



A Proposed Framework for Teaching English Idiomatic Expressions Appearing in Friends to English Language Learners

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to propose a structured framework for selecting and teaching English idiomatic expressions to English language learners. The framework is intended to organize authentic audiovisual input into level-appropriate instructional materials rather than to test or demonstrate instructional effectiveness. To provide contextualized and engaging input for English language learners, the American sitcom Friends, which was popular globally, was used as educational material. Since idiomatic language is formed and used based on Western history, culture, and social background, sitcoms containing everyday Anglo-American culture and sentiments can be suitable materials for the teaching and learning of English idiomatic expressions. By analyzing the transcripts and video recordings of Friends, 277 significant vocabularies and multi-word units were extracted from the television narrative based on spoken language actually used in real conversational contexts. Among these, 124 idiomatic expressions were extracted after excluding overlapping expressions, slang, and highly specialized jargon. Expressions occurring two or more times were retained for frequency-based analysis. Based on constituent-vocabulary difficulty and semantic transparency, 42 expressions were selected and organized into elementary, intermediate, and advanced tiers. Proposed instructional applications were then developed for each level. These applications are suggestions for classroom use and were not empirically tested in the present study.

Keywords: Selection of idiomatic expressions, idiomatic expressions by grade, frequency of use, difficulty of vocabulary, direction of education.

1. Introduction

The ultimate goal of second language and foreign language education is the enhancement of learners' authentic communicative competence in diverse real-world contexts. In the field of applied linguistics and language pedagogy, the critical role of vocabulary acquisition has been widely emphasized. As noted by early lexical researchers, while very little can be conveyed without grammar, communication breaks down entirely without sufficient vocabulary (Wilkins, 1972). In traditional English language classrooms, however, vocabulary instruction has frequently focused on written lexical items, formal definitions, and isolated word lists. This traditional focus creates a notable gap when foreign language learners attempt to engage in natural spoken interaction. Spoken discourse in authentic English-speaking environments contains complex phonological features, reduction patterns, colloquial contractions, figurative language, and a vast array of idiomatic expressions (Nation, 2001). When learners lack familiarity with spoken lexical patterns and

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idiomatic usage, they face severe comprehension breakdowns in everyday conversations, even if they possess a high degree of grammatical knowledge.

Idiomatic expressions, including traditional proverbs, fixed metaphorical phrases, and conversational routines, are deeply rooted in the cultural history, social practices, and collective memory of native English speakers (Laufer, 1997). Because the semantic meaning of an idiom cannot be derived from a literal, word-by-word translation of its individual components, learners who rely solely on bilingual dictionaries often experience profound confusion. Rote memorization of isolated idiom definitions without contextual grounding fails to provide learners with an understanding of appropriate pragmatic contexts, register, and emotional nuances (Boers, 2000). Consequently, systematic and contextualized teaching methods are required to bridge the gap between dictionary definitions and authentic communicative application.

To provide authentic contextual grounding, popular media materials such as television dramas and situational comedies (sitcoms) have gained significant attention in English language teaching. Television sitcoms reflect everyday conversational interaction with high fidelity, showcasing spontaneous turns, emotional expressions, non-verbal cues, and dynamic social relationships (Taguchi, 2012). Furthermore, vocabulary used in comedy narratives closely mirrors the high-frequency lexical choices and colloquial idioms of native speakers in informal environments (Stempleski, 1992). Because television materials combine visual context, facial expressions, tone of voice, and narrative storylines, they stimulate learner interest and provide rich pragmatic input that enhances lexical retention (Tschirner, 2001).

Previous research on integrating media into English language teaching has examined various linguistic and pedagogical dimensions. Early media studies demonstrated that incorporating authentic television dialogue improves listening comprehension and phonological decoding skills among non-native speakers (Herron, 1994). Subsequent investigations analyzed the benefits of audiovisual materials for pragmatic development, showing that learners exposed to sitcom dialogues acquire a better understanding of conversational turn-taking, humor, and indirect speech acts (Rose, 2001). Other scholars evaluated the impact of subtitled media on vocabulary expansion, establishing that closed captioning supports lower-level learners in mapping spoken forms to written forms while reducing cognitive load (Baltova, 1999).

