

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an overview of the study. It covers the background of the study, research questions, research purposes, research significances, rationale, and previous studies.

### A. Background

This study is aimed to investigate students' views of idiomatic language teaching and learning in the classroom and its importance in order to master the English language. An investigation of students' perception towards the instructions of idiomatic expression in the classroom and the importance of idiom mastering is an important issue. This study is important because language features such as grammar, pronunciation, spelling, and expression are important things to master by EFL learners and have been commonly taught (in this case, English Education Department students) compared to Idiom teaching and mastering.

An idiomatic expression is “a phrase established by popular usage as having a unitary holistic figurative meaning conventionally understood by native speakers that is unrelated to and undeducible from the individual literal meanings of its constituent elements, or the general grammatical rules of a language.” (Liontas, 2018b). According to Thyab (2016), every language has idiomatic expressions and they are full of it. In English, idioms are used in both formal and informal communications. Because it is frequently used in spoken and written English, language learners ought to make efforts to master idiomatic expressions, although complete mastery is probably almost impossible (Najarzadegan & Ketabi, 2015). As non-native speakers, what makes idioms are complicated to use by learners is that the meaning of idioms is hardly tracked from the literal translation, different from other metaphorical and figurative expressions that the meaning can be guessed through its connotation. So, idioms are things that learners need to learn specifically.

Idiom has an essential part in English language teaching to foreign learners. Learning idiomatic expressions also teaches foreign learners the culture of native speakers (Tran, 2013) as it reflects the cultural value of the native society. Idiom teaching might have not received adequate attention in foreign language teaching contexts yet (Tran, 2013). Despite all the arising theoretical records of idioms until this day, the teaching and learning of idiomatic expression in English as foreign language classrooms still gained very little attention, anecdotal evidence aside. It remains a severe challenge to develop idiom competency among learners of the English language (Liontas, 2015). Therefore, developing an efficient pedagogical practice to guarantee that English as second language learners establish an adequate level of figurative competency is fundamental. In contrast to first language users' linguistic repertoire's habitude of idiomatic language, foreign language learners frequently strive more in gaining idiomatic competence in the effort of using it in the language.

The three basic components in learning English are grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary (Hidayat & Bayu, 2017) and the Students of the English Education Department as English Foreign Learners are learning it as important linguistic features to master. In English Education Department, idioms as the subset of social expressions had been exposed to students in the Speaking for Social Interaction subject in the first semester. As idiom is utilized in both spoken and written media, students of the English Education Department must be aware that idioms will implicitly appear on English discourses they exposed to. However, based on the researcher's limited observation at the English Education Department of UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, the teaching and learning of idioms gain lesser attention rather than the teaching and learning of other major linguistic features such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. This makes questions appear about how students perceive the idiomatic expressions' teaching and learning activity in the classroom and students' thoughts about learning idiom as a part of English language competence.

Previous studies with the issue of the importance of mastering idioms for students had been conducted by several researchers. First, research of Al-kadi, (2015) about Yemeni EFL students at the undergraduate level that do not pay much attention to English idioms as if it is unimportant though they have hands-on learning it, so it affects their mastery of idioms that considered important. The second is research of Najarzadegan & Ketabi, (2015) about the teachers' perception of teaching and learning English idioms of EFL learners; the importance, and the problem they face. Third, the research of Thyab (2016), discusses the importance for English language learners to learn idioms as an effort to sounds natural and native-like as Arab EFL learners lack the skill of using idioms. In addition, the last is the research of Pucelj (2018), about the attitude of Croatian EFL learners towards learning idioms, with various learning strategies. Many research about the importance of learning idioms, teachers' perception of it, and students' attitudes toward learning have been conducted in many countries. However, there is still no research about students' perception of the teaching and learning idioms and its importance in the Indonesian context. Thus, this research will investigate Indonesian EFL students' (in this case, students of UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung) perception of the teaching and learning process of English idioms and its importance.

## **B. Research Questions**

From the background, the problems are formulated into questions of

1. What is the students' perception towards the teaching and learning of idiomatic expressions in the classroom?
2. What is the students' perception towards the importance of idiomatic expressions in English language mastery?

## **C. Research Purposes**

Considering the research question above, the purpose of this research are:

1. To find out the students' (in this case, students of the English Education Department of UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung) perception of the teaching and learning idioms in the classroom.
2. To reveal the Indonesian EFL students' (in this case, students of the English Education Department of UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung) perception of the importance of idioms in the mastery of English.

#### **D. The Significance of The Research**

This study is expected to be source information about the way English Education Department of UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung students' perception about the teaching and learning of idioms in the classroom and its importance for mastering English and then to give some understanding to lecturers to raise more attention to the teaching and learning idioms both implicit or explicitly. Practically, this research gives significance to:

1. Students

The result of this research is expected to gain feedback for the teaching and learning process of idioms in the classroom and raise students' awareness about the importance of learning idioms specifically to improve their language competence and as one of the ways of mastering English.

2. Lecturers

This research could contribute to all lecturers to consider the importance of teaching and learning idioms in the classroom both implicit or explicitly and to review the previous teaching and learning programs in order to enhance students' awareness to learn more about this language feature specifically.

