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**Implications of Teaching English Idioms to L2 Learners Through
Digital Gamification at a Public School**

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Quito, noviembre 2021

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	14
LITERATURE REVIEW	15
Idioms	15
Idioms, Metaphors and Similes	16
Idioms and Phrasal Verbs	17
Idioms, Clichés and Slang.....	19
Internet, Slang and Abbreviations	19
Gamification and Technology.....	20
Gaming Slang.....	22
Gamification	23
Pros and Cons of Gamification	24
L1 and L2 Idiom Processing.....	25
Dual Idiom Representation – DIR	26
Parasitic Mechanism	27
Idiom Diffusion Model -IDM.....	27
Gamification and Teaching	30
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	31
2.1. Research Questions.....	31
2.2. Hypotheses	32
2.3. General Objective	312
2.4. Specific Objectives.....	312
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS	33
Context and Participants.....	33
Description of Method	35
Data Collecting Instruments and Procedure.....	36
Gamified Class Using Quizlet	37
Data Analysis	40
RESULTS.....	41
Reliability Test.....	41
Pre Test Analysis	42
Control Group Results.....	44
Experimental Group Results	48

Proving the Hypotheses	52
Class Observations	54
Teachers' Interviews.....	56
Analysis and Interpretation of Teachers' Interview.....	61
DISCUSSION	62
CONCLUSION	66
RECOMMENDATIONS	68
LIMITATIONS.....	69
REFERENCES.....	70
ANNEXES	73

LIST OF TABLES

Table A – Participants Information.....	33
Table B – Control Group Participants.....	34
Table C – Experimental Group Participants.....	34
Table D – Teachers Participants.....	35
Table 1 – Control Group Pre-Test Data.....	43,45
Table 2 – Experimental Group Pre-Test Data.....	44,48
Table 3 – Control Group Post-Test Data.....	46
Table 4 – Experimental Group Post-Test Data.....	49
Table 5 – Idioms knowledge between Pre-Test and Post-Test.....	53
Table 6 – Mean, median and Mode.....	53
Table 7 – T-test Calculation.....	53

LIST OF GRAPHS

Graph 1 - Control Group Pre-Test Figures.....	47
Graph 2 – Experimental Group Pre-Test Figures.....	50
Graph 3 – Control Group Post-Test Figures.....	47
Graph 4 – Experimental group Post-Test Figures.....	51
Graph 5 – Benchmarking Pre-Test vs. Post-Test.....	52

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EXTRANJERA**

**IMPLICATIONS OF TEACHING ENGLISH IDIOMS TO L2 LEARNERS
THROUGH DIGITAL GAMIFICATION AT A PUBLIC SCHOOL**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of teaching English idioms through the use of digital gamification on students who are learning English as a second language at a public school. Sixty students and eight English teachers from the school participated in this research. The students were divided into two groups, a control group and an experimental group with 30 students each. Pre-tests and post-tests were applied to the participants in both study groups. For this descriptive study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. Several scientific instruments were applied to collect data as well as observations and analyses of the recorded classes by the teachers who participated in the study were carried out. After the discussion and analysis of the results, it was possible to conclude that the use of methodologies based on gamification positively impacts the learning of English idioms in students of the public institution. This study suggests that the application of gamification for teaching idioms has favorable results in student learning. It was

determined that learning methods through digital games motivate both students and teachers, making students acquire and use idiomatic expressions in their everyday language. After concluding the investigation, several recommendations for future studies were raised, mainly concerning a larger sample to obtain reliable results and additional tests at different times after the experimentation. On this basis, observations in-person classes and use combined teaching methods should be used to verify which is the most effective method for teaching English idioms.

Keywords: idioms, gamification, acquisition, language, gamified class, figurative meaning, teaching-learning, virtual, digital tools.

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RESUMEN

El propósito de este estudio es determinar el impacto de enseñar los modismos del idioma Inglés mediante el uso de gamificación digital a estudiantes que están aprendiendo éste idioma como segunda lengua en un colegio público. Sesenta estudiantes y ocho profesores de Inglés de un colegio público participaron en ésta investigación. Los estudiantes fueron divididos en dos grupos, uno de control y uno experimental con 30 estudiantes cada uno. Sendas pruebas previas a la aplicación de la técnica de gamificación y posteriores a la misma fueron aplicadas a los participantes en ambos grupos des estudio. Para éste estudio descriptivo se usaron tanto el método cuantitativo como cualitativo, se emplearon varios instrumentos científicos para recolectar los datos y se realizaron observaciones y análisis de las clases grabadas por cada uno de los docentes que intervinieron en el estudio. Luego de la discusión y el análisis

de los resultados se pudo concluir que el uso de metodologías basadas en la gamificación tienen un impacto positivo en el aprendizaje de modismos en Inglés en los estudiantes de la institución pública. Este estudio sugiere que la aplicación de la gamificación para la enseñanza de modismos tiene resultados favorables en el aprendizaje de los estudiantes; de igual manera se pudo determinar que los métodos de aprendizaje mediante juegos digitales motivan tanto a estudiantes como a profesores, logrando que los educandos adquieran y empleen las expresiones idiomáticas en su lenguaje de uso diario. Después de concluir la investigación, varias recomendaciones para futuras investigaciones fueron planteadas principalmente en lo referente a una muestra más amplia para obtener resultados confiables al igual que pruebas adicionales en diferentes momentos posteriores a la experimentación. Sobre esta base, deberían realizarse observaciones a clases presenciales y usar métodos combinados de enseñanza para verificar cual es el método más eficaz para la enseñanza de modismos en Inglés.

Palabras Claves: expresiones idiomáticas, gamificación, adquisición, idioma, clase gamificada, sentido figurado, enseñanza-aprendizaje, virtual, herramientas digitales.

INTRODUCTION

As the English language has become universal and English idioms are a fundamental component of the language, learners must acquire L2 idiomatic expressions to improve their communicative skills. Learning idioms are essential in language acquisition. An English learner might sound more natural using common idioms and useful expressions when speaking. According to Lionatas (2003) the figurative idioms are difficult for EFL teachers as well as foreign language learners because the interpretation of some idioms cannot be understood simply by considering their grammatical structure and lexical items.

On the other hand, with the continuous innovation of technology, the wide range of electronic devices, and digital applications or Apps, all areas of knowledge have changed, and education is no exception. The Gamification of learning is a new educational approach that has stemmed from new technologies. Teaching English idioms through digital Gamification is important because games in classrooms make them fun and dynamic for both parties.

Dehghanzadeh et al. (2019) has claimed that according to various researchers “Gamification is considered to be one of the most enjoyable, engaging, and effective methods for ESL” (p. 2). Gamification is a unique approach that EFL teachers can apply to engage students in English idioms acquisition: it allows to bridge the gap between effective learning and the student’s engagement.

Since the digital learning and virtual teaching environment is currently broader, the use of collaborative tools and digital methodologies is essential, because it contributes to improving the teaching-learning process at different educational levels; therefore, this research aims to determine the implications of teaching English idioms using digital Gamification in online classes at a public school; to reach this end, relevant data has been collected through surveys,

interviews, and observations. In addition, there is no information about integrating digital learning at public schools nor teaching Idioms in the online English classroom in Ecuador; thus, the educational community needs to research this topic. For example, at the level of curricular and methodological proposal, the MINEDUC (Ministerio de Educación y Cultura) has not promoted the use of innovative techniques as gamification for teaching English as a second language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Idioms

English Idioms are one of the more confusing areas for learning English as a second language. Despite being widely used in English, idioms baffle novice learners to a large extent. Thawabteh (2011, as cited by Al-kadi, 2015) They might cause not only linguistic but also cultural and technical problems to non-English speakers who learn English as an L2, and these problems may jeopardize communication. Samani & Hashemian (2012 as cited by Mahmoud 2017) idioms hinder the language acquisition and linguistic progress of L2 learners. ESL/EFL students have to know what every idiom means in context to understand them in everyday conversation, so they need to be familiar with the most common expressions, which do not have a literal meaning but a figurative one.

According to the Oxford Learner's Dictionary an idiom is "a group of words whose meaning is different from the meanings of the individual words"; particular people use idioms in a specific place or time. E.g., "Let the cat out of the bag" means a person tells a secret by mistake.

Whilst the primary topic of this research is the teaching of idioms, some similar linguistic terms, such as figures of speech, metaphors, and similes, need to be understood because they are often confused with them and thus misused.

Idioms, Metaphors and Similes

Figurative Language refers to the use of words in a nonconventional way; It has a complicated meaning because it is necessary to link the concrete and abstract connotations to understand those expressions. The figurative meaning is a colorful writing, or raises a kind of reminiscent comparison, while ordinary sentences are usually used to mention something indirectly.

Idioms, metaphors, and similes are different types of figurative language. Based on the analysis of Vedantu, an Indian online tutoring platform for learning live online, and where teachers provide outstanding information for English learners, we can differentiate between those comparable expressions.

Idioms: The meaning of an idiom cannot be inferred from the meaning of its isolated words because it conveys something beyond its literal meaning; most of the time, idioms have a figurative meaning more than a literal one. However, some phrases often become figurative idioms in the process of preserving the literal meaning of the phrase. Idioms are pigeonholed as formulaic language whose literal meaning differs from the stated meaning. E.g., "Let's paint the town in red"; this expression does not mean to paint the whole town in red color; it means to have fun. Given that the speakers of the language are already familiar with the nonliteral meaning of the idioms, these later expressions are different from figures of speech.

On the topic of metaphors: The Oxford Learner's Dictionary defines the metaphor as "*a word or phrase used to describe something else, in a way that is different from its ordinary use, to show that the two things have the same qualities and to make the description more powerful*, E.g., She has a heart of stone". Metaphors are used to describe something in a nonliteral way; they are helpful to make a comparison or express an idea. In other words, a metaphor conveys one thing that truly is a thoroughly different thing. People use metaphors to make language exciting and help imagination; in the same way metaphors also make us aware of networks we may not have thought of before.

Metaphors are frequently used in Poetry, Literature, and by anyone who wants to use the language creatively.

As for similes: The definition given by the Oxford Learner's Dictionary states that a simile is a word or phrase that uses the words *as* or *like* to compare one thing to something else, for instance, brave as a lion, white as snow, strong as an ox. Similes are like metaphors, except that they use conjunctions such as *like* or *as* to make a comparison. E.g., "She's as fierce as a tiger" is a simile, but "She's a tiger when she's angry" is a metaphor. Now, we can identify a simile when the comparative words *as* or *like* are used in the expressions.

According to Vedantu's article, although metaphors, idioms, and similes are figurative languages, they are different from each other; idioms are phrases used to describe a particular situation, metaphors are indirect comparisons between two things, and similes, although like metaphors, are more direct comparisons.

Idioms and Phrasal Verbs

Gairns & Redman (2011) mention that "Idioms are usually defined as groups of words whose meaning is different from the individual words". For instance, the expression "under the weather" has nothing to do with the weather; this idiom is used to mean "I feel sick"; moreover, they state that "Phrasal verbs consist of two and occasionally three words: a base verb and at least one particle (preposition or adverb)". They explain that the meaning of the Phrasal verbs can be idiomatic, that is the verb and the particle together have a different meaning from the base verb has by its own.

Several phrasal verbs, similar to idioms, have more literal meaning than others, e.g. stand up (stand) or sit down (sit). This means that, "phrasal verbs can be seen as a type of idiom, although they are often singled out for specific attention in language-teaching materials" Gairns & Redman (2011). For pedagogic rationale, Gairns and Redman have suggested that combining both

idioms and phrasal verbs in teaching materials makes it easier to introduce the foreign language rather than unlinked phrases or isolated sentences; this allows learners to see the how idiomatic expressions are used in real situations.

If L2 learners want to improve their learning and take English to the next level, they need to use English Idioms in everyday conversation. Unfortunately, English idioms can be difficult because they are expressions which cannot always have direct equivalents in the L2 student's native culture or language. According to Lionatas (2003) figurative idioms are challenging for English Foreign Language teachers and beginners because those expressions cannot be understood neither by their lexicon nor grammar structure. In this subject, this aspect could be a barrier for the methodical learning of idioms in English Foreign Language classrooms (Gramely & Patzold, 2004). Idioms are related to culture, idiosyncrasy, and language variety.

