

**A Corpus-Based Comparative Study of University Students' Idiom
Acquisition through Deductive and Inductive Approaches**

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Abstract

Idioms are widely used in daily communication but are often presented as decontextualized, outdated lists in Chinese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks, lacking authenticity and hindering learning. Corpus-based materials are a possible solution to this problem, but their design and applicability remain unclear. This study therefore compares the effectiveness of two major teaching methods – the deductive Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) and the inductive Data-Driven Learning (DDL) – for idiom acquisition using corpus-informed content. A set of high-frequency idioms featuring body parts was selected from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). Fifteen Year 1 English major students at an English Medium of Instruction (EMI) university in China participated in a one-group pretest-posttest experiment, experiencing both approaches. Their short-term and long-term retention were measured, and semi-structured interviews explored their perceptions of the two approaches. Data were analyzed with SPSS and qualitative methods. Quantitative results showed significant improvements in idiom retention under both approaches. Although the DDL group scored slightly higher, no statistically significant difference was found between the two methods. This study confirms the pedagogical value of corpus-based materials and suggests that both deductive and inductive approaches can be integrated to enhance idiom learning in tertiary EFL settings.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Idioms are frequently used to add richness to language by combining existing words in unique ways to create new meanings (Liontou, 2020). They are widely used in daily spoken and written communication. In particular, idiomatic expressions appear every 3 to 4 minutes in conversations and 38 times on a single page of a magazine (Xie, 2017). Therefore, idioms deserve greater attention in language teaching. However, idioms are often excluded from English textbooks and overlooked by language teachers (Mehranirad et al., 2023). Even worse, the idiom selection in recourse books and textbooks seems inconsistent, with highly common items missing while covering less frequent and more transparent ones (Liu, 2003). In Chinese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, most students learn the expression “*raining cats and dogs*” in junior high school, which is considered as outdated in the Cambridge Dictionary, causing inappropriate idiomatic language usage.

Corpus-based materials may be a possible solution as corpora allow material designers to identify the most frequent and relevant lexical patterns used in a certain language context (Bennett, 2026). Bennett (2026) also added that the authentic examples in corpora expose students to the variation of a word in meaning across genres, thus developing students’ language awareness and language proficiency level. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these materials remains unclear since teachers may have difficult accessing corpora tools and corpus-based materials may become quickly outdated (Le Foll, 2024).

Two prominent teaching approaches can be used to test the effectiveness of corpus-informed materials: deductive and inductive approaches. The deductive approach mainly follows a top-down approach, starting with the explicit presentation of grammar rules or language

structures and moving on to specific examples and controlled practice (Varsat, 2023). As noted by Hsiao (2025), such deductive instruction is connected with the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) model. With a clear and systematic presentation of language concepts, deductive instruction can help students better understand complex language structures and vocabulary usage. However, deductive learning may cause rote memorization (Varsat, 2023).

On the contrary, the inductive approach follows a bottom-up approach, beginning with authentic examples and encouraging students to generalize the rules from the example sentences. Data-driven Learning (DDL), featuring inductive learning and emphasizing stronger lexical awareness, can be incorporated into idiom teaching by offering students opportunities to investigate the idiomatic expressions in corpora independently. Nevertheless, there is a critique of time allocation since inductive instruction requires more time for students to identify the language patterns (Varsat, 2023).

1.2 Statement of Problem

Despite the advantages of the deductive and inductive approaches discussed above, idiom learning in EFL classrooms remains challenging. The lack of reliable textbooks not only intensifies learners' difficulty in idiom acquisition but also increases the workload of teachers to provide clear and systematic instruction to support learning. To address these issues, corpus-based materials have been proposed as a potential solution.

Nevertheless, how such materials are effectively implemented through different teaching approaches remains unclear. While these approaches have been studied in some areas, including synonym learning (Hsiao, 2025) and grammar instruction (Tzampazi, 2025), research comparing the effectiveness of these two approaches for Chinese EFL students learning idioms in EMI universities is limited.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Therefore, this study aims to address this research gap by investigating the affordances and limitations of these two approaches in enhancing university students' idiom learning. Moreover, it explores how to guide English teachers to design pedagogical materials for teaching idioms. Specifically, the research questions (RQs) are formulated as follows:

- 1) How can idiom-teaching materials be designed to support classroom implementation and pedagogical goals of English language teachers?
- 2) To what extent do inductive approaches to English language learning improve idiom retention and usage compared to deductive approaches among EMI university students?
- 3) What are university students' attitudes towards the usefulness and engagement of inductive versus deductive approaches in idiom learning tasks?

This research was conducted at an English Medium Instruction (EMI) university in China, utilizing quantitative and qualitative research methods. Participants included freshmen with limited knowledge about corpus linguistics and idioms in the English major. Specifically, a one-group pretest-posttest design was carried out to examine the impact of these two approaches on the short-term and long-term retention and usage of idioms among university students. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were employed to gain students' attitudes towards these two approaches and the corpus-based materials.

1.4 Value of the Study

The present study provides valuable information about how PPP and DDL perform differently in promoting effective idioms learning among Chinese university students. It shows significance from three perspectives. For teachers, it offers guidance on preparing lesson materials to support effective idiom learning. Secondly, it empowers students to select the most

appropriate learning technique to strengthen their lexical resources and word knowledge. Finally, for researchers, it compares the learning outcomes of deductive and inductive approaches as well as explores students' perception of these two approaches, bridging a gap in comparative studies between different instructional methods in idiom teaching settings.

2. Literature Review

This section reviews existing literature under sub-themes, laying a foundation for understanding the principles of corpus-based materials design as well as the applications of deductive and inductive approaches, especially PPP and DDL in language acquisition.

2.1 Idioms

Idioms refer to phrases whose meanings are not transparent and cannot be easily interpreted from their literal meanings (O’Keeffe et al., 2007). Despite its semantic opacity, idiom acquisition is still of great pedagogical value since it contributes to the overall comprehension of language and effective interpersonal communication (Aridasarie & Tabiati, 2022). In Chinese EFL classrooms, however, students struggle with idiom learning because of the syntactic and lexical flexibility, the distinct pragmatic features, and the limited exposure to the socio-cultural practice regarding idiom usage (O’Keeffe et al., 2007; Zhao, 2024).