Theoretically, this study can be beneficial information for curriculum planners as an evaluation for creating improvement for students in the knowledge and usage of idiomatic expression.

## **E. Rationale**

Idiomatic expressions are essential parts of English lexicon and vocabulary and it is spontaneously used by native speakers in daily communication. So, it can be said that in linguistics, idioms are figures of speech (figurative language) (Thyab, 2016b). Alhaysony (2017), defined idioms as “multi-word units which have to be learned as a whole, along with associated sociolinguistic, cultural and pragmatics rules of use”. Without idioms, the English language would lose much of its variety and humor both in speech and writing (De Caro, 2009).

Many researchers have a common belief that the knowledge of idioms is required for English language proficiency and fluency, and a lack of such knowledge can cause significant misunderstanding (Alhaysony, 2017). In accordance with that, Alhaysony (2017), stated that idioms are essential to successful communication, whether in listening, speaking, reading, or writing. Idioms are clearly presented in academic settings; consequently, failure to comprehend idioms could affect academic performance (Alhaysony, 2017).

The use of idioms can be utilized to differentiate natives from non-natives. Students who effectively communicate with idioms indicate a certain understanding of the deeper level of a language. The more non-native speakers of English are capable of using idioms, the closer they are to English Language competence. Using idiomatic expressions in a sufficient amount parallel to native speakers brings the non-native speaker closer to English Language proficiency (Thyab, 2016b). Idioms also useful for “decorating” language, making language more vibrant, powerful, and becoming a new way for speakers to express themselves (Rodriguez & Winnberg, 2013).

Many factors affect EFL learners’ use of idioms. Alhaysony (2017), pointed out that the difficulty of learning idioms could be related to five major challenges: (a) unknown vocabulary and unfamiliar idioms; (b) no analogous idioms in L1; (c) cultural differences; (d) lack of experience dealing with idioms; e) lack of the broad context for a given idiom. These difficulties may be fixed by following the five

steps of the learning process ranging from familiarization, recognition, and comprehension to mastery and automaticity (Tran, 2013). Students' Willingness to Communicate can also be a factor as idioms are often involved in daily speech (Motlagh & Gilakjani, n.d.). On the other hand, Alhaysony (2017) also mentioned that one of the main challenges of L2 idiom learning is that idioms are often unpredictable in terms of meaning. Students have been taught that the meaning of idioms cannot be tracked by their literal meaning but recent studies found that many idioms are explainable, non-arbitrary, and carry meanings due to reasonable causes. Idiomatic expressions are culturally based. They carry the history, heritage, culture, and customs of their native users (Rizq et al., 2015). So, learning idiomatic expressions also teaches foreign learners the culture of native speakers (Tran, 2013).

Idiom teaching might have not received adequate attention in foreign language teaching contexts yet (Tran, 2013). According to a study by (Rohani et al., 2012) revealed that 75% of participants reported to have not been taught any idioms by their foreign language teachers, although they were highly interested in it. However, many teachers may have encountered difficulties in choosing a suitable teaching method, selecting idioms, and explaining the use of an idiom in its appropriate contexts. Many teachers tend to avoid idioms in their language and teaching (Tran, 2013).

Thus, EFL learners' attitudes toward learning idioms are reflected from the result of the teaching and learning process. Many EFL learners are eager to learn more idioms due to the fact that these learners have had much exposure to the target language and therefore have learned to appreciate the value of idioms, including their richness and usefulness in communicative tasks (Alhaysony, 2017). On the other hand, students' poor idiomatic competence caused by their very limited knowledge of the frequently used idioms is the result of the lack of students' situation of using and learning idioms and their desire to learn (Alhaysony, 2017). Another case arises when students are actually have been taught about idioms and it somewhat makes them aware that idioms are an important part of the English

language, but after years of being unexposed to idioms again, a perception of the importance of mastering idioms might develop in students mind.

## **F. Previous Research**

Previous studies with the issue of the importance of mastering idioms for students had been conducted by several researchers. First, research of Al-kadi (2015) about Yemeni EFL students at the undergraduate level that do not pay much attention to English idioms as if it is unimportant though they have hands-on learning it, so it affects their mastery of idioms that considered important. The second is research of Najarzagdegan (2015) about the teachers' perception of teaching and learning English idioms for EFL learners; the importance and the problem they face. The third, the research of Thyab (2016), discusses the importance for English language learners to learn idioms as an effort to sounds natural and native-like as Arab EFL learners lack the skill of using idioms. Then, a study by Alhaysony (2017) about Saudi students' strategies and difficulties in understanding idioms. In addition, the last is the research of Pucelj (2018) about the attitude of Croatian EFL learners towards learning idioms, with various learning strategies. Many research about the importance of learning idioms, teachers' perception of it, and students' attitudes toward learning have been conducted in many countries. However, there is still no research about students' perception of learning and mastering idioms in the Indonesian context. Thus, this research will investigate Indonesian EFL students' (in this case, students of UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung) perception of the teaching and learning of idioms in the classroom importance of mastering idiom in learning English.