Improving Sudents Idiom Memorisation using Iconic Pictures

(Memperkasakan Pelajaran Idiom menggunakan Iconic Pictures)

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to utilise the picture superiority effect and iconic pictures to help students study idioms and assist in memorisation. The participants consist of 12 students of Semester 1 from Politeknik Kuching Sarawak. The participants were studying Communicative English DUE10012. They were required to take an online pre-quiz on idiom usage in sentences. Afterward, they were interviewed about their problems faced when studying idioms. Then the participants underwent the intervention and a post-quiz was administered. Before taking the post-quiz the students answered a survey on their experience using the intervention. After taking the post-quiz the participants were interviewed on their experience using the intervention. Data collected from the interview was analysed manually taking into consideration the value, mean, and percentage based on the objective. The findings of the research shows that students have positive feedback about iconic pictures and their post-quiz scores show a general increase in their quiz scores. We hope the use of iconic pictures can be improved upon by conducting further research.

Keywords: Idioms, Iconic pictures, memorization, meaning

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INTRODUCTION

Semiotics (also called semiotic studies) is the study of sign processes (semiosis), which are any activity, conduct, or process that involves signs, where a sign is defined as anything that communicates a meaning that is not the sign itself to the sign's interpreter. Charles Sanders Peirce defined three categories of sign which are icon, index, and symbol. For our research we will use icon signs as a means to boost the learning of idioms and its meaning. Icon in semiotic terms is a sign that resembles the object, it shares tangible qualities with the object. For example, 🖐 is a hand.

TEACHING REFLECTION

Idioms are often taught by the teacher by giving the idioms and explaining the meaning to the students. After students understand the idiom and its meaning, they resort to rote learning which is criticised by numerous academics. Cho (2010) thinks that long term memory of lesson cannot be formed by rote learning. Gebhard, Gunawan, and Chen (2014) states that remembering lengthy words in the target language requires comprehension. Generally, the typical L2 classroom is divided into 3 groups, advanced learners who comprise about 10 to 15 percent of the classroom. The second group is the average performers who make up 70 to 75 percent of the classroom and the weak learners who make up the remaining 10 to 15 percent.

I have noticed the advanced learners' retention of the new vocabulary is frequently successful and they seem to recall the new vocabulary more easily as this could be an act of recollecting a word that they have read in their daily lives. All I had to do to teach them was introduce the new vocabulary and explain their meaning in the classroom.

However, the "introducing new vocab and its meaning" method seems to be less effective for the average learner. Average learners would often unsuccessfully try to recall new words that were taught in the classroom the week before and I as a lecturer would often have to repeat the lesson to bring them up to speed. Despite this, they would earnestly participate in the lesson and admit their mistakes in which they will try to memorize the new vocabulary again despite not remembering the new vocabulary by the end of the semester.

As for the weak learners, their learning of new vocab would be more challenging. This situation is exacerbated by the low confidence and lack of vocabulary in the weak learners. They would very often sit far from the lecturer in the class, keep quiet until the end of the lesson. Weak students would often apologise often for their inability to learn in class, or they would sometimes avoid talking to the lecturer.

The L2 learning conditions of the advance, average and weak learners seem to indicate that background knowledge of L2 use in their personal lives plays a large factor in their ability to learn new vocabulary in class, the advanced learners would have less or no problem learning new vocab as they use English every day while the opposite is true for the weak and average learners. This would also indicate that the explanation that is used in class especially explanations in English would be hard to understand or remember by the average or weaker L2 students.

In contrast to the poor learning experience of the L2 learners in classrooms, my experience of teaching tuition students who are of average performance but high motivation using doodles, drawings notes seem to be more successful. There were three students in the tuition class and they are between 10 to 13 years of age. Very often these students would ask me to draw cartoons of collective nouns or phrasal verbs for them which they'll keep in their lesson files. When quizzed on the phrasal verbs or collective nouns weeks after seeing the drawings the tuition students will recall the proper vocabulary with above 65% success rate. This quiz result seems to indicate the drawings of the new vocabulary

reinforce the student's retention of the new vocabulary and using drawings of vocabulary might increase lesson retention in larger classrooms.

