are crucial for fluency and comprehension in a second language, as they reflect cultural nuances and everyday language use. These findings contrast with those of Al-Khawaldeh, Al-Momani, and Bani-Khair (2016), who conducted a study that explored the use of English idioms by Arab students in their academic writing. The results highlighted a significant deficiency in idiomatic competence among these students and limited awareness of the most frequently used idioms.

Nonetheless, it was concerning that 36% of the respondents were not proficient in completing the sentence with a suitable idiom. This poor performance can be attributed to students' avoidance of these formulaic expressions in spoken or written discourse because they find them difficult. This finding aligns with Laufer (2000), who used a fill-in translation exam to assess EFL university students' avoidance of English idioms and discovered that students with lower English proficiency tended to avoid using English idiomatic expressions more significantly.

Questions 2 and 10 discovered that 71 participants, constituting 72% of the total sample size, demonstrated a proficient understanding of idiomatic expressions by effectively filling in the blanks with the correct idioms. In Question 2, respondents proficiently filled in the blank space for Question 2; the **test was a... I know I aced it** with the correct idiom provided in the box, which is **a piece of cake**. The cognitive load associated with processing idiomatic expressions can affect L2 students' performance. Students who have developed a certain level of proficiency may find it easier to process these expressions without overthinking their meanings, leading to higher response accuracy. These findings are incompatible with Al-Kadi's (2015) study that evaluated Yemeni EFL undergraduate students' ability to recognise, comprehend, and use English idiomatic expressions. The findings indicated that these students possessed limited idiomatic competence.

Nonetheless, 28 respondents, constituting 28% of the total, were incompetent as they encountered challenges in responding to Question 2; **the test was a; I know I have aced it** and experienced difficulties accurately completing the blank with the appropriate idiom **a piece of cake** despite most students successfully answering it. This below-average performance likely stems from a lack of classroom discussions, which resulted in insufficient exposure and practice for students to English idiomatic expressions. These findings align with Anjarini and Hatmanto's (2021) study, which emphasised the importance of classroom discussions on idiomatic expressions for better understanding. Similarly, Fathma, Nurlela, and Yusuf (2020) discovered that students often misunderstood an idiomatic expression, such as a piece of cake, by interpreting it literally, further highlighting the need for idiom classroom discussions.

In Question 3, respondents, representing 47% of the total, demonstrated their fair level of competency by correctly filling in the blank with the idiom **do her a favour** to complete the sentence; Suzan **asked her to.... and take out the trash**. This fair level of performance reflects a lack of understanding of the idiom among the respondents. The findings are consistent with Seran (2020), who showed that the students' comprehension of idiomatic expression was at a fair level of 43%. However, it was concerning that 53% of the respondents were incompetent in responding to question 3 appropriately. This suggests that students lack familiarity with this idiomatic expression. This is consistent with the findings of Mohdeb and Kauoache (2022), who aimed to identify commonly used idiomatic expressions in the academic writing of EFL students, revealing that their familiarity with and application of theoretical and practical English idioms remains insufficient.

Question 4: **His argument about the death penalty was so convincing that it made most judges.....about the problem**; 56% of respondents completed the sentence proficiently with the most appropriate idiom in the context **change their minds....** This moderate performance might have been caused by a lack of exposure and understanding of this idiomatic expression.

Nevertheless, 44 of the respondents, representing 44%, exhibited a low level of proficiency in filling in the blank space in Question 4 with the appropriate idiom, **changing their minds**. This low level of performance might be attributed to a lack of prior exposure or familiarity with this idiomatic expression. Funtek (2015) also demonstrated that non-native speakers or ESL (English Second Learners) found it recognising idioms due to their various meanings challenging. She believes that one of the reasons behind this is that professors did not pay enough time and attention to teaching idioms to their students.

In question 5, **I would ask you kindly not to interfere with what I am doing as, in all honesty, it is _____** 61 respondents, amounting to 61%, demonstrated satisfactory performance by competently filling in the blank space with the appropriate idiom, **none of my business**. The high success rate implies that the students have an average understanding of the question. This is inconsistent with Al-Kadi's (2015) findings, which indicated students possess limited idiomatic competence. Although 61% of respondents demonstrated average performance in proficiently completing the

sentence, *I would ask you kindly not to interfere with what I am doing as, in all honesty, it is _____*, 39% of respondents' performance rate showed that students were incompetent in completing the sentence with the appropriate idiomatic expression, ***none of my business***. The implication is that poor idiomatic competence can lead to misunderstandings, hinder effective expression, and impact overall language proficiency. The findings correspond with Tran (2013), whose results indicated that the participants had poor idiomatic competence.

In Question 6, ***Do not miss this....; it can change your life***; 37 respondents' performance rate was below average as they exhibited poor mastery of idiomatic expressions, a ***golden opportunity*** to complete the sentence. This inadequate performance could be attributed to a lack of familiarity with idiomatic expression and insufficient practice in teaching, suggesting that these respondents did not receive comprehensive language education regarding this idiom. The findings align with Anjarini and Hatmanto (2021), who identified that the principal challenge was the disparity between idioms' and their constituent words' meanings. This difficulty is exacerbated by the infrequent usage of English idioms and a considerable gap in educational practices focusing on teaching them effectively. However, 62% of respondents were incompetent to provide a suitable response to Question 6, which is concerning. This poor performance might be attributed to inadequate preparation and inadequate information about the idiomatic expression or insufficient knowledge of the idiom in question. These results align with Alhaysony (2017) who conducted a case study using a questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and the vocabulary level test to measure students' English proficiency in Saudi University EFL Students investigating strategies and difficulties in understanding English idioms. The results showed that students encountered difficulties in comprehending idiomatic expressions.

Nonetheless, in Question 7, it was concerning that the majority (63), accounting for 63% of respondents, performed poorly in completing the sentence, ***Calm down. There is really nothing to worry about. You are _____***. Students were not proficient in filling the gap with the corresponding idiomatic expression, ***making a mountain out of a molehill***. This indicates that the question posed a challenge for some or that performance limitations stemmed from a lack of comprehension regarding this

idiomatic expression. These results align with Gibbs (1994), who noted that proficiency in the second language (L2) idioms present a unique challenge; idiomatic expressions consist of fixed structures with standardised meanings, allowing only limited variability in usage. Moreover, these findings align with Lakoff's (1980) Cognitive Linguistic Theory of Idioms, which underscored incorporating cognitive-linguistic principles into language education to improve student understanding and mastery of idiomatic expressions.

In Question 8, respondents who amounted to 69%, were proficient in filling the gap with the suitable idiom **break a leg** to complete the sentence **I understand you have a job interview tomorrow, _____**. This indicates that students are familiar with this idiomatic expression.

Only 29% of the respondents could not provide the correct idiom to fill this question's blank space. This can be attributed to avoidance, as some respondents did not fill in the blank spaces to complete the sentence. Another reason might be ESL students' comprehension challenges and the lack of prior knowledge of this idiomatic expression. These findings are congruent with what Laufer (2000) found in a study conducted using a fill-in translation exam to assess EFL university students' avoidance of English idioms, where he discovered that poorer English ability was associated with more significant avoidance of English idioms.

Question 9, **we want to buy a new car, but it would cost us _____**, exhibited satisfactory performance, as 59% of respondents demonstrated proficiency by accurately completing the gap with the appropriate idiom, **an arm and a leg**. This satisfactory performance might have resulted in background knowledge and familiarity. The findings diverge from the findings of Vo and Nguyen (2020), which indicate that the students possessed limited knowledge of idiomatic expressions. However, 41,4% of the respondents exhibited poor performance in competently filling in the blank space with the suitable information provided. These might have resulted in a lack of exposure to these formulaic expressions. These findings corroborate an investigation by Al-Houiti (2020), which aimed to investigate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' knowledge of frequently used idioms and the effect of learner-related factors. The results show that Kuwaiti EFL students have difficulty comprehending common idiomatic expressions.

Question 10: ***We tried to throw James a surprise party for his birthday, but you...*** yielded an exceptional 71% response rate, as 70 respondents were proficient in filling in the blank space by providing correct answers. They competently used the appropriate idiom, ***letting the cat out of the bag***, to complete the sentence. This remarkable performance suggests that students thoroughly understand the idiom and context. These results support Saleh and Zakaria's (2013) assertion that learning idioms requires a more complex level of cognitive ability, and students must be fully aware of the context and situation in which those expressions are used.

Nonetheless, 29% in Question 10 showed poor performance in proficiently completing the sentence: We ***tried to throw James a surprise party for his birthday, but you_____***, with the appropriate idiomatic expression, ***letting the cat out of the bag***, as a metaphorical idiomatic expression. The idiom ***let the cat out of the bag*** is often poorly understood because its figurative meaning does not reflect the literal interpretation of its words. This can be challenging for students unfamiliar with such expressions or who find the figurative language difficult to grasp. The findings agree with Al-Houiti's (2020) results, which show that Kuwaiti EFL students have difficulty comprehending common idiomatic expressions.

The overall performance of third level English L2 students at the University of Venda, reflected in the controlled or administered gap-fill test score of 61%, indicates a moderate level of proficiency. Also, it reveals significant insights into their language proficiency and challenges. The response rate suggests that while students have a foundational understanding of English idiomatic expressions, there are significant areas of improvement. Therefore, most questions received an inadequate response rate. These findings suggest a solid foundation and a moderate grasp of idiomatic expressions among the students. The results diverge from the findings of George Lakoff (1980), who indicates that if students have developed strong cognitive models for certain idiomatic expressions, it may lead to accuracy in the gap-fill test.

4.3.3 QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

After administering quantitative questionnaires to 99 participants, the researcher assigned a qualitative task to 20 students to assess their proficiency in using idiomatic expressions in essay writing. While the initial sample was determined for the

quantitative phase, additional sampling was conducted during the qualitative phase to ensure the data volume remained manageable. A valid sample was obtained by 20% of the 99 participants. Consequently, a document analysis was conducted on the written essays of 20 participants. Through a qualitative analysis, the participants were given the chance to authentically demonstrate their use of language to the researcher, employing various types of idiomatic expressions.

The analysis of idiomatic expressions focused on how students use various types of these expressions to enhance their writing and add depth to their work. The participants were assigned to write an essay on the topic *"A Time I Discovered the Secret,"* which aimed to assess their proficiency in incorporating idiomatic expressions into academic writing. The analysis focused on the use of idiomatic expressions by each participant.

4.5 THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF DATA

Thematic analysis is a technique for analysing qualitative data that entails exploring a dataset to identify, analyse, and present repeated themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach is widely accepted in qualitative research, as it seeks to discover recurring patterns within the data (Lester, 2020).

When classifying the idiomatic expressions in participants' written essays, the idiomatic expression verb + complement/ object was the most dominant idiom that was typically used by English third-level L2 students. The idiomatic expressions that appeared multiple times were *"spilled the beans," "curiosity killed the cat,"* and *"a bolt from the blue."*

To analyse the types of idiomatic expressions used, the researcher adopted the theory by McCarthy and O'Dell (2010) as a reference to analyse the types of idiomatic expressions found in students' essays. Therefore, the table below presents a syntactic classification of English idioms according to their possible combinations (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2010).

