



Teachers' experiences in using figurative language and idiomatic expressions to enhance learners' writing skills: Bases for training workshop

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Abstract

This study aimed at determining the teachers' experiences in using figurative language and idiomatic expressions to enhance learners' writing skills as bases for training workshop in a secondary school in the District of Janiway 1, for the school year 2025-2026. The commonly used figurative languages were simile, metaphor, and personification, while the commonly used idiomatic expressions were "a piece of cake", "break the ice", and "hit the nail on the head". For teachers' experiences in figurative language: develop descriptive and expressive writing, increase learner engagement, and develop creative expression, while for idiomatic expressions, they were: improve understanding of natural language use, increase learners' interest, and develop vocabulary and language expressions. Hindering and facilitating factors were also identified for both figurative language and idiomatic expressions. Based on the findings, the researcher proposed the development of a training workshop designed to equip teachers with effective strategies to integrate expressive language in writing.

Keywords: Teachers' experiences, figurative language, idiomatic expressions, writing skills, training workshop

Introduction

A fundamental language skill, such as writing, enables learners to effectively communicate ideas, experiences, and emotions. In English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts, writing instruction often emphasizes on essential elements, including grammatical accuracy and structural correctness. However, an excessive focus on form may limit learners' ability to express ideas creatively and meaningfully, particularly in writing tasks that require imagination and personal expression (Hanauer, 2021)^[21].

Figurative language and idiomatic expressions are important components of expressive language used in writing. Figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, imagery, and personification, allows writers to convey abstract ideas and emotions in vivid and imaginative ways, whereas idiomatic expressions contribute to enhancing the naturalness, fluency, and cultural authenticity in written discourse. Recent studies have reported that these forms of non-literal language play a significant role in enhancing learners' ability to produce engaging and meaningful written texts (Boers, *et al.*, 2021; Zhou, *et al.*, 2022)^[7,46].

Teachers play a crucial role in facilitating learners' writing development. In classroom practice, teachers play a vital part in facilitating the development of learners' writing where their instructional practices, beliefs, and perceptions directly influence how writing is taught and the engagement of learners with the English language. Reyes and Padilla (2021)^[35] emphasize that English teachers, when teaching writing, make decisions to integrate figurative language and idiomatic expressions into classroom instruction. Such decisions are often influenced by curriculum requirements, teachers' professional perceptions, experiences, and perceived challenges in teaching writing skills. Even though the instructional value of figurative language and idiomatic expressions is widely recognized, teachers often still encounter difficulties in effectively using these language features. Challenges, including but not limited to instructional time, learners' language proficiency levels, and lack of targeted professional training, may all contribute to hindering teachers' efforts to integrate expressive language into writing instruction. Therefore, examining teachers' experiences, challenges, and how they overcome the

challenges in using figurative language and idiomatic expressions is essential in identifying instructional gaps and professional development needs.

To address the above-discussed concerns, this study examined teachers' experiences in using figurative language and idiomatic expressions to enhance learners' writing skills. The findings of the study aim to serve as bases for the development of a training workshop. The training workshop would provide a strong foundation in supporting English teachers in strengthening writing instruction through expressive language use.

Objectives of the Study

This study was conducted to determine teachers' experiences in using figurative language and idiomatic expressions to enhance learners' writing skills as bases for training workshop in one of the secondary schools in the District of Janiway 1, Province of Iloilo, for the school year 2025-2026.

Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What figurative language and idiomatic expressions are commonly used by English teachers to enhance learners' writing skills?
2. What are the experiences of English teachers in using figurative language to enhance learners' writing skills?
3. What are the experiences of English teachers in using idiomatic expressions to enhance learners' writing skills?
4. What are the hindering factors experienced by English teachers in using figurative language?
5. What are the hindering factors experienced by English teachers in using idiomatic expressions?
6. What are the facilitating factors employed by English teachers to overcome the hindering factors in using figurative language?
7. What are the facilitating factors employed by English teachers to overcome the hindering factors in using idiomatic expressions?
8. What training workshop can be organized on the basis of the results of the study?

