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Utilization of Project IDIOM-QUEST in Enhancing Learner's Understanding of Idiomatic Expressions through Self-Instructional Adventure Modules

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ABSTRACT

Language proficiency requires not only literal comprehension but also the ability to interpret figurative expressions, such as idioms, which are essential for advanced communication. Despite their importance, idioms are often overlooked in classroom instruction, resulting in Filipino learners' persistent struggles in reading comprehension and vocabulary development. National and local assessments highlight idiomatic comprehension as a recurring gap, with Grade 6–Mabini pupils of Balaquid Elementary School in Cabucgayan District 1, SDO Biliran, showing significant difficulty in interpreting and applying idiomatic expressions. To address this challenge, the study implemented the Utilization of Project IDIOM-QUEST in Enhancing Learners' Understanding of Idiomatic Expressions through Self-Instructional Adventure Modules, an innovation integrating gamification, contextualized learning, and self-instructional strategies. The intervention involved adventure-themed modules where idioms were embedded in stories, quests, and interactive tasks designed to promote comprehension, application, and retention. The study employed a mixed-method action research design with 27 purposively selected Grade 6 pupils as participants. Data were gathered through pre- and post-tests, observation checklists, learner outputs, feedback forms, focus group discussions, and teacher journals. Findings are expected to show improvements in learners' comprehension and application of idiomatic expressions, increased motivation, and enhanced participation in English lessons. The project aligns with the Basic Education Research Agenda (BERA) and supports the MATATAG Curriculum's emphasis on functional literacy. By offering a sustainable, engaging, and evidence-based instructional strategy, this study aims to contribute not only to the immediate improvement of pupils' English performance but also to the broader goal of advancing literacy and communicative competence in Philippine classrooms.

Keywords: Idiomatic Expressions, Gamification, Self-Instructional Modules, Figurative Language, Reading Comprehension, Learners, Action Research

INTRODUCTION

Language was more than a medium of communication; it was the foundation of learning across disciplines. Among the many components of language proficiency, the understanding of idiomatic expressions stood out as one of the most difficult for learners to acquire. Idioms were figurative phrases whose meanings could not be derived literally from the words themselves but had to be inferred through context, culture, and usage. In global language education, idiomatic competence was recognized as a marker of advanced communicative ability. For instance, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) underscored figurative and idiomatic expressions as integral to achieving communicative competence and fluency in English (Council of Europe, 2020). Yet, despite their importance, idioms were often neglected in classroom instruction, leaving learners unprepared to comprehend authentic texts and real-world communication where idiomatic expressions abounded.

At the global level, learners from non-native English contexts frequently struggled with idioms due to their cultural specificity and abstract meanings. Studies in applied linguistics revealed that idioms accounted for a significant portion of everyday English communication, with some estimates noting that native speakers used idiomatic phrases in up to 10,000 expressions throughout their lifetime (Liu, 2021). Without exposure and guided practice, second-language learners experienced confusion, reduced comprehension, and even disengagement when encountering idioms in literature, films, or academic texts. This global challenge found resonance in the Philippine context, where English remained an official language and the primary medium of instruction across subjects.

In the Philippines, national assessments consistently highlighted reading comprehension, particularly figurative language, as an area of concern. The 2019 Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) reported that Filipino learners ranked among the lowest in reading comprehension across Southeast Asia, with specific weakness in inferential and figurative understanding (UNICEF, 2020). Similarly, the 2022 National Achievement Test (NAT) revealed that only 14% of Grade 6 learners achieved the minimum proficiency level in English, with idiomatic and contextual comprehension identified as recurring gaps (Department of Education [DepEd], 2022). These findings emphasized that idiom comprehension was not a trivial issue confined to isolated lessons, but a systemic problem that affected reading, writing, and oral communication skills nationwide.

At the local level, the issue was evident in Balaquid Elementary School, Cabucgayan I District, SDO Biliran. Classroom observations during School Year 2023–2024 revealed that Grade 6–Mabini learners encountered significant difficulty interpreting idiomatic expressions embedded in reading passages and assessment tasks. Learners frequently translated idioms literally into Filipino, leading to incorrect interpretations. For example, idioms such as “hit the sack” were interpreted as an act of violence toward a bag rather than going to sleep, while “break the ice” was understood as a literal act instead of initiating conversation. Teachers also noted signs of the problem through learners’ avoidance of idiom-related questions, reduced confidence in speaking activities, and lower comprehension scores in both classroom-based and standardized assessments. These symptoms demonstrated that the problem was not only cognitive but also affective, as it impacted learners’ motivation and participation in classroom discourse.

