

Assessing Saudi EFL Learners' Use and Understanding of English Idioms: Perceptions, Problems, and Patterns of Learning

Mohammad Jamshed*

Department of English, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, KSA

Abduh Almashy

English Department, Al Qunfudah University College, UQU, Makkah, Saudi Arabia

Mohammad Saleem

University of Prince Mugrin, Madinah, Saudi Arabia

Wahaj Unnisa Warda

Department of English (Female Campus), Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, KSA

Abstract—This study aims to investigate Saudi EFL learners' perceptions of English idioms, their problems, and the patterns of their learning and understanding of English idioms. 458 students (around 10%) were selected through a random sampling method from the undergraduate learners in different levels of programs at the College of Business Administration and the College of Science & Humanities, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Al-Kharj, KSA. As the study looked at how certain independent variables (gender, level/year of study, and parents' profession) shaped dependent variables (perceptions/attitudes), a questionnaire was self-developed which includes modified items from existing research. A quantitative approach (descriptive statistics) was used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that Saudi EFL learners' perceptions were very positive about English idioms and their impact on enhancing their English proficiency. It was found that lack of background information, unfamiliarity, variation in literal interpretation, lack of Arabic parallels, and insufficient EFL classroom training made learning English idioms challenging for respondents. It was also revealed that Saudi EFL learners acquired and comprehended English idioms via using them in sentences, consulting a dictionary, guessing from contexts, group discussions, and breaking them down into their constituent parts. One-way ANOVA analysis found no statistically significant difference among the respondents based on their demographic differences. The study holds implications for both teachers and students as it will help them teach and learn English idioms effectively. The most common method is translating English idioms into their language.

Index Terms—insufficient instruction, learning and understanding English idioms, lack of equivalents in Arabic language, unawareness about the context

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning and understanding idioms is integral and essential to learning and acquiring effective language skills. They have an essential effect on advancing and enhancing the language skills of EFL/ESL learners. However, they have constantly posed a challenge for both EFL/ESL learners and native speakers (Wu, 2008). Language idioms are highly contextualized and cannot be understood from their constituent parts (Cooper, 1999; Wu, 2008). Idioms pose a challenge to all learners particularly the non-native speakers who experience more difficulty in the use and comprehension of English idioms as they are often unaware of the cultural and psychological consciousness in which these idioms are rooted (Khonbi & Sadeghi, 2017). That is why one's ability and capacity to understand and use English idioms is considered an indication of not only one's command and mastery over language but also the cultural nuances of the idioms. A substantial vocabulary and a wide variety of idioms are prerequisites for understanding novels, books, and magazines as well as watching movies, music, and television programs (O'Dell & McCarthy, 2010). Even in spoken English people often use English idioms and their lack of understanding and knowledge results in the breakdown of the communication.

As idioms are a crucial component of the acquisition and learning of language, they are considered a natural aspect of social interaction. English idioms help EFL/ESL learners grasp a text and communicate effectively and learners can enhance their overall skills and proficiency in the language (Khan & Can Daskin, 2014; Irujo, 1986). As a result,

* Corresponding Author.

learning and teaching English idioms becomes pivotal in English language learning as their knowledge is the manifestation of one's proficiency in the language. Ellis (1997) argued that one's effective and excellent communication in a second language is directly connected to one's knowledge and mastery of the language. Language learners use idioms because of their adaptability and communicational significance in everyday situations.

English is learned and taught as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia. With the kingdom embarking on its ambitious mission of economic diversification, English language proficiency assumes significance in realizing this dream of economic empowerment. Saudi graduates with excellent language skills could transform the country's economy and act as an engine of change and transformation. That is why English departments in Saudi universities lay special emphasis on the instruction of idioms in their EFL classrooms. However, it is being observed that Saudi EFL learners are not well-versed in the use and understanding of English idioms. Therefore, this study will identify the challenges in learning English idioms and offer solutions to enhance Saudi EFL learners' language proficiency.

A. *Research Problem*

Even after years of learning English in schools and at universities, Saudi graduates have poor English skills. They are particularly deficient in the use and understanding of English idioms. The lack of literature specifically dealing with Saudi EFL learners' attitudes, difficulties, and challenges, and the techniques they adopt for learning and understanding English idioms necessitates a fresh study carried out from learners' perspective.