McPartland (1981) and Irujo (1986) agree that idioms are challenging to learn and teach for many reasons. The main reason, McPartland believes, is that idioms are not literal: they do not mean what they say. For instance: the idiom "it is raining cats and dogs" has nothing to do with animals but this expression has a different meaning which is that, it is raining heavily; what is in line with the statement of Gairns & Redman (2011).

Irujo (1986) attributes the difficulty of idioms acquisition to the following elements: first, native speakers always omit idioms; when they speak to second language learners, they use simple expressions and everyday vocabulary; second, idioms fluctuate in formality from colloquialisms and argots to those expressions which can be easily used in formal communication; and finally, idioms are not included in second language materials or just are relegated as other expressions and are not encouraged to be used by learners.

Cooper (1998) introduced one of the most successful strategies called "contextual clues" for guessing the meaning of idiomatic expressions. Fotovatnia and Khaki (2012, as cited by Ghaderi and Afshinfar 2014) have investigated how the recognition and production of the two types of idioms is

improved when verbal and visual channels are involved which occurs through the use of images.

Idioms, Clichés and Slang

According to D'Angelo Bromley, K (1984) Idioms are different from slangs or clichés; however, these terms can be confused with each other. Idiom differs from slangs, which are colloquial words or phrases that often enjoy popularity with a group. Slangs are languages of an informal register; in other words, slang words or phrases used by a particular group of people, e.g., teenagers, army members, etc. (grass is slang for marijuana). In the same way, idioms differ from clichés, which are trite and overused expressions, e.g., little red schoolhouse. Clichés are a kind of unoriginal thoughts.

Nowadays, slang is embedded in our culture and people use them frequently even though they might not realize they are using them. The Internet has become part of our lives and has brought many new phrases and slang to our everyday language.

Internet Slang and Abbreviations

One typical example of slang is “bye” used to say goodbye. Like the shortening “bye” was created to save time, much of internet slang and abbreviations such as “btw” (by the way), “lmk” (let me know), “g2g” (got to go), and so on, were created to save time and have a quicker communication. The abbreviations used in the chat rooms and messenger services, have become a complete new language used by thousands of people all around the world. Most of the people know these abbreviations as Internet Slang since most of them are used in informal language with specific groups in social media networks.

Some people call it Internet slang since many abbreviations are mostly used in informal conversations of concrete groups of colleagues in social media networks. Internet Slang are used by any person who read or write in chat rooms.

According to the Preply Blog¹, the following internet abbreviations are the most popular of 2022:

ASAP = “As soon as possible”

FB = “Facebook”

FYI = “For your information”

G2G = “Got to go”

IMO = “In my opinion”

LOL = “Laughing out loud”

MSG = “Message”

TTYL = “Talk to you later”

Google can help students and teachers find the meaning of any internet slang just by typing the term they want to know.

Gamification and Technology

At the same time, the evolution of technology is changing the way we live, learn and work. New ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) and modern mobile devices have changed the entire world, especially education. Today, it is impossible to carry out the teaching-learning process without the internet or smartphones. “Even for those schools with limited financial resources, educational technology is still a prevalent part of education today” (Vail, 2003, p.34). Nowadays, technology is a part of the education process, and the teaching of a second language also makes use of technology to carry out the acquisition of the target language, it is called technology assisted second language learning. In addition, qualified teachers often use a virtual learning environment for teaching languages and other classes.

¹ Retrieved from <https://preply.com/en/blog/the-most-used-internet-abbreviations-for-texting-and-tweeting/>

Digital gamification, as a part of education technology and e-learning (electronic learning), has had positive effects on language learning. “Gamification has been shown across multiple levels of academic instruction to have a positive impact on task completion by augmenting the experiential elements encountered by students who are engaging in the learning process.” (Kaufmann, 2018). Gamification supports an excellent teaching strategy and a motivational environment for L2 learners, so it is of great relevance for teachers and students, and all academic staff. Therefore, the combination of technology and gamification for teaching could be the perfect formula to teach a second language in an effective way.

Liu (2017) summarizes a wide range of idioms classification put forward by different authors regarding semantic transparency, structure, and syntactic composition; these include phrasal verbs, verb + noun phrases (*tournares*), lexical and phrase idioms, idioms of encoding and decoding, lexemic and sememic idioms, pure, semi-literal and literal idioms, and core idioms.

For nonnative teachers to determine the appropriate teaching pedagogy to teach idioms to EFL learners has been an ongoing challenge. Teachers of English as a second language/foreign language have different methods at their disposal to teach idioms; the traditional method and the conceptual method are the main general methodologies most used by teachers. While the traditional method relies on context to teach idioms; on the other hand, the conceptual method requires a basic understanding of metaphor for teaching idioms. Lionatas (2003) suggests that idioms can be learned and understood effectively through context; on the other hand, according to Lakoff (1987), the relationship between two semantic areas at the level of thought is linked to the conceptual metaphor. “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5).

Pedagogy of idioms has been meaningful for researchers for many decades since globalization became a new way to understand the world based on the inter-cultural relationships among its countries. Regarding the methodology for teaching idioms, Al-Kadi (2015) states that “in the context of

classroom teaching, EFL/ESL teachers have been always trying hard to find appropriate methods and techniques to teach idioms and they still do" (p. 515).

Clarke & Nation's (1980) suggest the guessing strategy as an alternative of pedagogy to teach idioms; and the training method should be carried out following these steps:

Step 1: Make a decision; having in view the unfamiliar words of speech

Step 2: Glance instantly at the contextual words

Step 3: Look at the vast context of the word

Step 4: Presume (guessing)

Step 5: Verify the guess.

Gaming Slang

As stated before, on the Internet, there are countless abbreviations or phrases. In the same way people who are particularly interested or immersed into gaming must learn a variety of idiomatic expressions or specific terminology, including slang and abbreviations. The webpage Fossbytes.com² (2021) mentions some examples of gaming slangs which every novice player should learn, are:

AFK = away from keyboard.

GG = good game.

² Information collected from the web page <https://fossbytes.com/gaming-terms-slangs/> 25 Gaming Terms And Slangs Every Gamer Must Know

CAMPING = refers to the tactic where a player gains a strategically advantageous position by sitting in a particular position on the map.

TOXIC = refers to a player who is irritated or rude towards their teammates or the opposite team. Insulting and slurring can be common as well for “toxic” players, not simply being rude; sabotage can also be considered “toxic” behavior.

DLC = refers to the in-game content made available by the developers after the launch of a game.

K/D or Kill/Death ratio = is one of the stats of a player which shows the number of kills per death.

OP = OP means overpowered; it is used in connection to a strong in-game weapon or a player who alone can take on multiple players.

TTK = Time to kill is gaming slang, which refers to the average time taken to kill an enemy player in a gunfight.

The experience of playing games makes it so that players/students must learn these kinds of idiomatic expressions to which they are exposed while they are playing.

Gamification

On the other hand, the use of technology in education has become more popular than ever. The concept of Gamification is reasonably new, and according to Werbach and Hunter (2012), it is the use of game elements and game design techniques in non-game contexts. Most studies show that many schoolteachers widely integrate digital learning at all teaching levels everywhere. It is relevant to understand that gamification learning is different from games-based learning.

According to the *Study of Gamification Effectiveness in Online e-Learning* “The introduced gamification adequately motivates users. A significant percentage of users have been returning to the application for further studies, demonstrating the effectiveness of developed tools and ideas” (Osipov et al., 2015, p.76). However, other studies such as “*Students’ Perceptions about Gamified Methods in English as a Second Language*”, developed by Hwang (2018), have shown that there are moderately positive effects of Gamification on cognitive and motivational learning outcomes. Gamifying education is a modern practical approach that integrates game design elements in the teaching environment to increase students’ motivation and engagement in second language acquisition.

Pros and Cons of Gamification

□ Several authors as well as academic articles agreed that Gamification can be an effective teaching strategy; Association for Talent Development cite how “gamification is a proven effective educational strategy”³. The use of gamification leads some advantages in teaching such as:

□ *Increases Learner Engagement:* Gaming encourage friendly competition among learners and it can transform a boring class into an interesting and motivating lesson.

□ *Improves knowledge absorption and retention:* educational games are engaging and allow students to acquire the target language faster.

□ *Provide Instant Feedback:* through the immediate feedback is possible to monitor the learners progress.

□ *Boost learners Motivation:* Gamification offers learners’ motivation through retribution and funny competition.

³ Data obtained from <https://www.turning.com/blog/what-are-the-advantages-and-disadvantages-of-gamification>

Nevertheless, gamification approach also presents some disadvantages such as:

- *High Development Cost:* game teaching design takes more time than traditional design.
- *Requires access to computers and Internet:* gamification requires electronic devices and internet service.
- *Diminished Value Over Time:* learners who wish to review a specific content, may not wish to play the whole learning game again.
- *Games that turn out to be poorly masked Quizzes:* most learners do not enjoy tests and questionnaires, thus, to design a gamified teaching material can take much time and effort.

L1 and L2 Idiom Processing

There are many definitions of idioms and theories about how speakers acquired them; however, most of the research was carried out regarding L1 idiom comprehension. Only a few studies have been done about L2 idiom comprehension. current investigations are limited, and they do not offer enough information about the process of idiom acquisition. Cooper, T (1999) studied the strategies used by nonnative speakers of English for online processing common idioms. Twenty common idioms were given to participants and they had to verbalize (think aloud) the meaning in a written context. He mentions several theories about L1 Idiom Comprehension; his study found that most of the participants preferred a heuristic approach to comprehend idiomatic expressions, using mainly trial and error to understand their meaning. Cooper states that the acquisition models used by L1 users did not produce good results for L2 speakers.

In the past decades, psycholinguists and linguists have widely investigated idioms acquisition and have formulated theories, models, and hypotheses regarding how L1 and L2 process the idioms. Warren (2005) studied the approaches and techniques used by native and nonnative speakers to process and acquire idiom expressions and raised the following question: “Why should we know more than rules and how to combine them?” she came to the conclusion that the answer was closely related to the economy of effort. She later states that regarding of L1, native speakers construct the generalized understanding through a bottom-up approach, while nonnative speakers construct the generalized meaning through a top-down approach by comparing the words with their first language – transferring.

Restricted combs and open combs were two categories of combination words posed by the old models; idioms and Collocations were considered restriction combinations. Warren’s model seeks to study abstract common threads among expressions of the mental lexicon. The model of Warren divides fixed phrases in two types: transparent phrases and opaque phrases.

Khoshnevisan (2019) believes that Idiomacity requires more investigation because a simple change of context can modify the process of comprehension from L1 to L2. Next, the most relevant hypotheses and oft-cited models of L2 idiom processing are outlined.

Dual Idiom Representation – DIR

This model was proposed by Abel (2003), after reviewing multiple patterns of idiom processing, in order to explain the differences between native learners and nonnative learners by considering lexical level as well as conceptual levels to process idioms; the model considers both a lexical and a conceptual level of representation. This model relates the idiom entries with the figurative meaning and the constituent entries with the literal meaning of their single words. A conceptual representation is accessed during the comprehension process when a particular idiom does not have an idiom entry. The frequency that the idiom appears in the speech and the decomposability

determine the lexical representation or lexical level. Decomposability concerns the analyzability of idioms. First language and second language lexicon vary respecting the number of idioms entries because of the frequency that native speakers are exposed to.

Parasitic Mechanism

Cieślicka (2015) compared L1 and L2 idiom processing and comprehension in contexts and analyzed the crucial factors in the process, focusing on second language learners' idiom processing. The author interpreted the differences between idioms and proposed comprehensive theoretical accounts about the first language and second language idiom processing. After a deep analysis, Cieślicka proposed the parasitic mechanism, a system to deal with the idiom processing and comprehension for L2 learners. The parasitic mechanism is a working cognitive strategy that L2 learners would use to develop figurative competence. She mentioned elements that play an essential role in L1 idiom processing, such as semantic decomposability, literal plausibility, salience, and context; but she also considered the aspects in L2 idiom processing, describing some similar factors like L1 process and some specific ones such as cross-language similarity in the L2 idiom learning context.

