

Teaching conceptual metaphors in Vietnamese idioms to foreign learners through a cognitive linguistic approach

Nguyen Thi Bich Hang^{1*}

¹Hanoi University, Vietnam; bichhangohr@gmail.com (N.T.B.H.).

Abstract: This article explores the application of a cognitive linguistic approach in teaching Vietnamese idioms to foreign learners, emphasizing the role of conceptual metaphors. The study demonstrates how understanding the underlying metaphorical structures can enhance learners' comprehension, retention, and application of idioms in practical contexts. By employing various cognitive-based teaching strategies, learners develop the ability to recognize and use idioms more flexibly and accurately. After applying this approach, the findings reveal significant improvements in learners' interest, synthesis thinking, and strategic use of language. The research underscores the potential for extending cognitive methods to other areas of language teaching for comprehensive skill development.

Keywords: *Cognitive linguistic approach, Conceptual metaphors, Language comprehension and retention, Language teaching, Second language acquisition, Vietnamese idioms,*

1. Introduction

Kovecses (2002) defines the term "idiom" as a set of words or phrases whose meanings cannot be directly deduced from the meanings of their components. Idioms encompass linguistic expressions that are metaphorical, metonymic, comparative, phrasal verbs, and other types of figurative speech, thereby enriching the language with nuance and creativity. From the perspective of Vietnamese linguists, idioms are distinguished by their fixed structures and convey complete meanings by interacting with their constituent words. While the literal meanings of individual words may contribute to the overall meaning, idioms often rely on intricate shifts in meaning that challenge straightforward interpretation.

Given their structural rigidity, rote memorization is traditionally considered a practical approach to mastering idioms. However, many Vietnamese language instructors hesitate to include idiomatic instruction in their curricula, perceiving idioms as overly complex and challenging for learners to grasp. This perception results in a gap in developing students' idiomatic fluency. The task of memorizing idioms is often seen as laborious and inefficient, requiring significant effort for learners to internalize isolated expressions without context. Consequently, there is a growing interest among researchers and educators in identifying effective teaching methods that facilitate idiomatic understanding and usage.

The recent advancements in cognitive linguistics have provided new pathways for enhancing idiom instruction. A notable shift has occurred from traditional methods that focus on rote memorization to cognitive approaches that prioritize a deeper comprehension of idiomatic structure and meaning. This paradigm shift underscores the value of understanding idioms within a cognitive framework that connects language to human thought and experience. Such an approach not only aids in comprehension but also in the practical application of idiomatic expressions.

This paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse by presenting the findings of an empirical study that explored the effectiveness of teaching Vietnamese idioms to foreign learners using a cognitive approach. The research underscores the potential of cognitive linguistics to revolutionize idiom instruction, making it more accessible, engaging, and meaningful for learners. By emphasizing the underlying cognitive structures of idioms, educators can facilitate more effective learning experiences, ultimately enhancing learners' language proficiency and cultural understanding.

2. Conceptual Metaphors and the Approach of Teaching Idioms through a Cognitive Linguistic Perspective

2.1. *The Theory of Conceptual Metaphor*

According to cognitive science theory, a conceptual metaphor is a phenomenon in which one concept is understood in terms of another, shaping how humans perceive and think about the world. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) marked a pivotal shift in the history of linguistics by proposing that we conceptualize and comprehend one domain through another. For instance, the metaphor “time is money” underpins various linguistic expressions such as “wasting time” and “saving time.” In this conceptual metaphor, the abstract concept of time is understood and represented through a more tangible, experiential concept—money. In cognitive linguistics, emotions are also structured metaphorically (Kovecses, 2000). Conceptual metaphors can be categorized as follows:

Orientational Metaphors: These are often referred to as spatial metaphors derived from our spatial perception. They result from our regular interaction with the environment and our physical experience of space. Orientational metaphors establish structured conceptual systems based on spatial opposites like up-down, in-out, deep-shallow, and center-periphery (Kovecses, 1986). For instance, happiness is often oriented as “up” and sadness as “down,” illustrated by phrases such as “eyes lit up” and “eyelids drooped” (Ellis, 2021).

Ontological Metaphors: Defined by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), ontological metaphors involve categorizing abstract entities by giving them a boundary within space. The cognitive structure in ontological metaphors is less complex than in structural metaphors because they provide an ontological status to abstract categories, making them more concrete. We conceptualize abstract domains through tangible objects, substances, or containers (Kovecses, 2002). For example, the mind is an abstract concept that cannot be described by color, shape, or physical attributes. However, it becomes more concrete through ontological metaphors, as in the metaphor “the mind is a machine.”

Structural Metaphors: According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), structural metaphors restructure the target domain by applying new knowledge or attributes from the source domain. An example is the metaphor “time is money,” where the concept of money (source domain) structures the concept of time (target domain), creating partial equivalence between the two. Kovecses (2006) emphasizes that understanding structural metaphors requires examining them from cross-cultural and within-culture dimensions. Research has extensively explored shared ways of conceptualizing emotions across different cultures (Kovecses, 2000; Nguyen et al., 2010). Universal human experiences, such as emotions, form universal conceptual metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Two main reasons contribute to the success of this teaching approach. First, teaching conceptual metaphors helps learners understand the semantic motivation behind idiomatic expressions, viewing them as interconnected and meaningful parts of a structured network rather than rigid, isolated language elements. Second, a metaphor-oriented approach in teaching idioms aids learners in creating mental imagery, enabling dual coding—“processing both visual and verbal information” (Clark & Paivio, 1991). Since conceptual metaphors are rooted in bodily experience and socio-cultural practices, explicit instruction can stimulate learners to visualize input, enhancing their comprehension and memory (Kovecses, 2002).