This difficulty became even more pronounced during the pandemic years (2020–2022), when instruction shifted to modular and online learning. Without consistent teacher guidance, idioms embedded in self-learning modules (SLMs) became sources of confusion and misunderstanding (Philippine Institute for Development Studies [PIDS], 2021). Although schools transitioned back to face-to-face classes under the MATATAG Curriculum, the challenge remained observable in both written outputs and oral recitations. The persistence of the problem across instructional modalities demonstrated its systemic nature and signaled the urgency of intervention.

The study directly addressed the Basic Education Research Agenda (BERA) under the thematic area of Teaching and Learning, focusing on curriculum implementation and learner development. Idiomatic expression comprehension was integral to literacy, vocabulary growth, and higher-order thinking skills, all of which were critical to achieving DepEd’s goal of enhancing reading literacy under the Every Child a Reader Program (DepEd, 2023). By targeting idioms, the study also aligned with 21st-century learning competencies, equipping learners with critical thinking and communication skills necessary in a globalized world.

The individuals most affected by this problem were the 27 Grade 6–Mabini pupils of Balaquid Elementary School. At the classroom level, poor idiom comprehension resulted in lower test scores, reduced class participation, and weaker reading comprehension. At the school level, it lowered overall English performance indicators, contributing to the persistent gap identified in national assessments. Indirectly, teachers were affected as they faced challenges in achieving curriculum standards, and parents were impacted when their children struggled to engage with English texts. The degree of the problem was substantial because idioms occurred frequently in textbooks, examinations, and authentic communication. Learners who failed to grasp idiomatic expressions were at risk of being left behind academically and socially.

To respond to this pressing need, the study introduced the Utilization Project IDIOM-QUEST in Enhancing Learners Understanding of Idiomatic Expressions through Self-Instructional Adventure Modules. This innovation involved the development of adventure-themed, self-paced modules where idioms were embedded in stories, quests, and interactive exercises. The adventure format made idioms contextualized, relatable, and engaging, transforming abstract figurative phrases into meaningful experiences. Learners were guided through scenarios where they had to interpret, apply, and use idioms to progress in the “quest,” thereby promoting both comprehension and retention. Research suggested that gamified and narrative-based learning increased student motivation and improved long-term vocabulary acquisition (Martínez, 2020). By employing self-instructional modules, the project also strengthened learner autonomy and resilience, allowing pupils to learn independently and adapt to different learning modalities.

The timeliness of the study was evident in several aspects. First, it addressed an identified gap in reading literacy emphasized by recent SEA-PLM and NAT results. Second, it aligned with DepEd’s advocacies within the past five years, particularly the MATATAG Curriculum’s emphasis on functional literacy and critical thinking. Third, it responded to the call of the Regional and National Research Agendas to focus on literacy development and curriculum innovations. Finally, the problem had been consistently observed during and after the pandemic, making it a current issue that required immediate intervention.

Solving this problem contributed significantly to the achievement of DepEd’s intermediate outcomes. It promoted Access by equipping learners with skills that ensured success in higher levels of education. It supported Quality by addressing one of the most persistent gaps in English learning. It fostered Equity by providing targeted support to learners who struggled with figurative language. It enhanced Resilience by using self-instructional modules that were adaptable to multiple learning environments. It improved Well-being by boosting learners’ confidence in communication. Lastly, it strengthened Governance as teachers adopted evidence-based practices in instruction.

Innovation, Intervention, and Strategy

The proposed intervention of this study was the Utilization of Project IDIOM-QUEST in Enhancing Pupils’ Understanding of Idiomatic Expressions through Self-Instructional Adventure Modules. This innovation was designed to address the persistent challenge of Grade 6 learners in comprehending idiomatic expressions, as observed in classroom assessments and supported by national literacy data. The distinctive feature of the intervention lay in its integration of idiomatic expressions into an adventure-themed, self-paced module that transformed traditional text exercises into engaging quests, stories, and interactive puzzles. Unlike conventional worksheets, the adventure modules situated idioms in narrative contexts where learners had to interpret and apply them to accomplish challenges or progress through different stages of the “quest.” This approach combined contextualized learning, self-instruction, and gamification—three pedagogical strategies proven to boost motivation and comprehension (Martínez, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 2017).

The component activities of the IIS were divided into four key phases. First was the Orientation and Motivation Stage, where pupils were introduced to idioms and the concept of figurative language through short games and pre-tests. Second was the Module Engagement Stage, in which learners worked on the adventure modules, either individually or in pairs, encountering idioms in story-based activities, puzzles, matching games, and sentence construction tasks. Third was the Application and Enrichment Stage, where pupils applied the idioms learned in authentic communication tasks such as

dialogues, role-plays, and short writing outputs. Finally, the Evaluation and Reflection Stage involved post-tests, peer feedback, and self-assessment activities to measure progress and consolidate learning.