Considering these issues, the following sub-themes will examine relevant studies of corpus-informed materials, PPP, and DDL in language education to understand their applications in idiom acquisition in the university EFL context.

2.2 Corpus-based Materials Design

The authentic example sentences in corpora reflect different usages of a certain word or phrase in different genres and different language varieties. By analyzing the concordance lines, material designers can identify the frequency level of vocabulary, collocations, and grammar structures (Bennett, 2026), as well as explore the linguistic distribution and discourse features (Friginal & Prado, 2025). This process helps them select the most common and relevant language patterns for textbooks or reference books, thereby ensuring the quality and authenticity of these resources. Accordingly, teachers can use corpora in designing direct corpus-based activities in which corpus data is presented explicitly to learners or indirect corpus-informed

activities where corpus data are used by teachers to inform pedagogical materials design (Farr & O’Keeffe, 2019; Friginal & Prado, 2025).

2.3 Deductive Approach

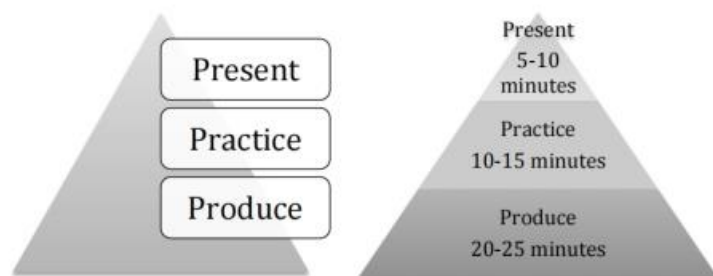
2.3.1 Core Principle

According to Varsat (2023), in deductive learning, students are exposed to the explicit language rules and principles and then examples and exercises. Guided by a top-down approach, deductive instruction provides systematic explanations for students to better understand the complex language structures and lay a foundation for advanced learning. Nonetheless, Varsat (2023) also mentions some limitations of this approach. It may lead to rote memorization, which means students memorize the spelling and meaning of target terms mechanically without internalizing how the grammar or vocabulary is used in real-world contexts. Additionally, students may find it boring to listen to the grammar rules passively and finish the language exercises, decreasing their learning interest.

As one of the main teaching approaches related to deductive learning (Hsiao, 2025), the PPP model can be implemented in idiom learning because of its clear and organized presentation of language concepts and vocabulary usage rules.

2.2.2 Presentation-Practice-Production Model

According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), PPP is a teaching method grounded in structuralism and behaviorist learning theory, stressing the teaching of vocabulary and grammar. In classroom practice, the Presentation–Practice–Production lesson format (Moonasar, 2013; Richards & Rodgers, 2014) is systematically followed. Moonasar (2013) further divides this PPP format into two categories: productive skill based (see Figure 1) and receptive skill based PPP lesson plans (see Figure 2).

Figure 1*Productive Skill Based PPP Lesson Plan***Figure 2***Receptive Skill Based PPP Lesson Plan*

Moonasar (2013) also explains the differences between these two types of PPP formats. In the productive one, the lessons focus on exploring language through reading or speaking practice. Specifically, the teacher first begins the class by presenting new target linguistic patterns in a situational context such as a story or a daily dialogue. Subsequently, students are asked to complete the controlled practice such as gap-filling or cloze activities, which empowers students to use the target sentence pattern automatically. Finally, students need to finish productive language tasks such as role-play using the target lexical items. Nevertheless, in receptive skill based PPP lesson plans, the classes emphasize more on the practice phase to enhance students' ability to identify and comprehend information, thus strengthening their receptive skills, namely listening and reading.

In Harris and Leeming's (2021) as well as Tzampazi (2025)'s studies, the majority of students showed preference for the PPP model due to its clear and explicit explanation as well as the ease of language tasks. This phenomenon may stem from their previous learning experiences and their preference for a smoother task completion process. However, PPP may affect learners' active involvement in the learning process and the development of higher-order thinking abilities among students.

2.4 Inductive Approach

2.4.1 Core Principle

As noted by Varsat (2023), in inductive instruction, students are presented with authentic examples or language contexts first and are encouraged to deduce language rules from the examples. Following the bottom-up approach, students are exposed to the real-world usage of target knowledge through discovery learning and hands-on activities, which contributes to active participation in language tasks and enhances their critical thinking abilities. However, Varsat (2023) also mentions that this approach brings some limitations. Due to the less structured lesson format compared to the deductive approach, students may get confused more easily and it requires more time for students to identify the patterns and generalize the rules. Furthermore, teachers have limited access to reliable authentic materials.

2.4.2 Data-Driven Learning

Data-Driven Learning (DDL) is defined as “an inductive, discovery-based approach to learning in which students work out rules or probabilities from the examples provided” by Flowerdew (2012, p. 197). In classroom practice, corpora, defined as “a collection of naturally-occurring language text” (Sinclair, 1991, p. 171), provide opportunities for students to search for target expressions, conduct frequency analysis and expose them to the cultural aspects of

language in authentic contexts via concordance lines (O’Keeffe et al., 2007; Boulton & Vyatkina, 2023). Rather than being passively exposed to textbook examples, students actively analyze how specific words or phrases are used across genres. Such interaction assists students in grasping the target lexical items, improves learner engagement, and strengthens learner autonomy (O’Keeffe et al., 2007). As noted by Boulton and Vyatkina (2023), DDL has also gained recognition in higher education settings, particularly for English for Academic Purposes, and has contributed to increased learner motivation and vocabulary acquisition.

Specifically, DDL offers various advantages when applied to idiom teaching. Firstly, it offers learners opportunities to view the actual use of idiomatic expressions in different genres to bridge the gap caused by limited access to the socio-cultural contexts (Liu, 2003; O’Keeffe et al., 2007). Additionally, unlike conventional teaching materials that depend on intuition-based idiom selection, causing the inclusion of unusual idioms while excluding regularly used ones (Liu, 2003), DDL enables the instructor and students to evaluate how commonly used idioms function in real-life scenarios. Based on these issues, there are critiques commenting on the great time demand for teachers to prepare adequate resources to support learning (Tsai, 2019) and for students to identify the language patterns using corpora (Varsat, 2023).