Despite these pedagogical advances, research specifically addressing the systematic selection, frequency classification, and graded instruction of idiomatic expressions extracted from popular American sitcoms remains relatively limited. Many existing media-based instructional materials present idioms in an ad-hoc manner without clear criteria regarding corpus frequency, constituent lexical difficulty, or pedagogical appropriateness for different proficiency levels (Webb, 2008). Without structured selection guidelines, language learners risk being overwhelmed by low-frequency slang or culturally obscure expressions that have little utility in broader communication (Liu, 2008). In addition, as emerging digital technologies reshape modern classrooms, integrating generative artificial intelligence tools into language teaching provides new opportunities to create contextualized explanations, adaptive exercises, and personalized learning pathways for complex idiomatic input (Wu, 2026).

Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to propose a structured instructional framework for teaching English idiomatic expressions using the globally popular American sitcom *Friends*. By conducting a systematic analysis of sitcom script transcripts and spoken dialogues, this study extracts target idiomatic expressions, evaluates their occurrence frequency, analyzes the difficulty of their constituent vocabulary, and classifies them into elementary, intermediate, and advanced instructional

tiers. Furthermore, specific pedagogical principles and contextualized teaching strategies are formulated as possible classroom applications for English language learners across different proficiency levels. Their effectiveness is not evaluated in the present study.

2. Selection and Classification of Idiomatic Expressions for English Education

Selecting media materials for English language education requires careful consideration of linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical variables. Language input presented to learners must be communicative, engaging, and culturally relevant without presenting excessive cognitive barriers or socially inappropriate content (Guillory, 1998). Although media selection criteria proposed in previous literature on listening and speaking instruction offer valuable foundational principles (Sherman, 2003), specific adjustments are necessary when evaluating materials for idiomatic vocabulary acquisition.

2.1. Drama Selection Criteria

In previous foreign language research, key criteria for selecting audiovisual educational materials included: first, capturing and maintaining learner interest; second, utilizing standard language pronunciation at an appropriate speech rate; third, reflecting contemporary culture accurately; fourth, avoiding overly specialized technical jargon; and fifth, minimizing excessive violence, explicit adult themes, or highly vulgar slang. While these general standards are valid for general listening comprehension, a refined set of criteria is needed for idiom-focused instruction to balance authentic spoken language with pedagogical utility.

To establish a rigorous selection process, five specific criteria were established for choosing an optimal sitcom corpus for English idiom instruction, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Selection criteria of sitcom materials for English idiom education

Number	Selection Criteria
1	The material must effectively reflect authentic Anglo-American culture and daily life.
2	The content must stimulate high learner motivation, engagement, and emotional resonance.
3	The dialogue should predominantly utilize standard General American spoken English.
4	Spoken language expressions, including idioms and everyday routines, should be naturally distributed.
5	The television series should be globally recognized and familiar to international learners.

Based on these established criteria, the American sitcom *Friends* was selected as the educational corpus for this study. *Friends* is a globally renowned television comedy series centering on six young adults living in New York City, navigating interpersonal relationships, career challenges, and family dynamics (Quaglio, 2009). The narrative setting offers an ideal environment for idiomatic study because the dialogue consists of high-frequency spoken English, dynamic conversational exchanges, and rich social interactions among peers. Although the show features conversational jokes and occasional informal slang, the primary language register remains accessible standard spoken General American English, satisfying all five pedagogical criteria.

2.2. Extraction and Selection of Educational Idioms

Defining the scope and boundaries of idiomatic expressions has been a topic of extensive linguistic discussion. Linguists have categorized multi-word units into phrasal verbs, metaphorical idioms,

conversational routines, proverbs, and binomials (Moon, 1998). In applied language teaching, a functional approach is essential: idioms encompass fixed or semi-fixed multi-word phrases whose total figurative meaning cannot be easily deduced from the literal definitions of their individual constituent words. For the pedagogical goals of this study, idiomatic expressions were defined to include core figurative idioms, phrasal combinations with metaphorical extensions, and established conversational routines.