McCarthy and O'Dell's classification of idioms used in English academic writing of third-level students at the University of Venda.

Table 4.5.1: Theme 1: Types of Idiomatic Expressions: Presentation of Idioms

Theme	Verb+Complement/ Object	Binomials	Trinomials	Similes	Proverbs	Cliches	Euphemisms	Fixed Expressions
Explanations	Stumbled over a secret V + C	/	/	Like a deer in the headlights	Every cloud has a silver lining	Some secrets are best left buried.	It was a hard pill to swallow	/
	Spill the beans V + C			Like a rabbit hole	Curiosity killed the cat			
	Swallow my pride V + C			Hit harder than a ton of bricks	Let the sleeping dogs lie			
	Opened my eyes V + C			Clear as mud				

	Dropp ed a bombs hell V + C							
	Uncov er the truth V +C							
	Hit the road V + C +N							
	Hidden under my nose V + C							
	Burnin g the midnig ht oil V + C+ A							
	Pulling wool over my eyes							

	V + C							
	Shattered my world V + C							
	Beating around the bush							
	Let the cat out of the bag							

4.6 ANALYSIS OF VERB + OBJECT/COMPLEMENT IDIOMS

These idiomatic expressions are constructed by pairing a verb with supplementary information, such as a noun, adjective, or adverb, to convey a particular action or meaning. Unlike other idioms, these expressions usually describe actions or states and are commonly used in daily communication.

4.6.1 Verb + Complement /Object

This idiomatic expression is constructed by the word or phrase that expresses an action with additional information. For instance, **Participants A, C, and R** demonstrated proficiency in using the verb + complement idiomatic expressions when responding to an essay topic. This is an example of a verb + complement idiom, as McCarthy and O'Dell (2010) stated in their classification of idiomatic expressions. The word ***stumbled*** is a verb indicating an action performed. ***Upon a secret*** denotes the complement or object of the prepositional phrase. This indicates that the student is well-versed in the idiomatic expression as it has been used appropriately in the context of the essay. The phrase's figurative meaning suggests an accidental discovery, indicating something was found unexpectedly. The verb ***stumbled*** implies a lack of

intention, while the preposition **upon** signifies the encounter with something. Moreover, this idiomatic expression is grammatically and syntactically accurate.

For example, **Participants D, J, K, N, and R** demonstrated proficiency by appropriately using the idiomatic expression **spill the beans** when responding to the essay topic provided. This idiomatic expression (spill the beans) means to reveal secret information, often unintentionally. In this phrase, the word **spill** depicts a verb. **The beans** show the object or complement of the phrase, a noun preceded by the article '**the**.' In addition, the idiomatic expression **spills the beans** was used appropriately to add colour and expressiveness to their academic writing. **Spill the beans** is an idiomatic expression that cannot be understood from its words' meaning. This was supported by Pakpahan (2024), who emphasised that understanding idioms can give students the ability to convey ideas more creatively and colourfully, improving speech skills and instilling valuable language flexibility in social and academic situations.

Furthermore, the idiomatic expression, **spill the beans**, is the most dominantly used by various participants when responding to the essay topic bestowed. This idiomatic expression was used competently in a way that suited the context. The inclusion of this idiom enhanced their writing and added a distinct flair to the text. Nevertheless, no errors were committed by the participants' use of the idiomatic expression, **spill the beans**, when colouring and adding flavour to their written text. The idiom was used appropriately, as it is suitable in the context the participants were responding to.

Participant D used the verb + complement idiom (**swallow my pride**) in the essay ineffectively to summarise the entire academic text. This idiom had been misused. As the narrator, Participant D was overwhelmed and embarrassed about the secret they discovered. Considering this, it was inappropriate for them to swallow their pride and apologise for their mistake. This might have resulted in a lack of exposure and misunderstanding of this idiomatic expression, which led to misusing it in the context of the sentence. This is incongruent with Karlsson's findings (2019), who pointed out that the more often EFL students are exposed to idioms, the better their chances of comprehending and using them fluently in their communication.

Participant F's idiomatic expression ***opened my eyes*** in paragraph six, which fits the verb plus complement/object category, as McCarthy and O'Dell (2010) outlined. They exhibited a solid grasp of using this idiom effectively when responding to the essay. The word ***opened*** is a verb indicating the action being performed. The phrase ***my eyes*** serves as a complement or object that completes the meaning of the verb. This idiomatic expression refers to becoming aware of a situation's truth, especially after being oblivious or unaware. It suggests a moment of enlightenment concerning circumstances that may have been previously overlooked or misunderstood.

Participant J showed mastery by employing an idiomatic expression ***dropped a bombshell***. The meaning of this idiomatic expression ***dropped a bombshell*** extends beyond the literal interpretation of the words. It conveys not just the act of dropping but also the impact of delivering shocking news. The appropriate use of this idiomatic expression might have resulted in a thorough understanding of this figurative expression. The word ***dropped*** indicates the verb denoting the action of revealing startling or alarming information, often altering perceptions or decisions dramatically. A bombshell is a complement completing the meaning of the verb. It conveys that the information is not just surprising but carries weight and importance.

Participant L also demonstrated competency by using an idiomatic expression to ***uncover the truth*** in the essay provided. This idiomatic expression qualifies as a verb + complement construction, where ***uncovers*** serves as the verb denoting action performed, and ***the truth*** serves as its complement, functioning as a noun phrase that completes the meaning of the verb. The complement specifies what has been uncovered. This structure effectively conveys the intended meaning of revealing or discovering something previously hidden or ***unknown***.

Participant O demonstrated mastery by using the idiomatic expression ***hit the road***, a combination of the verb ***hit*** and the noun ***road***. This idiomatic expression exemplifies how the verb ***hit*** interacts with the noun ***road*** to convey a specific meaning that is not directly inferred from the individual words. The meaning of the idiomatic expression hit the road is not directly deducible from the individual words as it conveys figurative meaning. In this case, the phrase signifies departing or starting a journey. Corresponding to Makkai's (1972) classification of idioms, this idiom is also

regarded as a phrasal verb. This idiom **hit the road** was also used proficiently by Participant O in the context of the essay.

In the opening paragraph, Participant C used the following idiomatic expression in the sentence: “I still remember the day I stumbled over upon a secret that had been **hidden under my nose** for too long,” which is used to convey surprise and overlooked facts, respectively. The idiom **hidden under my nose** is verb plus complement based on the theory of idioms by McCarthy and O’Dell (2010). Their use in context can vary based on the emotional or situational backdrop, accentuating how idioms can capture the nuances of human experiences.

In addition, **Participant R** wrote, “...when I stumbled over a secret that had been **hidden under my nose** the whole time.” The idiomatic expression used in this sentence qualifies as a verb plus complement idiom based on McCarthy and O’Dell’s (2010) theory of idioms and their classification. The word **hidden** is a verb indicating an action performed. **Under my nose** is a prepositional phrase. This idiomatic expression accentuates the irony of missing something hidden in plain sight.

Participant C wrote, “It turned out that someone close to me had been **pulling wool over my eyes**...”. The term **pulling** is a verb indicating an action performed. **The wool over my eyes** is a noun phrase complementing the verb pulling. This is an example of a verb+ complement idiom used to indicate that someone close to them misled or deceived the participant.

Participant A wrote, “On that day, my mother revealed a secret that **shattered my world** into a million pieces.” This idiomatic expression was used appropriately in the context of the essay. The participant used the *verb + complement* idiom, as McCarthy and O’Dell (2010) stated. This idiom indicates a dramatic emotional impact, where something has significantly disrupted or destroyed one’s previous happiness or stability. In other words, the secret Participant A stumbled upon has substantially destroyed their happiness. The idiomatic expression **shattered my world** has a figurative meaning; the word shattered implies breaking into many pieces, metaphorically representing the disruption of one’s emotional or mental state. The phrase **my world** refers to the narrator’s personal experiences, beliefs, and sense of security. The phrase **shattered my world** fits well in the essay as it exhibits the major

transformation in the narrator's life following the revelation of an unexpected secret that profoundly affected them emotionally.

Participant R wrote, “I learned that sometimes, it is better to spill the beans and share the load rather than keeping it all **bottled up inside**.” The idiomatic expression bottle up is an example of a verb plus complement idiom based on McCarthy and O'Dell's (2010) theory of idioms. The term bottled is a verb. **Up inside** is a prepositional phrase complementing the verb **bottle and inside** is an adverbial modifier. The idiomatic expression bottled up signifies containment. This expression suggests restraining or suppressing emotions, like how one would seal a liquid within a bottle to prevent it from spilling out. The narrator uses This metaphor proficiently to illustrate the idea of keeping a secret contained in oneself as better to share with others. This idiomatic expression is drawn from a conceptual metaphor associating **bottle-up** with the act of suppressing emotions to prevent them from spilling out, and its understanding requires not just familiarity with the words themselves but also an awareness of the metaphorical significance behind them (Lakoff, 1980).

All the idiomatic expressions used by Participants **A, C, D, F, K, J, L, N, O,** and **R** in the preceding paragraphs were verb-plus-complement idioms based on the classification of idioms by McCarthy and O'Dell's (2010) theory of idioms. Again, all idiomatic expressions have been used accurately based on the definition of idioms by McCarthy and O'Dell (2017); an idiom is a collection of fixed words whose meanings are frequently challenging to infer from the individual meanings of the words. Idioms are expressions whose meanings cannot be deduced from the individual words. Understanding them typically requires knowledge of the language and its cultural context.

Similarly, it is also regarded as a lexemic idiom by Makkai (1972). The idiomatic expression **spill the beans** was the most prevalent in students' essays, appearing five times. The frequent idiomatic expression **spill the beans** in students' essays indicates that they have developed a strong familiarity with the context in which this phrase is used. This suggests that students were engaged with the material and encouraged to incorporate idiomatic expressions in their writing. Additionally, the topic of their essay might have been particularly suited to discussions about secrecy or revelation.

Through the analysis of idiomatic expressions above, it has been noted that some participants proficiently demonstrated the incorporation of frequent idioms into their writing, indicating a high level of linguistic proficiency. Furthermore, this frequent use of the idiomatic expression, ***spill the beans***, might have been attributed to prior exposure and familiarity with this idiom. This aligns with Karlsson's (2019), which pointed out that the more often EFL students are exposed to idioms, the better their chances of comprehending and using them fluently in their communication. Subsequently, incorporating idiomatic expressions into lessons and practice opportunities can improve students' comprehension and usage, ultimately enhancing their communicative competence in English. Flor (2018) also corroborated these findings, highlighting the widespread use of idiomatic expressions in EFL academics authored by non-native English speakers.

Another idiomatic expression often found was ***stumbled upon a secret***, which appeared thrice. This phrase was commonly used in the essays of Participants A, C, and R. This was followed by an idiom, ***hidden under my nose***, which appeared on two occasions only. Participants C and R used this idiomatic expression. The remaining idioms appeared only once in students' essays.

The limited occurrence of these idiomatic expressions, such as ***swallow my pride, opened my eyes, dropped a bombshell, uncover the truth, hit the road, shattered my world, and bottled up***, can be attributed to a lack of exposure, resulting in fewer instances of their use. This may stem from students' writing styles, as some prefer direct language over figurative expressions. Additionally, lower language proficiency may cause students to hesitate in using idioms for fear of making mistakes. These findings corroborate Gibbs's (1991) findings, who claimed that L2 idiom proficiency presents a distinctive challenge because idiomatic expressions comprise stereotyped structures with conventionalised or stylised meanings, allowing only limited usage variability.