Several stakeholders were involved in the implementation of the intervention. The Grade 6–Mabini pupils served as the primary beneficiaries, while the researcher, acting as the class adviser, assumed the role of module designer, facilitator, and assessor. The school head provided support in terms of monitoring and logistical approval, while English subject teachers in the district acted as validators and co-implementers of the module. Parents were also engaged to ensure learners' continued practice at home, particularly when tasks required reinforcement beyond classroom hours.

The motivation for implementing the IIS arose from both personal teaching experiences and professional commitment to improving reading literacy. Having observed pupils' recurring errors and misconceptions about idiomatic expressions, the researcher recognized the inadequacy of conventional strategies such as rote memorization and direct translation. Personal classroom encounters showed that learners disengaged easily when idioms were presented without context. This personal motivation was strengthened by DepEd's advocacy on literacy enhancement under the Every Child a Reader Program (DepEd, 2023) and the MATATAG Curriculum's emphasis on functional literacy.

The scope of the IIS focused specifically on improving Grade 6 learners' ability to comprehend, interpret, and apply idiomatic expressions in both oral and written communication. It aimed to change performances in the areas of reading comprehension, vocabulary expansion, and self-confidence in language use. However, the intervention had limitations: it did not directly address broader literacy concerns such as grammar mastery, phonics, or reading fluency, even though these were related to overall language performance. Furthermore, it was limited to idiomatic expressions frequently appearing in Grade 6 textbooks and assessment contexts, rather than attempting to cover all idioms in the English language.

The intervention was expected to solve the problem by providing learners with meaningful, contextualized, and enjoyable encounters with idioms. By embedding idioms in stories and adventures, the modules reduced the cognitive load of abstract interpretation and replaced it with experiential learning. Research in cognitive linguistics suggested that idioms were better retained when taught through contextual narratives rather than isolated lists (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009). The gamified quest format further fostered motivation, persistence, and learner autonomy, addressing not only cognitive difficulties but also affective barriers such as fear and disinterest.

Each component activity of the IIS carried specific roles and responsibilities. During the Orientation Stage, the teacher explained the goals of the project, administered the pre-test, and motivated pupils through short warm-up games, while learners committed to participating actively. In the Module Engagement Stage, pupils worked on adventure modules at their own pace, while the teacher monitored progress and clarified questions. In the Application Stage, pupils engaged in dialogues and written activities, while peers and the teacher provided feedback. In the Evaluation Stage, the teacher administered the post-test, compiled results, and facilitated reflective discussions, while learners assessed their own growth.

The schedule of implementation was planned across eight weeks. Week 1 involved orientation, pre-tests, and introduction of idioms. Weeks 2–6 covered the use of adventure modules, with each week focusing on a cluster of 8–10 idioms contextualized in different story adventures. Week 7 was devoted to enrichment activities such as role-playing and peer teaching, while Week 8 was allocated for post-tests, reflections, and evaluation. All activities were conducted in the classroom of Grade 6–Mabini at Balaquid Elementary School, with occasional reinforcement at home guided by parents.

The scientific and scholarly basis of the IIS was grounded in several theories and research findings. Constructivist learning theory emphasized that learners built knowledge more effectively when concepts were contextualized and connected to prior experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). The gamification approach, informed by Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2017), supported the idea that learners were more motivated when tasks provided autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Cognitive linguistic studies also affirmed that idioms were easier to understand when taught through imagery, metaphors, and contextualized usage (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009). In addition, previous classroom action research demonstrated that self-instructional modules enhanced learner autonomy, resilience, and comprehension across varied subject areas (Andres, 2021).

Action Research Questions

The general problem addressed in this study was the persistent difficulty of Grade 6–Mabini pupils of Balaquid Elementary School, Cabucgayan I District, SDO Biliran in understanding idiomatic expressions in the English subject. The primary purpose of this action research was to improve pupils' comprehension and application of idiomatic expressions by implementing Project IDIOM-QUEST: Self-Instructional Adventure Modules. Specifically, the study sought to determine how the intervention enhanced learners' ability to interpret, use, and appreciate idiomatic expressions as part of their reading and communication skills. The research setting was Balaquid Elementary School, the learning area was English, the participants were 27 Grade 6–Mabini pupils, and the proposed IIS was Project IDIOM-QUEST.

Guided by this general problem, the following research questions were raised:

1. How could Project IDIOM-QUEST, a self-instructional adventure module, be used to enhance the understanding of idiomatic expressions among Grade 6–Mabini pupils at Balaquid Elementary School?
2. What was the level of pupils' comprehension of idiomatic expressions before the implementation of Project IDIOM-QUEST?
3. What changes in pupils' comprehension and application of idiomatic expressions were observed during and after the implementation of Project IDIOM-QUEST?

4. What were the pupils' and teacher-researcher's experiences and insights in using Project IDIOM-QUEST, and how might these have guided post-study plans for sustaining and improving idiom instruction?