Through analysis of the spoken script transcripts and corresponding dialogue audio in the Friends corpus used for this study, a preliminary pool of 277 significant multi-word items and formulaic expressions was identified. From this initial pool, duplicate occurrences were consolidated, and highly specific topical jargon, extremely transient slang, and offensive vulgarities were excluded. This rigorous refinement process yielded a core inventory of 124 distinct English idiomatic expressions, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. List of idiomatic expressions extracted from Friends corpus

List of Extracted English Idiomatic Expressions in Friends
Bite the bullet, Break a leg, Call it a day, Hit the nail on the head, Under the weather, Spill the beans, Piece of cake, Blow off steam, Cost an arm and a leg, Cross that bridge when you come to it, Cut corners, Get out of hand, Hit the sack, Let the cat out of the bag, On the fence, Pull someone's leg, Ring a bell, See eye to eye, Sit on the fence, Through thick and thin, Twist someone's arm, Up in the air, Wrap one's head around, Barking up the wrong tree, Beat around the bush, Bite off more than you can chew, Burn the midnight oil, By the skin of your teeth, Compare apples to oranges, Cry over spilled milk, Drive someone up the wall, Face the music, Finding a needle in a haystack, Get cold feet, Give the benefit of the doubt, Go down in flames, Have a change of heart, Hit the books, In the heat of the moment, Keep an eye on, Keep one's chin up, Leave no stone unturned, Let sleeping dogs lie, Look before you leap, Off the hook, On cloud nine, Once in a blue moon, Play devil's advocate, Rain on someone's parade, Read between the lines, Save for a rainy day, Take with a grain of salt, The ball is in your court, Throw in the towel, Under the radar, Weather the storm, Bend over backwards, Bite your tongue, Break the ice, Catch someone off guard, Clear the air, Draw the line, Eats like a horse, Feather in your cap, Foot in your mouth, Get your act together, Go the extra mile, Hands down, Have bigger fish to fry, In a nutshell, Jump on the bandwagon, Keep your fingers crossed, Know the ropes, Learning the ropes, Miss the boat, No pain no gain, Off the top of my head, On the same page, Out of the blue, Picture is worth a thousand words, Pull yourself together, Raining cats and dogs, Rock the boat, Shape up or ship out, Skating on thin ice, Steal someone's thunder, Take it with a grain of salt, The best of both worlds, The elephant in the room, Throw caution to the wind, Touch and go, Turn a blind eye, Up a creek without a paddle, Variety is the spice of life, Walking on eggshells, Wash your hands of, Water under the bridge, Wild goose chase, You can say that again, Add fuel to the fire, Back to the drawing board, Behind the scenes, Bite the dust, Call the shots, Down to earth, Drop a bombshell, Fly off the handle, Get a taste of your own medicine, Go out on a limb, Hit the road, In over your head, Jump the gun, Keep at arm's length, Make a long story short, Off the record, On a roll, Out of the woods, Penny for your thoughts, Rule of thumb, Spitting image, Take it easy, Through the grapevine, Tip of the iceberg.

2.3. Methodology: Corpus, Extraction, and Frequency Counting

For methodological illustration, a demonstration corpus was assembled from publicly available Friends episode transcripts covering representative episodes across Seasons 1–10. The episode identifiers and titles below are drawn from online episode/transcript records and are used to show how the corpus can be reported transparently. The demonstration corpus is not presented as a replacement for the authors' original coding file; rather, it provides reproducible episode-level metadata for the revised methodology. The reported inventory of 277 multi-word items, 124 idiomatic expressions, and the final graded set was retained from the study's coding framework.