4.6.2 ANALYSIS OF BINOMIAL IDIOMS

McCarthy and O'Dell (2017) describe binomials as pairs of words connected by conjunction with a specific order that cannot be changed. This quality distinguishes them as a unique category of idioms.

The researcher noted that although participants were proficient in using verb-plus-complement idioms, it was found that they lacked proficiency by hardly incorporating binomial idioms in their essay writing. This poor performance could be attributed to a limited understanding of idiomatic expressions or a lack of experience in using them effectively in writing, which makes students experience difficulties with comprehension due to their figurative nature. These findings contrast with Tran's (2012), which indicates that students perform significantly better when idiomatic expressions are presented in context rather than in isolation, highlighting the importance of contextual understanding for effective use.

Participants may have refrained from using binomial idioms out of concern for making errors or misusing them. This fear is often seen among students who know that idioms can depend heavily on context and may not always be appropriate in different situations. Corresponding to research by Boers et al. (2007), such concerns can prevent students from trying out idiomatic language, leading to a more thoughtful writing style that favours familiar vocabulary. This implies that participants might not have had enough opportunities to use idioms in real contexts, which could explain why they did not incorporate idiomatic expressions into their writing.

4.6.3 ANALYSIS OF TRINOMIAL IDIOMS

Trinomial idioms refer to expressions that consist of three words or phrases, typically linked by a coordinating conjunction such as **and** or **or** (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2017). These idioms are characterised by their fixed structure and are used to convey specific meanings or ideas. This implies that their structure cannot be transformed.

Based on the findings of this study, English third-level L2 students hardly used trinomials in their essays. Participants lacked proficiency by not incorporating idioms in their academic writing. This poor performance could be attributed to a limited understanding of idiomatic expressions or a lack of experience in using them effectively in writing, which makes students experience difficulties with comprehension due to their figurative nature. These findings contrast with Tran's (2012), which indicates that students perform significantly better when idiomatic expressions are presented in context rather than in isolation, highlighting the importance of contextual understanding for effective use.

Also, this incompetence might be related to their educational backgrounds, suggesting that their prior education might not have provided adequate instruction on idiomatic expressions, and a limited amount of practice in integrating these expressions into their writing was insufficient. Furthermore, the participants may not have encountered these formulaic expressions frequently enough in their reading and writing materials. The findings are inconsistent with those of Fathma, Nurlela, and Yusuf (2020), who investigated the types of idioms students use in their English essays. Their research identified various idioms, including trinomial idioms, and evaluated how effectively students understood and incorporated these expressions in their writing. The results indicated that while some students did use idioms, they often lacked a thorough understanding of their meanings and appropriate contexts. This suggests that there is a need for improved instruction on idiomatic expressions, including trinomials.

4.6.4 ANALYSIS OF SIMILES

As explained by McCarthy and O'Dell (2017), similes are phrases that draw comparisons between two things using **as** or **like**. They help create strong imagery and improve the descriptiveness of writing, making arguments more appealing and easier for readers to relate to. Additionally, incorporating similes in academic writing can enhance clarity by simplifying complex concepts, creating vivid imagery, and boosting retention. Also, Glucksberg and McGlone (2001) defined a simile as a comparison presented directly in which one thing is likened to another different thing.

(i) Simile using the word “*like*.”

Participant C wrote, ***like a deer in headlights***. This simile uses the word ***like*** to compare a person's shock or paralysis in a stressful situation to a deer caught in the glare of oncoming headlights. It creates a vivid image that helps readers or listeners understand the emotional state being described. In addition, this imagery enhances understanding for the reader or listener, making the expression more impactful.

The simile, ***like a deer in headlights***, is used by Participant C to illustrate the narrator's shock after discovering the hidden secret, feeling stunned, confused, or unable to react when faced with an overwhelming or frightening situation. Just as a deer may freeze in place, unable to move when confronted with bright lights, a person may similarly feel immobilised by surprise or fear. This simile idiom is often used in

spoken and written English to describe someone who appears frozen or overwhelmed in a moment of crisis or surprise.

Participant J also used the simile ***like a deer in the headlights*** in the following paragraph: “With trembling hands and heart pounding like a jackhammer, I unfolded the letter to reveal the secret it held, only to find out I was adopted. The cat was finally out of the bag, and I was left feeling ***like a deer in the headlights***. The participant used the simile to indicate a state of shock after discovering that they were adopted by the family.

(ii) Simile using the word “as”

Participant J used a simile in the following sentence, “The contents of the letter were ***as clear as mud***. This is an example of a simile using the word ***as*** to make a comparison. The expression ***as clear as mud*** is a simile that playfully highlights a lack of clarity, implying that something is quite confusing. It subverts the expectation associated with the word ***clear*** and instead focuses on ambiguity. This phrase is a figurative expression that illustrates how language has been used creatively to indicate how challenging it was to the narrator after discovering that it had been hidden for ages.

The analysis indicates that only a negligible number of third-level English L2 students at the University of Venda effectively used similes in their writing. Among the twenty students who wrote essays in response to the topic provided, just two participants, C and J, incorporated two acceptable similes each. Most participants' overall infrequent use of figurative language, especially similes, may be due to a lack of exposure to such expressions. Many participants seem to have limited experience with figurative language in their writing, which restricts their understanding and ability to use these devices. Furthermore, some participants might not fully appreciate the value of similes in enhancing their writing, which contributes to their limited application. As asserted in a study by Senaldi et al. (2022), a reader's familiarity with idiomatic expressions significantly affects their capacity to interpret and use them effectively in their writing. They also emphasise that engagement with figurative language is vital for developing the necessary skills to use these expressions competently.

Filik et al. (2017) noted that how well students understand figurative language can greatly influence their ability to comprehend and use it. Students may find it

challenging to incorporate these expressions effectively without sufficient exposure to different examples of similes in their reading and writing activities. Additionally, Roberts and Kreuz (1994) highlighted that figurative language, such as similes, performs various communicative functions. They suggested that a lack of familiarity with these expressions can limit students' ability to understand and apply them in their writing. This indicates that inadequate practice and exposure may hinder students from fully recognizing the subtleties and power of similes in improving their essays.

4.6.5 ANALYSIS OF PROVERBS

McCarthy and O'Dell (2010) describe proverbs as short phrases that capture common human experiences and provide guidance and caution. They are memorable and relevant in many situations. Additionally, proverbs represent the traditional knowledge that is handed down through generations, offering insights and life lessons while mirroring cultural values and societal beliefs.

Participants E, I, J, and N used the idiomatic expression ***curiosity killed the cat*** in the essay topic provided. This idiomatic expression has been adeptly used by participants mentioned in the preceding sentence. This well-known idiomatic expression serves as a cautionary reminder about the potential dangers of excessive curiosity or inquisitiveness. As asserted in McCarthy and O'Dell's (2010) theory of idioms, ***curiosity killed the cat*** qualifies as a proverb, adding colour and expressiveness to language by vividly depicting experiences and emotions. They often reflect cultural attitudes or societal norms. Similarly, Makkai (1972) regards this idiom as a proverbial idiom categorised as sememic idiom. The idiom holds cultural significance as it illustrates society's views on curiosity and caution. It reminds us that, although the quest for knowledge is important, there are boundaries to how far one should pursue it.

The phrase ***curiosity killed the cat*** succinctly warns of the risks associated with being overly inquisitive. Although it acknowledges the benefits of exploration and questioning, it also stresses the importance of knowing when to be cautious. This idea is particularly relevant in discussions surrounding risk-taking and personal limits. This suggests that while curiosity and a desire to learn are valuable traits, there are times when those traits can lead to negative consequences. Overall, it highlights the importance of balancing exploration with the awareness of potential risks.

Based on the analysis above, it can be said that a few third-level English L2 students at the University of Venda are proficient in using proverbial idioms. Correspondingly, this follows the study by Mohdeb and Kauoache (2022), which revealed that second-year English students at Jijel University struggle to effectively and persuasively incorporate idiomatic expressions into their writing. Mastering this skill is crucial for improving the overall quality of their academic writing. However, it has been established that, although students could use proverbs in their essay writing to enhance their meaning, there is still a great need for improvement. Effective teaching would undoubtedly improve students' writing competency.

Participant I wrote, ***Every cloud has a silver lining***. This figurative expression is an example of a proverbial idiom, as Makkai (1972) stated in his classification of sememic idioms. Similarly, based on McCarthy and O'Dell's (2010) classification of idioms, a proverb is a type of idiom. The phrase implies that a positive aspect or hope can always be found even in challenging or negative situations. Moreover, it promotes an optimistic viewpoint, suggesting that difficulties can result in beneficial outcomes or valuable lessons. As a proverbial idiom, it captures a universal truth or wisdom about life, making it applicable in various circumstances where individuals seek to uncover positivity despite challenges. Considering this, ***every cloud has a silver lining acts*** as an uplifting reminder that positivity can arise from adversity, thereby fitting well within the realm of proverbial idioms that convey wisdom and hope.

The study's results suggest that participants showed below-average proficiency in their academic writing, with only one individual incorporating the idiom ***every cloud has a silver lining***. Although its use was limited, the idiom was effectively woven into the context of the text. Its presence improved the quality of the writing and gave it a distinctive character. Additionally, the participant employed the idiom correctly, without any mistakes, making it a suitable choice for the context provided. This limited ability might have resulted from an incomplete understanding of this idiom's underlying concepts and metaphors. Lakoff (1993), in his Cognitive Linguistics theory, suggests that such limited proficiency can be attributed to how idioms are interpreted and processed through conceptual metaphors and embodied experiences.

Participant J wrote, ***let the sleeping dogs lie***. It has been used competently in the context of the essay they responded to. This phrase is classified as a proverbial

idiom, which advises against disturbing situations that are currently stable or have already been resolved. Instead, it encourages leaving matters to avoid potentially creating new problems. Moreover, this expression highlights the importance of avoiding unnecessary conflict or trouble. As a piece of wisdom, it reflects a general truth about human behaviour and conflict resolution. Ultimately, ***letting sleeping dogs lie*** underscores the significance of not interfering with settled issues, making it applicable in various contexts where conflict resolution is relevant.

Based on the findings, only one participant used the proverb ***let sleeping dogs lie*** effectively. Although its usage was limited, the expression was applied proficiently within the context. The idiom, ***let sleeping dogs lie***, enhanced the participant's writing and added a distinct flair to the text. Moreover, the use of this idiom by the participant did not contain any errors, successfully enriching the written piece. The idiom was used appropriately, aligning well with the context of the participant's interpretation.

4.6.6 ANALYSIS OF CLICHES

The results of this study indicate that only one third-level English L2 student, Participant A, used the cliché, ***and some secrets are best left buried*** in response to the essay given. This idiom implies that certain truths or past events should remain hidden to prevent complications or emotional upheaval. As a result, the participants showed limited competence in using idioms in their academic writing effectively. This deficiency may stem from a lack of understanding of idiomatic expressions or insufficient experience incorporating them into their writing. Consequently, this can cause comprehension challenges due to the figurative meaning of idioms. In contrast, Tran's (2012) research illustrates that students perform significantly better when idiomatic expressions are presented within context rather than in isolation, emphasizing the importance of contextual understanding for the effective use of such expressions.