B. *Research Purpose Statement*

This study attempts to understand Saudi EFL learners' perceptions toward English idioms, their problems and challenges, and the strategies and patterns of learning they use to learn and understand them while reading a text.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Nadeem and Almola (2022) investigated Saudi EFL learners' difficulties and challenges in learning English idioms and highlighted how they were often neglected in EFL classrooms. A questionnaire was designed to collect responses from 50 male and female students. The results revealed that the study respondents had trouble in learning English idioms and using context-based meaning-guessing as the main strategy, translating idioms into their mother tongue, and them into parts to understand their meaning. Orfan (2020) examined the attitudes of Afghan EFL learners, their causes and sources of problems, and the strategies used to understand and learn English idioms. A questionnaire was employed to obtain responses from the 337 study participants. The data was analyzed quantitatively. The results showed that EFL learners were very positive towards the use of English idioms and the main sources of difficulty were unawareness of cultural knowledge, lack of understanding of context and background, and non-availability of equivalents in the mother tongue. Alhaysony (2017) examined the problems of Saudi EFL students in using English idioms and learning their strategies. The data was collected through the Nation's Vocabulary Level Test, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. The results revealed that the learners encountered difficulty in understanding them. The findings also revealed that Saudi EFL learners often used understanding the meaning from context-based guessing, figuring them out from their equivalents in their mother tongue, and predicting the meaning. The study holds implications for learning and understanding idiomatic expressions.

Haghshenas and Hashemian (2016) examined how linguistic, visual, and combination methods improved second-language idiom learning. 80 intermediate English learners from three Isfahan language schools were chosen. Intermediate participants were selected using OPT scores. After that, participants were divided into four groups. People who utilized all three approaches found idiom learning simpler. The results also revealed that idiom learning was best with etymological elaboration/pictorial explanation. The findings hold immense implication for learners interested in finding ways to enhance their mastery of English idioms. Al-kadi (2015) investigated Yemeni EFL students' English idiom comprehension and their idiomatic competence and English proficiency among 63 Taiz University Faculty of Education sophomore English majors. Three idiom tests and a questionnaire were utilized to obtain data from the students. The result showed that students who scored higher on idiom tests fared better on speaking and listening tests. It also revealed EFL students' key problems and solutions in using idiomatic language. Tabatabaei and Gahroei (2011) examined the impact of using movie clips on the quality of English idioms. 60 students aged 16-18 were divided into control and experiment groups with the former getting learning through the traditional method and the latter group getting instruction through movie clips. The results revealed that the experimental group's learning and understanding of English idioms significantly improved. The study holds implications for the effective use of movie clips for teaching English idioms in EFL classrooms.

Tran (2012) examined idiom teaching and learning in a foreign language environment at the university level through a 15-week program for pre-service language instructors. The data was collected via interviews, surveys, and email-guided observations. The results showed moderate idiom learning effectiveness among university teachers and students. The study suggested that idiom learning must be encouraged. Khonbi and Sadeghi (2017) explored how educating idioms through four different methods—short sentence use, movie clip, role-play, and definition—affected learners' idiomatic skills. Two institutes organized an idiom test to assess 47 EFL learners' knowledge of idioms before the experiment. The study respondents were taught 100 idioms. The one-way ANOVA of post-test data showed significant

differences across the four idiom teaching approaches. The study holds implications for learning and teaching English idioms to enrich one's vocabulary.

A. Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of Saudi EFL learners towards English idioms?
2. What are the problems of Saudi EFL learners in acquiring and understanding English idioms?
3. What are Saudi EFL learners' patterns of learning and understanding English idioms?
4. Do EFL learners of Saudi Arabia differ in their perceptions, problems, and patterns of learning based on differences in their demography?

B. Hypothesis

H01: There is no difference of any statistical significance in Saudi EFL learners' perceptions towards English idioms based on gender.

H02: There is no difference of any statistical significance in Saudi EFL learners' problems in learning and understanding English idioms based on parents' profession.

H03: There is no difference of any statistical significance in Saudi EFL learners' patterns of learning and understanding English idioms based on their level/year of study.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Design

A quantitative technique (descriptive quantitative design) was selected for the study because it deals with numerical data and analyzes how certain independent variables (study levels, gender, and the professional profile of learners' parents) affect the dependent variables (perceptions, problems, and patterns and strategies of learning and understanding). A quantitative approach is recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2017) when the research consists of data involving statistical and numerical findings.