Table 3. Demonstration corpus episode metadata

Season/Episode	Episode Title
1/01	Pilot
2/14	The One With The Prom Video

3/15	The One Where Ross And Rachel Take A Break
4/16	The One With The Fake Party
5/09	The One With Ross's Sandwich
6/17	The One With Unagi
7/11	The One With All The Cheesecakes
8/04	The One With The Video Tape
9/10	The One With Christmas in Tulsa
10/04	The One With the Cake
10/17	The Last One, Part 1
10/18	The Last One, Part 2

Note. The online transcript archive covers all ten seasons and identifies episodes by season and episode number.

The extraction procedure followed four stages. First, the researchers reviewed the dialogue transcripts while checking the corresponding audiovisual scenes to identify multi-word units and formulaic expressions used in conversational contexts. Second, candidate expressions were consolidated so that repeated occurrences of the same lexical item were treated as one expression in the inventory. Third, expressions judged to be narrow topical jargon, highly transient slang, or offensive vulgarities were excluded according to the study's predefined selection criteria. Fourth, the remaining expressions were checked against the transcript corpus and their occurrence counts were recorded. An occurrence was counted when the target expression appeared as a recognizable instance in the dialogue, including ordinary grammatical variation where the lexical expression remained identifiable.

For frequency classification, the unit of analysis was the distinct idiomatic expression. The frequency value represents the number of identifiable occurrences across the analyzed episodes. Expressions occurring fewer than two times were excluded from the secondary frequency analysis, whereas expressions occurring two or more times were retained for the frequency table. When an expression occurred in more than one frequency range during preliminary tabulation, the highest verified frequency category was used in the final table so that each expression appeared only once.

2.4. Difficulty and Semantic Transparency Rating

Two dimensions were used to classify the 42 target expressions: constituent-vocabulary difficulty and semantic transparency. Constituent-vocabulary difficulty was rated on a three-point scale: 1 = mostly high-frequency/basic vocabulary; 2 = mixed basic and less frequent vocabulary; and 3 = comparatively difficult or less familiar vocabulary. Semantic transparency was also rated on a three-point scale: 1 = relatively transparent, with the figurative meaning readily connected to the literal components or context; 2 = moderately transparent, requiring contextual inference; and 3 = relatively opaque, with the figurative meaning difficult to infer from the literal components. The final elementary, intermediate, and advanced categories were assigned by considering both dimensions together rather than by frequency alone.

The ratings were made by the authors during the analytic process. No independent rater or inter-rater reliability statistic was reported in the original analysis. Accordingly, the classifications should be regarded as author-based pedagogical judgments rather than independently validated proficiency levels. Future studies should use multiple raters and report inter-rater agreement or a comparable reliability procedure.

To support a transparent selection procedure, expressions considered for formal vocabulary instruction were first screened by occurrence frequency (Schmitt, 2000). A frequency threshold was used as a selection rule; frequency alone was not treated as evidence of instructional effectiveness. In this study, expressions occurring two or more times across the analyzed sitcom episodes were selected for secondary frequency analysis. The frequency distribution of the target idiomatic expressions is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. List of idiomatic expressions appearing two or more times in Friends corpus

Frequency	Target English Idiomatic Expressions
2 Times	Bite the bullet, Break a leg, Under the weather, Spill the beans, Blow off steam, Cost an arm and a leg, Cut corners, On the fence, Pull someone's leg, Ring a bell, See eye to eye, Up in the air, Barking up the wrong tree, Beat around the bush, Burn the midnight oil, Cry over spilled milk, Drive someone up the wall, Face the music, Get cold feet, Have a change of heart, In the heat of the moment, On cloud nine, Once in a blue moon, Read between the lines, Weather the storm
3 Times	Hit the nail on the head, Cross that bridge when you come to it, Hit the sack, Let the cat out of the bag, Through thick and thin, Twist someone's arm, Wrap one's head around, Give the benefit of the doubt, Play devil's advocate, Save for a rainy day, Throw in the towel
4+ Times	Piece of cake (5 times), On the same page (5 times), Call it a day (6 times), Keep an eye on (12 times), Get out of hand (6 times), Out of the blue (4 times)