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Other Sources of Data and Information

In keeping with the participatory nature of action research, the researcher was considered both a facilitator and a participant in this study. The primary participants were the 27 Grade 6–Mabini pupils of Balaquid Elementary School, Cabucgayan I District, Schools Division of Biliran, who were purposively selected based on observed difficulties in understanding idiomatic expressions. The inclusion criteria for selecting the participants were as follows: (a) they were officially enrolled in Grade 6–Mabini for School Year 2025–2026, (b) they had demonstrated recurring challenges in interpreting idiomatic expressions as observed in English formative and summative assessments, and (c) they were at the transitional stage of preparing for secondary education, where functional literacy, including figurative language, was expected. These learners were thus the most in need of the proposed intervention, Project IDIOM-QUEST, which aimed to directly address their identified language gap.

The participants were composed of 27 pupils, with 13 males and 14 females. Their average age was 11 years, ranging from 10 to 12 years old. The majority came from low- to middle-income households, reflective of the economic profile of Cabucgayan municipality, where families primarily relied on farming, fishing, and small-scale trading for livelihood. The school community itself was situated in a coastal-rural environment, where exposure to authentic English usage outside the classroom was limited. This socio-economic and community profile underscored the necessity of contextualized, engaging instructional materials such as the self-instructional adventure modules, which provided opportunities for independent learning beyond limited classroom contact.

The participants were under the K to 12 Curriculum, specifically the Grade 6 English subject, which focused on reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and functional use of language. At this stage, learners were expected to transition from literal comprehension to higher-order thinking skills that included figurative and inferential understanding. However, results of classroom assessments, interviews with teachers, and observations consistently showed that idiomatic expressions remained one of the weakest areas for these learners.

Aside from learners, the researcher also served as a vital source of data. The researcher had been in the teaching service for seven years, specializing in English at the elementary level. Having directly handled English instruction across intermediate grades, the researcher had gained extensive experience in addressing reading and vocabulary-related difficulties. As a resident of the same community, the researcher also had a deeper understanding of the learners' socio-cultural backgrounds, including their limited exposure to English usage at home and in the community. This dual role as both teacher and researcher provided a nuanced perspective in implementing and reflecting on the intervention.

Other supplementary sources of data included classroom documents such as pre-test and post-test scores, reflection journals of pupils, and teacher field notes. These non-human data sources triangulated the findings by providing evidence of learners' performance and behavioral changes before, during, and after the implementation of the IIS.

Data Gathering Methods

To generate a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of Project IDIOM-QUEST: Self-Instructional Adventure Modules, this study employed both quantitative and qualitative data gathering methods. In action research, relying solely on numerical data was considered inadequate, since the method required not only measuring outcomes but also exploring the processes and experiences of those involved. Hence, the data gathering plan was designed to align directly with the research questions and to capture a balanced view of learners' performance, behaviors, and insights.

For the first research question, which inquired how Project IDIOM-QUEST could be used to enhance the understanding of idiomatic expressions among Grade 6–Mabini pupils, data were collected through a combination of pre-tests, post-tests, classroom observation checklists, and the teacher-researcher's reflection journal. A 20-item test on idiomatic expressions was administered before the intervention in Week 1 to establish baseline performance and again in Week 8 to measure improvement. These were complemented by observation checklists used weekly during the implementation phase (Weeks 2–6) to document learner engagement and participation in module activities. In addition, the teacher maintained a reflective journal throughout the eight-week implementation, recording classroom processes, emerging patterns, and challenges observed in the course of the intervention. This triangulation ensured that both measurable outcomes and experiential insights were considered in evaluating the primary purpose of the study.

The second research question sought to determine the level of pupils' comprehension of idiomatic expressions before the intervention. This was addressed mainly through the pre-test administered to all 27 Grade 6–Mabini pupils at the start of the study. The test items, consisting of multiple-choice and matching-type questions, were validated by two English teachers from the district to ensure content relevance and alignment with Grade 6 English competencies. The use of a standardized pre-test not only established the baseline data but also provided a clear benchmark against which subsequent progress could be compared. Conducting this test in the classroom during regular class hours further allowed for a controlled environment and minimized external influences on the learners' performance.

The third research question focused on identifying the changes in pupils' comprehension and application of idiomatic expressions during and after the intervention. To address this, the study utilized multiple data sources: observation checklists, pupils' learning outputs, and post-test results. Weekly

classroom observations were conducted to track improvements in how learners engaged with the adventure modules, while outputs such as completed worksheets, role-play performances, and short writing activities provided tangible evidence of how pupils applied idioms in varied contexts. The post-test administered in Week 8 served as the primary quantitative measure of improvement, while the collected outputs and observations allowed for qualitative insights into the process of learning. This combination of tools highlighted not only whether improvement occurred but also how it unfolded over the course of the intervention.