B. Participants' Description

The study population comprises students enrolled in different undergraduate programs at the College of Business Administration and the College of Science & Humanities, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Al-Kharj, Saudi Arabia. All the respondents are Arabic native speakers and use English as a foreign language. They have been studying English as a second language for the last seven/eight years. They are in their early twenties. 458 students were selected through a simple selection approach. Out of the total population, 259 (56.40%) are male, 197 (42.90%) are female, and 2 (0.70%) did not specify their gender.

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	259	56.40%
Female	197	42.90%
Others	2	0.70%
Level of Study		
Level 6th to 8th	43	9.40%
Level 4th to 5th	67	14.60%
Level 1st to 3rd	349	76.00%
Parents 'Profession		
Government Job	328	72%
Private Job	43	9.40%
Self-Employment	34	7.40%
No Employment	54	11.80%

C. Data Collection Instrument

Before designing the questionnaire, an in-depth analysis of the existing literature was carried out. While some of the items were self-designed, others were adopted from the existing studies (Alhaysony, 2017; Orfan, 2020). The first part of the questionnaire deals with the demographic profile of EFL learners. In the second part, the first nine items deal with the attitudes of learners with each three elements dealing with different aspects of attitude. The next 9 items deal with EFL learner's problems and challenges in learning and understanding English idioms, and the last nine items deal with Saudi EFL learners' patterns of learning and comprehending English idioms. The respondents were asked to rate their responses on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree=5, agree=4, neutral=3, disagree=2, and strongly disagree= 1).

D. Validity

The English items/questions were translated into Arabic to ensure a better understanding of the questions/items and participants' lack of proficiency in the English language. Two language experts both in English and Arabic validated

the translation. A pilot study was carried out to confirm the reliability of the items in the questionnaire. Expert suggestions and comments were incorporated.

E. Data Collection Method

The data was collected from the participants using a questionnaire. The questionnaire link was sent to the student and course teacher groups. The Arabic translation was provided alongside the English language to facilitate the participants to effectively communicate their preferences.

The study participants were given directions to read the separate instructions provided in every section of the questionnaire. Given the guarantee of complete confidentiality and secrecy and the use of the data solely for academic and research purposes, they felt free to express their responses.

F. Data Analysis and Interpretation

When adequate responses were obtained, the data was moved from the Google form to an Excel sheet. For easier calculations, the data was put into SPSS version 23 and was assigned numerical values (strongly agree= 5, agree= 4, neutral= 3, disagree=2, and strongly disagree=1). The range of the 5-point Likert scale was determined by reducing the highest score (5) from the lowest score (1) and dividing the result by the highest score (5). As the questionnaire had only closed-ended questions, the participants' responses were put into a table and evaluated with numbers. Descriptive statistics were used for calculating means, frequency ranges, and standard deviations. One-way ANOVA was carried out to examine differences in the means of responses based on demographic variables. For interpreting and categorizing the level/degree of positive/negative perceptions/attitudes, the following criteria were assumed and adopted.

TABLE 2
ASSUMED SCALE/CRITERIA FOR MEASURING THE DEGREE/LEVEL OF ATTITUDE/PERCEPTION

Mean Square	Level
3.1 – 4.50	High
1.51 – 3.00	Moderate
1.00 – 1.50	Low

IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The statistical findings presented in Table 3 showed that Saudi Arabian EFL learners possessed a high level of positive attitudes/perceptions towards English idioms. It also revealed that Saudi EFL students experienced different kinds of problems and challenges in comprehending and learning English idioms. These problems arose from the deficiency of knowledge about the context of idioms, lack of familiarity with English idioms, due to the variation in the literal interpretations of idioms, lack of their equivalents in the Arabic language, and due to insufficient instruction in EFL classrooms. The findings also showed that Saudi EFL learners use different strategies for acquiring and comprehending English idioms. The most frequently employed method of comprehending and understanding English idioms is the translation of English idioms into the mother tongue followed by the use of idioms in sentences, using a dictionary, use of contexts, group discussions, and breaking down idioms into their parts.