In addition to corpus frequency, the lexical difficulty of constituent words and semantic transparency must be evaluated to match expressions with appropriate learner proficiency levels (Read, 2000). Standard vocabulary profile frameworks, such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and standard EFL word lists, classify vocabulary into elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels based on structural complexity and frequency. However, because conversational media materials reflect authentic spoken discourse, certain idiomatic items contain simple constituent words while carrying complex metaphorical meanings. Therefore, both constituent word difficulty and semantic opacity were evaluated to establish a three-tiered pedagogical classification of 42 target expressions, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Graded list of target English idiomatic expressions for language education

Grade Level	Selected Educational Idiomatic Expressions
Elementary	Piece of cake, Call it a day, Keep an eye on, On the same page, Break a leg, Out of the blue
Intermediate	Blow off steam, Under the weather, Spill the beans, Get out of hand, Ring a bell, See eye to eye, Up in the air, Beat around the bush, Get cold feet, Have a change of heart, Read between the lines, Cross that bridge when you come to it, Twist someone's arm, Hit the nail on the head
Advanced	Bite the bullet, Cost an arm and a leg, Burn the midnight oil, Barking up the wrong tree, Face the music, Play devil's advocate, Throw in the towel, Wrap one's head around, Through thick and thin, Let the cat out of the bag, On cloud nine, Once in a blue moon, Weather the storm, Save for a rainy day, Drive someone up the wall, Give the benefit of the doubt, Skating on thin ice, Steal someone's thunder, The elephant in the room, Walking on eggshells, Water under the bridge, Wild goose chase

Elementary-level idioms were defined as expressions with relatively familiar constituent words and comparatively transparent metaphorical extensions. Intermediate-level idioms feature moderate semantic opacity, requiring learners to infer abstract figurative meanings from situational contexts. Advanced-level idioms involve high semantic opacity, complex figurative derivations, or deep

cultural metaphors that necessitate explicit instruction regarding socio-cultural origin and pragmatic constraints.

3. Instructional Directions and Pedagogical Strategies Using Friends

Integrating television sitcoms into language instruction can provide contextualized audiovisual input by placing idiomatic expressions within vibrant, authentic communicative situations (King, 2002). However, media materials must be utilized with clear pedagogical guidance. Drama dialogues contain exaggerated comedic elements, rapid speech, occasional interruptions, and informal register shifts that can confuse language learners if presented without structured mediation (Gilmore, 2007). Language instructors must carefully select relevant narrative scenes and align pedagogical activities with learner proficiency levels.

3.1. Elementary Level Strategies

At the elementary level, instruction focuses on building learner confidence, establishing basic conceptual associations, and introducing high-frequency idioms composed of simple, physical vocabulary (Ellis, 2002). A prominent group of elementary idioms extracted from *Friends* involves somatic terms, which are words referring to body parts such as the eye, hand, head, or leg. Somatic vocabulary provides a universal cognitive anchor because human body experiences are shared across cultures, facilitating conceptual metaphor mapping (Kövecses, 2002).

In *Friends*, narrative scenes frequently present characters discussing daily plans, emotional states, and simple decisions. For instance, when characters express agreement or shared understanding during group planning, expressions like ‘on the same page’ appear naturally in dialogue. The phrase does not refer to a physical book page but signifies psychological alignment between conversational partners. Similarly, physical body idioms like ‘keep an eye on’ or ‘give a hand’ are used during collaborative actions, such as moving furniture or watching an apartment. Because elementary learners possess concrete knowledge of physical words like eye or hand, instructors can guide them to project physical actions onto abstract meanings, such as paying attention or offering assistance (Littlemore, 2006).

For possible classroom use at the elementary level, three core instructional guidelines are proposed: First, select idiomatic expressions with high semantic transparency where metaphorical meanings can be logically inferred from basic physical vocabulary. Second, utilize short video clips depicting highly familiar everyday settings, such as coffee shops, apartments, or university hallways, to minimize cognitive overload. Third, provide multiple visual and contextual examples across varied scenes, enabling learners to independently deduce idiom meanings before consulting formal definitions.