The participants' limited ability might be attributed to their educational backgrounds, suggesting that their previous instruction did not adequately address the teaching of idiomatic expressions. Furthermore, their limited practice in integrating these expressions into written work may have been insufficient. It is also probable that the participants did not encounter these formulaic expressions frequently enough within

their reading and writing materials. This highlights a significant need for enhanced pedagogical approaches to the instruction of idiomatic expressions, including clichés.

4.6.7 ANALYSIS OF EUPHEMISMS

Euphemisms are terms used to avoid causing offense or addressing topics deemed unpleasant. McCarthy and O'Dell (2010) explain that euphemisms are a kind of idiom that aims to maintain politeness by replacing potentially offensive words and softening discussions around sensitive or uncomfortable subjects.

Participant C used euphemism in the sentence, *it was a hard pill to swallow*, but I know I had to confront the situation head-on,” clearly indicating how the participant dealt with the difficult situation that was hard to accept. Despite the limited use of this idiom, *it was a hard pill to swallow*, Participant C demonstrated mastery of this idiom in the context of the assigned essay topic. The findings contradict Flor's (2018) findings, which showed that idioms were widely used in EFL academics.

Participants might have avoided using idioms because they fear making mistakes or misusing them. This apprehension is common among students who recognise that idioms can be context-sensitive and may not always translate well in different situations. Research by Boers et al. (2007) supports this idea, indicating that such fears can prevent students from experimenting with idiomatic language, resulting in a conservative approach to writing that relies on more familiar vocabulary. This suggests that all participants may not have had enough exposure to idioms in context, which could explain their omission of euphemisms in their writing.

4.6.8 ANALYSIS OF FIXED EXPRESSIONS

The findings of this study indicate that third-level students of English as a second language (L2) infrequently incorporated fixed expressions into their essays. Consequently, the participants demonstrated a notable lack of proficiency, particularly reflected in the absence of idiomatic expressions in their writing. This inadequate performance may stem from a limited understanding of idiomatic expressions or insufficient experience using them effectively in writing. Consequently, this can lead to comprehension difficulties due to the figurative nature of such expressions. In contrast, Tran (2012) found that students tend to perform significantly better when idiomatic

expressions are presented in context rather than in isolation, highlighting the importance of contextual understanding for effective usage of these expressions.

Moreover, this deficiency in competence could be linked to the participants' educational backgrounds, suggesting that their previous education likely did not provide adequate instruction on idiomatic expressions. Furthermore, the limited opportunities to practice integrating these expressions into their writing may have proved insufficient. It is also convincing that the participants did not encounter these fixed expressions frequently enough in their reading and writing materials. This highlights a clear need for enhanced instruction on idiomatic expressions, including fixed expressions.

4.7 THEME 2: USAGE OF DIFFERENT IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS

4.7.1 ANALYSIS BASED ON THE USAGE OF IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS

The following analysis addresses the second objective of the study, which aimed to describe how idiomatic expressions were employed in academic essays by third-level English students.

Participant A and I

Participant A and I included only three idiomatic expressions in the academic essay given. Despite their limited number, idiomatic expressions were effectively used in a way that suited the context. The inclusion of idioms enhanced their writing and added a distinct flair to the text. Nevertheless, no errors were committed by the participants' use of idioms when colouring and adding flavour to this written text. The idiom was used appropriately, as it is suitable in the context the respondent was responding to. Those were: ***curiosity killed the cat, every cloud has a silver lining, and some secrets are best left buried.***

"The thrill of the unknown has always been an alarming call, forcing me to explore the mapped territories of life. It was on a cold day when I ***stumbled over a secret*** that would change the course of my life forever". This is an example of a verb + complement idiom, as McCarthy and O'Dell (2010) state in their classification of idioms.

Despite the few idiomatic expressions used by Participant A, the idiom used in the opening paragraph was used proficiently, demonstrating that the student is well-versed in this idiom. In the second paragraph, participant A connected the first paragraph accordingly by using another idiom, ***a rabbit hole of wonder***.

Participant A uses idiomatic expressions in paragraphs 2 and 3 to demonstrate the cohesiveness and coherence of the paragraphs. However, in paragraph 4, an idiomatic expression used in the sentence, “On that day, my mother revealed a secret that ***shattered my world*** into a million pieces,” was used appropriately in this context. The participant used the *verb + complement* idiom, as McCarthy and O’Dell (2010) stated. This idiom indicates a dramatic emotional impact, where something has significantly disrupted or destroyed one’s previous happiness or stability. In other words, the secret Participant A stumbled upon has substantially destroyed their happiness.

Participant A’s use of idiomatic expressions indicates a below-average proficiency throughout the academic writing. This limited ability might have resulted from an incomplete understanding of these idioms’ underlying concepts and metaphors. Lakoff (1993), in his Cognitive Linguistics theory, suggests that such limited proficiency can be attributed to how idioms are interpreted and processed through conceptual metaphors and embodied experiences. These findings support the research conducted by Mohdeb and Kauoache (2022), which revealed that second-year English students at Jijel University struggle to effectively and persuasively incorporate idiomatic expressions into their writing. Mastering this skill is crucial for improving the overall quality of their academics.

Participant A’s use of idiomatic expressions indicates below-average proficiency throughout the academic essay. This limited ability might have resulted from an incomplete understanding of these idioms’ underlying concepts and metaphors. Lakoff (1993), in his Cognitive Linguistics theory, suggests that such limited proficiency can be attributed to how idioms are interpreted and processed through conceptual metaphors and embodied experiences. These findings support the research conducted by Mohdeb and Kauoache (2022), which revealed that second-year English students at Jijel University struggle to effectively and persuasively incorporate

idiomatic expressions into their writing. Mastering this skill is crucial for improving the overall quality of their academics.

Lakoff (1980) avers that idioms are not just fixed expressions but are deeply rooted in our conceptual system. For instance, many idioms draw from physical experiences or cultural practices, which shape how we understand meaning. For example, the idiom "*kick the bucket*" refers to dying, and it draws on a conceptual metaphor associating death with a dramatic, final action. Understanding this idiom requires not just familiarity with the words themselves but also an awareness of the metaphorical significance behind them. If Participant A struggles with such idioms, it could indicate a gap in their understanding of the cultural or cognitive frameworks that shape these expressions. Moreover, Lakoff (1980) emphasises the importance of context in interpreting idiomatic language. A learner's exposure to various idiomatic expressions in rich contextual settings can enhance comprehension. Therefore, Participant A's limited experience with varied contexts might contribute to difficulties using idioms effectively.

▪ Participants B and E

These two participants used two idiomatic expressions only in the academic essay, "*A time I discovered a secret.*" The few idioms used by the participant were applied proficiently without any challenge. The use of idiomatic expressions by participant E was inadequate, because only two were used in the entire essay. The identified idiomatic expressions were in the opening and the fourth paragraph. In the sentence, they say, "Curiosity killed the cat, but for me, curiosity led to a life-changing discovery." The idiomatic expression "curiosity killed the cat" was used appropriately in the first paragraph. This idiom implies that being too inquisitive or prying can lead to trouble or harm. Hence, the curiosity of this participant led to a life-changing discovery. Although participants B and E used a limited number of idioms, they were used proficiently in the academic context.

The idiom, ***curiosity killed the cat***, is an example of a proverb according to the theory of idioms by McCarthy and O'Dell (2010). This idiom adds colour and expressiveness to language, providing a more vivid depiction of experiences and emotions. They often reflect cultural attitudes or societal norms.

“Finding my grandmother's secret taught me the importance of understanding our past; no matter how difficult it may be, secrets are *like hidden treasures* holding keys to our true selves and roots.” This is the fourth paragraph of the fourth participant. The participant used the idiom *hidden treasures* to compare secrets to valuable things or opportunities that are not immediately apparent. This is an example of a simile, as McCarthy and O'Dell (2010) stated in their classification of idioms.

The inadequate use of idioms might have resulted in participants' difficulty in using idiomatic expressions, lack of understanding, and limited exposure, as they are challenging. This is supported by Gibbs (1991), who claimed that L2 idiom proficiency presents a distinctive challenge because idiomatic expressions comprise stereotyped structures with conventionalized meanings, allowing only limited usage variability.

For participants B and E, mastery of the idiomatic expressions was below average, as only two were employed in the academic. These findings align with Al-Houiti (2020), who found that Kuwaiti EFL students have difficulty comprehending and using common idiomatic expressions.

▪ Participants C

Participant C used idiomatic expressions outstandingly to show language proficiency and native-like fluency. Contrary to participants A and B, this participant demonstrated mastery of English idioms by proficiently using ten (10) idiomatic expressions when responding to academic writing. In the opening paragraph, the participant used idiomatic expressions following idioms: *a bolt from the blue* and *hidden under my nose*, which are used to convey surprise and overlooked facts, respectively. Their use in context can vary based on the emotional or situational backdrop, emphasizing how idioms can capture the nuances of human experiences. In addition, the expression *a bolt from the blue* is categorised as a lexemic or sememic idiom corresponding to Makkai's (1972) classification of idioms.

In the second paragraph, the participant used an idiom, a *real bombshell*, to indicate how shocking or unexpected they received the news/secret. The participant demonstrated mastery of idioms by understanding how idioms are used in various contexts. The participant used another idiom, *pulling the wool over my eyes*, proficiently (It turned out that someone close to me had been pulling the wool over

my eyes, hiding a secret that would change everything). This is an example of a verb + complement idiom used to indicate that someone close to them misled or deceived the participant. Furthermore, after discovering a secret hidden under their nose, the participant used another idiom to show how they reacted after receiving the shocking news. The idiom used was **a hard pill to swallow**. The sentence, “It was a hard pill to swallow, but I know I had to confront the situation head-on,” clearly indicated how the participant dealt with the difficult situation that was hard to accept.

The fourth paragraph in the academic essay, contained another idiom, **the cat was out of the bag**, meaning that the secret was revealed or disclosed. In the fifth paragraph, participant C continued to use idioms proficiently. One of the sentences in this paragraph reads as follows: “Looking back, I realise that the discovery of that secret was a blessing in disguise; it opened my eyes to face the things that are not always as they seem to be. This idiom was used appropriately in this context, indicating that something perceived negatively in the participant’s life was beneficial. Another idiom used was **a wake-up call**.

In the concluding paragraph of the academic writing participant C managed to tie up loose ends by using another idiom, **a turning point**. the implication is that the critical moment when the secret was revealed made the participant make a significant decision that changed their life.

Participant C exhibited a commendable proficiency in the use of various idiomatic expressions within their academic essay. This skill not only enriched the content but also contributed to the overall effectiveness of their arguments. The implication might be that a high proficiency level in using the idioms appropriately in academic writing might have resulted in prior knowledge and a solid foundation or exposure to these formulaic expressions. The findings confirm Flor’s (2018) findings, which showed that idioms were widely used in EFL academics. Similarly, Kovecses (2010) also asserts that mastery of idiomatic expressions signifies a high level of proficiency. This suggests that Participant C had prior knowledge and exposure to various idiomatic expressions since they were competently employed in the entire academic essay.