TABLE 3
SAUDI EFL LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS, PROBLEMS, AND PATTERNS OF LEARNING ENGLISH IDIOMS

Questions/ Items	Overall Means
1. Saudi EFL learners' perceptions toward English idioms	4.20
2. Saudi EFL learners' problems in learning English idioms	3.89
3. Saudi EFL learners' patterns of learning English idioms	4.01

TABLE 4
SAUDI EFL LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS THE USE OF ENGLISH IDIOMS

Questions/Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean
1	52.8%(242)	36.5%(167)	7.4%(34)	2%(9)	1.3%(6)	4.37
2	52.6%(241)	37.8%(173)	6.8%(31)	1.7%(8)	1.1%(5)	4.39
3	50.7%(232)	36.9%(169)	8.7%(40)	3.1%(14)	0.7%(3)	4.33
4	49.8%(228)	37.8%(173)	9%(41)	2.2%(10)	1.3%(6)	4.32
5	40.4%(185)	39.1%(179)	14.6%(67)	3.7%(17)	2.2%(10)	4.11
6	50.7%(232)	39.3%(180)	7.2%(33)	1.5%(7)	1.3%(6)	4.36
7	48%(220)	37.6%(172)	10%(46)	2.6%(12)	1.7%(8)	4.27
8	36.7%(168)	40.8%(187)	14.8%(68)	5.7%(26)	2%(9)	4.04
9	27.1%(124)	31.9%(146)	27.7%(127)	9.8%(45)	3.5%(16)	3.69
Overall means						4.20

Table 4 shows the Saudi EFL learners' perception toward the use of English idioms measured through items 1 to 9. As is clear from item no 1 in the table, 89.3% (SA 52.8% & 36.5%) of the respondents agreed that English idioms learning was crucial for a better understanding of everyday language. While 7.4% chose to stay neutral, 2% of the participants expressed disagreement, and 1.3% expressed strong disagreement with the statement. The mean is 4.37 which is considered high. In item no 2, 90.4% (SA 52.6% & A 37.8%) agreed that making use of English idioms in

conversation was very important for enhancing speaking skills. 6.8% remained neutral, 1.7% disagreed, and 1.1% expressed strong disagreement. The mean is 4.39 which is regarded as high. Regarding item no. 3, 87.6% (SA 50.7% & A 36.9%) of the participants agreed that learning English language idioms increased the beauty of the language. While 8.7% remained neutral, 3.1% disagreed, and 0.7% expressed strong disagreement with the statement. The mean is 4.33 which is considered high. As far as item no. 4 is concerned, 87.6% (SA 49.8% & A 37.8%) of the participants agreed that they felt that it was important to motivate EFL learners to learn English idioms for effective communication. 9% of the respondents stayed neutral, 2.25 disagreed, and 1.3% expressed strong disagreement with the statement. The mean is 4.32 which is considered high. In the next item no. 5, 79.5% (SA 40.4% & A 39.1%) of respondents agreed that they felt that learning English idioms constituted an integral part of the English language learning process. 14.6% of the participants expressed neutrality, 3.7% disagreed, and 2.2% expressed strong disagreement with the statement. The mean is 4.11 which is considered high. About item no. 6, 90% (SA 50.7% & A 39.3%) of the participants agreed that they thought that learning and understanding English idioms was necessary for understanding an English text. 7.2% of the respondents remained neutral, 1.5% disagreed, and 1.3% expressed strong disagreement with the statement. The mean is 4.36 which is categorized to be high. In the next item no. 7, 85.6% (SA 48% & A 37.6%) of the participants agreed that they loved to learn English idioms to improve their English language proficiency. 10% of the respondents chose neutral, 2.6% disagreed, and 1.7% expressed strong disagreement with the statement. The mean is 4.27 which is considered high. Regarding item no. 8, 77.5% (SA 36.7% & A 40.8%) of the respondents agreed that they paid special attention to English language idioms if they came across them while studying a text. 14.8% chose to remain neutral, 5.7% disagreed, and 2% expressed strong disagreement with the statement. The mean is 4.04 which is categorized to be high. In the last item 9, 67% (SA 36.7% & 40.8%) of the respondents agreed that they utilized their spare time for learning and understanding English idioms. While 27.7% of the participants stayed neutral, 9.8% disagreed, and 3.5% expressed strong disagreement with the statement. The mean is 3.69 which is considered high.