3.2. Intermediate Level Strategies

Intermediate-level learners possess a solid foundation in basic English grammar and vocabulary, enabling them to engage with more complex conversational narratives (Nation, 2008). At this stage, instructional focus shifts to idioms that display moderate semantic opacity and register variation. Intermediate idioms often express emotional states, interpersonal tension, or figurative descriptions of everyday events.

For example, in *Friends*, when characters experience stress or interpersonal conflict, expressions such as ‘blow off steam’ or ‘get out of hand’ frequently occur during peer interactions. Based on

conceptual metaphor theory, where emotional anger or stress is conceptualized as heated fluid in a container (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), the phrase ‘blow off steam’ describes releasing emotional tension through physical activity or conversation. Similarly, ‘get out of hand’ describes a situation losing control, while ‘spill the beans’ refers to disclosing secrets unexpectedly during casual discussions.

Intermediate instruction must also address the linguistic variability of spoken idioms. In authentic sitcom dialogue, idioms rarely appear exclusively in canonical citation forms; characters frequently adapt phrases using different verb tenses, passive structures, or pronominal modifications (Sinclair, 1991). Instructors should present both baseline dictionary forms and spoken variants extracted directly from video scenes. Furthermore, integrating modern generative AI language tools allows intermediate learners to generate contextualized dialogue variations, receive real-time feedback on pragmatic appropriateness, and practice interactive conversational role-plays in simulated digital environments (Wu, 2026).

The instructional directions for intermediate-level learners are summarized as follows: First, select high-frequency idioms that express abstract emotions and interpersonal interactions, utilizing conceptual metaphor analysis to explain semantic extensions. Second, emphasize real-world media scenes involving personal, professional, and social relationships while avoiding overly technical or politically obscure contexts. Third, explicitly analyze spoken variations, phonological reductions, and register constraints, pairing video analysis with interactive generative AI learning activities to enhance comprehensive communicative competence.

3.3. Advanced Level Strategies

Advanced-level language learners possess high grammatical accuracy and broad vocabulary knowledge, enabling them to analyze complex social discourse, subtle irony, and implicit pragmatic meanings (Celce-Murcia, 2000). At the advanced level, target idiomatic expressions exhibit high semantic opacity, intricate cultural origins, or socio-historical metaphors that cannot be deciphered through simple word substitution.

In *Friends*, advanced idioms appear during high-stakes conversational moments, comedic climax scenes, or nuanced peer discussions. Expressions such as ‘bite the bullet’, ‘barking up the wrong tree’, or ‘play devil’s advocate’ carry deep historical and cultural roots. For instance, ‘bite the bullet’ originates from historical military medical practices where wounded soldiers bit on lead bullets to endure painful surgical procedures without anesthesia. In modern spoken English, the phrase signifies courageously facing an inevitable, uncomfortable situation. Without explicit knowledge of this historical background, learners might view the phrase as an illogical combination of words.

Similarly, culturally grounded expressions like ‘play devil’s advocate’ or ‘the elephant in the room’ depend on specific Western argumentative traditions and social etiquette conventions (Paltridge, 2012). Teaching advanced idioms requires instructors to provide rich socio-cultural narrative backgrounds, explaining how historical practices evolved into contemporary figurative expressions. Advanced learners should also analyze non-verbal cues, sarcastic intonation, and subtle facial expressions depicted in sitcom scenes to master the pragmatic conditions governing idiom usage in sophisticated discourse.

For possible advanced-level classroom use, the following instructional directions are proposed: First, present comprehensive historical, cultural, and etymological backgrounds for opaque idiomatic expressions to move beyond mechanical memorization toward deep conceptual comprehension. Second, explore multi-layered metaphorical meanings and indirect speech acts, encouraging learners

to analyze how context, tone, and interpersonal power dynamics influence idiomatic choice. Third, engage learners in critical discourse analysis and authentic oral production tasks, preparing them to deploy culturally appropriate idioms naturally across diverse academic, professional, and cross-cultural environments.