Overall, DDL shows strong potential for enhancing idiom learning. However, factors such as professional teacher training and time constraints may affect its effectiveness.

2.5 Deductive and Inductive Approaches in Higher Education: Implications for Idiom Retention

Based on the key concepts above, this sub-theme examines the impact of the deductive and inductive approaches on idiom retention in higher education contexts. Research in higher education settings suggests that both deductive and inductive approaches can facilitate

vocabulary acquisition and retention. For example, Lee and Lin (2019) pointed out that these two approaches were equally effective, with the word knowledge of undergraduate EFL learners generally moving to a higher level from pre-test to immediate post-test and generally remaining at the same level from the immediate post-test to the delayed post-test.

However, existing studies indicate that these two approaches may support different aspects of lexical knowledge. While deductive instruction is more effective in facilitating definitional knowledge (Tsai, 2019), the inductive approach has been found to better improve the retention of collocation and support contextualized language use because students are allowed to decode the corpus data (Tsai, 2019) as well as engage in the language feature identification and processing (Hsiao, 2025). Mehranirad et al. (2023) further illustrated that non-native English learners show great preference for the inductive teaching approach. Particularly, they emphasize the usefulness of the guessing activities and the contextual cues for memorizing idiomatic expressions.

Therefore, the effectiveness of deductive and inductive approaches may depend on the type of target linguistic knowledge, highlighting the need for systematic research in idiom retention in the EFL university.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The current investigation employed a mixed methodology, combining a quasi-experiment and interviews. The quasi-experiment addresses RQ1 and RQ2 by designing corpus-based materials for experiment intervention and quantifying the changes in the participants' scores between pre-test and post-test, while interviews provide qualitative insights for RQ3. Specifically, for the first RQ, idioms were selected according to the frequency level and corresponding materials were developed, including PowerPoint slides and a worksheet. To answer the second RQ, a one-group pretest-posttest experiment, in which one group of students received the Presentation-Practice-Production instruction for half an hour and then they engaged in the DDL lesson within the same timeframe, was conducted since it will provide useful information for the cause-and-effect relationship (Dörnyei, 2007). To address RQ two, semi-structured interviews were carried out to explore how they view the usefulness and engagement of PPP and DDL as well as the effectiveness of idiom-teaching materials. As mentioned by Adams (2015), semi-structured interviews are the best ways to gain participants' perceptions, and they can help the researchers get some deep insights out of anticipation.

3.2 Participants

This study was carried out in an EMI university in China, and the participants were selected from the course Foundations of Language Studies, which is a major required course for the freshmen in the English major at this EMI university. The students enrolled in this course had limited knowledge about idioms and English corpora, increasing the internal validity of the current research. Due to the difficulty of recruiting students who were available and willing to participate, only fifteen participants were selected.

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Experiment

For the idiom selection, the parts of the body, as an idiom-rich topic was chosen (Liontou, 2020). Moreover, the idioms of this study were extracted from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) due to its large collection of authentic texts. According to Sinclair's (2004) study of the *naked eye*, a certain pattern of the idiom will be identified first in the concordance lines after the Key Word in Context (KWIC) search and then the collocation search will be conducted to ensure the selected idioms are commonly used among native speakers. For example, after a KWIC search of *eye*, two idioms "*turn a blind eye*" and "*keep a close eye*" were identified, following the pattern of "*verb + determiner + adjective + eye*". To prove the frequency of these idioms, a collocation search was implemented. From the frequency list, the verbs *keep* and *catch* were identified. After checking the concordances of these two verbs, the idioms "*keep a close eye on*" and "*catch one's eye*" were selected. Based on the same selection framework, six more idioms "*stick one's nose in*", "*thumb one's nose at*", "*get one's foot in the door*", "*pull one's foot down*", "*break a leg*", and "*pull one's leg*" were chosen.

For the one-group pretest-posttest experiment, a pre-test was designed to evaluate participants' familiarity with these eight idioms. Three similar test papers were designed to examine the short-term and long-term retention and usage of idioms. Both questions were similar in topic (body parts) and in the same question type to ensure consistency in assessing retention. Furthermore, all the sentences were adapted from COCA to ensure authenticity. Participants were required to answer the questions via Wordwall, an online platform for teachers to design games for educational purposes without coding (Safitri et al., 2022), by scanning the QR code and dragging the words to complete the sentences.

For intervention, two types of instructional materials were created: a presentation slide (see Appendix A) and a worksheet (see Appendix B). The slide was provided for the PPP group for explicit explanation and visualization of idioms following Moonasar's (2013) productive skill based lesson format, while the DDL group was provided with a worksheet to guide participants through discovery learning using COCA.

A pilot test was conducted with two students sharing a similar background with the participants to validate the material design and check the time control.

3.3.2 Interview protocols

A semi-structured interview protocol, covering four aspects: prior experience, overall perceptions, advantages and disadvantages of these two approaches, and corpus-based materials evaluation, was designed to gain insights from participants about their perceptions of PPP and DDL in helping idiom retention.

The interview questions were also pilot tested to ensure the expected information could be gathered, enhancing the validity of the study (In, 2017).

3.4 Procedures

To begin with, a pretest was conducted. Participants were asked to write down the definitions in their own words within 10 minutes, during which the researcher monitored the process. After the pretest, the intervention was conducted in a classroom, with each lesson lasting about half an hour. The students first attended a teacher-centered lecture, where they listened to the teacher's explanations and finished the controlled exercise. Subsequently, the students conducted the discovery learning guided by the worksheet (see Appendix B) using COCA. Afterwards, participants took an immediate posttest and a delayed posttest after two weeks with the same format.

Based on the immediate post-test scores, three participants were selected: one who performed better in PPP than in DDL (Participant I), one who performed better in DDL (Participant A) and one with average performance (Participant J). The interviews, lasting about 15 minutes, were audio recorded. The interviews were conducted in Mandarin. The audio was transcribed into Mandarin and translated into English. The transcripts were sent to interviewees for them to check whether they want to add some comments, increasing the reliability of the interviews (In, 2017).