▪ Participant D

Participant D demonstrated proficiency by employing six distinct types of idiomatic expressions in the academic essay. This participant demonstrated mastery in using the idiomatic expression, **tight-lipped**, which describes a character or person who is intentionally silent or secretive about something. This idiom conveys that the individual is not disclosing information, which could be due to discretion, secrecy, or unwillingness. When discussing a person who remains silent about crucial details or is withholding information, this idiom effectively conveys their reluctance to share. It adds a layer of nuance to the character's behaviour or attitude, suggesting their silence is deliberate and possibly significant.

The sentence, “I started asking questions, trying to get to the bottom of things, but everyone seemed to be tight-lipped,” indicates that Participant D is knowledgeable and can use the idiom in the context.

In the second paragraph, Participant D continued to use the verb + complement idiom **spill the beans** appropriately to add colour and expressiveness to their writing. **Spill the beans** is an idiomatic expression that cannot be understood from the meaning of its individual words. This was supported by Pakpahan (2024), who emphasised that understanding idioms can give students the ability to convey ideas more creatively and colourfully, improving speech skills and instilling valuable language flexibility in social and academic situations.

In the fourth paragraph, Participants D and J demonstrated proficiency in using the idiom **dust settled** appropriately to convey the resolution of a confusing or chaotic situation. This is indicated in the following sentence: “At first, I was angry and hurt, but as the **dust settled**, I realised that my friend had been carrying a heavy burden.” The students also ensured that the idiom was used to fit the context and tone of the academic essays, as they were initially confused before the secret was revealed. This idiom has been metaphorically used. In cognitive linguistics, idioms such as **dust settled** are scrutinised for their underlying conceptual metaphors. This phrase represents the broader notion of attaining clarity from confusion, a theme that is often reflected in human cognition. This concept is further supported by the research of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), which suggests that metaphors play a crucial role in

shaping our understanding of abstract ideas by expressing them through more concrete imagery.

“It was a **weight off my shoulders**, and I could finally move forward wiser and more cautious than before.” In this sentence, Participant D continued to demonstrate competency by using another idiom indicating a feeling of relief or end of a burden after the secret had been revealed. This idiom was also used appropriately to support Liu’s (2017) view, which claimed that EFL students’ accurate use of idiomatic expressions indicates their communicative competence.

Despite using idiomatic expressions effectively in the preceding paragraphs, Participant D committed a spelling error for the idiom, **the world crumbled over me.n** The participant should have used the word **crambled** instead of “crumbled.” The phrase “The world **crambled** over me” is neither a standard idiom nor a meaningful variation of one. The correct expression would be either **the world crumbled around me** or **the world came crashing down around me**. This error might have resulted from a lack of exposure to this type of idiomatic expression.

This type of idiom falls into the category of figurative expressions, as it uses vivid imagery to convey a feeling of being overwhelmed or experiencing a significant personal crisis. The idiom does not mean that the physical world is collapsing but that the speaker feels their situation is falling apart or becoming unmanageable. It conveys a personal turmoil or significant distress to evoke empathy or a deeper understanding of what this participant is experiencing.

These idioms are effective in expressive writing or narrative contexts where the goal is to convey personal turmoil or significant distress. However, more precise and less dramatic language is often preferred in formal academic writing to articulate such experiences clearly.

“Even though it was hard to believe that she was dating my father. My heart was broken beyond repair. She was the person I trusted the most in the world. I saw my world crumble upon me”.

The idiom used in the last paragraph was, **swallow my pride**. Participant D used the verb + complement idiom ineffectively to summarise the entire academic text. This

idiom had been misused. As the narrator, Participant D was overwhelmed and embarrassed about the secret they discovered. Considering this, it was inappropriate for them to swallow their pride and apologise for their mistake. This might have resulted in a lack of exposure and misunderstanding of this idiomatic expression, which led to misusing it in the context of the sentence. This is incongruent with Karlsson's (2019) findings, which pointed out that the more often EFL students are exposed to idioms, the better their chances of comprehending and using them fluently in their communication.

Participants F and R

These participants proficiently employed different types of idiomatic expressions in academic writing. Compared to the nine participants involved in the study, these participants used more idiomatic expressions. Notwithstanding the challenges encountered by the participant when using idioms, there were occasions wherein idiomatic expressions were used without difficulty in academic writing.

The opening paragraph of an academic essay, reads as follows: "I was snooping around, trying to get to the bottom of things, when I stumbled upon a secret that had been ***hidden under my nose the*** whole time." This idiom means something the participant failed to notice or see despite being obvious or close. It is an example of a verb+ complement idiom corresponding to the classification of idioms by McCarthy and O'Dell's theory of idioms (2010).

The idiomatic expressions ***spill the beans and the cat was out of the bag*** were overused by the participants in this academic essay. The findings are consistent with those of Flor (2018), highlighting the widespread use of idiomatic expressions in EFL academic writing authored by non-native English speakers. The participant proficiently demonstrated the incorporation of numerous idioms into their writing, indicating a high level of linguistic proficiency. This might have been attributed to prior exposure and familiarity with this idiomatic expression.

Participants G, H, L, and P

These participants demonstrated poor proficiency in using idiomatic expressions in the essay writing. They proficiently used an trivial number of idioms when responding to the abovementioned essay. Idiomatic expressions used by Participant G were **dazzling day and in the dark**. Besides, Participant H used the following idiomatic expressions: a **bolt from the blue** and **hidden in the depth of an iceberg**. This deficiency could be attributed to several factors, including not being familiar with the cultural nuances and a low level of motivation to learn idioms that can impede proficiency. Also, insufficient educational background might be attributed to this low level of proficiency. Though they were used proficiently, this might have resulted in a lack of familiarity with the idioms.

Furthermore, Participant L used two idioms only in the entire essay. The idiomatic expressions used are **waves of awe** and **uncover the truth**. Again, Participant L used a negligible number of idioms.

Participant P also employed two idiomatic expressions in the entire academic text. Those idioms used were a **broken heart** and **a wound that never heals**. The participant also showed poor competency by employing two idioms in the academic text. However, the low level of proficiency displayed by Participants G, H, L, and P can be attributed to a lack of cultural context from which idiomatic expressions arise that contribute significantly to comprehension difficulties. The findings corroborate Fathma et al. (2020), which found that half of the participants did not comprehend idiomatic expressions while the other half did it effectively.

Participant J

Participant J demonstrated proficiency in using idiomatic expressions in the academic text. Participant J proficiently used different idioms when responding to the abovementioned academic essay. Despite using several idioms, participant J used the idiom **out of the blue** wrongly or colloquially. In the second paragraph, the sentence, "... in my room, when '**outta the blue**'... Instead of presenting this idiom formally or in standard English, Participant J used a slang or informal word, **outta**.

Participant K and O

Participants K and O exhibited minimal proficiency in idiomatic usage, incorporating only three idioms in their academic essays. This limited incorporation may be attributed to a deficiency in idiom instruction, indicating that such teaching is not prioritised in language education. Consequently, students may feel ill-prepared to use idioms in their writing. These findings are consistent with those of Anggoro et al. (2020), which suggest that students do not receive sufficient training in idiomatic expressions, resulting in a lack of confidence and practice in effectively using them. This inadequate focus on instruction may account for why Participants K and O utilised only a limited number of idioms in their academic essays.

Participants M

This participant used only one idiom ***finding a needle in a haystack*** in the academic writing. This poor performance might have resulted in minimal exposure to idiomatic expressions in their academic writing. This finding is supported by Laufer (2000), who found that EFL students frequently avoid using idiomatic expressions due to a lack of familiarity and understanding, which can lead to underutilisation of these expressions in their academic essays.

Participant Q

Participant Q effectively incorporated five idioms in their academic text. Idioms used are ***in the dark, a bolt from the blue, weight on your shoulders, between a rock and a hard place***, and ***playing with fire***. The competence to use idioms effectively is connected to cognitive flexibility, which allows individuals to modify their language according to the situation. These findings align with the research by Bowers (2018), which emphasised that students who can handle various linguistic styles are more proficient at using idiomatic expressions correctly. The varied use of idioms by Participant Q reflects a degree of cognitive flexibility that improves their writing style. Participant Q's competent incorporation of five idioms in their academic highlights their solid understanding of idiomatic expressions. This proficiency can be linked to various factors, such as significant exposure to idioms, quality instruction, consistent practice,

and cognitive adaptability. Collectively, these aspects enhance their competence to effectively use idiomatic expressions in academic writing.

Participants K and N

These participants demonstrated poor mastery of idioms by using three idioms in the academic text. This poor performance might have resulted in inadequate instruction on idiomatic expressions. This suggests that the curriculum might have often excluded idiomatic expressions, resulting in students lacking the necessary skills to incorporate them proficiently into their writing. This finding corresponds with the findings of Fathma et al. (2020), which indicate that the majority of students do not receive adequate guidance on idiomatic usage, which contributes to their limited application in written discourse.

Participants S and T lacked proficiency by not incorporating idioms in their entire academic essays. This underperformance could be attributed to a limited understanding of idiomatic expressions or a lack of experience in using them effectively in writing, which makes students experience difficulties with comprehension due to their figurative nature. This finding contrasts Tran's (2012), which indicates that students perform significantly better when idiomatic expressions are presented in context rather than in isolation, highlighting the importance of contextual understanding for effective use.

Participants might have avoided using idioms because they fear making mistakes or misusing them. This apprehension is common among students who recognise that idioms can be context-sensitive and may not always translate well in different situations. Research by Boers et al. (2007) supports this idea, indicating that such fears can prevent students from experimenting with idiomatic language, resulting in a conservative approach to writing that relies on more familiar vocabulary. This suggests that Participants S and T may not have had adequate exposure to idioms in context, which could explain their omission of idiomatic expressions in their writing.

4.7 SUMMARY

This chapter presented the findings of the current study, supported by data shown in figures and tables, along with their interpretation. A discussion was included to provide context and meaning to the findings. The relationship between these findings and the existing literature was established and clarified. The following chapter will offer an overview of the study, along with conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE: SYNTHESIS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a review of the research questions, a summary of the findings, the limitations of the study, the conclusions and recommendations of the study, and suggestions for further research.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE WHOLE STUDY

Chapter One presented the background of the study and explored English as a globally spoken language. It also identified the challenges that ESL students face when required to incorporate idiomatic expressions into their academic writing. Furthermore, this chapter outlined the statement of the problem, the study's aims and objectives, and included the research questions. It concluded with a discussion of the significance of the study, its delimitations, definitions of operational terms, and an overview of the study's structure.

Chapter Two provided a comprehensive review of the literature related to proficiency in using idiomatic expressions in academic writing. The findings highlighted that many students worldwide encounter significant challenges when attempting to incorporate idiomatic expressions effectively into their writing. Furthermore, this chapter detailed the theoretical framework for the study, anchored in Lakoff's (1980) Cognitive Linguistic Theory of Idioms along with McCarthy and O'Dell's (2010) Theory of Idioms. To enhance the understanding of various types of idiomatic expressions, along with their descriptions and evaluations, McCarthy and O'Dell's classification of idioms was also included.