RESEARCH FOCUS

The focus of this research is to determine if iconic pictures can help students remember the individual words in idioms, as idioms are, according to Oxford Languages; a group of words established by usage as having a meaning not deducible from those of the individual words. Students often could not understand the meaning of idioms just by reading the idioms alone and remembering both idioms and its meaning requires memorization, a lot of time and practice. Very often students do not recall the individual words in the idiom. And they do not remember the meaning of the idiom they read/heard despite studying it before.

It is my hope that with the use of iconic pictures to supplement the student's idiom studies that their idiom memorisation and understanding would increase.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

After completing this research, it is hoped that the students would be able to improve the memorization of the idioms and its meaning while getting better grades for their English tests.

RESEARCH SAMPLE

This research will be conducted on a group of 12 semester 1 diploma students from Politeknik Kuching Sarawak whom 8 are studying mechanical engineering and 4 are studying management courses. 7 of them are Malays, 3 are of local ethnicity and 2 are Chinese.

METHODOLOGY

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

To carry out this research, the problem statement can be established by analyzing the students pre quiz, interviewing the students and lecturers about their experience teaching and learning idioms. (Table 1).

Table 1. Data collection method

Steps/ Time	Data Collection Method	Target Group	Purpose
Step 1 Week 1	Analyise the students idioms pre quiz	Students	To determine students understanding of idioms
Step 2 Week 1	Interview students	5 students	To determine the problems faced by students when studying idioms.
Step 3 Week 2	Interview lecturers	5 lecturers	To determine the problems faced by lecturers when teaching idioms.

Before administering the intervention, the students were given a 20 questions pre-quiz with a 30-minute time limit. The pre-quiz consists of information gap sentences where students are to pick a correct idiom from a box to complete the sentences. (Figure 1)
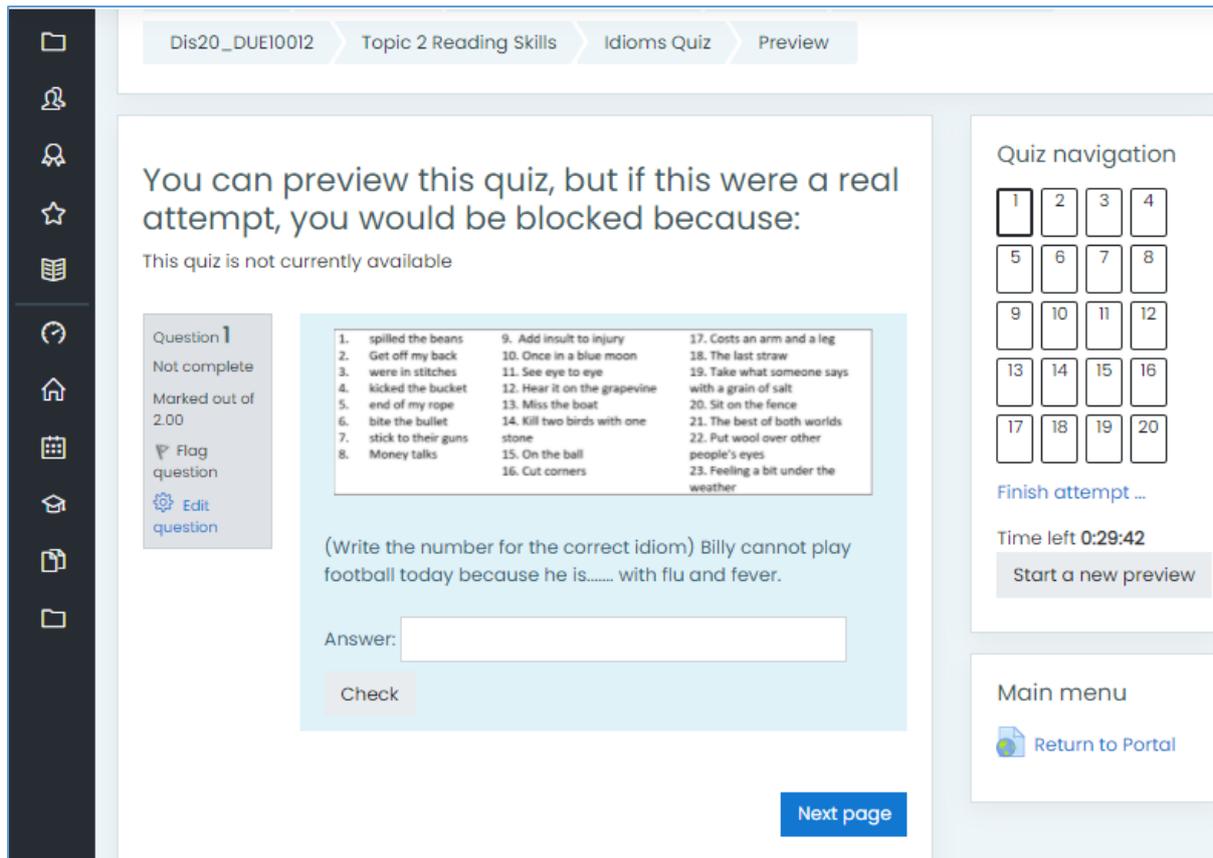
Figure1. CIDOS online pre-quiz