3.5 Data Analysis

3.5.1 Quantitative Data

The immediate and delayed post-test responses were recorded and converted into spreadsheets. After that, all the data was converted to SPSS. Subsequently, the 2×2 repeated-measures ANOVA, a data analysis method targeted on a person or a group of people receiving all experimental conditions (Field, 2009), was conducted to examine the effects of the teaching approach (PPP vs. DDL) and time (pre-test vs. immediate post-test and pre-test vs. delayed post-test) on students' idiom acquisition. This analysis aimed to investigate: a) the overall progress of learners over time, b) differences between deductive and inductive approaches in facilitating short-term and long-term idiom retention, and c) whether these two approaches resulted in different degrees of improvement.

3.5.2 Qualitative Data

After transcription and translation, the thematic analysis method raised by Braun and Clarke (2023) was utilized to explore RQ3. The data were analyzed via ATLAS.ti 25, a professional qualitative data analysis software. To be specific, after familiarizing with the data,

the researcher identified and assigned codes to the phrases or sentences that were related to RQ3. Subsequently, codes sharing with similar patterns were categorized into sub-themes and themes.

4. Findings

4.1 Effectiveness of deductive and inductive approaches on idiom retention

Firstly, the descriptive statistics were calculated (see Figure 3). Students' mean scores in the PPP group increased from 1.47 in the pre-test to 3.53 in the immediate post-test. Similarly, the mean score in the DDL group increased from 0.33 to 3.27, indicating the positive impact of both approaches on the improvement in short-term retention. Secondly, a paired-samples t-test was conducted to examine whether the two idiom sets differed at the pre-test (see Figure 4). The result revealed a significant difference, $p < .001$, indicating that students were significantly more familiar with the idioms related to the eye and nose before the PPP intervention. Therefore, subsequent analyses focused on learning gains rather than raw post-test scores. Gain scores were calculated by subtracting pre-test scores from post-test scores. A 2×2 repeated-measures ANOVA (see Figure 5) revealed a significant main effect of Time, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .92$, suggesting that students' idiom scores increased significantly from pre-test to immediate post-test. A significant main effect of Method was also found, $p = .005$, partial $\eta^2 = .44$. To further examine short-term learning outcomes, a paired-samples t-test for the gain scores was carried out (see Figure 6). Results demonstrate that although the DDL condition produced higher mean gains ($M = 2.93$) than the PPP condition ($M = 2.07$), this difference did not reach statistical significance ($p = .103$).

Finally, delayed post-test data were analyzed to examine long-term retention effects. Figure 7 shows that the DDL condition resulted in higher mean gain scores ($M = 2.07$) than the PPP condition ($M = 1.13$), suggesting a potential advantage of DDL in promoting longer-term retention. However, this difference did not reach statistical significance ($p = .053$). Likewise, the repeated-measures ANOVA revealed a marginally non-significant Method $\times$ Time interaction

effect ($p = .053$), indicating that while both approaches led to sustained learning gains over time, there is no statistically significant difference in retention between the two approaches.

Figure 3

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PPP_Pre	15	1	2	1.47	.516
PPP_Post	15	0	4	3.53	1.125
DDL_Pre	15	0	1	.33	.488
DDL_Post	15	1	4	3.27	1.033
Valid N (listwise)	15				

Figure 4

Paired-samples T-test Result (Pre-test)

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences				Significance			
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper	t	df	One-Sided p
									Two-Sided p
Pair 1	PPP_Pre - DDL_Pre	1.133	.834	.215	.672	1.595	5.264	14	<.001
									<.001

Figure 5

2 × 2 repeated-measures ANOVA Result (Immediate Post-test)

Tests of Within-Subjects Effects							
Measure: MEASURE_1							
Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Method	Sphericity Assumed	7.350	1	7.350	10.947	.005	.439
	Greenhouse-Geisser	7.350	1.000	7.350	10.947	.005	.439
	Huynh-Feldt	7.350	1.000	7.350	10.947	.005	.439
	Lower-bound	7.350	1.000	7.350	10.947	.005	.439
Error(Method)	Sphericity Assumed	9.400	14	.671			
	Greenhouse-Geisser	9.400	14.000	.671			
	Huynh-Feldt	9.400	14.000	.671			
	Lower-bound	9.400	14.000	.671			
Time	Sphericity Assumed	93.750	1	93.750	164.063	<.001	.921
	Greenhouse-Geisser	93.750	1.000	93.750	164.063	<.001	.921
	Huynh-Feldt	93.750	1.000	93.750	164.063	<.001	.921
	Lower-bound	93.750	1.000	93.750	164.063	<.001	.921
Error(Time)	Sphericity Assumed	8.000	14	.571			
	Greenhouse-Geisser	8.000	14.000	.571			
	Huynh-Feldt	8.000	14.000	.571			
	Lower-bound	8.000	14.000	.571			
Method * Time	Sphericity Assumed	2.817	1	2.817	3.049	.103	.179
	Greenhouse-Geisser	2.817	1.000	2.817	3.049	.103	.179
	Huynh-Feldt	2.817	1.000	2.817	3.049	.103	.179
	Lower-bound	2.817	1.000	2.817	3.049	.103	.179
Error(Method*Time)	Sphericity Assumed	12.933	14	.924			
	Greenhouse-Geisser	12.933	14.000	.924			
	Huynh-Feldt	12.933	14.000	.924			
	Lower-bound	12.933	14.000	.924			

Figure 6*Paired-samples T-test Result (Immediate Post-test)*

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PPP_Gain	2.0667	15	1.22280	.31573
	DDL_Gain	2.9333	15	1.22280	.31573

Paired Samples Correlations

		N	Correlation	Significance	
				One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	PPP_Gain & DDL_Gain	15	-.236	.199	.398

Paired Samples Test

			Paired Differences					Significance			
						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean		Lower	Upper	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	PPP_Gain - DDL_Gain	-.86667	1.92230	.49634		-1.93120	.19787	-1.746	14	.051	.103