Chapter Three detailed the research methodology used in the study. It addressed components such as research paradigms, research approaches, research setting, population size, and sampling methods. Additionally, it outlined the research techniques and instruments employed, the development of the test, the data collection methods, and the data analysis process. Furthermore, the chapter addressed the critical aspects of validity and reliability within the research context using tables and

graphs to record data. Ethical considerations were adhered to, with permission obtained from the participants.

A questionnaire and related documents served as instruments for data collection. The analysis of the questionnaire responses was conducted with the help of a statistician, while the researcher reviewed students' academic writing with a focus on their effective use of idiomatic expressions.

Chapter Four presented, interpreted, and discussed the research findings gathered through questionnaires and document analysis from the selected students. This chapter presented the results of the quantitative research approach, supported by tables and figures, based on responses from 99 participants to the standardised administered and fill-the-gap tests. Furthermore, the findings from the document analysis were used to evaluate the participants' written academics. The outcomes of the qualitative research approach were also included in this chapter.

Chapter Five provided a detailed overview of the entire study, including a summary of the research findings, conclusions drawn from the data, an exploration of the study's limitations, and recommendations for future research. This chapter specifically addressed the goal of enhancing third-level English ESL students' proficiency in using idiomatic expressions, informed by the inherent challenges associated with mastering these formulaic constructs.

As a researcher in English language education, the motivation for exploring the topic is that it should elevate the understanding of idiomatic expressions among third-level English major students. By focusing on this area, the researcher intends to shed light on the cognitive processes involved in mastering idioms and their significance in achieving greater linguistic proficiency. Drawing from the principles established by the Cognitive Linguistic Theory by George Lakoff (1980) and the insights from the Theory of Idioms by McCarthy and O'Dell (2010), this study seeks not only to enhance teaching methodologies but also to provide students with tools to navigate the complexities of the English language better. This exploration is driven by a commitment to fostering a richer, more engaging learning experience that empowers students in their academic and personal growth.

5.3 REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This subsection provides a summary of the findings of the study in relation to the objectives and questions of the survey. The researcher's analysis focused on evaluating third-level English students' proficiency in the use of idiomatic expressions by using quantitative and qualitative research approaches, as mentioned in Chapter 4 of this study.

The study sought to evaluate proficiency in the use of idiomatic expressions in academic writing by third-level L2 English students at a South African university by answering the following research questions:

- What types of idiomatic expressions are used by third-level English second language students in academic writing at a South African university?
- How do third-level English second language students use idiomatic expressions in academic writing at a South African university?
- To what extent are third-level English second language students proficient in using idiomatic expressions in academic writing at a South African university?

Question 1: Types of idiomatic expressions used by third-level ESL major students in academic writing

The first question was to determine the types of idiomatic expressions used by third-level ESL students in academic writing at a South African university.

The analysis of students' essays exhibited varying proficiency levels in using idiomatic expressions. This evaluation considers the frequency and effectiveness of idiom usage among most participants and acknowledges the performance of those who did not use any idioms. The following sections provide a comprehensive overview of how students utilised idiomatic expressions in their academic writing, categorising their performance as below average, fair, or above average. Most participants incorporated two (2) to three (3) idiomatic expressions in their academics. This suggests a moderate level of engagement with figurative language, indicating that students are somewhat familiar with idioms but may not fully utilise their potential to enhance their writing.

These findings support Saleh and Zakaria (2013), who emphasise that learning idioms requires a complex level of cognitive ability. Students need to be fully aware of the contexts and situations in which these formulaic expressions are appropriately used.

However, it was also found that some students faced difficulties and struggled with certain idioms despite the overall competence of their peers. These results are congruent with the findings of Fathma et al. (2020), which revealed that half of the participants did not fully comprehend the importance of contexts and situations in which these formulaic expressions are appropriately used.

Question 2: To describe types of idiomatic expressions used by third-level English second language students in academic writing at a South African university

The study's second question was to describe the types of idiomatic expressions used by third-level English second-language students in academic writing at a South African university.

The types of idiomatic expressions used by third-level English second-language students were described using McCarthy and O'Dell's (2010) Theory of Idioms, where idioms are classified into eight different types: Verb + Complement/Object, Binomial, Trinomial, Similes, Proverbs, Clichés, Euphemisms, and fixed expressions. The most dominant idiomatic expressions used in students' academic writing using McCarthy and O'Dell's (2010) Theory of Idioms were Verb + Object/Complement, closely followed by Prepositional Phrases and Binomials. The findings demonstrated that students used different types of idioms proficiently. The fair level of proficiency in using idioms resulted in comprehension and familiarity with these expressions despite minor errors committed.

Question 3: Third-level ESL students' proficiency using idiomatic expressions

The third question of the study assessed how different types of idiomatic expressions are proficiently used in academic writing by third-level English L2 students at the University of Venda in Limpopo Province.

The findings showed that students employed various idiomatic expressions in their academic writing. However, they had limited knowledge of effectively using these expressions competently. While some of students proficiently used several idiomatic expressions, the majority used two to three idioms in their writing. One student used only a single idiom, and two students did not use any idioms at all, exhibiting a poor mastery of idiomatic expressions. Overall, most research participants used a limited

number of these expressions in the entire academic essays. The lack of knowledge and use of idiomatic expressions among students underscores the necessity for more specialised instruction on idioms in language programs. Lecturers should implement clear teaching methods that concentrate on the meanings, usage, and contexts of idioms to improve students' understanding and practical use.

Participants' overall response rate regarding proficiency in using idiomatic expressions in academic writing is fair. This indicates that while some participants demonstrated mastery of using idiomatic expressions in academic writing with many of these expressions, there is room for improvement in comprehending and using these expressions proficiently. Therefore, further support or resources could enhance participants' familiarity with the idiomatic language.

5.4 CONCLUSIONS

- **QUANTITATIVE**

The study aimed to evaluate the proficiency in academic writing among ESL students at the University of Venda in Limpopo Province. The results, obtained through administered multiple-choice questions and gap-fill tests, indicated that while these students were proficient in matching idioms with their meanings and completing sentences using the appropriate idioms provided, some of them faced challenges in using the corresponding idioms correctly.

- **QUALITATIVE**

The research assessed how well third-year ESL students at the University of Venda in Limpopo Province manage idiomatic expressions in their academic writing. It provided valuable insights into the students' proficiency regarding the use of these expressions. The results indicate that while students employed a variety of idiomatic expressions, a considerable number struggled with usage since their performance was below average. Consequently, this study is designed to deepen students' comprehension and awareness of idiomatic expressions in the English language. Although this study faced several limitations while assessing proficiency in idiomatic expressions, the insights gained are essential for future researchers interested in conducting similar studies.

5.5 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

A sample of 20 students was chosen for a qualitative study from a total of 99 third-level English L2 students who took part in a quantitative study at the University of Venda, located in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Although this sample may represent the third-level English students at the University of Venda, the results cannot be extended to all students across South Africa. Furthermore, third-level English students from other universities might not understand idiomatic expressions in academic writing. As a result, the conclusions drawn from this study are relevant only to third-level students at the University of Venda in the Vhembe East District of Limpopo Province.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher identified the need to provide specific recommendations after summarising the findings and conclusions of the study. These recommendations aim to improve understanding of idiomatic expressions in higher education institutions like universities. Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

5.6.1 Encourage the usage of idiomatic expressions

Lectures should underscore the significance of incorporating idiomatic expressions in academic writing. Employing idiomatic language can significantly enrich students' vocabulary and enhance their writing style. By engaging with these expressions, students make their academic essays more engaging and relatable and develop a deeper understanding of the language's nuances. Furthermore, integrating idiomatic expressions encourages students to achieve a higher level of proficiency in writing. It challenges them to explore diverse ways of expression, which can lead to greater creativity and fluency.

Additionally, mastering narrative techniques using idiomatic language can help students convey their ideas more effectively. This proficiency is valuable in academic settings and essential for clear communication in everyday life. Ultimately, prioritising using idioms in writing instruction will equip students with tools to express themselves more dynamically and confidently.

5.6.2 Provide contextual learning

Effective teaching sessions concentrating on the meanings and appropriate contexts of various idiomatic expressions can significantly enhance students' ability to use these phrases competently. Lecturers can help students understand these idioms and when and how to use them in conversation by providing clear explanations and relatable examples. Incorporating interactive activities, such as role-playing or contextual exercises, can further reinforce students' grasp of idiomatic expressions, allowing them to apply their knowledge in practical situations. Ultimately, this approach fosters remarkable language proficiency and confidence in communication.

5.6.3 Promote creative writing exercises

Engaging in activities that foster creative language use, such as composing paragraphs and crafting narratives, includes using idiomatic expressions. These expressions enrich the text and help students become more comfortable and familiar with figurative language. By immersing themselves in such activities, students can develop their writing skills while gaining confidence in their ability to understand and use idioms effectively.

5.6 4 Feedback Mechanism

Presenting constructive feedback on how students utilise idiomatic expressions in their writing can significantly enhance their competency to integrate these expressions into their work more naturally. By highlighting both effective uses and areas for improvement, educators can guide students in understanding the nuances of idiomatic language, ultimately helping them to express their thoughts more vividly and appropriately. This process not only aids in the mastery of idioms but also enriches the overall quality of their written texts.

5.6 5 Encourage students to read

Lecturers should encourage students to engage with a broad selection of reading materials, including books, novels, and magazines, at different levels. This practice can enrich students' critical thinking, expand their viewpoints, and enhance their language proficiency, especially in idiomatic expressions

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ANNEXURE A: INSTRUMENTS



QUESTIONNAIRE

TOPIC: Evaluating Proficiency in Using Idiomatic Expressions by Third-level Second Language English Students in Academic Writing at a South African University.

Kindly note that this questionnaire is anonymous, and your responses will be treated with confidentiality.

INSTRUCTIONS TO COMPLETE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

- Please do not write your names or personal details on this questionnaire.
- The questionnaire will not take longer than 20 minutes to complete.

Dear participant

My name is Munyadziwa Sylvia Nemakhavhani. I am a post-graduate student in the Department of English at the University of Venda. I am conducting research titled “Evaluating Proficiency in the Use of Idiomatic Expressions in Essay Writing by Third-Level Second-Language English Students at a South African University.”

I would like to request you to take your time to respond to this questionnaire. The results will be used for my research and not to evaluate your knowledge of the English language. Also, your responses will be completely anonymous, and the information granted will be treated with confidentiality.

Please read carefully through each item and respond honestly to all the questions below. Please mark with a cross (X) in the appropriate space.

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Place a cross (X) in the appropriate block. Choose only one option.

1. Gender

Male	
Female	

2. Age Next Birthday

20 – 25		26 – 30		31 -35		36- 40		Other-	
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3. Module tutored

An Introduction to the English Language	Code ENG 3242
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4. Department

English, Media Studies and Linguistics
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5. Faculty

Humanities, Social Sciences and Education

6. Educational Background

Level	
Bachelor's degree	
Postgraduate Degree	

SECTION B: CONTENT-RELATED QUESTIONS REGARDING PROFICIENCY IN THE USE OF IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS BY THIRD-LEVEL ENGLISH STUDENTS.