Theoretical Underpinning

The present research is grounded in established linguistic and cognitive theories that explain how figurative language and idiomatic expressions function in language learning and how they contribute to the development of writing skills. Specifically, this study drew on Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the Lexical Approach, and Usage-based Theory. Together, these frameworks provide a coherent theoretical basis for examining non-literal language as a cognitive, linguistic, and expressive resource in ESL writing.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) states that metaphor is not solely a linguistic device but a fundamental cognitive mechanism through which individuals understand abstract concepts (Littlemore, 2021) ^[26]. According to this theory, people conceptualize abstract experiences by mapping them onto more concrete domains, which are reflected in everyday language use. Metaphors, therefore, shape not only language but also thought and meanings.

In educational contexts, Conceptual Metaphor Theory provides a framework for understanding the role of figurative language in writing. Studies have shown that metaphorical competence supports learners' ability to express complex ideas and emotions more effectively in written texts (Zhou, *et al.*, 2022) ^[46]. Figurative language allows writers to move beyond literal expression, hence resulting in richer and more engaging writing.

From a teaching perspective, Conceptual Metaphor Theory helps explain why teachers emphasize figurative language in writing instruction. Their experiences in teaching figurative language are shaped by how learners respond to metaphorical explanations and how such language supports idea development in writing.

The Lexical Approach emphasizes that language learning involves acquiring chunks of language rather than isolated grammatical structures (Nation, 2022; Boers, 2021) ^[7, 31]. This approach highlights the importance of formulaic language, including idiomatic expressions, collocations, and fixed phrases, in achieving fluency and natural language use.

In writing instruction, the Lexical Approach supports the teaching of idiomatic expressions as essential components of effective written communication. Research indicates that learners who use idiomatic and formulaic expressions demonstrate greater lexical richness and stylistic maturity in writing (Blinova, 2021; Nation, 2022) ^[6, 31]. Idioms contribute to authenticity and help learners approximate native-like language use.

Teachers' experiences in teaching idioms often involve balancing explicit instruction with contextualized practice. This theory explains why teachers may perceive idiomatic instruction as both valuable and challenging, particularly when learners struggle with non-literal meanings.

Usage-based Theory asserts that language learning occurs through repeated exposure to meaningful language use in context (Ellis, 2021) ^[17]. According to this theory, linguistic knowledge emerges gradually from learners' experiences with language, rather than from the internalization of abstract rules alone. Frequency, salience, and meaningful use play key roles in language development.

Usage-based Theory underscores the importance of repeated and contextualized practice. Figurative language and idiomatic expressions become part of learners' writing repertoire through consistent exposure and use in meaningful writing tasks. Teachers' instructional practices, therefore, directly influence learners' opportunities to encounter and practice expressive language.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted to determine teachers' experiences in using figurative language and idiomatic expressions to enhance learners' writing skills as bases for a training workshop in one of the schools in the District of January 1, Province of Iloilo, for the school year 2025–2026. The participants in the study were the eight (8) English teachers from one of the secondary schools in the District of January 1 in the Third Congressional District of Iloilo.

The study focused on teachers who meet the following criteria: those who teach English at the junior level and are involved in teaching writing lessons that include the use of figurative language and idiomatic expressions. These criteria ensure that participants possess an instructional background relevant to the study's focus.

The scope of the study was limited to examining teachers' experiences regarding the use of figurative language and idiomatic expressions, the challenges they encounter in the teaching process, and the facilitating factors they use to overcome these challenges. Teachers' experiences in this study were examined through their reported responses and are not intended to represent lived experiences.

A researcher-made in-depth interview guide was used as the primary instrument for data collection. The instrument was designed to gather qualitative data and was subjected to content-and-face validation by experts in the field of English and research prior to its administration.

The study did not include classroom observations or experimental interventions, nor did it directly assess learners' writing performance.

The data were gathered and analyzed using thematic analysis.

Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research method using an in-depth interview guide to examine teachers' experiences, hindering factors, and facilitating factors in using figurative language and idiomatic expressions to enhance learners' writing skills.

According to Moore (2022) ^[29], descriptive research methods are intended to describe or explain phenomena as they naturally occur rather than to determine cause-and-effect relationships. Researchers use descriptive methods to gather data that illustrate patterns, practices, and experiences of participants. In this study, the descriptive method was appropriate as it aimed at describing teachers' perceptions, instructional practices, and challenges related to the use of figurative language and idiomatic expressions in writing instruction.

Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative research design using the phenomenological approach. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth understanding of complex educational phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2021). According to Delve (2022) ^[13, 15], phenomenological research is a form of qualitative study used to understand and describe the fundamental characteristics of a phenomenon. The technique examines human everyday interactions while disregarding the researchers' prior beliefs about the subject. The responses of the participants to the questions through a phenomenological approach were analyzed in the study. An inquiry was used to obtain information on teachers' experiences in teaching figurative language and idiomatic expressions to enhance learners' writing skills in one of the secondary schools in the District of January 1.

Sampling Design

Purposive sampling was used in selecting the participants in the study. This sampling design allowed the researcher to intentionally select English teachers who were directly involved in teaching writing and who had experience in integrating figurative language and idiomatic expressions in their instruction.

Respondents

The participants in the study were eight (8) English teachers in one of the secondary schools in the District of January 1 during the School Year 2025–2026.

The selection of the participants in the study was based on a strategy called “purposive sampling”. This sampling technique was used to select participants who possess characteristics relevant to the objectives of the study and who can provide meaningful data.

The study focused on teachers who meet the following criteria: those who teach English at the Junior High School level and have experience in teaching English writing lessons that involve figurative language and idiomatic expressions. These criteria ensured that the participants had sufficient instructional experience related to the focus of the study.

In order to ensure confidentiality and to facilitate the presentation of responses in the discussion of the findings, the teacher participants were identified as Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8.

Data Gathering Instrument

The researcher used a researcher-made in-depth interview guide as the primary research instrument. The instrument was designed to gather data on teachers’ experiences in using figurative language and idiomatic expressions to enhance learners’ writing skills as bases for a training workshop.

The instrument was composed of eight (8) questions on the teachers’ commonly used figurative language and idiomatic expressions, their experiences, the hindering factors, and the facilitating factors they used to overcome the challenges in teaching these expressions.

Data Gathering Procedures

The data-gathering procedure began after the approval of the study by the panel of experts. A formal request letter was sent to the school head to seek permission to conduct the study. Upon approval, the researcher coordinated with the identified English teachers and scheduled a convenient time for the data collection.

After securing all necessary permissions, the researcher administered the research instrument to the selected participants. The participants were given clear instructions and were informed about the purpose of the study. They were also assured that their responses would be treated with the utmost confidentiality and used solely for research purposes. The researcher ensured that all participants were able to complete the instrument within the agreed schedule.

After the data were collected, the responses were organized and prepared for analysis. The data were carefully reviewed, encoded, and categorized according to the objectives of the study. The researcher then proceeded with the appropriate method of data analysis to identify patterns and insights relevant to the research questions.

Data Analyses

The data gathered for the study were transcribed, analyzed, and interpreted using thematic analyses. According to Blanza (2022) [5], thematic analysis is “a qualitative analytic method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative responses. It minimally organizes and describes a data set in rich detail”. In addition, this method is widely used in qualitative studies to analyze participants’ experiences systematically.

Therefore, the researcher followed the six-step thematic analysis as it was considered the most influential and widely accepted approach. These steps included becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and reviewing the report.

The six-step framework begins with familiarizing the data to understand them deeply. Next, initial codes are generated by identifying key segments of the data. Then, themes are developed by grouping related codes into broader patterns. In the reviewing themes step, these themes are refined to ensure consistency and accuracy. Afterward, each theme is defined and named to clearly capture its essence. Finally, the analysis concludes with writing the report, where findings are interpreted and supported by data excerpts. This structured approach ensures rigorous, transparent, and systematic analysis.