In recent years, comparative analysis of conceptual metaphors in English and Vietnamese idioms has garnered increasing attention (Giang, 2023; Ngoc & Thanh, 2019). However, using conceptual metaphors to teach Vietnamese idioms to learners in Vietnam has received limited focus. There is no evidence that teachers or learners in Vietnam have incorporated conceptual metaphors into idiom teaching and learning practices. This paper aims to fill this gap in the literature by examining the teaching and learning of idioms in Vietnam (Ngoc & Thanh, 2019).

2.2. *The Approach of Teaching Idioms through the Conceptual Metaphor Perspective in Cognitive Linguistics*

According to Kovecses (2002), the traditional view regards idioms as isolated linguistic expressions, resulting in teaching methods that guide learners to memorize idioms without systematic organization, supported definitions, or clear examples. Consequently, learners remember these idioms as disconnected and fragmented units (Chen & Lai, 2013; Vasiljevic, 2011). In contrast to the traditional view, cognitive

linguistics posits that the nature of language, including idiomatic expressions, is inherently metaphorical and not arbitrary. The fundamental principles of language are conceptualized, structured, and perceived by humans as conceptual metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). A conceptual metaphor involves understanding the meaning of one concept through another, typically an abstract concept (the target domain) understood via a more concrete or physical concept (the source domain) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kovecses, 2002; Hang, 2022).

When cognitive linguists discuss conceptual metaphors, they refer to the cognitive mappings they represent. A conceptual metaphor is a cross-domain mapping, meaning "a fixed set of ontological correspondences between entities in the source domain and entities in the target domain." It is expressed as "the target domain is the source domain" (Lakoff, 1993). The identification of conceptual metaphors holds significant value for teaching and learning idioms. Research has shown that understanding metaphors in this way can significantly facilitate learners' comprehension, retention, and use of idioms in both spoken and written contexts (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2008; Vasiljevic, 2011).

The cognitive approach emphasizes that teaching idioms through the lens of conceptual metaphors helps learners perceive the semantic motivations behind idiomatic expressions. This enables them to view these expressions as meaningful and interconnected components of a structured network rather than rigid, isolated language units. Moreover, this metaphor-oriented teaching strategy supports learners in creating mental imagery, thus allowing for dual coding—"the processing of both visual and linguistic information" (Clark & Paivio, 1991). Since conceptual metaphors are rooted in bodily experiences and socio-cultural practices, clear instruction can prompt learners to visualize inputs, thereby improving comprehension and memory (Kovecses, 2002).

Adopting this approach in teaching idioms is significant because it transforms learning from a rote memorization task into an engaging cognitive process. By understanding the conceptual underpinnings of idiomatic expressions, learners can more effectively recall and apply them in appropriate contexts.

3. Research Design

3.1. Principles for Lesson Design

According to Liu (2003) and Boers & Lindstromberg (2008), teaching idioms requires learners to have a solid foundation in the Vietnamese language to interpret their figurative meanings, as idioms often consist of multiple words and do not convey them literally. Educators should systematically categorize idioms using conceptual metaphors to enhance learners' memory retention and recall abilities (Pham, 2017). This systematic approach helps connect idioms with similar themes, facilitating comprehension and practical application.

Providing rich illustrative examples is an essential step in the teaching process. Educators should present idioms within varied contextual settings so that learners can identify and analyze their similarities (Mäntylä, 2004). Activities such as matching games or group discussions can encourage active participation and foster learners' ability to recognize and interpret the figurative meanings of idioms (Tukhtaeva & Razzakova, 2021). Assigning learners tasks to create short stories or scenarios incorporating the idioms they have learned can reinforce their skills in applying idioms flexibly and contextually (Nippold, 1991).

Illustrative visuals and multimedia tools are crucial in supporting the learning process. Visual aids and videos enhance memory retention and assist learners in visualizing how idioms are used in real-life contexts (Aljebreen & Alzamil, 2022). This contributes to forming a strong link between memory and knowledge, enabling learners to remember idioms more effectively and use them with greater confidence in communication (Chen Hsieh et al., 2017).

Once learners have mastered the meaning and usage of idioms, practical application exercises are necessary (Boers et al., 2004). Learners should be encouraged to use idioms in daily communication activities, such as writing short paragraphs, participating in simulated dialogues, or engaging in topic-based group discussions (Lin, Y2023). These activities help reinforce their knowledge and develop their ability to apply idioms in various communicative situations.

Furthermore, emphasizing the multicultural aspect of idiom instruction is essential for helping learners appreciate language diversity and similarities (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Comparing

Vietnamese idioms with those in the learners' native languages can enhance their flexibility and ability to apply idioms across different cultural contexts (Tran & Duong, 2018). Finally, to ensure learning effectiveness, small tests, and regular review exercises should be incorporated to assess learners' understanding and usage of idioms (Parker, 2023). Detailed feedback from educators will help learners recognize their strengths and areas for improvement, ultimately enhancing their ability to use idioms naturally and effectively (Sadler, 2014).

3.2. Teaching Practice

The inductive method offers significant advantages in teaching idioms as it encourages learners to develop creative thinking and build knowledge independently. Learning involves exploring, linking information, and drawing inferences from real-life situations and specific examples (Al-Hamdun & Al Mozari, 2024). The inductive approach promotes experiential learning and creates an active learning environment where learners discover and construct their understanding autonomously. This leads to better retention and more profound comprehension of the subject matter (Shen, 2023). Furthermore, knowledge formed through real-world experiences enables learners to apply idioms naturally and effectively in everyday communication (Wang et al., 2020). This method also supports the development of logical thinking and reasoning skills, creating a foundation for approaching more complex knowledge in the future.