INTERVIEW SECTION

For this research the researchers have prepared two sets of interview questions to interview 5 students and 5 lecturers who have studied or taught DUE10012 course regarding their problems in learning and teaching idioms. Interview is a cost saving and expedient way to collect data.

Based on the interview analysis of the 5 students and 5 lecturers whom have studied or taught idioms for DUE10012 it was discovered there are 3 themes:

Theme1: The idioms' meaning cannot be deduced from reading the words that make up the idioms factor.

When asked if the students had any difficulty learning idioms, student C mentioned she has faced difficulty as the meaning of the idioms is not reflected on the words that make up the idiom:

"Its not because I can't remember the idioms, I can remember some but it is hard to remember the idioms if the meaning and idioms is too unrelated." (Student C)

In line with that, Student L mentioned the idioms' meaning are harder to remember if the words are not similar to what they speak in Malay:

"[Saya]Tak ingat sangatla[idiom yang dibelajar] Saya dapat ingat maksud idiom itu kalau ia hampir sama macam bahasa yang kita biasa pakai. Contohnya Kick the bucket, dekat sini kami cakap masuk gol maksudnya mati." (Student L)

Theme2: The notes are too dry and wordy factor.

Student D mentioned that her form 5 notes for idioms was a thick booklet with idioms and its meaning. We asked her if she remembered the idioms in the notes, she said no. Student A mentioned she did not remember the idioms in the online notes which consists of mostly words. They mentioned the notes are hard to study because there are just too many words. Student K said she had to translate the English words in the idioms and its meaning into her native tongue to study them. Student A has this to say:

"I don't like learning the idiom notes because it is too wordy." (Student A)

Theme3: The Idioms are not often used factor

When asked if the students used idioms in their daily lives. Only two said they used idioms in their everyday conversations. These students spoke English with their friends as mentioned by student I:

"I used idioms when talking with my friends. I speak Malay when I am at home."

Some students had to resort to using Google translate to translate the words in the idioms itself:

"...I'll use Google translate to translate the idiom first, and then I would find the idioms meaning on the internet. If i can't find the meaning in Mandarin I will use Google translate to translate the meaning in the notes." (Student K)

This problem is also deduced by 4 of 5 the five lecturers I interviewed:

"Researcher: Do the students have problems remembering the idioms and their meaning?
Teacher 1: Yes they do.
Researcher: What causes the problems?
Teacher 1: They seldom use idioms in their daily lives I guess."