Figure 7*Paired-samples T-test Result (Delayed Post-test)*

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PPP_DGain	1.13	15	1.246	.322
	DDL_DGain	2.07	15	1.163	.300

Paired Samples Correlations

		N	Correlation	Significance	
				One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	PPP_DGain & DDL_DGain	15	-.007	.491	.981

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences							Significance	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
					Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	PPP_DGain - DDL_DGain	-.933	1.710	.441	-1.880	.014	-2.114	14	.026	.053

Figure 8*2 × 2 repeated-measures ANOVA Result (Delayed Post-test)*

Tests of Within-Subjects Effects							
Measure: MEASURE_1							
Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Method	Sphericity Assumed	6.667	1	6.667	6.292	.025	.310
	Greenhouse-Geisser	6.667	1.000	6.667	6.292	.025	.310
	Huynh-Feldt	6.667	1.000	6.667	6.292	.025	.310
	Lower-bound	6.667	1.000	6.667	6.292	.025	.310
Error(Method)	Sphericity Assumed	14.833	14	1.060			
	Greenhouse-Geisser	14.833	14.000	1.060			
	Huynh-Feldt	14.833	14.000	1.060			
	Lower-bound	14.833	14.000	1.060			
Time	Sphericity Assumed	38.400	1	38.400	53.228	<.001	.792
	Greenhouse-Geisser	38.400	1.000	38.400	53.228	<.001	.792
	Huynh-Feldt	38.400	1.000	38.400	53.228	<.001	.792
	Lower-bound	38.400	1.000	38.400	53.228	<.001	.792
Error(Time)	Sphericity Assumed	10.100	14	.721			
	Greenhouse-Geisser	10.100	14.000	.721			
	Huynh-Feldt	10.100	14.000	.721			
	Lower-bound	10.100	14.000	.721			
Method * Time	Sphericity Assumed	3.267	1	3.267	4.469	.053	.242
	Greenhouse-Geisser	3.267	1.000	3.267	4.469	.053	.242
	Huynh-Feldt	3.267	1.000	3.267	4.469	.053	.242
	Lower-bound	3.267	1.000	3.267	4.469	.053	.242
Error(Method*Time)	Sphericity Assumed	10.233	14	.731			
	Greenhouse-Geisser	10.233	14.000	.731			
	Huynh-Feldt	10.233	14.000	.731			
	Lower-bound	10.233	14.000	.731			

4.2 Learner's perspectives on the two teaching approaches

Similar to Harris and Lemming's (2021) study, learners generally showed a preference to the deductive approach. Two participants mentioned its positive effect on retention.

I think the learning effect of the first half (PPP) of the class was better for me... As for the reason, I think it is mainly because there was a lot of repetition. Whether in the explanation, in the dialogues, or in the practice activities, we kept saying and using the expressions repeatedly. Because of this repetition, the idioms may form a relatively deep impression in the brain. (Participant I)

In the short term, I think the first one (PPP) is more impressive. Because once I knew this idiom, the teacher could tell me what it meant. So compared to figuring out the meaning on my own, the first method in the short term will definitely make me remember the idiom a little deeper. (Participant J)

When it comes to the inductive approach, one participant confirmed its effectiveness on long-term retention, which is consistent with Tsai's (2019) research that contextualized language usage helped students memorize the vocabulary.

But if in the long term, maybe if I, if I really do the action of figuring out the meaning on my own, I may remember the meaning of what I know more deeply. (Participant J)

4.3 Learner's perspectives on the corpus-based materials

Learners acknowledged the usefulness of example sentences in the PowerPoint slides and worksheets in enhancing their understanding of the meaning and usage of the idioms.

So when there is a conversation, it seems to give me a situation that allows me to better understand when and what situation I am facing. You can use that idiom and you won't make a mistake. (Participant J)

However, learners also mentioned some challenges when using the corpus-based materials, including cognitive load and contextual variability.

Another form is the worksheet that was given to us. I think for some people it might create a kind of laziness, because they may not feel motivated to do it or may not like this kind of plain text. (Participant A)

I remembered that for some texts, I read for a long time before I realized what they were about—for example, one was about marriage. Then others were about things like biology, so sometimes it was quite difficult to guess. (Participant I)

5. Conclusion

The present study explored the effects of deductive and inductive approaches on university students' idiom learning using corpus-based materials. The findings indicate that both approaches resulted in significant improvements in students' idiom retention in both short-term and long-term memory. While the DDL condition showed a tendency toward greater learning gains, especially in long-term retention, no statistically significant difference was found.

These results resonate with previous research suggesting that both deductive and inductive instruction can support lexical development (Lee & Lin, 2019; Mehranirad et al., 2023). The positive outcomes in both conditions may be attributed to structured input and explicit instruction in the PPP lesson (Varsat, 2023), as well as meaning and lexical pattern identification in the DDL intervention as discovery learning can improve retention (Bruner, 1961). The slight advantage observed in the DDL condition aligns with claims that inductive learning may better support context-dependent lexical knowledge (Tsai, 2019), which is particularly relevant to idiom acquisition.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that teachers may benefit from integrating corpus-based materials and both approaches when teaching idioms. However, attention should be paid to potential challenges such as increased cognitive load and context ambiguity, which may require extensive training on task design.

Nevertheless, this study has some limitations. The sample size was relatively small, which may limit the generalizability of the results to a larger population. Additionally, the research context is an EMI university, which may not fully represent the wide range of students in different cultural backgrounds and educational contexts learning idioms.