In this study, we selected idioms related to happiness and sadness—two fundamental and common emotional states. Teaching and learning idioms based on emotional themes help learners approach and use language appropriately and flexibly in daily communication. Happiness and sadness are not only natural psychological states but also reflect important cultural and social aspects, enabling learners to gain deeper insight into the language and expressions of native speakers. This approach allows learners to resonate and connect more profoundly with the Vietnamese language and culture, thus fostering the ability to use idioms more naturally and effectively.

The study participants included 20 students from Russia, South Korea, China, and Italy, currently studying at universities in Vietnam, where Vietnamese is the primary language of instruction. The selection of students from various countries aimed to test the applicability and effectiveness of teaching idioms through conceptual metaphors in a multicultural environment, thereby evaluating their ability to use idioms in real-life contexts.

3.2.1. Activity 1: Warm-Up (Guessing the Lesson Topic)

The instructor places nine images on the board, with four depicting happiness and four illustrating sadness. These images, generated by artificial intelligence (Big AI) according to the author's concept, illustrate nine idioms related to joy and sorrow that will be taught in subsequent activities. The images are employed to stimulate the learners' interest in the topic. Learners are asked to observe the images, guess the lesson topic (i.e., happiness and sadness), and share any expressions describing those emotions they know. Then, the instructor asks the learners to work in pairs and share an extremely happy or unhappy experience with their partners. Learners are encouraged to use all available language resources and express their ideas freely. This activity aims to engage learners' interest, energize them, and create a sense of anticipation for exploring the target language to be taught later.

3.2.2. Activity 2: Group Discussion

Worksheets are distributed to the learners, who are then guided to complete the first task. Ten idioms are provided in context and classified under three themes: up/down, liquid in a container, and force (natural/physical). Learners read the contexts in which the idioms are used, guess their meanings, discuss them with classmates, and write them into the correct categories. After ten minutes, the instructor elicits answers from the learners and provides corrections and explanations as needed. The instructor also asks the learners to match the idioms with the nine images on the board, facilitating dual coding and enhancing memory retention (Vasiljevic, 2011; Boers & Lindstromberg, 2008). For instance, idioms expressing happiness include "mát mày mát mặt" (beaming with pride), "mặt tươi như hoa, mừng mặt bắt tay" (a face as fresh as a flower, greeting with joy), "nở mày nở mặt" (to be proud and

delighted), "nở mặt nở mày" (to shine with pride), and "tay bắt mặt mừng" (shaking hands with joy). Idioms conveying sadness include "lòng đau như cắt" (a heart torn with pain), "đau như cắt ruột" (pain like one's gut being cut), "nhăn nhó như nhà khó hết ăn" (frowning like a struggling household running out of food), "nước mắt ngắn nước mắt dài" (tears streaming down), and "nước mắt đầm đìa" (tears flooding).

These tasks also encourage learners to infer the meanings of idioms from context, involving deeper processing that can help them better understand and remember the expressions. The instructor uses the "Group Discussion" activity to introduce learners to conceptual metaphors. Idiomatic expressions are categorized according to their thematic groupings as surface realizations of conceptual metaphors. For example, "Her heart was full of happiness" (Trái tim cô ấy tràn ngập hạnh phúc) and "Joy welled up in her" (Niềm vui trào dâng trong cô ấy) are driven by the conceptual metaphor that happiness is a liquid in a container. The definition of conceptual metaphors is provided. To help learners better understand this new concept, the instructor should explain in English or the learners' native language why understanding conceptual metaphors can facilitate learning idioms and vocabulary.

3.2.3. Activity 3: Conceptual Metaphor Motivation Discovery

To familiarize learners with conceptual metaphors, instructors can emphasize that these metaphors are rooted in or motivated by human experiences (Kovecses, 2002). For example, the pair of "happiness is up" and "sadness is down" can be used; learners are asked to look at the nine images on the board, examine the differences in posture and facial expressions of happy and sad individuals, and explore how they relate to conceptual metaphors. Clues for this analysis can be found by studying the images and completing a fill-in-the-blank exercise. These metaphors originate from the human experience of having an upright body. Thus, an upright posture is often associated with a positive physical state, potentially leading to positive emotions, whereas a slumped posture conveys the opposite (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Similarly, a smile, typically linked to upward curving lips, is universally associated with happiness, while a frown, characterized by downturned lips, indicates sadness.

3.2.4. Activity 4: Mapping Discovery

In learning English as a foreign language, learners may not be aware of conceptual metaphors or the basic structures linking the source and target domains. Incomplete knowledge of metaphorical mapping often prevents learners from accurately inferring the meaning of unfamiliar idioms, even when those idioms share conceptual metaphors with ones they have already learned. Therefore, teaching learners about metaphorical mappings and connecting a more concrete, physical concept with an abstract, unfamiliar one is essential for idiom acquisition (Chen & Lai, 2013).

When teaching idioms related to happiness and sadness, instructors should explain metaphorical mappings and guide learners in discovering the metaphorical connections that underlie target idioms.

3.2.5. Activity 5: Discovering What Is Missing

While the previous activities focus on understanding idiomatic expressions through the awareness of their semantic motivations, this activity emphasizes the form or lexical structure by drawing attention to their phonological motivations. According to Boers and Lindstromberg (2008), learners' awareness of alliteration and rhyme used in idioms to create appealing sound patterns can enhance their retention of idiomatic forms.