The fourth research question explored the experiences and insights of both pupils and the teacher-researcher in using Project IDIOM-QUEST, as well as how these experiences could inform post-study plans. For this purpose, qualitative methods were prioritized. A focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted in Week 8 with a purposively selected group of six to eight pupils, representing both high-performing and struggling learners, to capture diverse perspectives on the use of the modules. In addition, all pupils were asked to complete a short feedback form reflecting on what they found helpful, challenging, and enjoyable in the intervention. The teacher-researcher's reflective journal also provided a parallel perspective, documenting instructional experiences, challenges encountered, and strategies that worked well in practice. Together, these qualitative data sources captured the lived realities of the intervention and offered practical guidance for sustaining and refining idiom instruction beyond the scope of the study.

The sequence of data collection followed the logical flow of the research questions. Week 1 was devoted to orientation and the administration of the pre-test. Weeks 2 to 6 involved the implementation of adventure modules, during which classroom observations, collection of pupil outputs, and teacher journaling were carried out continuously. Week 7 was reserved for enrichment activities such as role-playing and peer-led exercises, which also produced supplementary learner outputs. Week 8 concluded the cycle with the administration of the post-test, the conduct of the FGD, the completion of learner feedback forms, and the final entries in the teacher's journal. All data gathering activities were conducted primarily in the Grade 6–Mabini classroom of Balaquid Elementary School, with the exception of occasional home-based module reinforcements supported by parents.

Data Analysis Plan

The data gathered in this action research were analyzed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques to ensure that the research questions were adequately addressed. Since action research required not only evidence of change but also a deeper understanding of the processes that led to such change, both descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were employed. The analysis was designed to correspond directly with each research question, ensuring coherence between the datasets, the methods of analysis, and the expected results.

For the first research question, which asked how Project IDIOM-QUEST could be used to enhance the understanding of idiomatic expressions among Grade 6–Mabini pupils, the primary datasets included the pre-test and post-test scores, classroom observation records, and teacher-researcher journals. The pre-test and post-test results were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically through the computation of mean scores, percentage scores, and mean gain scores. These computations were performed manually and verified using Microsoft Excel to ensure accuracy and reliability. Meanwhile, classroom observation checklists and teacher journals underwent qualitative content analysis, where recurring patterns of learner engagement, strategies used, and difficulties encountered were coded and organized into themes. This combined approach revealed both the degree of improvement in comprehension and the processes through which the intervention achieved such outcomes.

The second research question, which sought to determine the pupils' level of comprehension before the implementation of Project IDIOM-QUEST, relied mainly on the results of the pre-test. These results were analyzed by computing frequency distributions, percentages, and mean scores, which were then grouped into proficiency categories such as beginning, developing, proficient, and advanced based on set cut-off points. Using descriptive statistical analysis, facilitated by Microsoft Excel, provided a clear benchmark of learners' baseline performance prior to the introduction of the intervention. Establishing this benchmark was crucial for measuring progress and making comparisons with post-test results.

The third research question focused on identifying the changes in pupils' comprehension and application of idiomatic expressions during and after the intervention. For this purpose, the datasets included weekly classroom observations, learner outputs from the adventure modules and enrichment activities, and post-test results. The post-test was analyzed through descriptive statistics, comparing mean scores and percentages with the pre-test results to measure learning gains. At the same time, qualitative data from observations and learner outputs were analyzed using thematic analysis. Learner behaviors such as participation, collaboration, creativity in using idioms, and accuracy of responses were coded into categories that highlighted patterns of progress. In addition, written and performance-based learner outputs were rated using a teacher-designed rubric. These ratings were converted into percentage scores and discussed alongside qualitative observations, ensuring that the analysis captured not only whether learners improved but also how they demonstrated comprehension in authentic tasks.

The fourth research question explored the experiences and insights of both pupils and the teacher-researcher in using Project IDIOM-QUEST, and how these could inform post-study plans. The datasets for this inquiry included transcripts of focus group discussions, learner feedback forms, and the teacher's reflection journal. Data from these sources were analyzed through qualitative thematic analysis, where responses were grouped into themes such as perceived usefulness of the module, challenges encountered, motivation gained, and suggestions for improvement. Responses from feedback forms were also tallied and summarized in simple frequencies and percentages—for example, the number of learners who found the module enjoyable, motivating, or challenging—which served as supplementary quantitative data. The thematic analysis was conducted using Microsoft Word for coding, while Excel was employed to tabulate the tallied responses. This approach allowed the authentic voices of learners and the reflective insights of the teacher to shape practical recommendations for sustaining and refining the intervention.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1. How could Project IDIOM-QUEST, a self-instructional adventure module, be used to enhance the understanding of idiomatic expressions among Grade 6–Mabini pupils at Balaquid Elementary School?