Idiom Diffusion Model –IDM

The Idiom Diffusion Model or IDM was introduced by Lionatas (2002) to describe the different processes through which L1 and L2 acquire idioms. Lionatas based in his study about “vivid phrasal (VP) idioms and Conceptual Semantic Image (CSI) distance”, developed in 2002, points out that the main concern regarding “*idiomaticity*” is the result of the absence of an academic agreement to define the term idiom. The author announced an original category for second language idioms called Vivid Phrasal Idioms – VPI; he also introduced the continuum known as conceptual lexical-image continuum. After several studies carried out in 1997 with students of Modern Greek at different levels.

Lionatas (2002) proposed a new approach to unify the three hypotheses regarding L1 and L2 idioms acquisition. This concept was called Conceptual Semantic Image distance – CSI, which tries to determine how far or how close is an idiom in the target language from its corresponding native language, both in terms of the image (conceptually) as well as in terms of the literal meaning (semantically). The investigator mentioned that he intended to contribute to the research of Vivid-Phrasal idioms for Second Language Acquisition more than to establish a conclusive taxonomy.

Qureshi et al. (2018), in their research “*Pedagogy of English idioms: An Etymological perspective*” selected 50 students from a public institution of higher education for men in Multan, Pakistan, and they were broken into two similar groups of 25 participants one each. A pre-test was conducted in order to determine the idioms comprehension of all students, and they found that learners were not able to understand and use idioms in a creative way; after this, the students were encouraged to understand the cultural root of the idioms for one month. Then, a post-test was equally conducted to determine the effect of the etymological approach in the idioms comprehension; results were analyzed using an SPSS program for statistical analysis.

After carrying out their investigation, they found that their study followed the criterion suggested by Leech (1974) regarding idiomatic expressions. He proposes four types of meaning which can be used to teach idioms comprehensively.

- 1) Connotative Meaning
- 2) Conceptual Meaning
- 3) Affective Meaning
- 4) Stylistic Meaning

The findings of the above mentioned research showed a beneficial effect on the idioms’ understanding; when students are conscious of cultural roots – the etymology of the idioms, L2 learners were able to use them craftily. In the authors’ opinion, nonnative speakers of English often do not feel motivated to

learn idioms creatively. Besides, they believe that the pedagogy of idioms is a challenging task for nonnative EFL teachers.

Another study was carried out by Khoshnevisan, B (2019) at University of South Florida under the title “Spilling the Beans on Understanding English Idioms Using Multimodality: An Idiom Acquisition Technique for Iranian Language Learners”. He states that idioms are present in every moment of the English language; however, they are a thorny aspect for ESL learners. He mentions that many studies have been developed concerning the different issues of idioms; however, there was a gap in the application of those models to Persian Language Learners, so Khoshnevisan conducted qualitative research to determine the perceiving of Iranian language learners about learning idiomatic expressions through a website. The author used a networked questionnaire to find out the students’ perception and learning on the topic. The results showed that most participants got the figurative meaning of the idiomatic expressions by using picture modules and videos; nevertheless, many learners preferred the translation approach to decode the meaning of the idioms. This fact confirms the hypothesis that translation facilitates the learning of idiomatic phrases in second language learners.

Idioms acquisition is a prickly matter for ESL. “Despite their ubiquity, learners need to bend over backwards to learn a boatload of idioms” (Khoshnevisan, 2018a, p.128). It can be considered that native speakers speak idioms with no effort or even subconsciously; on the contrary, the usage of idioms in routine communication for nonnative speakers is a pain in the neck. So, Jackendoff (1997) states that in the lexicon of a native speaker, the quantity of fixed expressions is comparable to that of single words. Idiom investigators agree that conceptual knowledge of idiom comprehension is connected to the cultural environment; for example, Boers and Demecheleer (1997) believe that food and cooking are a relevant aspect of its culture in France, many French idioms are linked with cooking, food and culture.

Gamification and Teaching

One of the problematic issues regarding teaching is motivating students to learn, especially those born before 2000, even more, when traditional teaching approaches are applied. Most students believe conventional teaching methods as dull despite the educators' effort (Lee & Hammjer, 2011). Educational professionals have put forward teaching through Gamification as a possible solution to transform and improve classic teaching methodologies and foster learners to get involved in the teaching-learning process. Gameful learning has been considered an experiential approach for teaching and learning which offers a potential motivation for students and encourages them to participated in the learning process (Lee & Hammer, 2011).

In the field of education, Gamification is an important facilitator , and it is generally defined as “Gamification refers to using game-design elements in any non-game system context to increase users' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, help them process information, help them to better achieve goals, and/or change their behavior.” (Treiblmaier et at., 2018, p.136).

Preliminary research has found that some benefits can be achieved by using gamification classrooms, including intrinsic motivation, better retention, and students' engagement in the learning process.

Putz, Hofbauer and Treiblmaier (2020), developed a “*longitudinal study*” to determine if Gamification can improve education and foster retention of learners. A total number of 617 students of secondary and tertiary level participated in the research for two years. Gamified activities were incorporated in some workshops designs, and the results were compared with those workshop designs with no gamified elements. The authors found that Gamification has a positive impact on the knowledge retention of the students. Additional studies were carried out regarding gender and age; nevertheless, no effect or inconsistent results were found, confirming Gamification's usefulness in

the learning process. They used quantitative data to prove their hypotheses; for the experiment, they considered a control group with non-gamified participants and other groups exposed to gamified workshops. For validity purposes, all participants had a similar level of English knowledge.

They also conducted a longitudinal study for about two years between 2015 and 2017, considering 617 participants. The study included both non-gamified and gamified workshops and similar knowledge assessments taken at different stages: immediately before, 20 minutes after, and the last evaluation, which was taken two weeks after the workshops. The gender of participants was balanced between male and female students, while the maximum score was ten points for all the assessments. After several research procedures, the authors concluded that neither the age of the participants nor the gender had a relevant influence on the study.

Corresponding assessments for every workshop were conducted at different periods of time to determine the implications of the Gamification on students' performance; based on the findings, the researchers promote the use of Gamification in the teaching process to foster students' knowledge retention. To sum up, the researchers concluded that Gamification has a beneficial effect on retaining students' knowledge regardless of gender or age.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

2.1. Research Questions:

Q1: What are the implications of teaching English idioms through digital Gamification at a public school?

Q2: What are the benefits of using Gamification for L2 learners when learning/acquiring idioms?

2.2. Hypotheses:

The following null hypothesis has been considered to answer the research question Q1 and Q2:

H0: Teaching English idioms through digital Gamification does not imply any benefit for L2 learners.

H1: Teaching English idioms through digital Gamification implies positive benefits for L2 learners.

2.3. General Objective:

Determine the implications of teaching Idioms through digital Gamification at a public school in an online learning class.

2.4. Specific Objectives:

- To determine if teachers from the Public High School use and teach Idioms in their classrooms.
- To identify teachers' opinions about the relevance of incorporating idioms for teaching English.
- To describe the pros and cons of using digital Gamification in online learning to teach idioms to L2 learners.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Context and Participants

This study took place at Pomasqui High School, a public institution located in the northern outskirts of Quito, the population of the High School is 2400 students. All of the participants were teenagers between 16 and 18 years old who are coursing the second level of Bachillerato General Unificado (BGU). The current study was based on a new vision of innovative pedagogies in teaching English and Applied Linguistics. This study aims to determine the implications of teaching English idioms to second language learners through digital Gamification by comparing the gamified and non-gamified group. Under this point of view, the gamification approach should be seen as a methodological strategy in language acquisition.

Table A. The sampling population considered for this research was 60 teenage students of the Second Level of Bachillerato General Unificado (BGU), having already approved an A2.2 English level in the First Course of BGU, which means that all the participants have a comparable level of English. 36,67% of the participants were female (22) and 63,33% were male (38); the age range was between 16 to 18 years old.

Number of Participants	Gender	Percentage	Age Range	English Level
60	Female	22	Between 16 and 18	Second
	Male	38		BGU

Table A – Participants Information

After the selection process, participants were randomly split into two main groups, a control group that did not get a gamified class and an experimental group that had a gamified course. Each group was integrated by 30 participants of both male and female gender. Teenage students between the ages of 16 to 18 are the target sample; according to Piaget, this is the age when cognitive development and comprehension skills are being strongly developed. Both students and teachers were observed during English classes to find out if they used idioms in the class communication.

Control Group Participants	Gender	Percentage	Age Range	English Level	
30	Female	10	33,33%	Between 16 and 18	Second
	Male	20	66,67%		BGU

Table B - Control Group Participants

Experimental Group Participants	Gender	Percentage	Age Range	English Level	
30	Female	12	40,00 %	Between 16 and 18	Second
	Male	18	80,00 %		BGU

Table C -Experimental Group Participants

Table D shows the eight English teachers were observed while teaching English language to their students; those ESL teachers were interviewed virtually by asking their opinion about teaching idioms.

Teachers Participants	Gender		Percentage	Age range	English Level
8	Female	3	37,50 %	Between 30 and 48	B2-C1
	Male	5	62,50 %		

Table D – Teachers Participants

Description of Method

This is a descriptive research that combines both quantitative and qualitative methods. Some relevant data has been collected as feedback from participants, and class observations have been analyzed to determine if idioms are used in the classroom by teachers and what idiomatic expressions are mostly used. According to Brannen and Moss (2012), combining the two approaches helps researchers view social relations and their intricacies clearer while also recognizing the limitations of both methods. In social research, mixed approaches are also known as triangulation, which provides the opportunity to present the findings using elements of two or more approaches (Haq, 2014),

All data in this primary research was collected directly through surveys, observations, and interviews. The present experimental study is also based on a deductive approach, so there are two hypotheses or expectations at the beginning of the research: the null hypothesis (H0) and the alternative hypothesis (H1). Based on data analysis of the premises, the implications and benefits of teaching idioms using Gamification have been determined. Different instruments were used to collect the data, such as observation sheets, semi-structured interviews with teachers, analysis of teaching material, multiple-choice test results of the class that had gamification exercises (experimental group), and the class results of the students who did not have a gamified approach class (control group).

A pre-test and a post-test were applied for both groups. The gamified class for the experimental group was conducted using an innovative digital tool called QUIZLET, an interactive study creation tool for both teachers and students. It allows the creation of multiple tasks quickly with total freedom. Fifteen common idioms were introduced to the experimental class using this educative tool through gamified exercises; after that, a practical test was applied to participants for measuring the students' retention of the idioms. On the other hand, the same test was used for the control group to determine the retention of the idiomatic expressions, but no game activities were conducted this time.

Data Collecting Instruments and Procedure

First of all, it must be pointed out that the research was carried out in virtual classes due to the COVID pandemic. The following data collection instruments were applied: class observations, student surveys, and teachers' interviews. Eight close-ended questions were considered for the student surveys. Ten opened-ended questions were formulated for the teachers; observation sheets were used to determine which idioms are mentioned in the 8 recorded classes - one per teacher. Multiple-choice tests to measure comprehension of these idioms found in the control and experimental groups were also applied. While in the experimental group, the test was administered after teaching idioms to L2 students in a gamified class using Quizlet; in the control group, the test was issued without any gamified activities.

English teachers were requested to record their classes, in which the use of English idioms was observed. Observation sheets have been filled with the findings. Students' multiple-choice surveys and teachers' semi-structured interviews were applied through a Google Forms, in which data can be automatically gathered and statistical reports.

The students' questionnaire included eight close-ended questions to collect from learners some relevant information about the knowledge about idiomatic expressions as well as the gamification approach. Pre-tests were

applied to both the control and the experimental group to measure the knowledge of idioms; after the gamified lesson, a post-test was given to students to collect new information about the knowledge variance. Students from the experimental group learned idioms through a Gamification method, while students from the control group learned them through traditional teaching methods.