To prepare for this activity, instructors select idiomatic expressions containing allusions or homophones from the list of previously taught idioms and add supplementary ones. Examples include "jumping for joy," "heavy-hearted," "down and out," "doomed and gloomy," "happy as Larry," "happy as a clam (at high tide)," and "snug as a bug in a rug." These idioms, with a missing keyword, are presented in clear, concise sentences. The fill-in-the-blank exercise can be made more accessible by revealing the first letter of the missing word.

Each sentence has two versions printed on separate cards, each showing different missing keywords. For example:

Learners work in pairs to identify the missing words in each sentence as quickly as possible to win the game. Each pair has a set of cards placed face down on their table. Learners flip one card at a time and try to fill in the blank. If uncertain about their answer, they turn the card face down again and will receive the answer after flipping the corresponding version of that expression (with the keyword they want and the other still missing). Once learners complete this game, the instructor can ask if they noticed any specific features of the idioms presented to enhance awareness of alliteration and rhyme in these expressions.

Understanding conceptual metaphors helps learners comprehend and recall the meanings of idioms but does not guarantee retention of their forms (Vasiljevic, 2011). This form-focused activity is crucial for developing adequate knowledge of idiomatic language, including the retrieval and production of appropriate spoken or written forms. Additionally, this activity revisits idioms from previous exercises, allowing learners to practice and learn new idioms in a relaxed setting. High success rates provide learners with a sense of achievement and satisfaction.

These activities are designed to raise learners' awareness of the universality and variations of conceptual metaphors by exploring idiomatic expressions across multilingual and multicultural contexts. As Deignan, Gabrys, and Solska (1997) noted, this approach greatly enhances learners' acquisition and formation of idiomatic expressions.

3.2.6. Activity 6: Discovering the Universality of Conceptual Metaphors

This activity underscores that certain conceptual metaphors may be shared across various cultures and languages due to similarities in experiences and perceptions. First, learners are instructed to work in groups to find equivalent words for idioms. The instructor then provides another exercise and asks the learners to compare idioms with similar meanings in English and Vietnamese. After sorting Vietnamese expressions into appropriate groups based on their underlying conceptual metaphors, learners identify similarities between the two languages and add their equivalent expressions.

3.2.7. Activity 7: Discovering Cultural Variations in Conceptual Metaphors

In addition to universality, cultural variations in metaphors also exist. English and Vietnamese, for example, may exhibit different conceptual metaphors. Moreover, one language may possess conceptual metaphors that do not exist in another. For instance, while the metaphor "sadness is blue" is common in English, as seen in expressions like "feeling blue," "baby blues," and "Monday morning blues," it does not exist in Vietnamese. English language learners often find it challenging to comprehend and recall idioms with conceptual metaphors that differ from those in their native language. Therefore, instructors must raise learners' awareness of these differences and help them apply conceptual metaphors to understand target idioms.

For this activity, instructors can explain to learners why such differences exist between the two languages and cultures. Knowledge of etymology, as well as different lifestyles and medical ideologies in each country, is necessary to provide adequate explanations (Nguyen, 2012).

3.2.8. Activity 8: Picture This!

Learners play this game in groups of five. Each member receives two cards and is asked to keep them private. Each card contains an idiom previously studied. Learners take turns mimicking or drawing to illustrate the literal meaning of the idioms for their group to guess. The imagery in each idiom should be easy to depict through drawing or acting. For example, "happy as a clam at high tide" could be illustrated by drawing a smiling clam or mimicking two hands as clam shells. The first group to complete the game wins.

This activity is based on the experimental findings of Boers, Lindstromberg, Littlemore, Stengers, and Eyckmans (2008). Visualization and pantomime have been shown to enhance memory retention of meanings. To complete the task, each learner must consciously think of an appropriate drawing or pantomime to illustrate the idiom's meaning. Apparent use of images and body gestures to depict meanings can stimulate the dual-coding process, particularly for learners whose learning styles do not

naturally generate sufficient mental imagery from previous activities. This conscious effort is believed to benefit learners' comprehension and memory.

At the end of the lesson, the instructor can ask learners to work in pairs to “retell” a story about an extremely happy or sad experience shared earlier. This time, they should incorporate as many idioms as possible. Finally, learners compare the first version (before learning metaphors and idioms) with the second version (after learning them) and evaluate the effectiveness of using idiomatic language.

Traditionally, metaphors were viewed as mere decorative tools used by poets to embellish their language. The advent of cognitive linguistics has “revolutionized” the understanding of metaphors. Metaphors are no longer considered purely linguistic tools but are studied as cognitive instruments that shape language, thought, and action (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kovecses, 2002). Metaphors are believed to be pervasive in everyday language, with native speakers using them to convey abstract concepts such as emotions and time. This paper aims to address this gap, at least partially, by providing a multilingual analysis of metaphors of happiness across three unrelated languages. The Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) serves as the analytical framework for this study. Thus, the methodological tools provided by Conceptual Metaphor Theory, such as “conceptual metaphor,” “linguistic metaphor,” and “cognitive mapping,” are utilized to analyze existing data.

Metaphors have a long history. Traditionally, they were seen as purely linguistic phenomena, a language issue, and “extraordinary” tools used by poets to enrich language. One of the earliest philosophers, Aristotle stated that metaphors were rhetorical tools to evoke emotions. However, the traditional definition was challenged with the rise of Cognitive Linguistics in the 1970s. Since then, studies have focused on how human conceptual systems are organized. One area of interest in linguistics is related to metaphors. Scholars like Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Kovecses (2002) have “revolutionized” our understanding of metaphors. Based on linguistic data, they demonstrated that metaphors are not merely language tools used by poets but are central to language, thought, and action, shaping how we think and act. For them, metaphor involves conceptual mapping from a source domain to a target domain, where elements of the source correspond to elements of the target. These cognitive correspondences allow us to think about the target domain in terms of the source domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff & Turner, 1989).