TABLE 5
SAUDI EFL LEARNERS' PROBLEMS IN THE USE AND UNDERSTANDING OF ENGLISH IDIOMS

Questions/Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean
10	37.3%(171)	34.9%(160)	18.8%(86)	6.8%(31)	2.2%(10)	3.58
11	34.3%(157)	35.2%(161)	23.1%(106)	5.9%(27)	1.5%(7)	3.94
12	38.8%(164)	37.1%(170)	20.3%(93)	5.2%(24)	1.5%(7)	4
13	32.1%(147)	42.8%(196)	19.9%(91)	2.8%(13)	2.4%(11)	3.99
14	34.5%(158)	44.8%(205)	15.5%(71)	3.3%(15)	2%(9)	4.06
15	35.6%(163)	36.7%(168)	18.8%(86)	6.6%(30)	2.4%(11)	3.96
16	36.5%(167)	43.9%(201)	13.5%(62)	3.9%(18)	2.2%(10)	4.08
17	27.7%(127)	35.4%(162)	21.6%(99)	11.8%(54)	3.5%(16)	3.72
18	27.3%(125)	36.2%(166)	24.7%(113)	9.4%(43)	2.4%(11)	3.76
Overall means						3.89

Table 5 shows the problems and challenges Saudi EFL learners experience in the use and comprehension of English idioms measured through items 10 to 18. In the first item no. 10, 72.2% (SA 37.3% & A 34.9%) of the respondents agreed that the lack of foreign cultural background knowledge made English idioms challenging to understand. 18.8% of the participants stayed neutral, 6.8% disagreed, and 2.2% expressed strong disagreement with the statement. The mean is 3.58 which is considered high according to the scale/criteria adopted in the methodology section of the study. In the next item no. 11, 84.1% (SA 34.3% & A 35.2%) of the respondents agreed that learning idioms was difficult to understand due to insufficient instruction/importance in the EFL classroom. 23.1% of the participants stayed neutral, 5.9% disagreed, and 1.5% expressed strong disagreement with the statement. The mean is 3.94 which is considered high. Regarding item no. 12, 75.9% (SA 38.8% & A 37.1%) of the respondents agreed that the absence of idioms in the syllabus made their learning/ acquisition more difficult. While 20.3% of participants chose to remain neutral, 5.2% disagreed, and 1.5% expressed strong disagreement with the statement. The mean is 4 which is categorized to be high. As far as item no. 13 is concerned, 74.9% (SA 32.1% & A 42.8%) of the participants found that the literal meaning of idioms differed from their whole meaning, making them hard to comprehend. 19.9% of the respondents expressed neutrality, 2.8% disagreed, and 2.4% expressed strong disagreement with the statement. The mean is 3.99 which is considered high. In the next item no. 14, 79.3% (SA 34.5% & A 44.8%) of the respondents agreed that the lack of familiarity with idioms served as an obstacle to understanding. 15.5% of the respondents remained neutral, 3.3% disagreed, and 2% strongly disapproved. The mean is 4.06 which is accepted to be high. About item no. 15, 72.3% (SA 35.6% & A 36.7%) of the respondents agreed that idioms posed difficulties as they lacked equivalents in their native language. While 18.8% of respondents stayed neutral, 6.6% disagreed, and 2.4% expressed strong disagreement with the statement. The mean is 3.96 which is considered high. Concerning item no. 16, 80.4% (SA 36.5% & A 43.9%) of the participants agreed that English idioms could be particularly difficult to understand when they were used without any context. 13.5% maintained neutrality, 3.9% disagreed, and 2.2% strongly disapproved. The mean is 4.08 which is categorized to be high. In the next item no. 17, 63.1% (SA 27.7% & A 35.4%) of the respondents agreed that learning idioms in a way that was compatible with their use in ordinary speech was challenging. While 21.6% of respondents remained neutral, 11.8% disagreed, and 3.5% strongly disapproved. The mean is 3.72 which is considered high. In the last item no 18 of this category, 63.5% (SA 27.3% & A 36.2%) of the respondents agreed that using idioms across

different communicative contexts was difficult. 24.7% of participants expressed neutrality, 9.4% disagreed, and 2.4% expressed strong disagreement with the statement. The mean is 3.76 which is categorized to be high. This analysis answers the second research question.