Table 1 - Frequency of Usage of Module Features and Learner Responses

Feature / Activity	% of Pupils who Reported High Use / High Engagement
Story-based quests	85%
Puzzle and matching tasks	78%
Role-play / dialogues	70%
Weekly reflections	65%
Autonomous work with minimal teacher prompts	60%

Table 1 presents the frequency of usage and learner engagement with the different features of the Project IDIOM-QUEST self-instructional modules. The results revealed that story-based quests had the highest engagement, with 85% of pupils reporting frequent use, followed by puzzle and matching tasks at 78%. Role-play and dialogues showed 70% engagement, while weekly reflections and autonomous work with minimal teacher prompts received 65% and 60% respectively. These results indicate that learners were most responsive to activities that were contextualized and gamified, while reflective and independent tasks were more challenging for them to sustain.

The strong preference for story-based quests confirms the importance of narrative contexts in language learning. Recent studies emphasized that embedding figurative language in stories increases motivation and comprehension because learners are able to process idioms as part of meaningful discourse rather than in isolation (Özdemir & Türkoğlu, 2023). Similarly, a 2024 study on gamified storytelling in language classrooms found that narrative-driven modules significantly boosted engagement and comprehension among elementary learners (Al-Khresheh, 2024). This suggests that the narrative quest structure of Project IDIOM-QUEST effectively bridged the gap between abstract idioms and learner experience.

Puzzle and matching tasks also ranked highly, with more than three-fourths of pupils reporting strong engagement. This outcome supports the claim that interactive, game-like activities sustain learner interest and reinforce comprehension by requiring active problem solving. In a study on interactive modules, learners described matching and puzzle-based tasks as enjoyable and beneficial in strengthening recall and contextual usage of new expressions (Mallari & Tayag, 2022). Such activities promote immediate feedback and allow repeated practice, both of which are crucial for mastering idiomatic expressions.

Meanwhile, role-play and dialogue activities received a lower but still substantial engagement rate of 70%. While pupils participated, some remained hesitant to perform idioms in spoken contexts. This finding mirrors results from recent idiom instruction studies, which noted that learners often understood idioms but were reluctant to use them in oral tasks due to fear of error or lack of confidence (Prayuda, 2023). Nonetheless, even moderate engagement in role-plays is significant, as production tasks remain essential for transitioning from passive recognition to active usage of idiomatic expressions.

On the other hand, weekly reflections (65%) and autonomous work (60%) ranked lowest in terms of high engagement. This outcome reflects broader challenges observed in modular distance and self-paced learning where students tend to favor interactive tasks over metacognitive or independent activities that demand higher self-regulation (Tran et al., 2023). Although lower, these levels still demonstrate that more than half of the pupils engaged in reflective and autonomous tasks, and teacher journal notes suggested gradual improvement over the eight-week implementation. Studies confirm that reflective practices are often underutilized by learners but become more meaningful when modeled and scaffolded by teachers (Jugar & Cortes, 2022).

Research Question 2. What was the level of pupils' comprehension of idiomatic expressions before the implementation of Project IDIOM-QUEST?

Table 2 - Pretest Comprehension Scores in Idiomatic Expression Test

Descriptive Statistic	Value
Mean score (out of 20)	9.2
Standard Deviation	2.8
% who scored below 10 (i.e. < 50%)	70%
% in "developing" or "beginning" level	80%

Table 2 presents the pretest comprehension scores of Grade 6–Mabini pupils in idiomatic expressions before the implementation of Project IDIOM-QUEST. The mean score was **9.2 out of 20** with a standard deviation of 2.8, indicating a generally low level of comprehension and wide variability

among pupils. Notably, **70% of the learners scored below 10 points**, or less than 50% accuracy, while **80% were categorized at the “developing” or “beginning” levels** of proficiency. These results confirm that most pupils struggled to interpret idiomatic expressions prior to the intervention.

The low baseline performance supports earlier classroom observations that pupils often resorted to literal translations when faced with idiomatic phrases, leading to misinterpretations. This difficulty is consistent with broader findings in Philippine education, where figurative language has been identified as one of the weakest areas of reading comprehension in national assessments (UNICEF, 2020; DepEd, 2022). Recent studies also reported that idioms remain a persistent challenge for second-language learners because their figurative meanings are culturally bound and often unrelated to the literal meanings of the words (Pavčina, 2024).

The results in Table 2 align with international research showing that without explicit instruction, idiomatic expressions are rarely acquired naturally by young learners in EFL or ESL settings. A study by Özdemir and Türkoğlu (2023) found that learners exposed only to conventional methods, such as rote memorization, performed poorly in idiomatic comprehension compared to those taught through contextualized instruction. Similarly, Prayuda (2023) observed that many learners understood idioms only superficially and hesitated to apply them in communication, reinforcing the need for structured interventions.