4. Research Findings

4.1. Enhancing Interest in Learning a Second Language

Fostering learner engagement and sustained interest is fundamental to successful second language acquisition, as these factors drive motivation and improve educational outcomes. This study assessed the impact of a cognitive-based teaching approach on learner interest by surveying 20 students before and after participating in a structured language course. The survey employed targeted criteria to measure interest levels, with the results analyzed using percentage changes and T-tests to confirm statistical significance.

The analysis of the survey data revealed a pronounced positive shift in students' attitudes after exposure to the cognitive linguistic approach. Many students reported that learning a second language became more enjoyable and approachable. The cognitive approach facilitated more effective language processing and encouraged learners to view language learning as an organized and logical system. More importantly, this methodology reframed language acquisition as an ongoing journey, sparking curiosity and fostering a resilient, growth-oriented mindset.

Specifically, the percentage of students who found language learning to be problem-solving-oriented and accessible increased significantly, from 40% to 80%, with a T-test value of 3.56 ($p < 0.01$), indicating a meaningful enhancement. The perception of language as a logical and comprehensible system also rose from 45% to 85%, with a T-test value of 3.78 ($p < 0.01$). This change signifies improving learners' comprehension and ability to internalize language structures effectively.

The most substantial improvement was observed in students' perception of language learning as a journey of exploration, which increased from 50% to 90%, supported by a T-test value of 4.15 ($p < 0.001$). This result indicates that the cognitive approach successfully instilled a sense of discovery and active engagement, essential for sustaining interest. Additionally, students reported finding it more

accessible to overcome the inherent challenges of language learning, with an increase from 30% to 70% and a T-test value of 2.67 ($p < 0.05$), showcasing the approach's effectiveness in addressing learning difficulties. The data also highlighted a notable rise in motivation, as the percentage of students who felt encouraged to be diligent and persistent surged from 42% to 88%, with a highly significant T-test value of 4.23 ($p < 0.001$).

Table 1.
Enhancing interest in learning a second language.

Evaluation criteria	% Before participation	% After participation	Significance (p)	T-test value (t)
The cognitive approach helps me solve second language problems easily	40%	80%	$p < 0.01$	3.56
The cognitive approach enables learners to view and understand language better	45%	85%	$p < 0.01$	3.78
The cognitive approach makes me see second language learning as a journey of discovery	50%	90%	$p < 0.001$	4.15
The cognitive approach makes me feel that learning a second language is an endless path with always something new to learn	35%	75%	$p < 0.05$	2.89
The cognitive approach makes me feel that learning a second language is smooth and understandable, like problem-solving	38%	78%	$p < 0.01$	3.47
The cognitive approach helps me easily overcome the challenging and frustrating aspects of language learning	30%	70%	$p < 0.05$	2.67
The cognitive approach motivates me to be more diligent and persistent in second language learning	42%	88%	$p < 0.001$	4.23
The cognitive approach makes learning a second language feel like a source of entertainment	33%	68%	$p < 0.05$	2.75

The data presented in Table 1 underscore the substantial positive impact of a cognitive-based teaching approach on learners' interest and engagement in second language learning. The statistically significant T-test values demonstrate that this approach effectively enhances learners' perspectives on language acquisition, making it a more structured and logical process and a stimulating and rewarding experience.

4.2. On the Ability to Synthesize Thinking

The cognitive approach in language instruction not only aids in learning and memory retention but also plays a pivotal role in enhancing learners' ability to synthesize thinking. Synthesis thinking refers to connecting distinct language elements into a cohesive whole, enabling learners to use language more flexibly and precisely. After implementing the cognitive approach, survey results (Table 2) revealed substantial progress in learners' synthesis thinking capabilities. Notably, the percentage of students who found it easier to build a coherent language system from separate components rose from 38% before participation to 75% afterward, supported by a T-test value 3.00 ($p < 0.01$). This underscores the effectiveness of the cognitive approach in helping learners organize and synthesize language information more effectively. Moreover, the mental approach significantly enhanced the ability to transition from vocabulary to more complex grammatical structures. Only 42% of students initially expressed confidence in this area, but after the course, this figure increased to 80%, with a T-test value of 3.20 ($p < 0.01$). This suggests that the cognitive approach redefined grammar learning, making it a more interconnected and comprehensible process than a set of isolated rules.

The results also highlighted improvements in the learners' ability to arrange and integrate smaller, independent language components into a structured grammatical system. This ability rose from 35% to 72%, with a T-test value of 2.60 ($p < 0.05$). Additionally, learners reported that the cognitive approach facilitated word positioning and the identification of complex structures in the second language. This was reflected in an increase from 40% to 78% and a T-test value of 3.10 ($p < 0.01$). Interestingly, the approach also made learning more engaging, with learners likening it to the experience of watching a captivating television series that demands synthesis and exploration. The percentage of students who resonated with this idea increased from 33% before participation to 70% after, with a T-test value of 2.50 ($p < 0.05$). This demonstrates that the cognitive approach fosters synthesis thinking and promotes enthusiasm and sustained interest in language learning.

Overall, these results affirm that the cognitive approach has a clear, positive impact on learners' ability to synthesize thinking. Its application in second language instruction can significantly enhance learners' ability to process, organize, and apply language effectively in real-life communication.

Table 2.

On the ability to synthesize thinking.