Summary

This study aimed at determining teachers’ experiences in using figurative language and idiomatic expressions to enhance learners’ writing skills as bases for training workshop.

This qualitative research involved eight teachers teaching English in one of the schools in the district of January 1 during the school year 2025-2026.

The instrument used was a researcher-made in-depth interview guide to identify the teachers’ experiences in using figurative language and idiomatic expressions, the commonly used expressions, hindering factors, and facilitating factors they use in applying these figurative expressions in writing instruction, and served as bases for proposing a training workshop. This instrument underwent validation from qualified experts in the fields of English and research.

To analyze the responses of the participants, the researcher used thematic analysis. Data were organized, and relevant themes were selected, coded, and discussed.

The study came up with the following findings:

The commonly used figurative languages were simile, metaphor, and personification, while the commonly used idiomatic expressions were “a piece of cake”, “break the ice”, and “hit the nail on the head”.

Teachers’ experiences in using figurative language to enhance learners’ writing skills were: develop descriptive and expressive writing, increase learner engagement, and develop creative expression; while the experiences in using idiomatic expressions were: improve understanding of natural language use, increase learners’ interest, and develop vocabulary and language expression.

The hindering factors experienced by teachers in using figurative language were: difficulty understanding abstract meanings, limited vocabulary, and limited exposure to literary texts. Whereas, in idiomatic expressions were: literal interpretation, limited exposure, and difficulty using idioms in the correct context.

The facilitating factors teachers used to overcome the challenges in teaching figurative language were the use of examples and modeling, guided writing, and use of visual aids. On the other hand, in idiomatic expressions were providing contextual explanations, guided practice, and use of realia.

Based on these findings, a training workshop was proposed to strengthen teachers' instructional practices, address the challenges encountered in teaching, and further improve learners' writing skills through the effective use of figurative language and idiomatic expressions.

Insights

Based on the findings, the following insights were drawn: Teachers use different figurative language and idiomatic expressions in writing instruction, therefore helping learners able to express ideas more clearly and creatively when exposed to non-literal language. It also indicates that writing becomes more meaningful and engaging as learners move beyond basic and literal expressions.

Instructional practices play a significant role in improving learners' writing. When learners are guided and encouraged to explore language, they become more engaged and develop confidence in expressing their ideas.

Teachers play a crucial role in improving learners' writing by guiding and facilitating the use of expressive language in instruction.

More structured instruction, increased exposure, and guided practice may help learners develop deeper comprehension and accurate application of such language in writing, since learners are not yet fully equipped with the necessary linguistic and cognitive skills to understand and use non-literal language effectively.

Appropriate teaching strategies can help learners overcome difficulties and enable them to better understand and use language more effectively in writing.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and insights arrived at in the study, the following recommendations are forwarded:

English teachers should continue to integrate figurative language and idiomatic expressions in writing instruction to enhance learners' creativity, vocabulary, and expressive communication skills.

Teachers should provide learners with more opportunities to practice using figurative language and idiomatic expressions through guided writing activities, contextual examples, and interactive classroom tasks.

Learners may be encouraged to read more literary and informational texts to increase their exposure to figurative language and idiomatic expressions and improve their understanding of expressive language use.

School heads should support English teachers by organizing professional development programs and workshops that focus on improving writing instruction and the integration of expressive language features in teaching.

DepEd officials should design training programs and instructional materials that assist teachers in teaching figurative language and idiomatic expressions more effectively in writing instruction.

The proposed training workshop, developed as a result of this study, should be implemented in order to strengthen teachers' instructional strategies in teaching figurative language and idiomatic expressions and to further enhance learners' writing skills.

Lastly, future researchers may conduct further studies on the effectiveness of figurative language and idiomatic expressions in improving learners' writing performance using different research methods and larger participant groups.

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