Gamified Class Using Quizlet

With the experimental group, the gamified class was conducted using an interactive online platform known as Quizlet, in which everyone can sign up for free at the Quizlet Web page.⁴



(Image taken from: Quizlet)

Quizlet is a digital tool designed for teachers to generate quizzes for online learning, building and assessing quickly and easily. Quizlet offers adaptive learning to suit the student's learning needs. It provides a broad range of question styles of different issues; Quizlet's activities vary from visual study materials (visual aids) to fill-in-the-blank games and lots more besides. According to the platform creators, students who use Quizlet improve their learning and reach higher degrees; a beneficial characteristic of this interactive tool is that teachers can freely use more than 300 million study sets from its digital pop-quiz database.

⁴ Quizlet address: Herramientas de aprendizaje y fichas educativas gratuitas www.Quizlet.com/es

Quizlet offers several learning styles, including: flashcards, spell, learn, test, match, live and gravity.

- Flashcards are pretty self-explanatory, like real ones, with a question on one side and the answer on the other.
- Learn puts questions and answers into multiple choice-style quizzes that can be completed to get an overall result. This applies to images, too.
- Spell will speak aloud a word and the student is then required to type out the spelling of it.
- Test is an auto-generated mix of questions with written, multiple choice, and true-or-false answer options.
- Match has you pairing up correct words or a mix of words and images.
- Gravity is a game that has asteroids with words coming at a planet you need to protect by typing out the words before they hit.
- Live is a game mode that allows for multiple students to work collaboratively. (Edwards, 2021, Para.3)

During the gamified class, fifteen common idioms were written using the flashcard-style layout, which allow showing on one side the idiomatic expression or idiom, and on the other the real meaning of the idiom.

The following idioms and expressions were chosen from a list published by Education First (EF)⁵ in its article English Idioms, which according to the information given by EF staff, are spoken quite regularly in the everyday conversation in the United States:

1. It's raining cats and dogs
2. It's a piece of cake
3. A dime a dozen
4. Better late than never
5. Break a leg
6. Cutting corners
7. Get out of hand
8. Hang in there
9. No pain, no gain
10. Speak of the devil
11. By the skin of your teeth
12. A Bird in the hand is worth two in the bush
13. A penny saved is a penny earned
14. A picture is worth 1000 words
15. Costs an arm and a leg

During the gamified lesson, different virtual classroom games were used to teach the idioms, spelling, and matching functions were mainly used. Finally, the live mode of Quizlet was used with the students to strengthen the idioms

⁵ Data collected from the web page <https://www.ef.com/wwen/english-resources/english-idioms/> The most common English idioms

acquisition. Live Quiz allows two options for teaching: Classic Live Quizlet to motivate the students through practicing in groups or individual games in order to reinforce the topic of the lesson, and the second option enables the instructor to use an evaluation control activity to measure briefly how much knowledge has been assimilated by learners. For the experimental class, the classic Quizlet alternative was applied so many idioms were randomly presented and the students were asked to link with their corresponding meaning. This Quizlet live activity improved the students' management of the expressions by associating and memorizing the concepts with their meanings better.

It is essential to mention that the handling of Quizlet was straightforward and fun for the students and the teacher.

Data Analysis

The effects of using Gamification for teaching idioms was analyzed through interviews and observations of the teachers' performance and the student's response to this new gamed methodology. It was found that none of the teachers used or taught idioms during their lessons systematically, but one or two common expressions were used occasionally. Surveys applied to students with no gamified class showed that 87,9% percent of the participants did not know idioms nor utilized them at any moment in the classroom. In contrast, 83,3 % of the participants of the experimental group learned at least six idioms and tried to use them in the class. In addition, it was also found that students improved their motivation and engagement in the learning process after the gamified course.

Regrettably, a few students (8,3% percent) did not have a positive effect after Gamification because they did not find the gamified activities interesting or were not interested in learning the proposed expressions. This negative effect could be caused by the type of digital platform used for gamification "Quizlet", perhaps if a different application is used, there would be better results.

RESULTS

The teachers agreed to take a semi-structured interview to answer questions about the research topic. According to Olivia (2018), a researcher can adjust the questionnaire to ask different types of inquiries related to the research topic using a semi-structured interview.

Reliability Test

To evaluate the internal consistence or the degree of reliability of the data to be collected, the Kuder-Richardson 21 (KR-21) test was applied to the experimental group as well as the control group at the beginning of the investigation. A questionnaire with eight dichotomic questions about some aspects of language as well as idioms knowledge was given to participants; then the answers were tabulated to get the mean, the variance, and the value of the KR-21 test, obtaining the following numbers:

Sample size (k) = 8

mean (M) = 0,63

variance (S²) = 1,69

participants = 60

Calculations:

KR-21 formula:

$$K - R21 = \frac{k}{k-1} \left(1 - \frac{M(k-M)}{kS^2} \right)$$

Note that this is variance
(standard deviation squared)

Image taken from <https://slidetodoc.com/>
Reliability Consistency in testing Types of variance Meaningful

sample size k	8,00
mean	0,63
variance (s^2)	1,69
kr-21	0,75

$k/(k-1)$	1,14
$M(k-M)$	4,67
$K \cdot S^2$	13,55
$M(k-M)/K \cdot S^2$	0,34
$1 - M(k-M)/K \cdot S^2$	0,66
KR-21	0,75

As the KR-21 result was 0.75, it can be considered that the study results are consistent. Indeed, all the participants had similar idioms knowledge and English language skills at the beginning of the study.

Pre Test Analysis

The Pre-test findings evidenced no substantial differences between the results collected from the control and the experimental group; therefore, it is possible to deduce that all sixty students who participated in the study had a similar knowledge background about English as their second language. The students also had a comparable knowledge regarding idiomatic expressions.

These results agree with the KR-21 calculations, which confirmed the internal consistency of the test.

Tables 1 and 2 show that only between 16,7% and 13,3% of ESL teachers use games for teaching, whereas between 23,3% and 26,7% never use Gamification in the classroom. Results from the control and experimental group were comparable with minimal shifts. Twenty percent said they know what idioms are, and between 13,3 % and 16,7% know what Gamification is. Most of the participants would like to learn through games, and just 3,3 % said not to be interested in learning games. Only 16,7 % in the control group and 20% in the experimental group were able to mention at least one idiom, while 40% in the other were not able to.

Control Group – Pre Test

	MUCHO /SI	MAS O MENO S	MUY POCO	NADA / NO
El docente ha usado juegos para enseñar	5 16,7%	8 26,7%	10 33,3%	7 23,3%
Conoce qué son las Idioms	6 20,0%	12 40,0%	7 23,3%	5 16,7%
Conoce usted qué es Gamificación	4 13,3%	6 20,0%	9 30,0%	11 36,7%
Le gustaría aprender jugando	13 43,3%	8 26,7%	9 30,0%	0 0,0%
Podría mencionar una expresión idiomática	5 16,7%	5 16,7%	8 26,7%	12 40,0%

Table 1 - Control Group Pre -Test Data

Experimental Group – Pre Test

	MUCHO /SI	MAS O MENOS	MUY POCO	NADA / NO
El docente ha usado juegos para enseñar	4 13,3%	9 30,0%	9 30,0%	8 26,7%
Conoce qué son las Idioms	6 20,0%	11 36,7%	8 26,7%	5 16,7%
Conoce usted qué es Gamificación	5 16,7%	5 16,7%	10 33,3%	10 33,3%
Le gustó aprender jugando	15 50,0%	6 20,0%	8 26,7%	1 3,3%
Podría mencionar una expresión idiomática	6 20,0%	5 16,7%	9 30,0%	10 33,3%

Table 2 – Experimental Group Pre – Test Data

Control Group Results

Tables 1 and 3 show no significant difference between the perception and knowledge of participants about English idioms before beginning the experiment and after concluding it. Graphs 1 and 2 allow the appreciation of the similarities between the pre-test and post-test results in the control group, which did not learn idioms through digital Gamification. Data shows that the numbers before and after the experiment were 16,7 % and 23,3 % regarding if their English teachers had used games for teaching while 23,3 % and 30 % said that

teachers have never used Gamification in their classroom. In question two, between 40% and 43% percent of the participants said they had a good idea about what idioms are. Regarding the third question, only between 13% and 27% said to know about the gamification approach, and from 33% to 37% of students answered that they did not have any idea about what a gamified class is. In question number four, the half of the participants, around 50%, said they would prefer games for learning, on the other hand, no one said not to be interested in Gamification for class. Finally, in the fifth question, 17% (5 participants) in every test wrote a correct idiomatic expression, whereas, in the pre-test, 40% (12 students) and 37% in the post-test did not know any idioms.

Data collected from the Control Group				
	MUCHO /SI	MAS O MENOS	MUY POCO	NADA / NO
El docente ha usado juegos para enseñar	5 16,7%	8 26,7%	10 33,3%	7 23,3%
Conoce qué son las Idioms	6 20,0%	12 40,0%	7 23,3%	5 16,7%
Conoce usted qué es Gamificación	4 13,3%	6 20,0%	9 30,0%	11 36,7%
Le gustaría aprender jugando	13 43,3%	8 26,7%	9 30,0%	0 0,0%
Podría mencionar una expresión idiomática	5 16,7%	5 16,7%	8 26,7%	12 40,0%

Table 1 - Control Group Pre-test Data

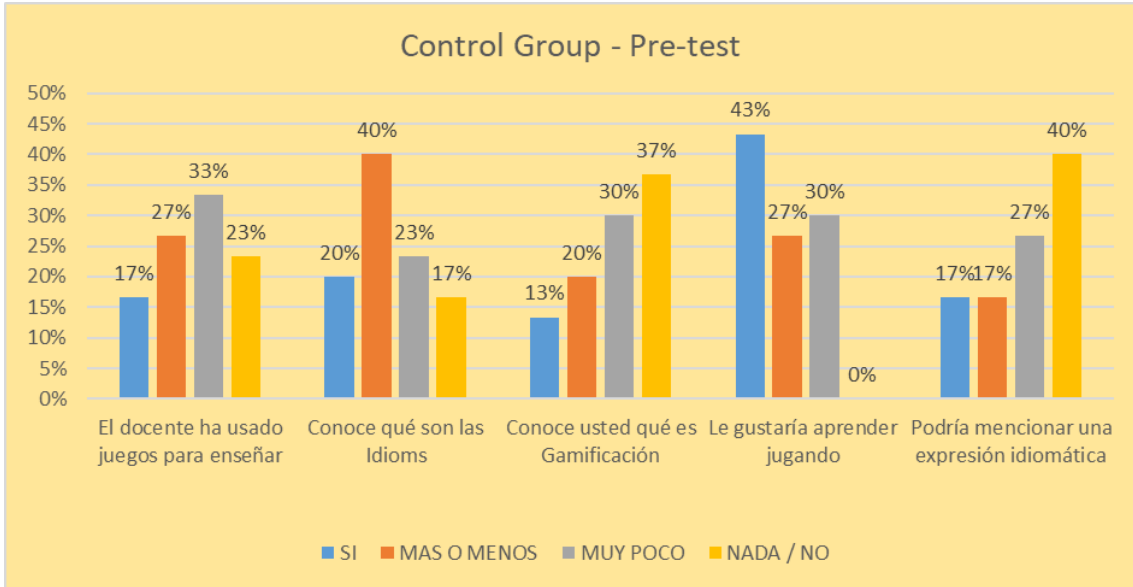
Data collected After the Experiment

	MUCHO /SI	MAS O MENOS	MUY POCO	NADA / NO
El docente ha usado juegos para enseñar	7 23,3%	7 23,3%	7 23,3%	9 30,0%
Conoce qué son las Idioms	5 16,7%	13 43,3%	6 20,0%	6 20,0%
Conoce usted qué es Gamificación	8 26,7%	7 23,3%	5 16,7%	10 33,3%
Le gustó aprender jugando	15 50,0%	8 26,7%	7 23,3%	0 0,0%
Podría mencionar una expresión idiomática	5 16,7%	5 16,7%	9 30,0%	11 36,7%