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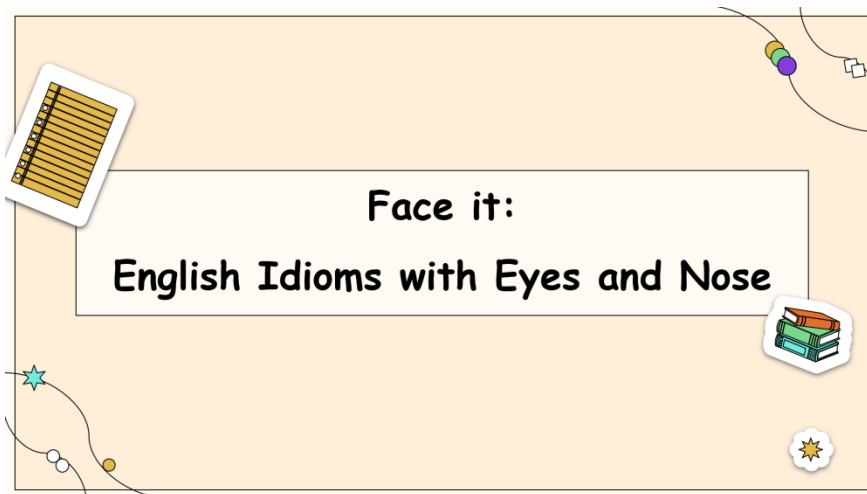
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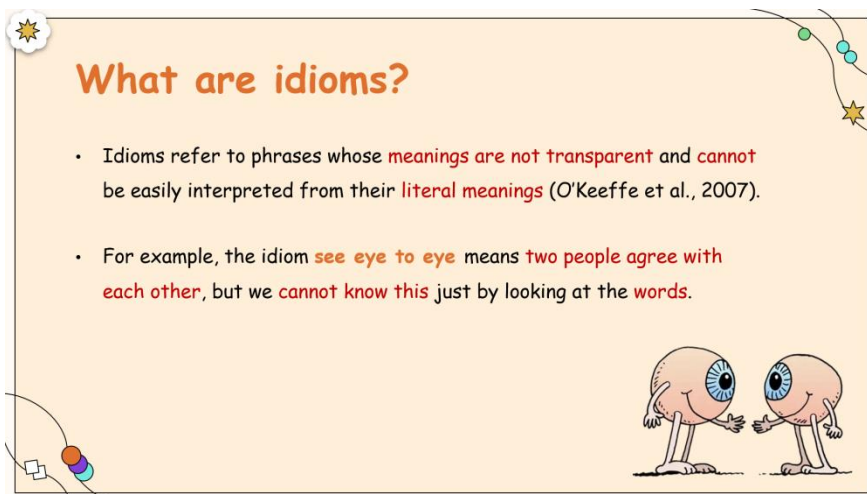
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Appendix A

Presentation Slides for Intervention (PPP)

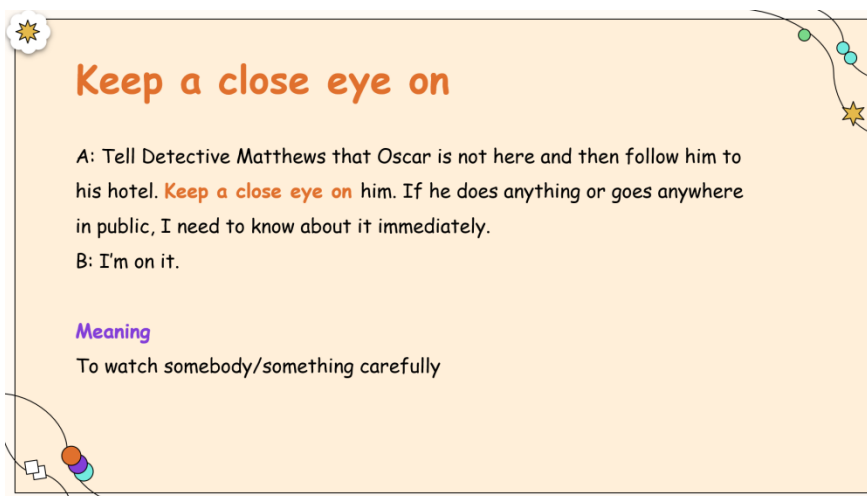


Face it:
English Idioms with Eyes and Nose



What are idioms?

- Idioms refer to phrases whose **meanings are not transparent** and **cannot** be easily interpreted from their **literal meanings** (O'Keeffe et al., 2007).
- For example, the idiom **see eye to eye** means **two people agree with each other**, but we **cannot know this** just by looking at the **words**.

Keep a close eye on

A: Tell Detective Matthews that Oscar is not here and then follow him to his hotel. **Keep a close eye on** him. If he does anything or goes anywhere in public, I need to know about it immediately.

B: I'm on it.

Meaning
To watch somebody/something carefully

Keep a close eye on

A: Tell Detective Matthews that Oscar is not here and then follow him to his hotel. **Keep a close eye on** him. If he does anything or goes anywhere in public, I need to know about it immediately.

B: I'm on it.

Culture background

The origin of this idiom can be traced back to **ancient times** when people relied heavily on their **sense of sight for survival**. In medieval times, guards were positioned atop castle walls to **watch for any approaching enemies**. During World War II, soldiers were trained to **monitor enemy movements** and report back to their superiors. Today, it is often used in situations where someone needs to **be cautious about something important** (Anderson, 2025).

It's so refreshing and nice to **keep a close eye on a movie** where you just get to get absorbed into a world that's as detailed and beautiful as Rhyme City and the Pokmon landscape. It's really, it's really amazing.

I can not wait to see it!

Is the use of "**keep a close eye on**" appropriate in this sentence? Why or why not?

Catch one's eye

A: The minister lectured on this subject for an amazingly long time and with an amazing anger, scolding and admonishing and tyrannizing everybody.

B: I'm looking around to **catch someone's eye** -- you know, maybe raise an eyebrow -- but they're all just looking straight ahead with these blank faces. They're scared. They're frozen with fear.

Meaning

To get someone's attention

Catch one's eye

A: The minister lectured on this subject for an amazingly long time and with an amazing anger, scolding and admonishing and tyrannizing everybody.

B: I'm looking around to **catch someone's eye** -- you know, maybe raise an eyebrow -- but they're all just looking straight ahead with these blank faces. They're scared. They're frozen with fear.

Culture background

Throughout history, people have used various methods to **catch each other's attention**. For example, in ancient Rome, gladiators would **wave their arms or weapons** to get the crowd's attention before a fight.

Today, catching someone's eye is still an important part of **communication and social interaction**.

