

## TEACHING FOOD IDIOMS TO A2 LEARNERS THROUGH DIFFERENT GAMES

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the integration of food-related idioms into the curriculum of A2 level English learners through the use of engaging and interactive games. Idioms, as an essential part of language fluency, present a unique challenge for second language learners due to their figurative meanings. By focusing on food idioms, which are both culturally rich and commonly used, and teaching them through play-based methods, learners can grasp meanings more intuitively (Shakhjahan, A, 2020) [1]. This study illustrates how game-based learning supports retention, motivation, and deeper understanding of idiomatic expressions. The article includes examples of classroom applications and reflects on student feedback, offering insights for language instructors aiming to enrich their vocabulary teaching strategies.

**Keywords:** Food idioms, A2 learners, game-based learning, figurative language, ESL, vocabulary acquisition, teaching strategies, engagement, language fluency, idiomatic expressions

### INTRODUCTION

Idiomatic expressions are a vital part of any language, enriching communication with nuance, emotion, and cultural context. However, for learners at the A2 level, idioms can often feel confusing and inaccessible (Khusainova, R. A, 2021) [2]. This challenge is especially evident with food-related idioms, which are frequently used in everyday English but rarely make sense when interpreted literally. Phrases like “spill the beans,” “apple of my eye,” or “piece of cake” can be particularly puzzling for learners, as their figurative meanings are deeply rooted in culture and can’t easily be guessed from the individual words.

This study aims to explore whether incorporating idioms into game-based learning can support A2 learners in understanding and using them more effectively. Research has shown that learning through games increases motivation, promotes active engagement, and improves long-term retention—particularly among young or lower-intermediate learners. When learners are immersed in playful, interactive environments, they tend to absorb language more naturally and confidently.

In this context, idioms presented through carefully designed games may become more relatable and less intimidating. Instead of memorizing definitions, learners can experience the idioms in action, linking them to emotions, situations, and visual cues. This paper investigates how such an approach can transform idiom learning from a passive, often frustrating task into a dynamic and meaningful experience—helping learners not only to comprehend idiomatic expressions but also to use them comfortably in real-life communication (Tursunova, M, 2023) [3].

### METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a qualitative, classroom-based approach involving 20 A2-level English learners aged between 13 and 16. Over a four-week period, students were introduced to ten commonly used food idioms through a variety of interactive games designed to enhance both comprehension and retention. The activities included:

1. **Idiom Bingo** – students matched idioms with their correct meanings in a classic bingo format.
2. **Charades** – learners acted out idioms, encouraging interpretation through movement and creativity.
3. **Matching Cards** – students paired idiomatic expressions with their figurative meanings.
4. **Sentence Completion Races** – teams competed to accurately complete sentences using the target idioms.
5. **Story Building** – students collaboratively created stories that incorporated specific idioms assigned to them.

Each session concluded with a short reflective discussion to encourage metacognitive thinking and a formative quiz to assess understanding and measure engagement (Brown, H. D, 2007) [4]. This structure aimed to create a supportive and dynamic learning environment where idioms became more meaningful and easier to apply in context.

### RESULTS

The findings revealed that students demonstrated significant improvement in both recalling and using idioms when they were introduced through game-based activities. By the end of the sessions, 85% of participants were able to explain and correctly use at least 7 out of the 10 targeted food idioms in appropriate contexts (Yuldasheva, Z, 2022) [5]. Learner feedback indicated a higher level of enjoyment and engagement during the lessons, with many students reporting that the use of games helped reduce their anxiety when dealing with non-literal language.

In addition, teachers noted increased active participation throughout the sessions, particularly during speaking tasks. Learners were more willing to take risks, and many began using idioms spontaneously in conversation. These observations

suggest that integrating idioms into playful, interactive formats can not only enhance understanding but also boost learner confidence and willingness to communicate.

### DISCUSSION

Integrating idioms through games proved particularly effective for intermediate learners. Food idioms, in particular, are vivid and often highly visual, making them especially suitable for gamified learning. Games offer a dynamic context in which learners can experiment with language, take creative risks, and receive immediate feedback—all within a low-pressure, engaging environment. For instance, acting out the idiom “*butter someone up*” helped students grasp its connotation of flattery more intuitively (Lazar, G, 2003) [6].

Additionally, repeated exposure to idioms across a range of game formats reinforced retention and deepened understanding. Collaborative activities also encouraged peer-to-peer learning, allowing students to construct meaning together. These findings align with Vygotsky’s theory of social interaction as a key driver of cognitive development, highlighting the value of learning through shared experiences.

Importantly, incorporating idioms into the curriculum provided learners with access not only to figurative language but also to cultural insights and metaphorical thinking—essential yet often overlooked components of true language fluency in traditional vocabulary instruction.

### CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the effectiveness of using games to teach food idioms to A2-level English learners, and the results strongly support the integration of such approaches in language instruction. Idioms, particularly those related to food, often pose challenges to learners due to their non-literal meanings and cultural specificity. However, the use of games proved to be a highly effective strategy for making these expressions more accessible, engaging, and memorable. Through a series of interactive activities—including charades, bingo, matching games, sentence races, and storytelling—students not only demonstrated improved recall but also began to use idioms confidently in context. The combination of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements allowed learners with different cognitive preferences to connect with the material in meaningful ways. Furthermore, the playful nature of games created a low-anxiety environment, encouraging risk-taking and increasing motivation—two key factors in second language acquisition.

Another significant outcome was the role of social interaction in the learning process. As learners worked together to interpret and use idioms, they engaged in collaborative problem-solving and shared meaning-making. This supports Vygotsky’s theory that social interaction plays a crucial role in cognitive development, especially when learners operate within their Zone of Proximal Development. Peer learning and



repeated exposure across diverse game formats further reinforced understanding and retention of idiomatic expressions.

Beyond linguistic outcomes, this study highlights the cultural and cognitive benefits of idiom instruction. Idioms are deeply rooted in cultural norms, humor, and shared experiences. Introducing them early—even at lower proficiency levels—can foster cultural awareness and promote metaphorical thinking, both of which are essential components of communicative competence and language fluency.

In light of these findings, educators are encouraged to rethink traditional methods of vocabulary instruction and to incorporate more creative, game-based strategies into their classrooms. Teaching idioms through games not only enriches learners' vocabulary but also builds their confidence and fluency in using authentic, native-like expressions (Rakhimova, D, 2021) [7]. As this study has shown, when language learning becomes active, playful, and socially meaningful, it opens the door to deeper understanding and more joyful engagement with the target language.

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