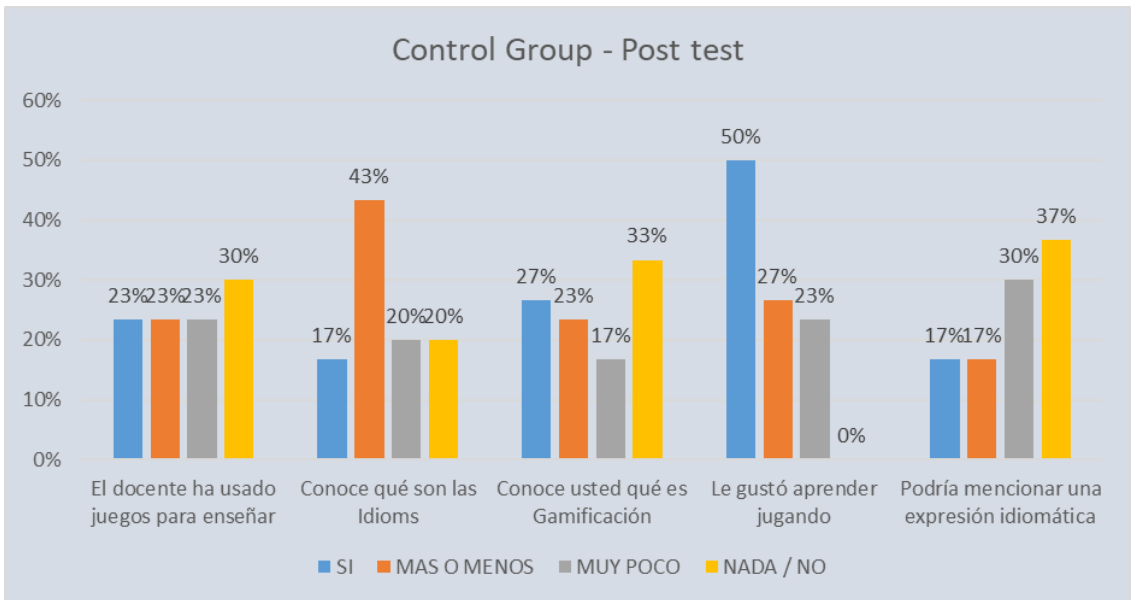
Table 3. Control Group Post-test Data

Comparing Tables 1 and 3, we can quickly look at the similarity between the results collected before the experiment and the results obtained after using the gamification approach with the experimental group. It is necessary to point out that traditional methods were used to teach idioms to control group students.

Next, Graphs 1 and 2 demonstrate the similarities between the pre and post-test graphically, as mentioned before.



Graph 1. Control Group – Pre-test Figures



Graph 3. Control Group – Post-test Figures

Experimental Group Results

Tables 2 and 4 show a significant difference in the experimental group between the participants' perception of knowledge about English idioms before beginning the gamification approach and after concluding it. Graphs 1 and 2 allow the appreciation of the differences between the pre-test and post-test results in the experimental group by teaching idioms through digital Gamification. In the first question, the highlighted data shows that in the pre-test, only 13% (4 students) said that their English teachers had used games for teaching; in comparison, after the gamified class, 60% (18 students) said had been taught by gamification methods.

Data collected Before Applying the gamification				
	MUCHO /SI	MAS O MENOS	MUY POCO	NADA / NO
El docente ha usado juegos para enseñar	4 13,3%	9 30,0%	9 30,0%	8 26,7%
Conoce qué son las Idioms	6 20,0%	11 36,7%	8 26,7%	5 16,7%
Conoce usted qué es Gamificación	5 16,7%	5 16,7%	10 33,3%	10 33,3%
Le gustó aprender jugando	15 50,0%	6 20,0%	8 26,7%	1 3,3%
Podría mencionar una expresión idiomática	6 20,0%	5 16,7%	9 30,0%	10 33,3%

Table 2. Experimental Group Pre-test Data

Data collected After Applying the gamification

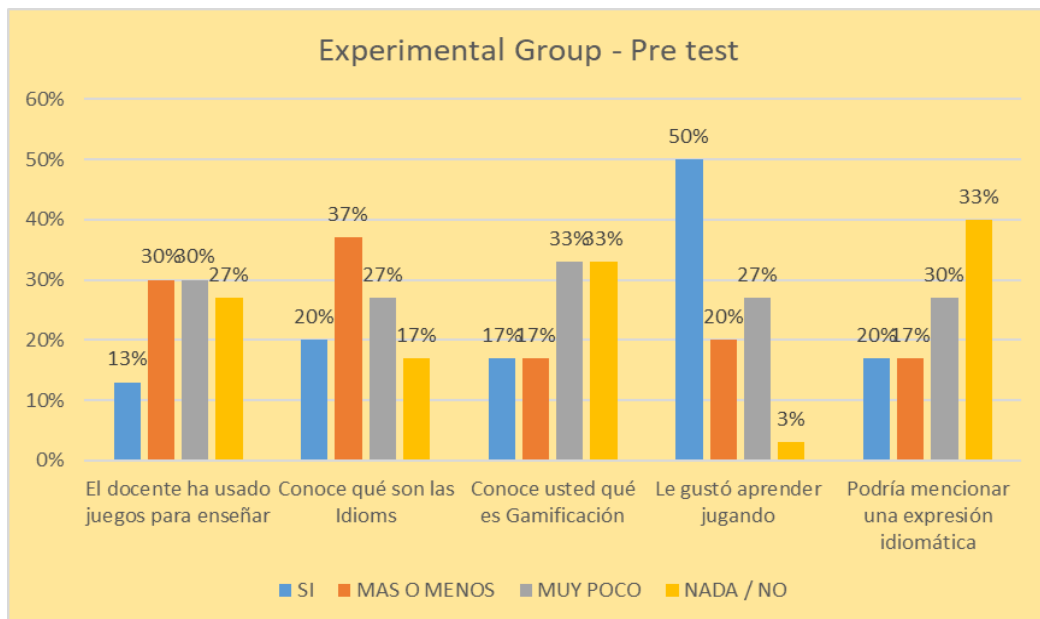
	MUCHO/ SI	MAS O MENOS	MUY POCO	NADA / NO
El docente ha usado juegos para enseñar	18 60%	7 23%	4 13%	1 3%
Conoce qué son las Idioms	17 57%	8 27%	5 17%	0 0%
Conoce usted qué es Gamificación	16 53%	9 30%	4 13%	1 3%
Le gustó aprender jugando	23 77%	5 17%	2 7%	0 0%
Podría mencionar una expresión idiomática	16 53%	3 10%	5 17%	6 20%

Table 4. Experimental Group Post-test Data

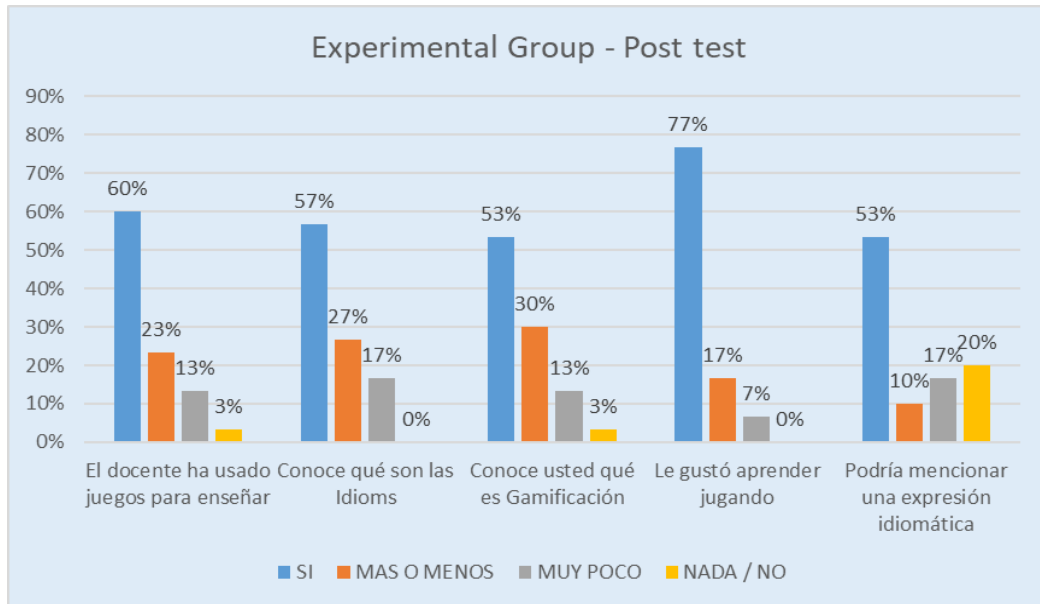
The results of question number two, point out a significant increase of 37% (20% during the pre-test and 57% in the post-test) regarding the understanding of idioms; in the same question in the pre-test, 17% said not have an idea about idiomatic expressions, but in the post-test, no student answered in that way. In the third question, the students of the experimental group who are aware of what gamification is increased from 17% to 53%; only

3% (one student) said not know about it. Question four shows that 23 participants (77%) enjoyed the class after the gamified lesson, compared to the 15 students (50%) who said they would like to learn by gamification methods before the experiment.

The most significant variance was found in the fifth question because, during the pre-test, only 20 percent (6 students from 30) were able to provide an idiom example, and 33% (10 participants) did not, after using Quizlet for the English Class, 53% (16 students) knew at least one English idiom, and only 6 (20%) of the participants could not remember any idiom.



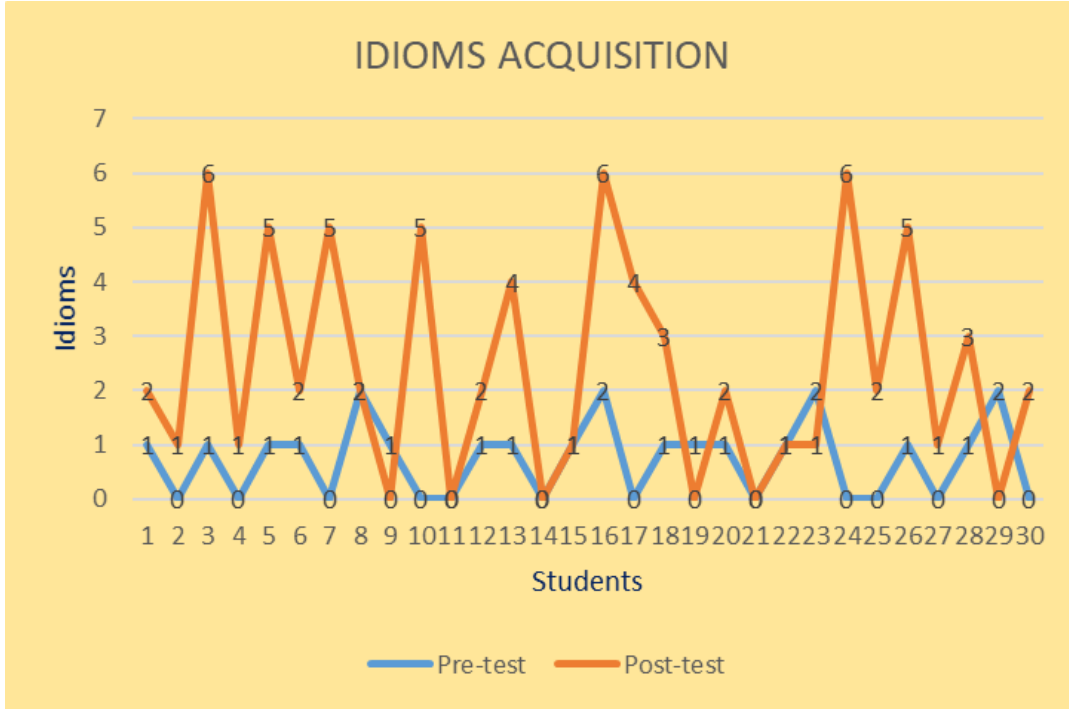
Graph 2. Experimental Group – Pre-test



Graph 4. Experimental Group – Post-test Figures

As graph five demonstrates, the findings determine a clear difference between the pre-test and the post-test in the experimental group. The trace of the brown line representing the after-gamification class is entirely different from the blue line representing the class without gamified techniques.