Whether it be through **body language, fashion choices or verbal cues** such as compliments or jokes, we all strive to **make connections with others by getting noticed** (Anderson, 2025).

I was joking about the 3rd headline. Are you seriously recommending that? I personally like the first one. Has just the right amount of capital letters to **catch the eye**.

What's your take on the headline?

Is the use of "**catch the eye**" appropriate in this sentence? Why or why not?

Stick one's nose in

A: Just let them go.

B: Leave me alone, ghost! Don't **stick your nose in** the affairs of us living folks!

Meaning

Interfere in the affairs or business of **other people**

Stick one's nose in

A: Just let them go.

B: Leave me alone, ghost! Don't **stick your nose in** the affairs of us living folks!

Culture background

Historically, this idiom has been used in various contexts throughout literature and everyday speech. It can be traced back to at least **the 19th century** when it was commonly used in newspapers and novels. Over time, its usage has changed to cover a wider range of circumstances where someone is being **overly intrusive or meddling** (Anderson, 2025).

On the demand side, the reason is obvious and pressing: The number of elderly and disabled in need of assistance is expected to double in the next 25 years.

It's going to put tremendous pressure on unpaid family members to **stick their noses in**, but they're not going to be there in the numbers that we need.

Is the use of "**stick their noses in**" appropriate in this sentence? Why or why not?

Thumb one's nose at

A: He was a single, good looking guy always up for a party. Here he's seen at a wedding. Did you ever get the feeling he was **thumbing his nose at** you and all the other people looking for him?

B: Yeah, I think so.

Meaning

To show **no respect**, or to raise the end of your thumb to the end of your nose to show that you **do not respect someone**



Thumb one's nose at

A: He was a single, good looking guy always up for a party. Here he's seen at a wedding. Did you ever get the feeling he was **thumbing his nose at** you and all the other people looking for him?

B: Yeah, I think so.

Culture background

Some historians believe it may have originated from **medieval Europe**, when **court jesters** would **make fun of their superiors** by wiggling their fingers and placing their thumb on their noses.

Others suggest that it may have come from **Native American tribes** who used a similar gesture to **taunt their enemies during battles** (Anderson, 2025).



I think the scientists themselves are personally reluctant to take the next step, which really is human research.

Will there be rogue scientists that **thumb their nose at** this?

Is the use of "**thumb their nose at**" appropriate in this sentence? Why or why not?

Scenario exercise

- Work in **pairs**. Each group has **two sets of cards**.
- One set of cards contains **English idioms**, and the other set of cards includes some **scenarios**.
- **Match** the English idioms to the appropriate scenarios.

Scenario exercise

During the design review, several projects turned out not to be completely original, which caused confusion. People guessed that some interns had probably passed the wrong information to the presenter. However, at least, **one of the designs was good enough that someone in the room immediately noticed it** and thought it stood out from the rest.

Catch one's eye

Scenario exercise

Marcus is angry. He warns his younger brother all the time not to go into the woods behind their house, but his brother never listens. Now something dangerous happens, and Marcus completely loses his patience. He yells at his brother, **asking why he keeps getting involved in situations that have nothing to do with him.**

Stick one's nose in

Scenario exercise

David's doctor keeps warning him to avoid spicy food because of his stomach condition. However, David insists he feels fine and continues ordering the hottest dishes at the restaurant every day. His friends remind him that it could make his health condition worse, but **he just laughs it off and acts like the risks don't really apply to him.**

Thumb one's nose at

Scenario exercise

Lisa has a cat. It is adorable but very curious. Whenever Lida is studying or doing her makeup, the cat quietly climbs onto her desk and starts sniffing around her brushes and eyeshadow palettes. To make sure nothing gets knocked over or broken, **Lisa watches her cat closely every time.**

Keep a close eye on

Create a dialogue

- Work in **pairs**. Each group selects **two idioms** first.
- Each group uses these 2 idioms to **create a dialogue (6 mins)**.
- Each team **shares the dialogue** in front of the whole class.

Example

Context: Mary and Tom are working on a group project in the library. Suddenly, they notice something unusual outside the window.

Mary: Hey, Tom! Can you **keep a close eye on** my laptop for a minute? I'm gonna grab my coffee.

Tom: Sure, no problem, I'll make sure nobody touches it.

Mary: Thanks. I don't trust this floor lately. Someone's charger was missing yesterday.

Tom: Yeah, I also heard of that.

Mary: (Look out the window) Oh! Something just **caught my eye**. They're setting up the Christmas tree.

Tom: Really? That is so fast.

Mary: We can go and take pictures soon. I need something fun to look forward to after this week.

Tom: Same. Anything to survive before the final week.

Sharing time

The groups sitting as the audiences needs to **write down idioms** you heard the other group used.



Review

- **Keep a close eye on:** to watch somebody/something carefully
- **Catch one's eye:** to get someone's attention
- **Stick one's nose in:** Interfere in the affairs or business of **other people**
- **Thumb one's nose at:** to show **no respect**, or to raise the end of your thumb to the end of your nose to show that you **do not respect someone**

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Appendix B

Worksheet for Intervention (DDL)

Step Up: Idioms with Leg and Foot

Some of these activities are adapted from Liantou (2020), The effect of Data-Driven Learning Activities on young EFL learners' processing of English idioms.

- **Do not look at an online vocabulary book or dictionary!** Towards the end of the class, you may be asked to present and share your findings with other members of the class.

First, follow the manual “How to register for COCA” and register at <https://www.english-corpora.org/>.

I. Key-Word-in-Context Task

- Go to <http://english-corpora.org>.
- Choose COCA.
- Click on the + symbol above the search box and choose a **Collocates** search.
- Type “foot” in the first search box and “put” in the second search box.
- Click on the number “2” on the left of the blue box and set the span as “2”.
- Click on “**Find collocates**” to begin your search.