Evaluation criteria	% Before participation	% After participation	Significance (p)	T-test value (t)
The cognitive approach helps me build a content system from elements and use them to create a complete language idea	38%	75%	$p < 0.01$	3.00
The cognitive approach makes it easier for me to move from vocabulary to grammar structures in the second language	42%	80%	$p < 0.01$	3.20
The cognitive approach helps me arrange small, separate language components flexibly into the grammatical system	35%	72%	$p < 0.05$	2.60
The cognitive approach makes it easier and more flexible for me to position words and recognize complex structures in the second language	40%	78%	$p < 0.01$	3.10
The cognitive approach makes me feel that learning a second language is like watching an engaging TV series that requires synthesis and exploration	33%	70%	$p < 0.05$	2.50

Table 2 illustrates significant improvements in learners' synthesis thinking abilities, supported by T-test values indicating statistical significance. These findings validate the cognitive approach's effectiveness in developing comprehensive language skills and enhancing the learning experience.

4.3. Perception of the Benefits of Learning Vietnamese Idioms through a Cognitive Linguistic Approach

Integrating a cognitive linguistic approach in teaching Vietnamese idioms has demonstrated significant advantages for language learners, particularly in fostering their understanding and practical application of grammar and developing adaptable and nuanced language skills. The following data, presented in Table 3, outline the perceptual changes in students before and after implementing this teaching approach, accompanied by T-test results to identify statistically significant differences.

Table 3.

Perception of the benefits of learning vietnamese idioms through a cognitive linguistic approach.

Benefits of learning a second language through cognitive techniques	% Before participation	% After participation	Significance (p)	T-test value (t)
The cognitive approach helps me easily revive grammar	36%	74%	$p < 0.01$	3.05
The cognitive approach helps me easily discover guided language rules	40%	78%	$p < 0.01$	3.15
The cognitive approach helps me easily eliminate habitual language patterns through behavior	34%	69%	$p < 0.05$	2.55
The cognitive approach helps me develop error analysis skills	38%	76%	$p < 0.01$	3.10
The cognitive approach helps me easily apply grammar contextually	42%	81%	$p < 0.01$	3.25
The cognitive approach helps me understand grammar rules clearly before practicing them in meaningful contexts	39%	77%	$p < 0.01$	3.00

The results in Table 3 highlight a marked improvement in learners' perception of the benefits of employing the cognitive approach to language learning, particularly in terms of understanding and applying grammar. For instance, before the intervention, only 36% of learners felt confident in their ability to revive their understanding of grammar. At the same time, after the course, this figure rose to 74%, accompanied by a T-test value of 3.05 ($p < 0.01$), signifying a statistically significant shift. Similarly, learners' ability to discover guided language rules independently showed considerable growth, with an increase from 40% to 78% post-intervention, supported by a T-test value of 3.15 ($p < 0.01$). This finding underscores how the cognitive approach facilitates a deeper, more autonomous engagement with language rules, moving beyond rote learning to active discovery and comprehension.

Notably, the cognitive method also enhanced learners' capability to break habitual language patterns, which is critical for avoiding the automatic repetition of learned behaviors that may not align with advanced language proficiency. The percentage of students who recognized this benefit increased from 34% to 69%, with a T-test value of 2.55 ($p < 0.05$). This shift suggests that the approach fosters a more reflective and adaptive language-learning process.

Error analysis skills, a vital aspect of language mastery, also saw significant gains, as indicated by the growth from 38% to 76% of learners acknowledging this benefit, with a T-test value of 3.10 ($p < 0.01$). This demonstrates the cognitive approach's effectiveness in helping learners identify errors and understand their nature and how to correct them.

The ability to apply grammar contextually—a critical component of language fluency—improved from 42% to 81%, as indicated by a T-test value of 3.25 ($p < 0.01$). This suggests that students who engage with language through conceptual metaphors and cognitive techniques are better equipped to use grammar fluidly and accurately within various contexts.

Lastly, understanding grammar rules before applying them in meaningful situations is a hallmark of effective language learning. The proportion of students who felt confident in this ability increased from 39% to 77%, with a T-test value of 3.00 ($p < 0.01$). This outcome highlights how the cognitive linguistic approach supports learners in moving beyond surface-level memorization to achieve more profound, integrated language skills.

The survey results prove that a cognitive linguistic approach significantly enhances the learning experience by promoting a more profound and adaptable understanding of language. These findings validate the potential of such methods to advance language instruction, suggesting that integrating

cognitive strategies could contribute substantially to learners' success in understanding idioms and applying grammar within a broader linguistic framework.

4.4. Strategies for Learning a Second Language

Effective language learning strategies are critical for enhancing both the learning process and communication skills. This study analyzed changes in students' use of language learning strategies before and after implementing a cognitive-based approach, revealing significant improvements across various aspects. Survey results showed that students' ability to predict language accurately increased notably, with percentages rising from 35% before participation to 73% afterward. This improvement was supported by a T-test value of 3.05 ($p < 0.01$), indicating a statistically significant enhancement. Additionally, learners reported a stronger motivation to engage in communication or learn from their community, reflected in an increase from 38% to 79%, with a T-test value of 3.20 ($p < 0.01$).

The cognitive approach also increased learners' confidence and reduced inhibition when communicating or learning within a community. The percentage of uninhibited students rose from 33% to 68%, supported by a T-test value of 2.50 ($p < 0.05$), demonstrating a meaningful difference. Preparedness and the tendency to seek out language patterns significantly improved, climbing from 40% to 82%, with a T-test value of 3.30 ($p < 0.01$). Students also reported a greater focus on language practice, with the percentage increasing from 41% to 83%, yielding a T-test value of 3.40 ($p < 0.01$). Furthermore, the ability to monitor both their own speech and that of others improved from 36% to 75%, supported by a T-test value of 3.10 ($p < 0.01$). The percentage of learners who frequently paid attention to meaning during communication also rose from 39% to 80%, with a T-test value of 3.25 ($p < 0.01$).