At the same time, the findings highlight a key contrast with studies conducted in contexts where idioms are integrated into authentic, everyday input. For example, Tran et al. (2023) reported that when idioms were embedded in multimedia and conversational tasks, comprehension levels at the baseline were higher compared to learners who encountered idioms only in textbooks. This difference suggests that the low scores of Grade 6–Mabini pupils may have stemmed from limited exposure to authentic idiomatic use in their community and learning environment.

Research Question 3. What changes in pupils’ comprehension and application of idiomatic expressions were observed during and after the implementation of Project IDIOM-QUEST?

Table 3 - Pretest vs Posttest Mean Scores & Gain

Measure	Value
Pretest mean	9.2
Posttest mean	15.4
Standard deviation (posttest)	2.1
Mean gain	+6.2
Percentage gain	~ 67% increase
% scoring ≥ 15 ($\geq 75\%$) in posttest	60%

Table 4 - Learner Output Accuracy & Application Tasks (Mid vs Final Weeks)

Indicator	Mid (Week 4)
Accuracy in applying idioms in sentences (%)	55%
Quality in role-play / dialogues (rubric high/medium/low)	10 high / 12 medium / 5 low
Number of spontaneous idiom uses in writing tasks	8 instances total

Tables 3 and 4 show the changes in pupils’ comprehension and application of idiomatic expressions during and after the implementation of Project IDIOM-QUEST. The results indicate a marked improvement in learner performance. The mean score increased from 9.2 in the pretest to 15.4 in the posttest, representing a gain of 6.2 points or approximately 67% improvement. The posttest standard deviation narrowed to 2.1, suggesting more consistent performance across the class. Notably, 60% of the pupils scored at least 15 points ($\geq 75\%$), showing that a majority reached satisfactory comprehension levels after the intervention.

Learners also demonstrated steady progress in application tasks. As presented in Table 4, accuracy in applying idioms in sentences improved from 55% at mid-intervention to 80% by the end of the program. Role-play and dialogue performance showed a shift from 10 pupils rated “high,” 12 “medium,” and 5 “low” at midterm to 15 “high,” 9 “medium,” and only 3 “low” by Week 8, indicating greater confidence and skill in oral use of idioms. Similarly, spontaneous use of idiomatic expressions in writing tasks increased from 8 recorded instances at midterm to 25 by the final assessment, reflecting deeper integration of idioms into learners’ productive language skills.

These findings suggest that the intervention effectively enhanced both receptive and productive aspects of idiomatic competence. The results are consistent with recent research highlighting the effectiveness of contextualized, gamified, and story-based approaches in improving figurative language learning. Özdemir and Türkoğlu (2023) found that learners exposed to digital story-based idiom instruction achieved significant gains in both comprehension and usage compared to those taught through traditional memorization methods. Similarly, Prayuda (2023) reported that role-play and collaborative dialogue helped learners overcome reluctance in producing idiomatic expressions, which mirrors the upward shift in pupils’ role-play performance in this study.

Moreover, the increase in spontaneous idiom usage supports claims in recent studies that repeated contextual exposure promotes retention and transfer of idiomatic knowledge to authentic communication. Tran et al. (2023) emphasized that when idioms are embedded in interactive tasks, learners are more likely to reuse them in speaking and writing tasks beyond formal assessments. In contrast, earlier studies that relied primarily on drill and translation methods reported weaker transfer from comprehension to production (Pavlına, 2024). Thus, the results of Project IDIOM-QUEST demonstrate the advantage of self-instructional, adventure-based modules in bridging the gap between understanding idioms and applying them in real communication.

At the same time, the findings also highlight areas for further improvement. While overall gains were substantial, 40% of learners still did not reach the 75% proficiency benchmark in the posttest, suggesting that some idioms—particularly opaque ones—remained challenging. Pavlına (2024) similarly observed that learners often continued to struggle with highly figurative or culturally specific idioms despite intervention. This indicates the need for extended reinforcement, visual scaffolding, and continued practice across grade levels to achieve long-term mastery.

Research Question 4. What were the pupils' and teacher-researcher's experiences and insights in using Project IDIOM-QUEST, and how might these have guided post-study plans for sustaining and improving idiom instruction?

Table 5 - Qualitative Themes: Experiences & Insights

Insights	Experiences
Increased motivation & enjoyment	"I looked forward to each quest because it was like a story."
Sense of achievement & confidence	"When I could use idioms in my writing, I felt proud."
Initial difficulty in module navigation	Some pupils in Week 2: "I didn't know what to do first in the quest."
Preference for peer collaboration	Several pupils: "Working with classmates helped me guess idiom meanings."
Suggestions for module improvement	More visuals, more idiom choices per quest, extension tasks
Teacher's reflection: workload & sustainability	"Creating new modules was time-intensive, but reuse is possible."
Teacher's insight: scaffolding needed in early modules	In early modules, some pupils stalled and needed hints

Table 5 presents the qualitative themes that emerged from pupil feedback, focus group discussions, and the teacher-researcher's reflective journal on the use of Project IDIOM-QUEST. The findings highlighted both the strengths of the intervention and the challenges that shaped post-study plans for sustaining idiom instruction.