"Researcher: Did the students had any problems memorising the idiom and its meaning?
Teacher 2: Yes.
Researcher: What did they say was the cause ma'am?
Teacher 2: Unless we make them use it in daily conversation every time during class cause they didn't use them… That's why can't remember. Also cannot give a lot at a time, max just 3."

From the data collected from the interview it can be concluded that among the problems faced by the students is they cannot recall some of the idioms and their meaning. This is caused by the meaning of the idiom being not deducible from the words in the idiom, the idioms not being similar to their native tongue which causes them to not have a point of reference for recollection and addition to this, the students were given wordy notes with no pictures which bores the students and makes the learning process tedious.

From this finding we hope that by supplementing their learning with iconic pictures the students will show signs of better idiom lesson retention.

The grades from the students' quiz will be analyzed and compared to a similar idiom post-quiz after the intervention is administered. The intervention is administered a month after the idiom pre-quiz. (Figure 2) (Figure 3)
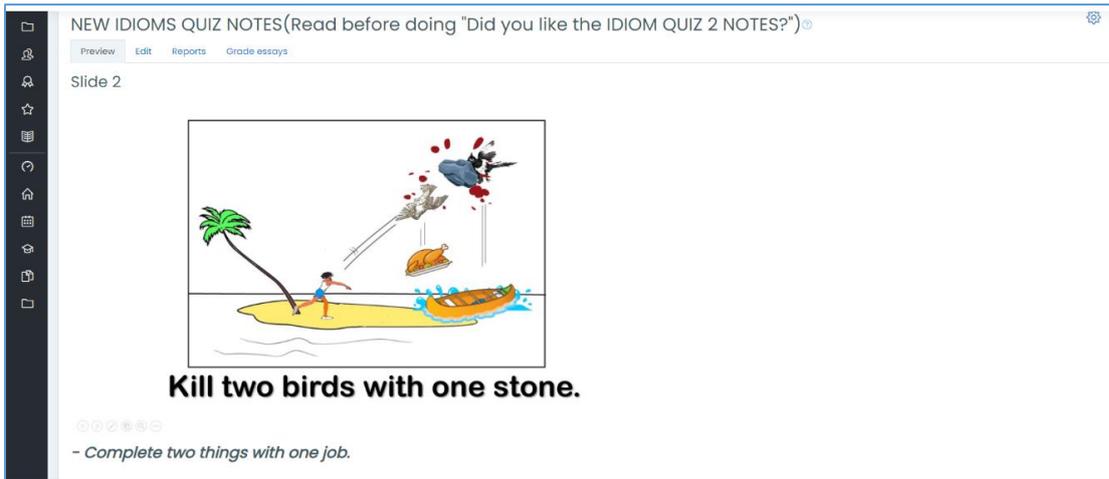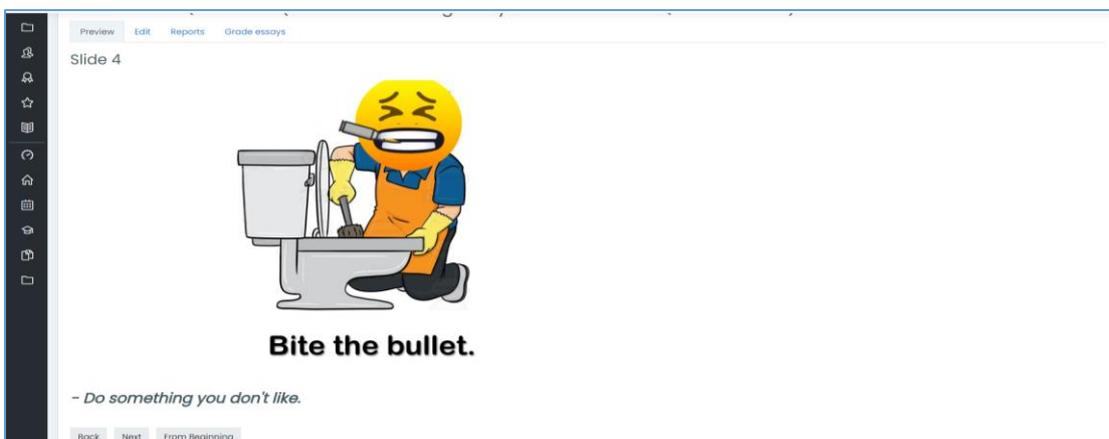
Figure 2. CIDOS iconic pictures