Table 4.
Strategies for learning a second language.

Second language learning strategies	% Before participation	% After participation	Significance (p)	T-test value (t)
I find myself able to predict language accurately	35%	73%	$p < 0.01$	3.05
I feel strongly motivated to communicate or learn from a community	38%	79%	$p < 0.01$	3.20
I am not inhibited when communicating or learning from a community	33%	68%	$p < 0.05$	2.50
I am well-prepared and frequently look for patterns in the language	40%	82%	$p < 0.01$	3.30
I focus on practicing the language	41%	83%	$p < 0.01$	3.40
I have the ability to monitor my speech and that of others	36%	75%	$p < 0.01$	3.10
I frequently pay attention to meaning in communication	39%	80%	$p < 0.01$	3.25

Table 4 clearly illustrates significant positive changes in learners' application of language learning strategies following the adoption of the cognitive approach. The T-test values indicate statistically significant differences, confirming that this method effectively enhances learners' motivation, practical language skills, and speech-monitoring abilities during second language acquisition.

5. Research Implications and Conclusion

This study reinforces that applying a cognitive linguistic approach to second language teaching, especially in teaching Vietnamese idioms, delivers significant learner benefits (Hang, 2020). The empirical evidence obtained through surveys and T-test analyses reveals a marked improvement in learners' engagement, synthesis thinking abilities, and the implementation of language learning

strategies post-exposure to this teaching method (Nasiadka, 2009). These enhancements extend beyond simple rote memorization and comprehension, contributing to a deeper, more integrated understanding and practical application of idioms in real-world communication scenarios (Jackendoff & Aaron, 1991).

A notable implication from the study is that the cognitive approach enriches language acquisition by transforming the learning process into an engaging and meaningful experience (Chubaryan & Vardanyan, 2024). By perceiving language as a logical and interconnected system through the lens of cognitive mappings, learners can reshape their understanding of the learning journey (Yasrebi, 2022). This transformation shifts language learning from a challenging, isolated task to an intriguing exploration where each element is connected to broader cognitive structures (Mitchell et al., 2004). Such a shift is particularly valuable in second language instruction, where the sustainability of interest and motivation is often a determining factor for long-term persistence and success. Inspiring and motivated learners are more likely to invest time and effort, leading to more profound language proficiency and more excellent retention over time (Habley et al. 2012).

Additionally, this research underscores that the cognitive approach provides a strong foundation for learning idioms and can be extended to various aspects of language learning, including vocabulary acquisition, grammar mastery, and enhancing communication skills. The approach's emphasis on understanding the metaphorical and conceptual basis of language encourages learners to perceive language patterns, which can enhance their ability to infer meanings, create connections, and apply linguistic knowledge more flexibly. For educators and curriculum designers, this presents a clear recommendation to incorporate cognitive-based teaching activities into curricula. Such activities should be designed to stimulate learners' analytical and creative thinking, facilitating an environment that is both interactive and cognitively enriching.

Moreover, the cognitive approach's benefits in developing synthesis thinking skills cannot be overstated. The findings indicate that students experienced significant growth in their ability to piece together language components and construct coherent linguistic structures. This skill is critical for higher-level language use, where nuanced understanding and articulation of ideas require more than just a surface-level grasp of vocabulary and grammar. By fostering this type of deep cognitive engagement, the approach supports learners in mastering complex linguistic concepts and applying them effectively in diverse communication settings.

The implications of this research also highlight the importance of incorporating diverse teaching strategies that go beyond traditional methods. While conventional language instruction often focuses on memorization and repetitive practice, the cognitive approach emphasizes active engagement with language's deeper structures and meanings. This not only aids in better comprehension and application but also prepares learners for independent language use, equipping them with the tools to adapt and respond to new linguistic challenges creatively and confidently.

In conclusion, the study provides substantial evidence that the cognitive approach is not merely an alternative but a superior method for fostering deeper language understanding and application. The significant gains observed in students' interest, cognitive synthesis abilities, and strategic use of language suggest that integrating cognitive linguistics into teaching practices could redefine how second languages are taught and learned. These insights open up new avenues for curriculum development, advocating for a harmonious blend of theoretical linguistic concepts and practical teaching methodologies. Such integration can elevate the quality of language education, ensuring that learners are equipped not just with language knowledge but with the ability to use it effectively and adaptively in real-life contexts. This approach holds promise for improving language instruction not only in Vietnam but also in broader international educational settings, fostering more competent, confident, and culturally aware language users.

Copyright:

© 2024 by the authors. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

References

- [1] Al-Hamdun, S., & Al Mozari, S. (2024). Exploring the contribution of film and music in learning English idioms. *Research Studies in English Language Teaching and Learning*, 2(1), 12-22.
- [2] Aljebreen, S., & Alzamil, A. (2022). The Impact of Using Short Films on Learning Idioms in EFL Classes. *World Journal of English Language*, 12(7), 250-250.
- [3] Boers, F., & Lindstromberg, S. (Eds.). (2008). *Cognitive linguistic approaches to teaching vocabulary and phraseology* (p. 355). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- [4] Boers, F., Demecheleer, M., & Eyckmans, J. (2004). Cross-cultural variation as a variable in comprehending and remembering figurative idioms. *European Journal of English Studies*, 8(3), 375-388.
- [5] Chen Hsieh, J. S., Wu, W. C. V., & Marek, M. W. (2017). Using the flipped classroom to enhance EFL learning. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 30(1-2), 1-21.
- [6] Chen, Y. C., & Lai, H. L. (2013). Teaching English idioms as metaphors through cognitive-oriented methods: A case in an EFL writing class. *English Language Teaching*, 6(6), 13-20.
- [7] Chubaryan, A., & Vardanyan, M. (2024). Exploring the Cognitive Dimensions of Language Acquisition. *Armenian Folia Anglistika*, 20(1 (29)), 13-24.
- [8] Clark, J. M., & Paivio, A. (1991). Dual coding theory and education. *Educational psychology review*, 3, 149-210.
- [9] Deignan, A., Gabryś, D., & Solska, A. (1997). Teaching English metaphors using cross-linguistic awareness-raising activities. *ELT journal*, 51(4), 352-360.
- [10] Ellis, C. (2021). *Happy Now: Let Playfulness Lift Your Load and Renew Your Spirit*. Rose Publishing.
- [11] Giang, D. N. (2023). Vietnamese concepts of love through idioms: A conceptual metaphor approach. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 13(4), 855-866.
- [12] Habley, W. R., Bloom, J. L., & Robbins, S. (2012). *Increasing persistence: Research-based strategies for college student success*. John Wiley & Sons.
- [13] Hang, N. T. B. (2020). Teaching Vietnamese comparative idioms for foreigners in the approach of cognitive linguistics. *language*, 1, 122.
- [14] Hang, N. T. B. (2022). Applying Cognitive Linguistics to Teaching Vietnamese Idioms: Evidence From Teaching Vietnamese to Foreigners in Vietnam. *Przestrzeń Społeczna (Social Space)*, 22(3), 385-413.
- [15] Jackendoff, R., & Aaron, D. (1991). More than cool reason: A field guide to poetic metaphor by George Lakoff and Mark Turner. *Language*, 67(2), 320-338.
- [16] Kövecses (2002), *Metaphor a practical introduction*, Oxford University press
- [17] Kövecses, L. Z. (2002). Emotion concepts: Social constructionism and cognitive linguistics. In *The verbal communication of emotions* (pp. 117-132). Psychology Press.
- [18] Kövecses, Z. (2000). The scope of metaphor. *Topics in English Linguistics*, 30, 79-92.
- [19] Kövecses, Z. (2006). *Language, mind, and culture: A practical introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- [20] Lakoff, G. (1993). How metaphor structures dreams: the theory of conceptual metaphor applied to dream analysis. *Dreaming*, 3(2), 77.
- [21] Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). The metaphorical structure of the human conceptual system. *Cognitive science*, 4(2), 195-208.
- [22] Lakoff, G., & Turner, M. (2009). *More than cool reason: A field guide to poetic metaphor*. University of Chicago press.
- [23] Liddicoat, A. J., & Scarino, A. (2013). *Intercultural language teaching and learning*. John Wiley & Sons.
- [24] Lin, Y. R. (2023). An idiom-driven learning strategy to improve low achievers' science comprehension, motivation, and argumentation. *Computers & Education*, 195, 104710.
- [25] Mäntylä, K. (2004). Idioms and language users: the effect of the characteristics of idioms on their recognition and interpretation by native and non-native speakers of English (No. 13). Jyväskylän yliopisto.
- [26] Mitchell, R. K., Busenitz, L., Lant, T., McDougall, P. P., Morse, E. A., & Smith, J. B. (2004). The distinctive and inclusive domain of entrepreneurial cognition research. *Entrepreneurship theory and practice*, 28(6), 505-518.
- [27] Nasiadka, M. (2009). Some Arguments Provided by Lakoff, Johnson, Turner and Direct Experience in Support of the Conduit Metaphor. *ANGLICA-An International Journal of English Studies*, (18), 109-118.
- [28] Ngoc, P. T. B., & Thanh, T. M. (2019). The application of conceptual metaphors to teaching English idioms to English-major students in Viet Nam. *Theory and practice in language studies*, 9(6), 610-619.
- [29] Nguyen Duc Ton (2010), *Cultural and ethnic characteristics of language and thinking*, Encyclopedia Publishing House.
- [30] Nippold, M. A. (1991). Evaluating and enhancing idiom comprehension in language-disordered students. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 22(3), 100-106.
- [31] Parker, T. M. (2023). Eliminating Idioms, Slang, and Unnecessary Wording from High-Stakes Examinations in Nursing Education. *Teachers College, Columbia University*.
- [32] Pham, N. T. B. (2017). Teaching English idioms of happiness and sadness through conceptual metaphors in Vietnamese context. *SOCIAL SCIENCES*, 7(1).
- [33] Sadler, D. R. (2014). Beyond feedback: Developing student capability in complex appraisal. In *Approaches to assessment that enhance learning in higher education* (pp. 45-60). Routledge.
- [34] Shen, H. (2023). The Application of the Inductive Method in Secondary School English Teaching. *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 8, 87-92.

- [35] Tran, T. Q., & Duong, T. M. (2018). The effectiveness of the intercultural language communicative teaching model for EFL learners. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 3, 1-17.
- [36] Tukhtaeva, K., & Razzakova, N. (2021). The role of cognitive linguistic approach in implementing idioms into english language teaching process. *South Asian journal of marketing & management research*, 11(6), 10-17.
- [37] Vasiljevic, Z. (2011). Using conceptual metaphors and L1 definitions in teaching idioms to non-native speakers. *Journal of Asia TEFL*, 8(3).
- [38] Wang, W., Xu, K., Niu, H., & Miao, X. (2020). [Retracted] Emotion Recognition of Students Based on Facial Expressions in Online Education Based on the Perspective of Computer Simulation. *Complexity*, 2020(1), 4065207.
- [39] Yasrebi, S. (2022). "We Are the Stories": Narrative Competence and Cognitive Mapping as a Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in the Education of Emergent Bilinguals. State University of New York at Albany.