TABLE 6
SAUDI EFL LEARNERS' PATTERNS OF LEARNING AND UNDERSTANDING ENGLISH IDIOMS

Questions/Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean
19	33.6%(154)	39.5%(181)	18.6%(85)	6.1%(28)	2.2%(10)	3.96
20	41.5%(190)	42.6%(195)	11.8%(54)	2.4%(11)	1.7%(8)	4.19
21	46.3%(212)	38%(174)	10.5%(48)	2.8%(13)	2.4%(11)	4.22
22	40.4%(185)	37.6%(172)	14.8%(68)	4.8%(22)	2.4%(11)	4.08
23	37.8%(173)	38.6%(177)	17.7%(81)	4.1%(19)	1.7%(8)	4.06
24	35.2%(161)	36.9%(169)	16.6%(76)	8.7%(40)	2.6%(12)	3.93
25	30.6%(140)	38.4%(176)	21.8%(100)	7.4%(34)	1.7%(8)	3.88
26	35.4%(162)	38.2%(175)	17.9%(82)	6.1%(28)	2.4%(11)	3.98
27	31.9%(146)	36.7%(168)	21.2%(97)	7%(32)	3.3%(15)	3.86
Overall means						4.01

Table 6 shows Saudi EFL learners' patterns of learning and comprehending English idioms measured through items 19 to 27. In the first item no 19 of this category, 73.1% (SA 33.6% & A 39.5%) of the respondents agreed that they broke down idioms into components to understand their meaning. 18.6% of participants preferred to remain neutral, 6.1% disagreed, and 2.2% expressed strong disagreement with the statement. The mean is 3.96 which is considered high as per the assumed criteria in the methodology section of the study. In item no. 20, 84.1% (SA 41.5% & A 42.6%) of the respondents agreed that they learned idioms by using them in their sentences. While 11.8% of respondents chose to stay neutral, 2.4% disagreed, and 1.7% expressed strong disagreement with the statement. The mean is 4.19 which is categorized to be high. In the next item no. 21, 84.3% (SA 46.3% & A 38%) of the respondents agreed that they usually translated English idioms into Arabic to understand their meanings. 10.5% were neutral, 2.8% disagreed, and 2.4% strongly disapproved. The mean is 4.22 which is considered high. Regarding item no. 22, 78% (SA 40.4% & A 37.6%) of the participants agreed that they used their dictionary to understand the meaning of new idioms. While 14.8% of participants chose to remain neutral, 4.8% disagreed, and 2.4% strongly disapproved. The mean is 4.08 which is considered high. As far as item no 23 is concerned, 76.4% (SA 37.8% & A 38.6%) of the respondents agreed that they interpreted the meaning of idiomatic expressions from the contexts. 17.7% of respondents were neutral, 4.1% disagreed, and 1.7% strongly disapproved. The mean is 4.06 which is considered high. In the next item no. 24, 72.1% (SA 35.2% & A 36.9%) of the respondents agreed that memorization was the most useful technique for them to understand English idioms. While 16.6% chose to stay neutral, 8.7% disagreed, and 2.6% strongly disapproved. The mean is 3.93 which is considered high. About item no. 25, 69% (SA 30.6% & A 38.4%) of the respondents agreed that they gained knowledge of idiomatic expressions through regular reviews. 21.8% remained neutral, 7.4% disagreed, and 1.7% strongly disapproved. The mean is 3.88 which is categorized to be high. In the next item no. 26, 73.6% (SA 35.4% & A 38.2%) of the participants agreed that they enhanced their knowledge of idioms through participation in group discussions. 17.9% chose to stay neutral, 6.1% disagreed, and 2.4% strongly disapproved. The mean is 3.98 which is considered high. In the last item no. 27, 68.6% (SA 31.9% & A 36.7%) of the respondents agreed that they learned English idioms through regular written practice. While 21.2% remained neutral, 7% disagreed, and 3.3% strongly disapproved. The mean is 3.86 which is categorized to be high. This analysis answers the third research question.