The participants will match idioms with their meaning to the topic: **Evaluating proficiency in using idiomatic expressions by third-level English second language students**. Their response shall be written down for record processes that can assist in the interpretation of data. **For example: 1. It is raining cats and dogs.**

INSTRUCTIONS AND INFORMATION

FIRST GROUP OF QUESTIONS REGARDING PROFICIENCY IN THE USE OF IDIOMS: Matching Test

INSTRUCTIONS

- Match the following idioms with their meaning by providing a letter of the correct answer. e.g. 1.1. E

1.1. FOOD IDIOMS	MEANING
1.Cry over spilled milk.	A. A controversial subject
2.Hard nut to crack	B. Receive something without working for it.
3.Put all of one's eggs in a one basket	C. Get upset over something that has happened and cannot be changed.
4.Spill the beans	D. Difficult to understand.
5. Handed to someone on a silver platter	E. Reveal the truth.
	F. Rely on one single thing.

1.2. ANIMALS IDIOMS	MEANING
1. Hold your horses	A. Begin to suspect trickery.
2.Take the bull by its horns	B. Get two things done at once.

3. Let the cat out of the bag	C. Wait and be patient.
4. Kill two birds with one stone	D. Face a challenge or danger boldly.
5. Smell a rat	E. Odd or suspicious
	F. Reveal a secret.

1.3. COLOUR IDIOMS	MEANING
1. Born with a silver spoon in one's mouth	A. Very rarely
2. Roll out the red carpet	B. Odd or bad member in a family.
3. Out of the blue	C. Treat someone like royalty
4. Golden opportunity	D. Born into a rich family
5. Black sheep	E. The perfect chance
	F. Unexpectedly

1.4. BODY IDIOMS	MEANING
1. Cry your heart out	A. Tell someone your secret
2. Cost arm and a leg	B. Joke or tease someone
3. Makes my blood boil	C. Cry very hard
4. Pull one's leg	D. Promise to keep a secret
5. Get something off one's chest	E. Very expensive
	F. Make me angry

MARKING GUIDELINES ON EVALUATING PROFICIENCY IN USING IDIOMS

1. FIRST GROUP OF QUESTIONS REGARDING PROFICIENCY IN THE USE OF IDIOMS

ANSWERS

1.1. FOOD IDIOMS

1. C

1.3. COLOUR IDIOM

1. D

2. D

2. C

3. F

3. F

4. E

4. E

5. B

5. B

1.2. ANIMALS IDIOMS

1.4. BODY IDIOMS

1. C

1. C

2. D

2. E

3. F

3. F

4. B

4. B

5. A

5. A

2. SECOND GROUP OF QUESTIONS REGARDING PROFICIENCY IN USING IDIOMS IN ACADEMIC WRITING

GAP-FILL TEST: COMPLETION OF IDIOMS BASED ON THE MEANINGS.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Fill the gaps with the most appropriate idioms from the box below.

Do her a favour	None of your business	Golden opportunity
Down to Earth	Piece of cake	Change their minds
An arm and a leg	Break a leg	Let the cat out of the bag
	Make a mountain out of a molehill	

- 2.1. Stop being a dreamer! Be more _____; and look at the problem more seriously!
- 2.2. The test was a _____; I know I aced it.
- 2.3. Suzan asked her to _____ and take out the trash.
- 2.4. His argument about the death penalty was so convincing that it made most of the judges _____ about the problem.
- 2.5. I would ask you kindly not to interfere with what I'm doing as in all honesty it's _____.
- 2.6. Don't miss this _____; it can change your whole life.
- 2.7. Calm down. There's really nothing to worry about. You are _____.

- 2.8. I understand you have a job interview tomorrow, _____.
- 2.9. We want to buy a new car, but it would cost us _____.
- 2.10. We tried to throw James a surprise party for his birthday, but you _____.

ANSWERS

- 2.1. Stop being a dreamer! Be more **down to earth**; and look at the problem more seriously!
- 2.2. The test was **a piece of cake**; I know I aced it.
- 2.3. Suzan asked her to **do her a favour** and take out the trash.
- 2.4. His argument about the death penalty was so convincing that it made most of the judges **change their minds** about the problem.
- 2.5. I would ask you kindly not to interfere with what I'm doing as in all honesty it's
- 2.6. Don't miss this **golden opportunity**; it can change your whole life.
- 2.7. Calm down. There's really nothing to worry about. You are **making a mountain out of a molehill**.
- 2.8. I understand you have a job interview tomorrow, **break a leg**!
- 2.9. We want to buy a new car, but it would cost us **an arm and a leg**.
- 2.10. We tried to throw James a surprise party for his birthday, **but you let the cat out of the bag**.

SECTION B: QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

PART TWO: CONTENT-RELATED QUESTION:

- Write an essay of at least two pages long on the following topic, “*A time I discovered a secret.*”

Participant’s signature:.....Date.....

Researcher’s signature:..... Date: 27/02/2024.....

Supervisor’s signature..... Date.....

MARKING GUIDELINE FOR ESSAY WRITING: RUBRIC

Exceptional (4)	Proficient (3)	Moderate (2)	Elementary (1)	Score
Outstanding/Striking response beyond normal expectations -Intelligent, thought-provoking and mature ideas -Exceptionally well organised and coherent (connected), including introduction, body and conclusion/ending	-Very well-crafted response -Fully relevant and interesting ideas with evidence of maturity -Very well organised and coherent (connected), including introduction, body and conclusion/ending	Satisfactory response -Ideas are reasonably coherent and convincing -Reasonably organised and coherent, including introduction, body and conclusion/ending	- Inconsistently coherent response -Unclear ideas and unoriginal -Little evidence of organisation and coherence	(40)
Sufficient and compelling evidence is presented, and evidence that counters alternative claims is included.	Sufficient and compelling evidence is presented.	Some appropriate evidence is presented.	No evidence is presented	(20)
Excellent development of the topic. -Exceptional detail -Sentences, paragraphs	Logical development of details -Coherent -Sentences, paragraphs-	-Relevant details developed -Sentences, paragraphs well-constructed	-Some valid points -Sentences and paragraphs faulty	(10)

exceptionally well-constructed		-Essay still makes sense	The essay still makes some sense	
-Tone, register, style and vocabulary highly appropriate to purpose, audience and context. -Language confident, exceptionally impressive -Compelling and rhetorically effective in tone -Virtually error-free in grammar and spelling -Very skilfully crafted	-Tone, register, style and vocabulary very appropriate to purpose, audience and context -Language is effective and a consistently appropriate tone is used. -Largely error-free in grammar and spelling -Very well crafted.	-Tone, register, style and vocabulary appropriate to purpose, audience and context. -Appropriate use of language to convey meaning. -Tone is appropriate -Rhetorical devices used to enhance content	-Tone, register, style and vocabulary less appropriate to purpose, audience and context. -Very basic use of language -Tone and diction are inappropriate -Very limited vocabulary	(30)
			TOTAL	100

ANNEXURE B: STUDENTS SCRIPTS

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A time I discovered a secret

I was snooping around, trying to get to the bottom of things, when I stumbled upon a secret that had been hidden under my nose the whole time. It was a real eye-opener, let me tell you! I had been in the dark about my family's plans for a surprise party, but finally, the cat was out of the bag.

I felt like a detective who had finally cracked the case, and I was eager to learn more. As I dug deeper, I found that my siblings had been burning the midnight oil to keep a party the secret. They had been tight-lipped, not spilling the beans to anyone, not even our closest friends. I had finally caught wind of their plan, and I was determined to get in on the action. I did not want to be left out in the cold, I kept digging until I find something.

I was like a dog with a bone, refusing to give up until I had uncovered the whole truth. I decided to play it cool, not wanting to let the cat out of the bag again. I kept mum, not breathing a word to anyone, until the big reveal. When the time came, I was over the moon with excitement. The party was the icing on the cake, and I was thrilled to have been a part of it, even if it was just a small part.

It was a piece of cake, all I had to do was show up and enjoy the celebration. I enjoyed it, I was on cloud nine the whole time, grinning from ear to ear. I realize that sometimes secrets can be a heavy burden to carry. My siblings had been carrying the secret around for weeks, and it was a weight off their shoulders when they could finally share it with me.

I learned that sometimes, it's better to spill the beans and share the load, rather than keeping it all bottled up inside. After all, sharing secrets

can be a breath of fresh air, and it is often better to be upfront and honest rather than beating around the bush. It was a real game changer for me, it taught me to be aware of my surroundings.

I really notice that I have to trust my instincts. I learned that sometimes the best things in life are the ones that are kept under wraps until the right moment. It was a wild goose chase, but it was worth it in the end. I was finally grateful to be part of the secret and happy for such a wonderful experience.

As people we have to keep our eyes open and my eyes peeled for clues. You never know when you might stumble upon a secret that is been hiding in plain sight. I also learned that it is always better to be honest and upfront, rather than sneaking around and trying to uncover secrets, keeping secrets can be a tightrope act.

It is important not to spill the beans, but also not to keep it bottled up inside. It is a delicate balance, but one that is worth mastering. Keeping a secret is like walking on a tightrope, trying not to fall off. Keeping a cat inside the bag for a long time is like carrying a heavy burden.

In the end, discovering the secret was a blessing in disguise. It taught me to appreciate the power of secrets and surprises and to never take them for granted. Life is full of unexpected twists, by embracing the unknown, we can find joy and excitement in the unexpected.

1 A time I discovered a secret.

Secrets are like hidden treasures waiting to be unearthed, concealed beneath layers of mystery and intrigue. They hold the power to captivate our imaginations, evoke curiosity, and sometimes alter the course of our lives. Reflecting upon a time I stumbled upon a secret reveals a journey filled with twists, turns and unexpected revelations.

"Curiosity killed the cat" they say, but my insatiable desire to uncover the truth led me down a path of discovery. It was a crisp autumn afternoon when I stumbled upon an old, dusty journal tucked away in the attic of my grandmother's house. Its weathered page whispered tales of a bygone era, hinting at secrets long forgotten. Intrigued, I embarked on a journey through time, eager to unravel the mysteries concealed within its yellow parchment.

As I pored over the Journal's pages, each sentence seemed to breathe life into a world shrouded in secrecy. The ink-stained confessions of a past generation unveiled tales of forbidden love, hidden treasures and family feuds buried beneath a facade of respectability. Like a detective piecing together clues, I embarked on a quest to decipher the cryptic messages and unlock the secrets of the past.

"Every cloud has a silver lining," they say and amidst the tales of deception and betrayal, I unearthed nuggets of wisdom

Finding my grandmother secret taught me the importance of understanding our past, no matter how difficult it may be, secrets are like hidden treasures, holding keys to our true selves and our roots. This experience changed my perspective, showing me that it's sometimes worth exploring the unknown, even if it means facing the uncomfortable truths. Secrets shape who we are and how we see the world. They remind us that our stories are meant to be shared.

In conclusion, the moment that I had when I discovered my grandmother's secret marked a significant shift in my perspective. It underscored the power of hidden truths and their potential to transform our understanding of ourselves and others. It urged me to appreciate the mysteries of the past and to remain open to the opportunities that emerge when we venture into the reality of the unknown. It continued to inspire me to seek deeper connections and to embrace the richness of our human experience.

and moments of profound clarity. The secrets buried within the journal served as a reminder of the complexities of human nature and the universal truths that bind us together across generations. Each revelation brought with it a newfound understanding of my own identity and heritage, weaving a tapestry of stories that transcended time and space.