Figure 3. CIDOS iconic pictures

PLANNING AND EXECUTION OF INTERVENTION

This research aims to use the picture superiority effect which is the phenomena of pictures being more easily remembered than words in improving students learning of idioms. This effect was verified in multiple experiments utilizing various methods. According to Yuille, John C. (2014) "human memory is extremely sensitive to the symbolic modality of presentation of event information" Eitel and Scheiter (2015) notes students can construct a mental model when they see a picture preceding a text so that no further model construction is necessary when processing the text. Salmerón, Baccino, Cañas, Madrid, and Fajardo (2009) affirms this stating that showing a picture before a text is helpful for the learning process of students with minimal knowledge of subject matter. In addition to using the picture superiority effect, we are also trying to solve the problem of memorizing the individual words that make up an idiom as this is a difficulty faced by many students. To do that we will utilize iconic pictures which are images resembling the words in the idioms as shown in the pictures above (Figure 2, Figure 3)

For the intervention the students will read slides of 20 picture idioms and the slides must be read entirely before the students can take the post quiz. A survey must also be completed before the students can take the post-quiz.

SURVEY

In addition to having the 12 sample students answer the survey, the pre quiz, post quiz and intervention and survey was also administered to 68 other students. After going

through the intervention, the students then answer a 6-item questionnaire with 3 of the items responded with 4-point Likert scale while 3 questions are open ended (Table 2):

Table 2. Items from questionnaire

Item	Mean score
The pictures were interesting.	3.60/4
The pictures help me understand the idiom.	3.49/4
The pictures help me remember the idiom.	3.38/4

Table 2 shows the students generally have a positive response to the intervention with most of them finding the pictures interesting with a mean score of 3.60. The students also found the pictures in the intervention helped them understand and remember the idiom with a mean score of 3.49 and 3.38 respectively.

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

When asked what they liked about the intervention the survey shows that 69% of the students found the intervention interesting, fun and or attractive. However, only 27.9% said the intervention helps with understanding the meaning of idiom but this doesn't mean the majority didn't gain understanding from the intervention as Table 2 shows. Only 3% of the students mentioned the intervention helps with idiom memorization but this also doesn't mean the majority didn't find the intervention helpful with memorization shown in table 2. When asked what they dislike about the intervention 82.3% of the students said there is nothing they dislike however 9 students found the pictures confusing, 3 students found the pictures hard to remember and 2 students didn't like the online slide navigation, and or the slide was not downloadable for local storage (Table 3).

Table 3. Open ended questions from questionnaire

No.	Item	Number of students
4	What do you like about the Notes?	
	Interesting/fun/attractive	47/68
	Understanding	19/68
	Remember	2/68
5	What do you dislike about the Notes?	
	Confusing/don't understand	9/68
	complicated	1/68
	deep meaning	2/68
	figurative meaning	1/68
	hard to remember	3/68
	Gambar kurang menarik/color	2/68
	Nothing	56/68
	Ergonomics	2/68
6	Any suggestion for improvement?	
	More idioms	5/68
	examples/clearer explanation	3/68
	flash card Gaming	1/68
	video/music	3/68
	Gambar lebih gah	1/68
	Bilingual	1/68

REFLECTION

The students were amused by the pictures in the slides and they say it is very eye catching due to the colors and funny drawings. However, they found the navigation buttons below un-user friendly as they could not navigate to the specific slide without pressing the next

button multiple times and most students had a problem accessing the post-quiz as they tried to skip some of the slides or survey.