3.4. Sample Lesson Plans and Assessment Ideas

The following lesson plans operationalize the proposed strategies. They are illustrative applications rather than tested instructional treatments.

Elementary (45 minutes): Target expressions: “piece of cake,” “keep an eye on,” and “on the same page.” Teacher instructions: show a short scene, replay the target lines with captions, and ask learners to underline the expressions. Learner activities: infer meanings from the scene, match each expression with a simple situation, and practice two short dialogues in pairs. Assessment: a five-item meaning-and-use check plus a two-sentence role-play in which learners use at least two target expressions appropriately.

Intermediate (50 minutes): Target expressions: “blow off steam,” “spill the beans,” and “get out of hand.” Teacher instructions: present the scene twice, first for general comprehension and then with attention to the target expressions. Learner activities: identify literal and figurative meanings, explain the contextual meaning, transform one dialogue into a new situation, and use a generative AI tool to produce two alternative dialogues that are then checked by the learners. Assessment: a short contextual multiple-choice task and a paired dialogue scored for meaning, appropriateness, and grammatical form.

Advanced (60 minutes): Target expressions: “bite the bullet,” “play devil’s advocate,” and “the elephant in the room.” Teacher instructions: provide the scene and a short cultural or etymological explanation, then guide discussion of tone, implied meaning, and interpersonal relationships. Learner activities: compare literal and figurative interpretations, identify pragmatic conditions, rewrite one exchange for a formal setting, and perform a short role-play. Assessment: a brief discourse-analysis response and an oral performance scored for interpretation, pragmatic appropriateness, and accurate use of the target expressions.

Across levels, teachers should distinguish recognition from productive use. A simple assessment sequence is therefore recommended: (a) meaning recognition, (b) contextual interpretation, (c) controlled production, and (d) freer oral or written use. These procedures can generate classroom evidence for future empirical testing of the proposed framework.

4. Limitations

Three limitations should be emphasized. First, the analysis is based on one sitcom, *Friends*, and therefore does not represent the full range of English-language audiovisual media or conversational varieties. Second, the study did not involve learner participants and did not measure changes in vocabulary knowledge, idiom comprehension, communicative competence, or retention. Third, the difficulty and transparency classifications were author-based judgments without independent rater verification. Consequently, the proposed levels and instructional strategies should not be generalized as validated proficiency standards or as evidence of instructional effectiveness. Future research should replicate the selection procedure across multiple media sources, involve independent raters, and test the proposed lesson activities with learners using appropriate pretest-posttest or comparison-group designs.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study proposes a structured pedagogical framework for selecting and teaching English idiomatic expressions to foreign language learners, using the popular American sitcom *Friends* as an authentic audiovisual corpus. By applying five core media selection criteria, including cultural authenticity, learner interest, standard American English pronunciation, balanced idiom distribution, and global media familiarity, an initial inventory of 277 multi-word items was refined into a targeted set of 42 target idiomatic expressions. These items were categorized across elementary, intermediate, and advanced proficiency levels to support systematic vocabulary instruction and pragmatic fluency.

To maximize learning outcomes across different proficiency levels, level-specific strategies were designed. Instruction for elementary learners focuses on high-transparency somatic idioms related to human body parts and physical actions. Intermediate instruction shifts to moderate-opacity expressions of emotion and social interaction through conceptual metaphor analysis and interactive AI-driven tools. For advanced learners, instruction incorporates etymological backgrounds and pragmatic analysis to master opaque idioms and indirect speech acts. This structured approach demonstrates how popular narrative media can be systematically organized into a tiered vocabulary curriculum.

As a pedagogical proposal, this analytical framework has not yet been empirically tested in real classroom settings. Additionally, the *Friends* corpus reflects a specific situational context and time period. Future research should expand corpus analysis to diverse media genres, gather real-time learner data, and empirically evaluate the long-term effectiveness of AI-assisted idiom instruction in actual language classrooms.

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