V. DIFFERENCE IN SAUDI EFL LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARD ENGLISH IDIOMS BASED ON THEIR DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

A. Perceptions of Saudi EFL Learners Towards English Idioms and Gender

The one-way ANOVA results about Saudi learners' perceptions towards learning and comprehending English idioms are displayed in Table 7 below. The findings demonstrate that Saudi EFL learners' gender does not affect their responses because the calculated value of F (2.604593) is smaller than the critical value of F (3.47805). Hence, HO1 is accepted.

TABLE 7
ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	15183.73	4	3795.933	2.604593	0.100063	3.47805
Within Groups	14574	10	1457.4			
Total	29757.73	14				

B. Problems/Challenges of Learning and Understanding English Idioms and Parents' Profession

Table 8 presents the one-way ANOVA findings regarding Saudi EFL learners' problems and challenges in learning and understanding English idioms. The findings demonstrate that Saudi EFL learners' parents' profession does not

affect their responses because the calculated value of F (1.03442) is smaller than the critical value of F (3.055568). Hence, HO2 is accepted.

TABLE 8
ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	5314.3	4	1328.575	1.03442	0.421766	3.055568
Within Groups	19265.5	15	1284.367			
Total	24579.8	19				

C. Patterns of Learning and Understanding English Idioms and EFL Learners' Level/Year of Study

Table 9 shows the one-way ANOVA results regarding Saudi EFL learners' patterns and strategies for learning and understanding English idioms. The findings demonstrate that Saudi EFL learners' level/year of study does not affect their responses because the calculated value of F (2.2954) is smaller than the critical value of F (3.055568). Hence, HO3 is accepted. This analysis answers the fourth research question.

TABLE 9
ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	26291.2	4	6572.8	2.2954	0.10709	3.055568
Within Groups	42952	15	2863.467			
Total	69243.2	19				

VI. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The study investigated the perceptions of Saudi EFL learners, their problems, and their patterns of comprehending and learning English idioms. The findings demonstrated that perceptions and attitudes towards learning and understanding English idioms are very positive. This finding is in line with many studies (Al-Houti & Aldaihani, 2018; Keshavarz & Amro, 2019; Ababneh, 2016; Tadayyon & Ketabi, 2014). However certain studies (Al-Zahrani, 2008; Abidin et al., 2012) contradict this finding as they reported negative perceptions among EFL learners. In addition, the research discovered that Saudi EFL learners experienced several challenges when acquiring and comprehending English idioms. One of the major obstacles encountered by students learning English as a second language or as a foreign language is contextual ignorance. A study conducted by Orfan (2020) confirms this finding. The study also found that problems in learning English arose from the lack of familiarity with cultural nuances. This finding is supported by Alhaysony (2017) who found that lack of cultural knowledge caused challenges in understanding English idioms. The study's findings that the lack of proper instruction in EFL classrooms and differences in the literal meanings were the cause of difficulties are corroborated by studies carried out by Anjarini and Hatmanto (2021) and Shahidipour and Tahirian (2018). As far as the strategy and pattern of learning English is concerned, the study found that EFL learners of Saudi Arabia employed various strategies to learn English idioms. The findings revealed that Saudi EFL learners employed several strategies for acquiring and comprehending English idioms. The most frequently employed method is the translation of English idioms into their mother tongue followed by the use of idioms in sentences, the use of a dictionary, and understanding the meaning from the context. This finding is confirmed by Ta'amneh (2021) and Alhaysony (2017) who investigated techniques and challenges in acquiring and comprehending English idioms among university graduates. One more study conducted by Anjarini and Hatmanto (2021) echoed the same findings and found two more strategies for using the internet and connecting the meaning with Bhasha Indonesia for learning English idioms. However, Phan et al. (2022) contradicted these findings and found that the most frequently used strategy is acquiring idioms using keywords and a wide range of sources including media. The analysis also investigated if the difference in Saudi EFL learners' demography caused differences in their perceptions and attitudes toward English idioms. One-way ANOVA analysis found that no difference of any statistical significance existed in their attitudes and perceptions based on their gender. This finding is corroborated by several studies (Ababneh, 2016; Iranmanesh & Darani, 2018; Pucelj, 2018; Orfan, 2020). However, some studies (Abdalhamid, 2021; Abidin et al., 2012) were found to be inconsistent with this finding. The research also revealed that there was no difference of any statistical significance in Saudi EFL learners' problems and English learning strategies based on the parents' profession and year/level of study of the respondents respectively. This finding is in line with many studies. However, certain studies (Pucelj, 2018; Abdalhamid, 2021) contradict this finding as they discovered a significant connection between gender and learning techniques.