While in the pre-test, a few students said to know just one or a maximum of two idioms, after the gamified class, most of the students mentioned between two and five idiomatic expressions, even three of them knew six idioms perfectly. Before gamification, twelve students did not know any idiom, but after the gamification approach only six students answered no idioms. These facts are conclusive findings that endorse gamification teaching improves idioms acquisition.



Graph 5 - Benchmarking Pre -Test vs. Post - Test

Proving the Hypotheses

The first step was to accept or reject the null hypothesis by using descriptive analysis; as numbers in table five and graph five show, there is enough evidence to infer that the null hypothesis (H0) must be rejected. Instead, the alternative hypothesis (H1) has to be accepted, because the collected data demonstrates that students improved their idioms knowledge after the gamification approach.

The method used for the statistical hypothesis testing, was a Paired Sample t-test. Previously the statistics of the pre-test and the post-test were compared to check if there was a significant difference between the findings. Statistical elements such as mean, variance, standard deviation, number of the sample n, t-value, and critical value were calculated to determine if the null

$$\text{t-value} = \frac{|\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2|}{\sqrt{\frac{s_1^2}{n_1} + \frac{s_2^2}{n_2}}}$$

T-value formula

Image taken from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTmLQvMM-1M>
Student's t-test

To sum up, according to table 5, the pre-test numbers show that the mean is 0,733, the variance is 0,478, and the standard deviation is 0,69. The statistical procedure concluded that *as t-value (4,02) is higher than the critical value (1,67)*; therefore, the null hypothesis (H0 = there are no implications or benefits of teaching English idioms to L2 learners through a gamification approach) must be rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H1 = Teaching English idioms through digital Gamification implies positive benefits for L2 learners) is to be accepted.

Class Observations

Firstly, it is necessary to mention that the class observations were developed in the digital classroom environment. All of the ESL teachers were asked to record their routinary lessons without any restriction or special requirements, such as using games or a specific methodology. They were free to teach as they do every day, so teachers conducted no gamification approach in the classroom. Teachers used two platforms, ZOOM and Microsoft TEAMS to do their job.

The main findings from the classes observations were:

- The teachers took the attendance of the students at the beginning of the class.
- The topics introduced by English teachers could not get students engaged because they were not interested.
- Lack of warming activities for engaging students.
- Some teachers were not well trained to conduct their classes successfully.
- The students had passive behavior with little or no participation in the classroom.
- Internet problems contributed to interrupting the teacher's performance and the student's attention.
- Too many students per classroom, between 40 and 45 learners in every class, making class interaction more difficult.

Regarding English idioms, the observation and analysis of the recorded classes showed that none of the eight ESL teachers emphasized idiomatic expressions in their lessons. Nonetheless, three of them, equivalent to 37,5%, used the following routine idioms at least once during the teaching “a piece of cake”, “be the black sheep”, “face to face”, and “better late than never”. Two of the used idioms (50 percent) match those chosen from the EF list as the most used by native speakers and considered in this research.

It was also observed that the ESL teachers did not make sure that students understood the idiomatic expressions nor encouraged learners to integrate idioms into their everyday vocabulary. Hence, students never used any phrase during the English classes; on the contrary, the high school participants did not speak with idiomatic expressions when interacting with their teachers or classmates. Students generally had a passive participation during the learning process; they asked questions only a few times. Learners were

limited in answering the questions teachers asked; students used even Spanish to ask questions, breaking the first rule of English classes – no Spanish at all.

The teachers used a couple of traditional teaching methods. The direct method focused on oral skill and repetition drills; two teachers also used grammar translation to concentrate on grammar and translated several terms into Spanish. One of the English teachers also applied total physical response (TPR), trying to teach the second language by doing some exercises, especially with arms movements. Unfortunately, more than one of the educators spoke too much Spanish during the class, which is counterproductive because learners need to be immersed in the target language.

Class observations suggest that English teachers need more training and must be more aware of the importance of idioms in language acquisition. On the other hand, students need to be encouraged to learn and practice common idiomatic expressions used in everyday conversation by native speakers, which will help students a lot to understand the way native people speak.

Teachers' Interviews

The interviews with the teachers were carried out by virtual means as well, and they answered ten different questions about using gamification. The questionnaire was formulated in Spanish and the answers were given in the same language.

Regarding the first question, 75% of teachers agreed idioms are moderately important whereas 25% believe idioms are highly important for language acquisition.

1.- How important do you consider idioms are in the language acquisition?

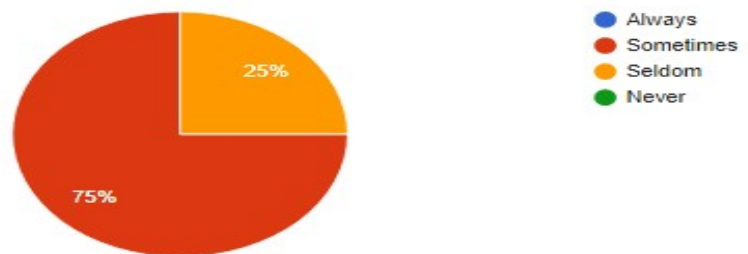
8 responses



In the second question, 75 % of the English teacher said to use/teach idioms in their classes, while 25% use those expressions rarely.

2.- How often do you use/teach idiomatic expressions in your lessons?

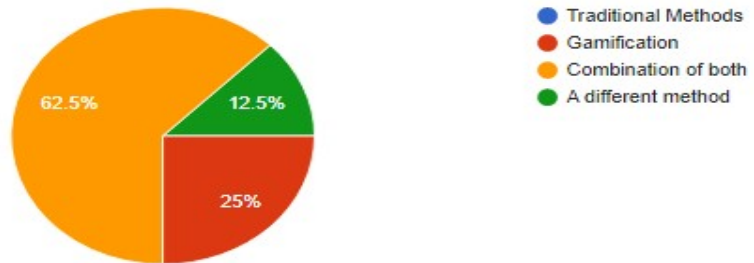
8 responses



Regarding question number three, most of the teachers (5) said they would prefer a combination of traditional methods and gamification; 25% prefer only the gamification approach.

3.- What method would you prefer for teaching idioms?

8 responses



Question five showed that 62,5% of ESL teachers agreed that idioms learning is difficult because they are not used in everyday conversation, while 25% believed that students are not motivated to learn English idioms.

4.- Why do you think it is difficult to learn/acquire English idioms?

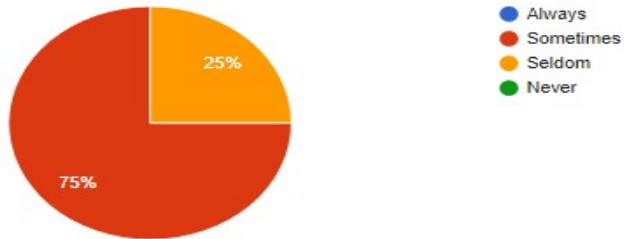
8 responses



When teachers were asked how often they use games for teaching, 75% said sometimes and 25% chose the option seldom.

5.- Have you ever taught English using games in classroom (gamification), including board, card and electronic games?

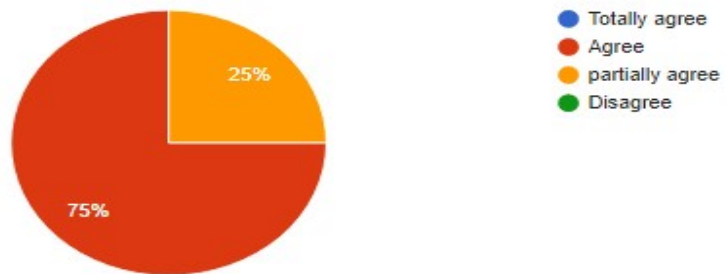
8 responses



In question six, 75% of the teachers agreed to master the gamification tools and 25% of them partially agreed.

6.- Do you consider mastering the tools necessary to gamify your classrooms?

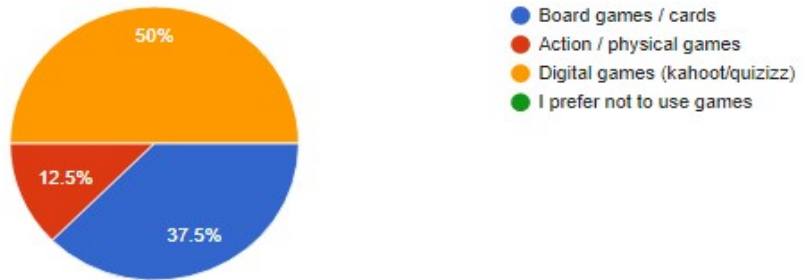
8 responses



Question seven showed that 50% of the teachers use digital games for teaching while the other half prefer board games or action games.

7. What kind of learning games would you prefer to use when teaching?

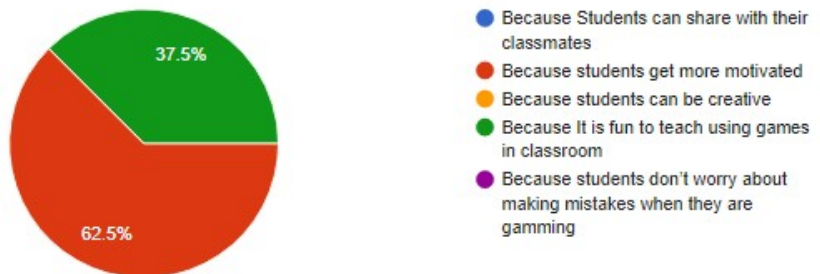
8 responses



In relation to the eighth question, 62,5% believed that gamification should be used in their classrooms because students get more motivated, and the remaining 37,5% of the teachers said to enjoy gamification because it is fun to teach while playing.

8. Why should teachers use gamification for teaching in their classroom?

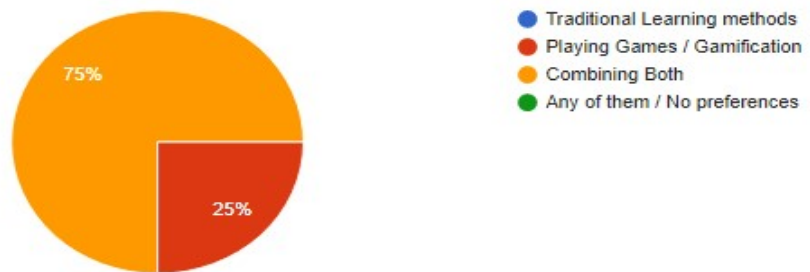
8 responses



Results of question number nine confirmed that most of the teachers prefer a combination of both traditional and gamification methods for teaching.

9. Do you prefer teaching by traditional methods or gamification?

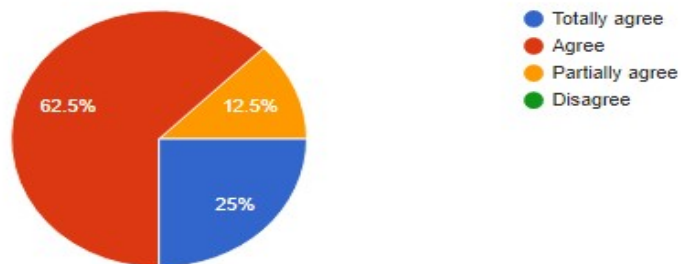
8 responses



In the last question, 62,5% of ESL teachers agreed that gamification would be a good method for teaching; whereas 25% totally agreed with the statement, and only 12,5% partially agreed.

10.- Do you think using gamification to teach English Idioms would be a good teaching method?

8 responses



Analysis and Interpretation of Teachers' Interview

The results of the interviews showed that most of the ESL teachers, agreed that English Idioms are of high importance in the language acquisition, however they also said that Idiomatic expressions are difficult to acquire by learners. Likewise, interviewed teachers stated that they master the gamification tools but they prefer to combine different teaching methods in their lessons. In the same way, more than half of the English teachers agreed that gamification is an advisable method for teaching because it engages students and motivates the learning process.