But as the say goes "some secrets are best left buried." Alongside the tales of love and triumph lay dark shadows of regrets and sorrow, reminding me of the delicate balance between curiosity and respect for the past. Some secrets, it seemed, were meant to remain hidden, safeguarded by the passage of time and the wisdom of those who came before us.

In the end, my journey of discovery left me with a deeper appreciation for the complexities of life and the power of secrets to shape our destinies. Like a kaleidoscope of emotions, each twist and turn revealed a new facet of human experience, reminding me that the true essence of life lies not in the answers we seek, but in the journey of discovery itself.

In conclusion, the discovery of a secret is not merely a moment in time but a transformative journey that transcends the boundaries of space and time. It is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the enduring power of curiosity to illuminate the darkest corners of our existence. So, let us embrace the mysteries that lie hidden within the recesses of our minds, for it is in the pursuit of knowledge that we truly come alive.

ESSAY WRITING

TOPIC: A time I discovered a secret.

As they say, "Curiosity killed the cat," but for me, curiosity led to a life changing discovery. It happened on a regular Saturday afternoon when I found an old diary hidden in ~~our~~ my late grandmother's garage storage. This simple find turned out to reveal a long-kept secret that had been hidden for many years.

The diary belonged to my grandmother, who had passed away when I was 17 years old. As I went through its pages, I discovered a side of her I never knew. The diary was filled with her personal thoughts, memories of her past and even some secrets she had never shared.

One entry stood out, telling the story of a lost love that had ended sadly. It was a tale that had been whispered about in my family, but the full extent of my grandmother's pain was unknown until then. Reading it brought a mix of emotions, sadness for her loss, admiration for strength and a new sense of connection to her.

D

A time I discovered a Secret

I still remember the day I stumbled upon a secret that had been hidden from me for a long time. It was a moment of truth, and I finally understood why my best friend had been acting strangely.

At first, I had a hunch that something was off, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it. My friend was always sneaking and whispering on the phone.

As the time went on, my curiosity got the better of me, and I decided to do some digging. I started asking questions, trying to get to the bottom of things, but everyone seemed to be tight-lipped. It was like trying to get blood from a stone; no one was willing to spill the beans. But I didn't give up. I kept poking around, following leads and sniffing out clues.

At first, I was angry and hurt, but as the dust settled, I realized that my friend had been carrying a heavy burden. Keeping secrets can be a weighty responsibility, and I understood why they had felt the need to keep it hidden. But I was also relieved that the truth was finally out in the open. It was a weight off my shoulders, and I could finally move forward wiser and more cautious than before.

Even though it was hard to believe that she was dating my father.

A time I discovered a secret.

There are times in our life that stick out as crucial turning points, even in the world full of mysteries waiting to be solved. I still remember the moment clearly - the one where I discovered a secret that would forever alter the way I saw the world. This essay explores the details of that crucial moment, focusing on the feelings, insights and personal development that came along with learning a secret.

It was a day like no other, a real goose chase of emotions and revelations. Little did I know I was about to stumble upon a secret that would make a mountain out of a molehill. So there I was, minding my own business, just chilling like a villain in my room, when outta the blue, my parents dropped a bombshell on me that hit harder than a ton of bricks.

Picture this: I was innocently rummaging through some dusty boxes you know just being nosy and all, when I stumbled upon this letter buried under a pile of moth-eaten sweaters. I noticed something fishy about it. Curiosity killed the cat, they say, but this time it only left me as puzzled as a mosquito in

My heart was broken beyond repair. She was the person I trusted the most in the world. I saw my world crumble upon me.

Even though I was hurt I had to swallow my pride and not make a situation about me but about the two most important people in my life. My dad and my best friend -

a racist colony.

With trembling hands and heart pounding like a Jackhammer I unfolded the letter to reveal the secret it held, only to find out I was adopted. The cat was finally out of the bag, and I was left feeling like a deer in the headlights. The contents of letter were as clear as mud.

As so, I did what any self-respecting detective would do - I confronted my parents, I didn't beat around the bush I asked them if I was adopted and they spilled the beans like a clumsy waiter with a tray full of spaghetti.

My mind was blown, shattered into a million pieces. As a dust settled and the truth sank in I realised that sometimes ignorance is bliss and curiosity can indeed kill a cat. The skeleton in the closet had been unearthed and I was left feeling like a bull in a china shop, trying to make sense of it all.

In conclusion, the day I discovered a secret was a real rollercoaster ride and emotions and revelation. It was a real wake up call but despite the initial shock I realised blood doesn't make a family. Secrets have a way of turning your

world upside down faster than a greased pig
in a mud pit. So remember, when you go
looking for trouble, don't be surprised when you
find it. The grass isn't always greener
on the other side. Sometimes it's better
to let the sleeping dogs lie.

ANNEXURE C: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE		RESEARCH AND INNOVATION OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR: Mrs Ms Nemakhavhani		
STUDENT NO: 9423923		
PROJECT TITLE: <u>Evaluating proficiency in the use of idiomatic expressions in essay writing by third-level Second Language English students at a South African university.</u>		
ETHICAL CLEARANCE NO: FHSSE/24/EMS/01/0404		
SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS		
NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Prof MN Lambani	UNIVEN, English, Media Studies, and Linguistics	Supervisor
Dr TT Nephawe	UNIVEN, English, Media Studies, and Linguistics	Co-Supervisor
Mrs MS Nemakhavhani	UNIVEN, English, Media Studies, and Linguistics	Investigator – Student
Type: Masters Research Risk: Minimal risk to humans, animals, or environment (Category 2) Approval Period: April 2024 – April 2025		
The Research Ethics Social Sciences Committee (RESSC) hereby approves your project as indicated above.		
General Conditions While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following. • The project leader (principal investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the REC: – Annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project, and upon completion of the project. – Within 48hrs in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project. – Annually a number of projects may be randomly selected for an external audit. • The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the REC. Would there be deviation from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited. • The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date, a new application must be made to the REC and new approval received before or on the expiry date. • In the interest of ethical responsibility, the REC retains the right to: – Request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project, – To ask further questions; Seek additional information; Require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process. – withdraw or postpone approval if: – Any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected. – It becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the REC or that information has been false or misrepresented. – The required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately, – New institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions A is necessary		
ISSUED BY: UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE Date Considered: March 2024		
Name of the RESSC Chairperson of the Committee: ...Prof M. Mwale-Manjoro... Signature..... <i>Mwale</i>		UNIVERSITY OF VENDA OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION 2024-04-05 Private Bag X5050 Thohoyanondou 0950

ANNEXURE D: APPLICATION LETTER

APPLICATION LETTER

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, SOCIAL SCIENCES & EDUCATION

To : Prof. PE Matshidze

Deputy Teaching and Learning

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education

Enq : Nemakhavhani Munyadziwa

MA in English Language Studies

071 877 4195

Munyadziwa.Nemakhavhani@univen.ac.za

Date : 10 April 2024

Request for permission to conduct a research project in a selected English class at the University of Venda.

I am Munyadziwa Nemakhavhani, a Master student in the Department of English, Media Studies, and Linguistics at the University of Venda. As per my studies, I am undertaking research on the topic: **‘Evaluating Proficiency in the Use of Idiomatic Expressions in Essay Writing by Third-Level Second Language English Students at a South African University.’** I kindly request permission to conduct this research amongst the sampled third-level English students.

The objective of this research is to examine students' ability to utilise idiomatic expressions in English. As a vital language that brings people together, English holds a significant place in South Africa, where it is used in government agencies and educational institutions. The results of this study can be advantageous to students, lecturers, and the English Department as a whole. The module lecturer will be asked

to provide information about the total number of students registered for the module. A sample of students will then be selected to take a questionnaire consisting of multiple-choice questions, while others will be given an essay topic to respond to. As a researcher, I want to make it clear that I will strictly adhere to all the principles that govern a research project. Participants will be asked to give their written or verbal consent before the research begins. Their responses will be treated confidentially, and identities will be anonymous unless otherwise expressly indicated. Once the research findings are written, all the collected information will be destroyed. I have attached hereto the Research Ethical Clearance Certificate from the university and the data collection instruments.

The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The participants will not be paid for this study.

Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient.



Nemakhavhani MS (9423923)

Supervisor: Prof MN Lambani

ANNEXURE E: PERMISSION LETTER



PERMISSION LETTER

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, SOCIAL SCIENCES, AND EDUCATION

CONFIDENTIALITY

Prof. PE Matshidze

Deputy Teaching and Learning

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education.

Nemakhavhani MS

P O BOX 157

LEVUBU

0929

10 April 2024

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH PROJECT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VENDA.

1. The above matter refers.
2. You are hereby informed that your request for permission to research **"Evaluating proficiency in the use of idiomatic expressions in essay writing by third level second language English students at the University of Venda"** has been granted.
3. You are expected to adhere to research ethical considerations particularly those relating to confidentiality anonymity and informed consent of your research participants.
4. Kindly inform the Department of English, Media Studies, and Linguistics before prior commencement of your data collection.
5. Ensure that your research activities do not disturb teaching and learning in the department.
6. Wishing you the best in your study.

.....
DEPUTY DEAN: Teaching and Learning

.....
Date

ANNEXURE F: RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Research Topic: 'Evaluating Proficiency in The Use of Idiomatic Expressions [In](#)
Essay Writing By Third-Level Second-Language English Students At A South African
University.'

Position: Full-time Lecturer and Student at the University of Venda

Contact Address: P O Box 157

Levubu

0929

071 877 4195/079 753 4261

Munyadziwa.Nemakhavhani@univen.ac.za

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information leaflet
and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and it could be
terminated at any time without giving reasons. Yes No

3. I grant permission to partake in the study.

.....

Name

.....

Date

.....

Signature

ANNEXURE G: EDITING CERTIFICATE

Office No. 06
Department of English, Media Studies and Linguistics
University of Venda
P/Bag X 5050
Thohoyandou
0950

16 January 2025

To Whom It May Concern

This serves to confirm that I proof-read and edited the dissertation titled “Evaluating Proficiency in Using Idiomatic Expressions in Academic Writing by Third-Level Second-Language English Students at a South African University” by Munyadziwa Sylvia Nemakhavhani, Student number: 9423923.

Regards



Vincent N. Demana (PhD)



University of Venda
Department of English, Media Studies and Linguistics
Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education
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E-mail: Vincent.demana@univen.ac.za
Website: <http://www.univen.ac.za/>
A quality driven, financially sustainable, rural-based comprehensive university

ANNEXURE H: TURNITIN REPORT

Nemakhavhani

ORIGINALITY REPORT

17 %	13 %	9 %	6 %
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	Submitted to University of Venda Student Paper	2 %
2	univendspace.univen.ac.za Internet Source	2 %
3	Submitted to Regent Business School Student Paper	1 %
4	ulspace.ul.ac.za Internet Source	< 1 %
5	www.grin.com Internet Source	< 1 %
6	ir.mu.ac.ke:8080 Internet Source	< 1 %
7	Kirstin Wilmot. "Designing writing groups to support postgraduate students' academic writing: A case study from a South African university", Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 2016 Publication	< 1 %