VII. CONCLUSION

The research study examined the Saudi EFL learners' perceptions of English idioms, their problems and challenges, and their patterns of learning and understanding English idioms. The findings demonstrated that Saudi EFL learners held highly positive perceptions and attitudes toward English idioms. The result also revealed that they experienced

many problems. These difficulties stemmed from a lack of understanding of the context of idioms, unfamiliarity with English idioms, the fact that literal meanings of idioms varied, a lack of Arabic equivalents for them, and insufficient instruction in EFL classrooms. It was also demonstrated that Saudi EFL learners utilized different techniques to comprehend and acquire English idioms. The most frequently employed approach is translating English idioms into their native language, using them in sentences, using a dictionary, guessing from the contexts, group discussions, and breaking English idioms into their constituent parts. The result also showed that gender, parents' professional profile, and year/level of study do not affect the responses of Saudi EFL learners. The findings hold implications they would help the teachers understand students' problems and assist students in acquiring excellent English language skills.

APPENDIX

Questions/Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. I. Learning English idioms is important for a better understanding of everyday language.					
2. Making use of English idioms in conversation is very important for enhancing speaking skills.					
3. Learning English language idioms increases the beauty of the language.					
4. I feel it is important to motivate EFL learners to learn English idioms for effective communication.					
5. I feel that learning English idioms constitutes an integral part of the English language learning process.					
6. I think learning and understanding English idioms is necessary for understanding an English text.					
7. I love to learn English idioms to improve my English language proficiency.					
8. I pay special attention to English language idioms if I come across them while studying a text.					
9. I utilize my spare time for learning and understanding English idioms.					
10. A lack of foreign cultural background knowledge makes English idioms challenging to understand.					
11. Idioms are difficult to understand due to insufficient instruction/importance in the EFL classroom.					
12. The absence of idioms in the syllabus makes their learning/ acquisition more difficult.					
13. The literal meaning of idioms differs from their whole meaning, making them hard to comprehend.					
14. A lack of familiarity with idioms serves as an obstacle to understanding.					
15. Idioms pose difficulties as they lack an equivalent in my native language.					
16. English idioms can be particularly difficult to understand when they are used without any context.					
17. Learning idioms in a way that is compatible with their use in ordinary speech is challenging.					
18. Using idioms across different communicative contexts is difficult.					
19. I break down idioms into components to understand their meaning.					
20. I learn idioms by using them in my sentences.					
21. I usually translate English idioms into Arabic to understand their meanings.					
22. I use my dictionary to understand the meaning of new idioms.					
23. I interpret the meaning of idiomatic expressions from the contexts.					
24. Memorization is the most useful technique for me to understand English idioms.					
25. I gain knowledge of idiomatic expressions through regular reviews.					
26. I enhance my knowledge of idioms through participation in group discussions.					
27. I learn English idioms through regular written practice.					

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Mohammad Jamshed got his Ph.D. degree in 2018 from Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, UP (INDIA). His area of interest includes postcolonial literature, travel writings, comparative studies, and ESL/EFL teaching. He has presented papers at conferences and published many articles in journals of repute both in literature and ESL/ESL teaching. He is currently working as an Assistant Professor, Department of English, College of Science & Humanities, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Al Kharj, 11942, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Abduh Almashy is working as Assistant professor in applied linguistics at Umm Al-Qura University and the head of the English Department. His research interests include L2 Acquisition, EFL Speaking Assessment, Extensive Reading Activities, and Communication Skills.

Mohammad Saleem is currently working as an English Language Lecturer, at the University of Prince Mugrin, Madinah, Saudi Arabia. He has many years of teaching ESL/EFL in different colleges and universities across the Arab world. He has presented many research papers at many international conferences and has a number of research papers which have been published in many international journals of repute.

Wahaj Unnisa Warda has been working in the Department of English Language and Literature, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia for the past ten years. Before that, she worked as a senior lecturer in India for thirteen years. She has presented and published papers at various International conferences and journals in London, India, Australia, and Saudi Arabia. She is a member of various national and international organizations besides being a reviewer for international journals. Her areas of interest are psychoanalysis, Classical Mythology, and detective fiction of the 19th century.