DISCUSSION

The present study attempts to determine the implications of teaching idioms to L2 learners through digital Gamification and establish if there are any benefits for second language learners in the teaching process. This research started from the awareness of the importance of idiomatic expressions in second language acquisition and the need to use idioms in everyday communication to reach the next level in the target language. Native speakers use idiomatic expressions in their usual speech making it difficult to understand them, so it is relevant for second language learners the idioms acquisition as part of the everyday vocabulary.

Because of the sample size taken, it is complicated to generalize the findings to a broad population; however, it could be assumed that comparable results would be obtained in the whole high school system because the same English teachers work in the different levels of this public school.

The main concern about analyzing data collected through the research instruments was the unfamiliarity and lack of knowledge about idioms that L2 learners showed before the experimentation. This finding confirms what Irujo (1986) mentioned that learners do not use idioms to speak in their second language; instead, they use simple words and everyday vocabulary. This happens because of the complexity of understanding idiomatic expressions that do not have a literal meaning but a symbolic or figurative connotation. The pre-test applied to both control and experimental groups showed the lack of familiarity with the idiomatic expression and the low number of participants who provided a correct idiom utterance.

The second issue was the limited frequency or even absence of idioms usage by the teacher in their classroom language, supporting what has been mentioned before. The recorded classes did not show any evidence that teachers were aware of the relevance of idioms in language acquisition, nor the

method used for teaching idiomatic expressions in a second language. L2 learners did not use expressions with figurative meaning either. These findings reveal that the majority of English teachers do not use idioms as an essential element in their classroom speech and do not encourage their students to use them either. Nevertheless, teachers in the interviews said to be aware of idioms is of great importance for a fluent conversation in real life.

The third concern about conventional classes is the role of the students. In traditional classes the role of the students is primarily a passive one; while in the gamified classes the students have an active performance role. This matches with what instructional designer Andrea Eberly cited in the US News & World Report, "Gamification allows students to become more active learners by inserting themselves into different scenarios, rather than passively listening to lectures and reading course material on their own."

The study showed a positive impact on most learners when the gamification approach was used for teaching idiomatic expressions in the classroom. Comparing pre-test and post-test statistics demonstrated a significant improvement in the students' performance regarding idioms learning after using a digital gamification method to teach those figurative expressions. The idioms most cited by students were "It is raining cats and dogs", "Better late than never", "Break a leg" and "A dime a dozen"; while the least cited expressions were "No pain, no gain" and "Hang in there". A few L2 learners were not able to repeat any idiom or expression even after receiving the gamified class, giving credit to the studies developed by Hwang (2018) in the field of Gamified Methods for teaching English as a Foreign/Second Language, which have shown that there are moderately positive effects of Gamification on cognitive and motivational learning outcomes.

After gamified class, L2 learners had a significant improvement in the results of the test about idioms. It seems that students assimilated idioms much better than learning expressions with no gamification method. This study also suggests that the learners and the teacher were more motivated in the gamified classroom.

Students' engagement is a precious asset that all teachers want to have in their classes. This study determined a significant variation between the control and experimental groups after using the proposed digital approach. Intrinsic motivation is more valuable than outer stimulus. When teachers conduct lessons focused on intrinsic motivation, they drive learners to have an active role full of participation and desire to excel.

In addition, the post-test applied to the control group after teaching idioms using traditional approaches showed similar learners' accomplishments to those obtained at the beginning of the research. There is no evidence of improvement or motivation to acquire English idioms.

Based on the deductive approach and after calculating the t-test value the null hypothesis had to be rejected, and the alternative view had to be accepted; therefore, it was determined that the implications of teaching English idioms through digital Gamification are beneficial for both actors in the teaching and learning process.

These findings confirm that Gamification methods positively affects language learning by augmenting engagement and students' motivation, such as Kaufmann (2018) claimed. Nonetheless, public teachers are not motivated to teach idioms and other topics using different methods; they should be trained and encouraged to use these effective teaching strategies. This fact matches the Al-Kadi statement that English Second Language and English Foreign Language Teachers are constantly testing different techniques and methodologies for teaching idioms and they are still working on that.

To sum up, as it has been widely discussed, second language learners often face difficulty identifying and understanding idioms because they cannot be translated literally because their meaning is figurative, it has to be inferred and acquired in the language environment. Hence, ESL teachers must ensure that L2 learners understand the importance of using those idioms in everyday communication and encourage the idiomatic acquisition of English expressions as a vital part of their English language knowledge. Gamification can be a great

useful tool for teaching idioms because it inspires students and motivates them to participate actively during English lessons.

CONCLUSION

All second language learners at any time, with no exception, have faced idioms and have realized that idiomatic expressions are fundamental to language acquisition. In the same way, they all have understood that learning idioms is not an easy task because they do not always have a literal translation but a figurative meaning. Most L2 learners do not understand native speakers' conversations because of the idioms used in regular conversations; however, learners do not show any interest in idioms acquisition, making it more challenging for teachers to teach them. In the same way, English Second language teachers have found that teaching idioms is a complex issue due to the symbolic meaning and the students' lack of motivation.

Unfortunately, the findings showed that English Second Language teachers from Pomasqui public school did not use idioms in their classroom language and did not motivate students to use idiomatic expressions. Second language learners are not interested in idioms by themselves, worse if their teacher does not encourage them to learn these essential language components. L2 learners have no opportunity to acquire English idioms in these conditions.

When an ESL teacher uses traditional teaching approaches for teaching idioms to L2 learners, more often than not there is no real learning, and the meaning of those expressions is forgotten as soon as the class finishes. On the other hand, if an English teacher uses a gamification approach, the outcomes are entirely different, making students hold the idioms on their minds longer and increasing the idiomatic language acquisition drastically.

Therefore, it was determined that the gamified class positively impacted the experimental group of learners. Using this modern approach for teaching, it was also possible to increase the motivation and engagement of students during the learning process. Gamification can help both students and teachers

deal with idioms in classrooms, and it allows them to teach/learn these idiomatic expressions in a fun and dynamic manner. Gamification increases the student's motivation in learning, improving the language acquisition and facilitating the teaching –learning process.

Finally, teaching idioms to L2 learners through digital Gamification implies a good learning process and more engaged second language learners; students can take advantage of this beneficial approach and ESL teachers. They are also more motivated to teach and enjoy having an interactive and fun class.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After concluding the research about the implications of teaching idioms to L2 learners through digital gamification, as well as the analysis and discussion of the findings, the following recommendations can be listed for future research:

- A broader sample of participants and institutions should be considered in the study in order to get better results and accurate numbers that allow extending the findings to the whole population.
- Two or more post-tests at different moments should be carried out after using gamification in the experimental group; for example, one week after the gamified class or one month after conducting the gamified lesson to probe if students have really acquired the idioms in their second language.
- Some different teaching games or digital gamification techniques should be applied for experimental teaching to determine which one is more efficient to teach idioms.
- Not only recorded classes should be observed, but face-to-face classes have to be analyzed by the researchers.
- A combination of traditional methods and gamified teaching approaches should be conducted to determine the impact of introducing learning games into the classroom.

LIMITATIONS

Some factors have restricted the research and should be considered for future investigations in teaching idioms and using gamification approaches. Here are listed the primary limitations:

- Lack of prior research studies on this topic: there is no information on previous research studies about teaching idioms at public schools
- There are no up to date studies or theories about teaching idioms and how they are acquired better.
- There are no specific guidelines about using the gamification approach for teaching, making every researcher use different strategies to reach the same goal.
- Inadequate fluency in a language: students who participate in this study are in second level of BGU; they have an A2.2 Level, limiting their understanding of idiomatic expressions.
- The students' surveys were conducted in their native language (Spanish) to ensure learners could understand the questions thoroughly.
- Very short time: the research was carried out in two months of the school year, but a more extended investigation should be considered.

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ANNEXES

Class Observation Sheet

PONTIFICIA UNIVERSIDAD CATOLICA DEL ECUADOR
MAESTRIA EN PEDAGOGIA DEL INGLES COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA
**Implications of Teaching English Idioms to L2 Learners Through
Digital Gamification at a Public School in Pomasqui, Ecuador**

Class Observation Form

TEACHER: _____ SCHOOL: _____
OBSERVER: _____ DATE: _____

ASPECTS	OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS
CLASS TOPIC according to the Lesson Plan	
OBJECTIVE:	
TEACHING METHODOLOGY:	
USE OF IDIOMS IN THE CLASSROOM LANGUAGE:	
IDIOMS SPOKEN BY TEACHER:	
IDIOMS WRITTEN BY TEACHER:	
IDIOMS SPOKEN BY STUDENTS:	
IDIOMS WRITTEN BY STUDENTS:	
FREQUENCY OF USE:	
OTHER COMMENTS:	

Pre-Test Interview:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf4To0s4tKEhLboa1dr7Qydwicgn_oD1uXus1nxuM3fEc15Eg/viewform?usp=sf_link

Quizlet – Gamified class

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a Quizlet flashcard. The browser's address bar shows the URL `quizlet.com/604371689/flashcards`. The Quizlet interface includes a top navigation bar with the Quizlet logo, 'Inicio', 'Explicaciones', 'Tu biblioteca', and a 'Crear' button. A search bar on the right contains the text 'Unidades de estudio, lib...'. The main content area features a flashcard with a cartoon illustration of a man in a brown coat holding a black umbrella, surrounded by various animals (cats, dogs, birds) falling from the sky. To the right of the illustration, the text 'It's raining hard' is displayed. Below the illustration, a dark banner contains the instruction 'Haz clic en la ficha para ver el término'. The left sidebar shows a 'Fichas' section with a progress indicator 'AVANCE 1/15' and buttons for 'Empezar', 'Mezclar', and 'Opciones'. The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the search bar with the text 'Escribe aquí para buscar', several application icons, and the system tray displaying '24°C' and the date '14/11/2021'.

Quizlet – Gamified class

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a Quizlet spelling game. The browser's address bar shows the URL `quizlet.com/604371689/spell`. The Quizlet header includes navigation links for 'Inicio', 'Explicaciones', and 'Tu biblioteca', along with a 'Crear' button and a 'Suscribete' button. A search bar on the right contains the text 'Unidades de estudio, lib...'. On the left side of the game interface, there is a 'Regresar' link and a progress section titled 'ORTOGRAFÍA'. The progress section shows 'AVANCE 3%' and 'ESTA RONDA 3/7'. Below the progress section is an 'Opciones' button. The main game area features a text input field with a speaker icon and the prompt 'Escribe lo que escuchas'. Below the input field is a 'RESPUESTA' label. The game content includes the text 'The person we were just talking about showed up!' and a cartoon illustration. In the cartoon, a man with glasses is sitting at a desk, and a devil-like figure with horns and a tail is standing in a doorway behind him. A speech bubble from the devil says 'WELL, SPEAK OF THE DEVIL! LOOK WHO'S HOME'. The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the search bar with the text 'Escribe aquí para buscar', several application icons, and system tray information including '24°C' and the date '14/11/2021'.

Post-test Interview:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc-PrOaoCDIY00esMoiOzpx1bASit16yJfyfkaOpZaNKBg8tQ/viewform?usp=sf_link

ENCUESTA SOBRE LAS IMPLICACIONES DE LA ENSEÑANZA DE EXPRESIONES IDIOMATICAS EN INGLES MEDIANTE EL USO DE LA GAMIFICACION

INFORMACION PERSONAL
* Required

SELECCIONE LA FECHA ACTUAL *

Date
mm/dd/yyyy

SELECCIONE SU GENERO *

Option 1 

Option 2 

Pre-test and Post-test about Idioms Learning:

Questions Responses **30** Total points: 0

ASOCIE LA EXPRESIÓN CON SU CORRESPONDIENTE SIGNIFICADO

	Get out of control	Don't give up	Better to arrive late than not to come at all	Something very common	It's raining hard	Very expensive	You have to work for what you want
A dime a dozen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Costs an arm and a leg	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No pain, no gain	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Hang in there	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
get out of hand	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Break a leg	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Better late than never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It's raining cats and dogs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11 responses 0 / 0

Something very common ✓

ik

Evidence of Recorded Classes

ESL Teacher 1

WEEK 17 - Visualizador de fotos de Windows

Archivo ▾ Imprimir ▾ Correo electrónico ▾ Grabar ▾ Abrir ▾

Listen to a linguistic talk about the do's and don'ts of studying a language. For each of the sentences below, decide if it is something that will help you become fluent in English or it won't help you become fluent.

