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RESEARCH ARTICLE

**USING CONTEXT IN TEACHING ENGLISH IDIOMS TO ALBANIAN STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY
 LEVEL IN KOSOVO.**

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Abstract

Teaching English has long been an issue among different researchers. In this regard, difficulties associated with teaching English to the students of different levels including university level students in Kosovo are also an issue to be further studied. The study in question deals with this from a practical view: based on a research conducted at the Univesrum College in Prishtina and Ferizaj (in two campuses) with the first and the second year students from the English Department. It digs into the core of a more complex issue: teaching idioms to the Albanian students at university level in Kosovo based on the context. Teaching English in general has proven to be a challenge for professors but teaching idioms has proven to be much more difficult. Taking into account the fact that there were not many studies on idioms in Kosovo or in the neighbouring countries just adds to the difficulty of teaching them to the students hence the necessity for such a study. Most importantly, the study also puts emphasis on how students acquire idioms more easily using context. Last, but not least, the study in question is also based on other researchers' works.

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Introduction:-

One of the biggest challenges for the English teachers in Kosovo is not merely teaching their students some grammar, rather teaching them how to communicate better. At university level, professors face a big difficulty one of the reasons being that the students must have not learnt English at an earlier age. Based on the study in question, the students from English Departments are not all at the same level of English: some of them are Pre-Intermediate, some of them Intermediate and some of them Upper-Intermediate or even Advanced. This means that the students from the same group are in different language levels. This poses a dilemma for professors when it comes to teaching English. One of the biggest challenges for professors themselves is that sometimes they come across some idioms and trying to explain them to the students becomes a necessity and a difficulty at the same time. To clarify this issue, a study with 80 students from the Univesrum College was carried out: 40 students from the first year and 40 students from the second year. The results are going to be elaborated further in this study after some explanation is given on the importance of idioms on one hand and the effect of context on teaching idioms to university level students in Kosovo, on the other.

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What are idioms?

It is often the case when people come across groups of words (phrases) which they find impossible to translate into their mother tongue, in our case into Albanian language. These phrases or groups of words contain words and trying to translate them using word-per-word translation method is proven to be unsuccessful. For instance, *once in a blue moon* which means *very rarely*. Researchers have long dealt with idioms and tried to give definitions for idioms. There are many definitions for idioms. Some researchers categorize idioms in the group of multi-word units, some others; define them as a group of words. In this regard, Rodriguez and Winnberg (2013) claim that, "Researchers tend to use different words with similar definition, for example Wiktorsson (2002) prefers, Grant and Nation (2006) figurative as well as Nation and Meara (2002), and Wiktorsson (2003) use the term multi-word units" (pp.7-8). They further give other definitions on idioms stating that, "A definition found in the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2009) states that 'an idiom is a group of words that has a special meaning that is different from the ordinary meaning of each separate word'". (Rodriguez & Winnberg, 2013, p.7).

Other researchers have also dealt with the definition of idioms. Yet, there is one thing in common: idioms consist of words which give a different meaning taken together as compared to their meaning as separate words. However, most of the researchers have come to conclusion that the meaning of an idiom is not the sum of the words taken separately.

Statement of the problem:-

The problem this study puts emphasis on is the difficulty the Albanian students at university level in Kosovo face in acquiring idioms and the necessity of using context in teaching them to the students.

Research hypothesis:-

The above statement of the problem brings us to the following hypothesis:-

1. Using context is very important to teaching idioms to Albanian university students.
2. Enabling students use idioms as more often as possible in the classroom helps them improve their comprehension of idioms.
3. Students' motivation to learning idioms is a good tool to teaching idioms to the university students.

Literature review:-

Unlike in Kosovo, in other countries there has been more research on English idioms. The researchers have also put emphasis on different issues regarding idioms. Some of the issues worth mentioning are: the use of context in learning and teaching idioms, the effect of culture on learning idioms in particular and English in general as well as the importance of idioms on learning English.