The screenshot shows the COCA Collocates search interface. At the top, there are tabs for 'List', 'Chart', 'Word', 'Browse', 'Collocates', and 'Compare KWIC'. The 'Collocates' tab is selected. Below the tabs, there are two search boxes. The first box contains the word 'foot' and is labeled 'Word/phrase [POS] ?'. The second box contains the word 'put' and is labeled 'Collocates [POS]'. Below the search boxes, there is a row of buttons for selecting the number of collocates. The buttons are labeled '+', '4', '3', '2', '1', '0', '0', '1', '2', '3', '4', '+'. The button '2' is highlighted in green. Below the buttons, there are two buttons: 'Find collocates' and 'Reset'.

- Look at the concordance lines containing the idiom “**put one’s foot down**”.
- Guess the meaning of the idiom “**put one’s foot down**” and write down in the chart below (e.g., 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 13).

1	2012	BLOG	...eamstobeyouandme.com	🔍🔍🔍	Q	you snort milk out your nose. It gives you the energy to put one foot in front of the other and keep going. # Over the summer, I
2	2012	BLOG	Scities6women.com	🔍🔍🔍	Q	of the burden of hiding this. Of managing it alone. You put one foot in front of the other and go from there. One hour at a time
3	2012	BLOG	frontpagemag.com	🔍🔍🔍	Q	were president, he would be doing what he did, which is put his foot down and say stop. I think we would not be seeing the phenomenon growing
4	2012	BLOG	avoiceformen.com	🔍🔍🔍	Q	like a baby " or being irrational when I say these things and put my foot down. # If you want something from me, you must offer me something
5	2012	BLOG	...ttlechatboxes.com	🔍🔍🔍	Q	do that without crying or vomiting. A normal person would have to put his/her foot down and walk out or quit, but these cold brown shirts just go to
6	2012	BLOG	...hatshintonthelist.com	🔍🔍🔍	Q	together when you're ahead. Working together is for losers. You put your foot on the opponents neck when they are down and you crush the wind ou
7	2012	BLOG	steptalk.org	🔍🔍🔍	Q	F U in DysFunction Since 2009 # " Parents who are afraid to put their foot down usually have children who step on their toes " ---Chinese Proverb # He
9	2012	BLOG	stonekettle.com [1]	🔍🔍🔍	Q	next guy to do his job and mostly it works. You put your foot on the brakes and it turns out the brake assembler did a job that lasts
10	2012	BLOG	verysmartbrothas.com	🔍🔍🔍	Q	see people saying they're scared to get married, men need to put their foot down and/or up the woman's ass, and the women need to stop choosing
11	2012	BLOG	...egalinsurrection.com	🔍🔍🔍	Q	order to get the independents. There is a good chance he'll put his foot in his mouth and flip flop then. # flipper flips depending on what audience
12	2012	BLOG	...dotorg.wordpress.com	🔍🔍🔍	Q	n't matter if it's ethical or not -- surely TF has massively put his foot in it (No pun intended) by admitting he accessed the email after being
13	2012	BLOG	persuasive.net	🔍🔍🔍	Q	trying for almost years too now. And I am finally starting to put my foot down. I have recently been only sweeping the dirt out of my way,
14	2012	BLOG	just.thinkofit.com	🔍🔍🔍	Q	're doing dynamic things mentally, the fact is that you can just put your foot out like that and the whole big ship of state is going to go.
15	2012	BLOG	...orfall.wordpress.com	🔍🔍🔍	Q	money or a job. I need to knock on others doors and put my foot in the door if I want to help myself. That is how the world

j) Type “foot” in the first search box and “get” in the second search box. Click on the number “2” on the left of the blue box and set the span as “2”. Look at the concordance lines containing the idiom “**get one’s foot in the door**”. Guess its meaning and match each idiom with the correct definition (A-D) in the chart below.

k) Type “leg” in the first search box and “break” in the second search box. Click on the number “2” on the left of the blue box and set the span as “2”. Look at the concordance lines containing the idiom “**break a leg**”. Guess its meaning and match each idiom with the correct definition (A-D) in the chart below.

l) Type “leg” in the first search box and “pull” in the second search box. Click on the number “2” on the left of the blue box and set the span as “2”. Look at the concordance lines containing the idiom “**pull one’s leg**”. Guess its meaning and match each idiom with the correct definition (A-D) in the chart below.

Idiom	Definition
Put one’s foot down	
Get one’s foot in the door	
Break a leg	
Pull one’s leg	

- A. To wish someone good luck
- B. To use your authority to stop something happening
- C. To tell someone something that is not true (as a way of joking with the person)
- D. To enter a business or organization at a low level, but with a chance of being more successful in the future

II. Corpus-based domino cards

- a) The sentences below were extracted from COCA.
- b) Work in Pairs. Match the sentence fragments on the left side (A-D) with those on the right side (E-H) to form a complete and meaningful sentence.
- c) When you finish, check your answers and be ready to share them with other members in class.

A. Uh, Professor Adams. Your class has nothing to do with why I wrote The Book. I know all this fundamental stuff already. I need the credits to graduate.	E. Really broke my heart that she cried because she couldn't "shop" at the holiday bazaar because she just wanted to get me something for Christmas.
B. We're stronger together than alone. Be anything but quiet, indeed -- and you, m'dear, will be "astonishing" on Saturday! If the tears come, so be it -- just be honest and true.	F. I know. I'm <u>pulling your leg</u> . I enjoyed your work so much, I took the liberty of passing it on to a publisher friend of mine in New York.
C. "Seasonal jobs are a great way to <u>get a foot in the door</u> and often have the potential to turn into permanent, full-time employment," says Anna Sidana, a vice president at Simply Hired.	G. Sara Sutton Fell, CEO and founder of Flexjobs, agrees. She says any time you're hired by a company -- even if it's for a temporary role -- you have the opportunity to create a good working relationship with people there.
D. I get so frustrated that they get the kids hyped about little cheerleading, book fairs, Christmas bazaars -- all this stuff that costs money -- and how disappointed my kid is when I just have to <u>put my foot down</u> and tell her we can't swing it.	H. You'll be spreading joy to so many people just by sharing your message. It's going to be an incredible experience. <u>Break a leg!</u>

And finally...

Finished before the end of class? Wow, that was so fast! Spend your extra time preparing to share your findings with your peers 😊

Thank you!