	You will become fluent	You will not become fluent
1. If you repeat words twenty times, ...		
2. If you memorize lists of adverbs, ...		
3. If you practice verb formulas, ...		
4. If you read a lot in English, ...		
5. If you do things you like in English, ...		

ENGLISH CLASS ROCIO CHIPANTASI

0:23:23 0:10:48

ESL Teacher 2

Blanca Verdezoto

Forma +
Reemplazar +
Forma +
Forma +
Seleccionar +

3

4

5

6

7

8

ACTIVITY THREE: (READING) READ THE FOLLOWING PASSAGE AND DETERMINING IF EACH OF THE SENTENCES ARE TRUE (T) OR FALSE (F)

SMILING: AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE

Have you ever thought of the value of a smile?

It is free to give and can change the mood of the person who receives it. Everyone can do it, even little babies. It connects us with other humans, no matter what language we speak. Being able to make connections with other humans, do you know that establishing a habit of smiling on a regular basis also has wonderful health benefits? Studies have shown that even if you are not having a good day, smiling can boost your mood. It's because the physical act of smiling sends signals to your brain that you are actually happy. Smiling also reduces stress levels because it releases chemicals called endorphins

Clase de hoy 2da hora 1RO. TEC B

0:16:27 0:21:09

DIAPORAMA ESPAÑOL (ESPAÑA)

NOTAS COMENTARIOS

11:03 % 04/06/2021

**Implications of Teaching English Idioms to L2 Learners Through
Digital Gamification at a Public School in Pomasqui, Ecuador**

TEACHER'S INTERVIEW

TEACHER: _____ SCHOOL: _____

INTERVIEWER: _____ DATE: _____

QUESTIONS	ANSWERS
1.-¿Qué importancia tienen las IDIOMS en la adquisición del idioma Inglés ?	
2.-¿Con qué frecuencia usa o enseña IDIOMS en sus clases de inglés?	
3.-¿Qué método de enseñanza prefiere?	
4.-¿Por qué cree usted que aprender IDIOMS es una tarea difícil?	
5.-¿Ha enseñado usando la metodología de la Gamificación, incluyendo cartas y juegos interactivos?	
6.-¿Considera manejar las herramientas necesarias para una clase gamificada?	

7.-¿Qué clase de juegos para aprender prefiere usar en sus lecciones de Inglés ?	
8.-¿Por qué deberían usar el método de Gamificación los profesores para la enseñanza del idioma?	
9.-¿Qué metodología de enseñanza prefiere, métodos tradicionales o gamificación?	
10.-¿Cree usted que la Gamificación sería un buen método de enseñanza?	
COMENTARIO LIBRE (puede aportar con opiniones y sugerencias de forma libre y voluntaria)	

GRACIAS POR SU TIEMPO

Teachers Questionnaire

The screenshot shows a Google Forms interface for a questionnaire titled "TEACHERS TEST". The form is titled "RESEARCH ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS OF TEACHING ENGLISH IDIOMS TO L2 LEARNERS THROUGH GAMIFICATION". Below the title, it asks the respondent to select the best option based on their teaching experience. The first question is "1.- How important do you consider idioms are in the language acquisition?" with four radio button options: "Highly important", "Moderately important", "Little important", and "Nothing important". The second question is "2.- How often do you use/teach Idiomatic expressions in your lessons?" with one visible radio button option: "Always". The interface includes a "Send" button, a "Total points: 0" indicator, and a navigation menu on the right. The browser's address bar shows the Google Forms URL, and the Windows taskbar is visible at the bottom.

TEACHERS TEST

Questions Responses Settings Total points: 0

RESEARCH ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS OF TEACHING ENGLISH IDIOMS TO L2 LEARNERS THROUGH GAMIFICATION

Please, select the option that is best for you according to your teaching experience

1.- How important do you consider idioms are in the language acquisition?

- Highly important
- Moderately important
- Little important
- Nothing important

2.- How often do you use/teach Idiomatic expressions in your lessons?

- Always

This screenshot shows the continuation of the "TEACHERS TEST" questionnaire. The third question is "3.- What method would you prefer for teaching idioms?" with four radio button options: "Traditional Methods", "Gamification", "Combination of both", and "A different method". The fourth question is "4.- Why do you think it is difficult to learn/acquire English idioms?" with five radio button options: "Idioms are not used in everyday conversation", "Idioms do not have a literal meaning", "Students are not interested/motivated to learn idioms", "Non-native speakers/learners do not need to learn idioms", and "There is not an effective methodology for teaching idioms". The interface remains consistent with the previous screenshot, showing the "Send" button, "Total points: 0", and navigation menu. The browser and Windows taskbar are also visible.

TEACHERS TEST

Questions Responses Settings Total points: 0

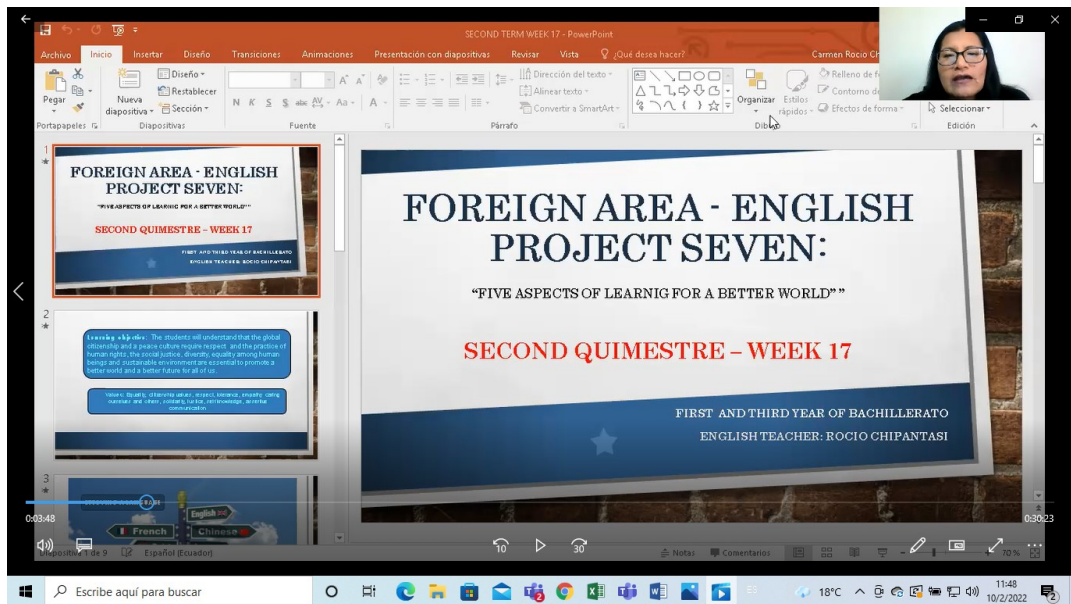
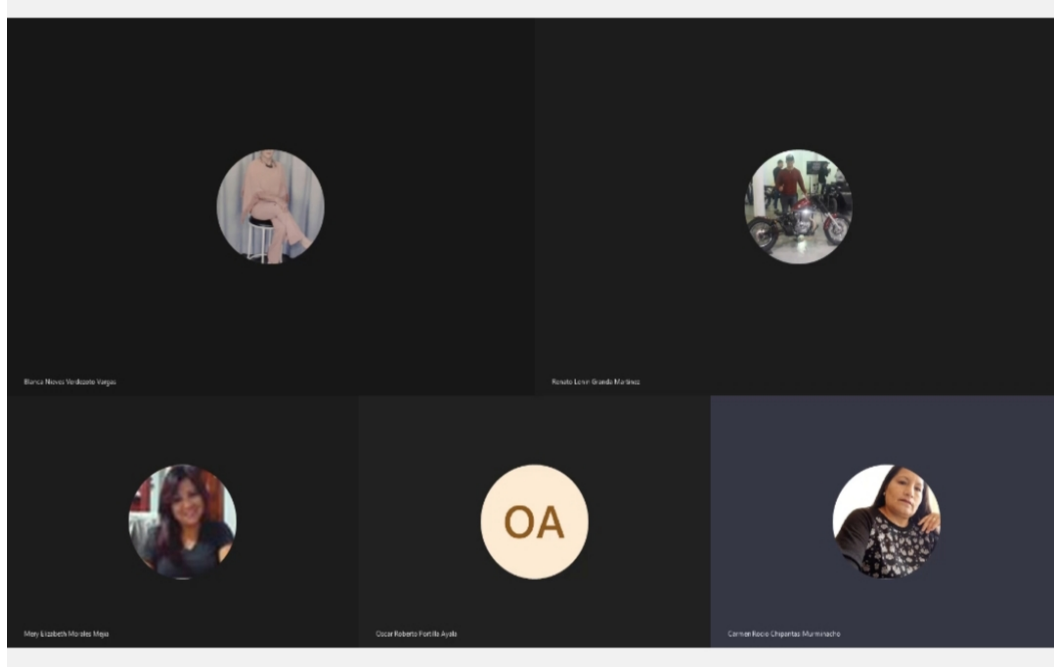
3.- What method would you prefer for teaching idioms?

- Traditional Methods
- Gamification
- Combination of both
- A different method

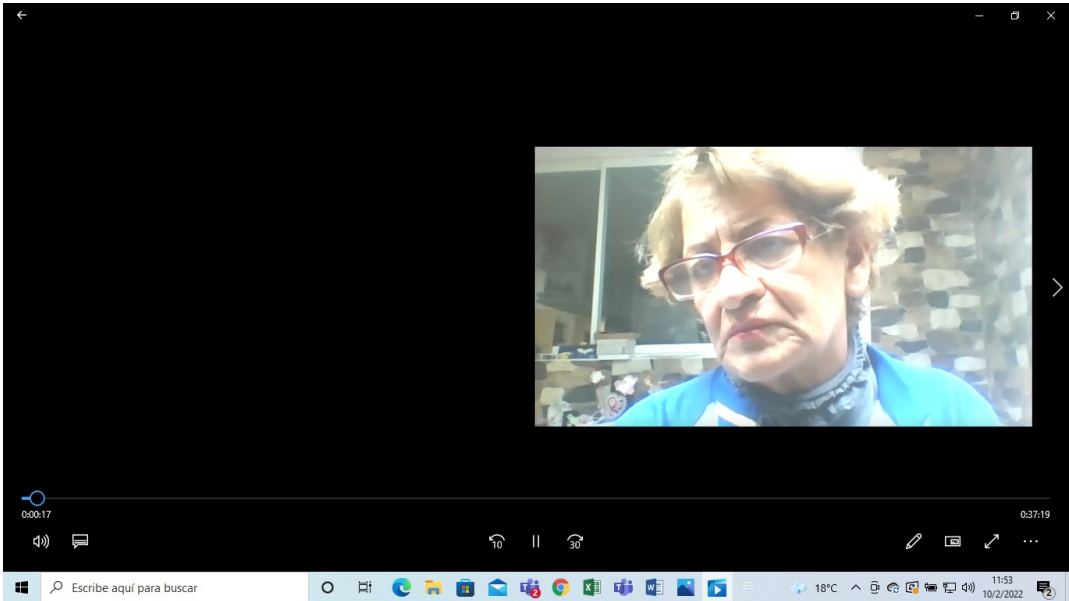
4.- Why do you think it is difficult to learn/acquire English idioms?

- Idioms are not used in everyday conversation
- Idioms do not have a literal meaning
- Students are not interested/motivated to learn idioms
- Non-native speakers/learners do not need to learn idioms
- There is not an effective methodology for teaching idioms

English Teacher Team



ESL Teacher 4



Virtual Classes via Microdoft Teams