RESULTS

After reading the iconic pictures all the students exhibited improvements in their post-quiz as compared to the pre-quiz.

Table 4. Students pre-quiz, post-quiz results

No	Students Name	Pre-Quiz score	Post-Quiz score	% Improvement
1	Student A	8.21/10	9.00/10	7.9
2	Student B	7.18/10	9.00/10	18.2
3	Student C	4.62/10	8.00/10	33.8
4	Student D	5.38/10	7.50/10	21.2
5	Student E	6.41/10	6.50/10	0.9
6	Student F	3.08/10	6.50/10	34.2
7	Student G	3.59/10	5.00/10	14.1
8	Student H	4.10/10	4.50/10	4
9	Student I	7.95/10	8.00/10	0.5
10	Student J	5.13/10	6.00/10	8.7
11	Student K	2.31/10	5.50/10	31.9
12	Student L	2.56/10	4.50/10	19.4

STUDENTS POST QUIZ INTERVIEW

After the post-test the students were interviewed again on their perception of the intervention. All students agree the pictures help with memorizing the individual words in the idiom, this is reflected in students A,C,D and H's interview:

"Researcher: Do the pictures help you with memorizing the idioms?"
"Student A: Yes, it helps memorize individual words because images represent each word in idioms so I can picture in my mind."
"Student C: Yes, the picture related to idiom words.
"Student D: Yes, easy to remember because of picture is related to words in the idiom, doesn't really help with remembering meaning because the meaning of pictures can be confusing."
"Student H: Yes, the pictures remind each word in idiom."

However, only 6 of the students strongly believe the images help with memorizing the idioms meanings, according to them the meaning of the idioms is more memorable if the pictures illustrate the meaning clearly. Students B and C says the meaning of the idioms are harder to remember if the meaning cannot be deduced from the idiom:

"Researcher: Do the pictures help you with memorizing the idioms' meaning?"
"Student B: [the pictures] helps with understanding meaning if they illustrate meaning.
"Student C: A little help with remembering the meaning, the meaning is not really tied to the pictures. Worse if meaning is not same as the idiom."

Students D and L are confused with some of the idiom's meanings in relation to the pictures in the intervention:

"Researcher: Do the pictures help you with memorizing the idioms' meaning?"

"Student D: Doesn't really help with reinforcing meaning because the meaning of pictures can be confusing."

"Student L: Some of them helps but some doesn't help. Maybe it is because I did not try to understand it carefully."

ACTION RESEARCH REFLECTION

After the intervention was administered, it was found the students generally exhibit improvements with varying degrees of increment. The students found the pictures eye catching and it helped them to remember the idiom better however some students found the images' meaning ambiguous and some students suggested putting examples of sentence usage to clarify the meaning of the idioms. Furthermore, some students also suggesting gamifying the notes to allow students to practice usage and reinforce memorization. In addition, some students also encourage the researchers to make more icon pictures of idioms to increase the idioms taught in this manner. We feel happy with the results, and we look forward to improving the lesson delivery method of this invention and we also look forward to get more feedback from more students for quality improvement.

CONCLUSION

Based on the action research we've conducted it can be concluded that the iconic pictures help with students' recollection of the idioms to answer the idiom quiz. However, it remains to be seen if the retention will last after a long period. The students do find the iconic pictures interesting, and it increases their motivation to learn idioms. Despite the positive effect of the iconic pictures on idiom recollection, they still have the weakness of being open to interpretation when it comes to their meaning. This was remedied by putting the meaning below the pictures. Despite being given the meaning below the pictures, the students who have below average command of English needs sentence examples for clarification. Other students also suggested gamification (example: match the iconic pictures with the idioms). We hope to be able to make improvements on this intervention and conduct further research on its effects on long term retention.

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