Hinkel, for instance, writes about the importance of idioms in written and spoken language, thus, "In idiom classifications going as far back as the 1920s, various sets of recurrent and conventionalized phrases are typically classified by their communicative functions, such as, greetings, requests, apologies, or invitations" (Hinkel, 2017, p.51). Many researchers have written on the importance of idioms in learning a language, more particularly English. Some of them consider idioms a bridge to understanding a language by decoding the cultural aspects of a nation. Based on this,

An idiom most often reflects the national specificity of the people. It is a figurative interpretation of a reality and an emotional model of communication. Idioms are highly interactive terms. They are firmly assimilated in various languages and have become part of the whole of these cultures. The main difficulty is whether an idiom is appropriate in the given context when a non-native speaker tries to translate an idiom from his native language into English. (Goshkhetliany & Megrelidze, 2013, p.2)

In other words, individuals play an important part in building specific culture by using idioms in conveying messages. Idioms are used by the people of different countries. In Kosovo and other neighbouring countries, local idioms are also used. There has been a research on this issue by an Albanian researcher. In her PhD Thesis on idioms named "Procesi i mesimdhënies së idiomave në gjuhën angleze në shkollat e mesme në Maqedoni dhe pershtatja e tyre në gjuhën shqipe" (in English "The process of teaching English idioms in the secondary schools in Macedonia and their adaptation in the Albanian language") Ejupi claims that;

It is well-known that word per word translation of idioms from one language into another is not possible because the real meaning of the idiomatic expression is lost or it can be confused and a wrong message be conveyed which causes misunderstanding between different cultures (Ejupi, 2016, p.57)

What Ejupi states is that many people try to understand idioms by translating them literally which proved to be wrong.

Culture and its influence on learning idioms by the students

Culture is also a very important issue worth mentioning when it comes to learning idioms by and teaching idioms to the students. Based on the study in question, more particularly based on the interviews conducted with 8 students as well as 5 professors at the Universum College, culture also proved to be another key factor to helping students acquire idioms more easily (apart from context). The students and the professors interviewed claimed that culture is one of the key factors in helping students learn English in general and idioms in particular. The data gathered from the focus groups proved the same.

The effect of context on teaching idioms to and learning idioms by the Albanian university level students in Kosovos:-

When teaching English to the students at different levels and ages, professors need to pay attention to different elements that may help the process of teaching. Some of the most important ones are a) the context b) culture and c) the way professors teach English in general and idioms in particular to their university level students. In Kosovo, after the war, students got in touch with native speakers of English more frequently. In some cases, they found it almost impossible to understand what the native speakers were talking about due to usage of idioms. After having been given the context, the students managed to understand idioms much better. Apart from the interviews and the focus groups conducted with the students from the Universum College, there were also observations where particular attention was paid to the use and the effect of context on learning idioms as well as some of the methods professors used in teaching the idioms used to the students. The observations were conducted during literature classes. Another issue worth emphasizing is that students' motivation was also seen to have improved idiom comprehension by the students. More importantly, using idioms in the classroom more often was also considered to be of great importance.

Results from the study:

In order to find easier ways to teach idioms to the students, a study was conducted at the Universum College English Department in Prishtina and Ferizaj, more particularly with 40 students from the first year and 40 students from the second year. Apart from the interviews, focus groups and observations (which were mentioned earlier herein), the students were given two types of tests: a) Pre-test and b) Post-test. In order to see the effect of context at a later stage, in the pre-test, a particular number of idioms were given to the students out of context. There were four (4) tasks with 45 points in total. The main aim of the pre-test was to see how much the students can understand idioms when the context is not given. After the pre-test, the students were given a post-test. This time, the context was given and there were three (3) tasks which the students had to accomplish. Some of the idioms in the post-test were the same ones used in the pre-test and some others were the ones not used in the pre-test. The results showed that, in the post-test, the students scored much higher than in the pre-test so the context proved to have improved the students' comprehension of idioms. Apart from these tests, there were two focus groups with 8 students each. The main aim of the focus groups was to find out a) if context helps students comprehend idioms and b) what other ways can be used to teach idioms to the students. The responses from the students gave insight into how they learn idioms better. It turned out that context is the most important tool in teaching idioms. Bringing students as closer as possible to the native-like environment was also seen necessary.

The following table shows the results of the post test as compared to the pre-test.

	Pre-test	Post-test
Universum College 1 st year students	19 %	49 %
Universum College 2 nd year students	34 %	60 %

Table 1:-The results of the Universum College students from the first and the second year of studies in the pre-test and the post-test (the accuracy of the tests in percentage)

As it can be seen from the above table, the accuracy of the students in the post-test as compared to the pre-test was much higher and this proved the context to have played a great role and improved the students' comprehension of idioms.

Conclusion:-

As a conclusion, teaching and learning idioms is of great importance to the students on one hand and professors, on the other. Yet, insufficient studies have been carried out to date. Despite the study in question trying to clarify this issue, there is still to be done for a clearer picture in the use and the effect of context on teaching and learning idioms to the Albanian students at university level in Kosovo. A larger-scale study involving more universities is needed. However, the results from this study revealed that context plays a great role in learning idioms by the Albanian students.

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