One of the most prominent themes was increased motivation and enjoyment, with pupils noting that the quests felt like stories that made learning exciting. This sense of immersion aligns with recent studies emphasizing the motivational benefits of gamified storytelling in language learning, where narratives were found to enhance learner engagement and emotional connection to the material (Al-Khresheh, 2024). Pupils also expressed a sense of achievement and confidence, sharing that successfully applying idioms in their writing gave them pride. This reflects findings from Tran et al. (2023), who reported that contextualized, task-based activities increased learners' confidence in using new expressions because success was tied to authentic performance rather than rote recall.

However, some learners reported initial difficulty in navigating the modules, particularly in the first weeks of implementation. Pupils admitted uncertainty about how to begin the quests, highlighting the importance of clear scaffolding at the early stages. This mirrors challenges identified in modular and self-paced learning environments, where learners often struggle with orientation and require structured guidance before developing autonomy (Mallari & Tayag, 2022). By Week 4, though, most pupils were more comfortable with the module flow, indicating that repeated exposure and teacher guidance gradually eased these difficulties.

Another key insight was the preference for peer collaboration, as several pupils remarked that working with classmates helped them interpret idioms more effectively. This finding reinforces the role of social constructivism in language learning, where meaning-making is enhanced through peer negotiation and collaborative tasks. Jugar and Cortes (2022) similarly observed that peer interaction supported deeper engagement in reflective and applied language tasks, suggesting that group activities should remain integral to sustaining idiom instruction.

Learners also offered suggestions for module improvement, including the addition of more visuals, more idiomatic expressions per quest, and extension tasks. Such feedback is consistent with the dual coding theory, which posits that combining verbal and visual cues supports retention of abstract language like idioms (Pavlına, 2024). Incorporating visuals and supplementary idioms may not only sustain motivation but also help address lingering difficulties with opaque or culturally unfamiliar expressions.

From the teacher's perspective, the reflections revealed concerns about workload and sustainability. Developing and validating adventure modules was described as time-intensive, though the potential for reuse made the innovation practical in the long term. Similar challenges are noted in the literature, where teachers often express difficulty sustaining innovative instructional designs without institutional support or shared resources (Prayuda, 2023). Finally, the teacher emphasized the need for stronger scaffolding in early modules, observing that some pupils stalled in initial activities without hints or examples. This aligns with best practices in instructional design, which advocate for a gradual release of responsibility—moving from guided to independent tasks—to ensure that learners build confidence progressively (Özdemir & Türkoğlu, 2023).

4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

This action research investigated the effectiveness of the Utilization of Project IDIOM-QUEST in Enhancing Pupils' Understanding of Idiomatic Expressions through Self-Instructional Adventure Modules among Grade 6–Mabini pupils of Balaquid Elementary School, SDO Biliran. Specifically, it sought to determine (1) how the module could enhance pupils' understanding of idiomatic expressions; (2) the level of pupils' idiomatic comprehension before implementation; (3) the changes in comprehension and application during and after implementation; and (4) the experiences and insights of pupils and the teacher-researcher regarding the intervention.

The findings can be summarized as follows:

1. On module features (RQ1): Pupils engaged most with story-based quests (85%) and puzzle/matching tasks (78%), while role-plays (70%), reflections (65%), and autonomous work (60%) showed moderate uptake. Learners preferred interactive and contextualized tasks but gradually adapted to reflective and independent activities with guidance.
2. On pre-intervention comprehension (RQ2): Pupils had low baseline performance, with a mean pretest score of 9.2/20, a standard deviation of 2.8, and 70% scoring below 50% accuracy. About 80% were at “developing” or “beginning” levels, confirming the need for targeted intervention.
3. On changes during/after intervention (RQ3): Pupils' mean scores improved from 9.2 (pretest) to 15.4 (posttest), a gain of 6.2 points or a 67% increase, with 60% scoring $\geq 75\%$ in the posttest. Accuracy in sentence tasks rose from 55% to 80%, role-play performances shifted toward more “high” ratings, and spontaneous idiom use in writing grew from 8 to 25 instances.
4. On experiences and insights (RQ4): Pupils reported greater motivation and enjoyment from the story quests, as well as a sense of pride and confidence in using idioms. Challenges included initial difficulty navigating modules and the need for more visuals and scaffolding. The teacher noted concerns about workload and sustainability, but also recognized the reusability of the modules for future classes.
5. These results were consistent with recent literature emphasizing the importance of contextualized, gamified, and scaffolded learning in idiom instruction (Özdemir & Türkoğlu, 2023; Tran et al., 2023; Al-Khresheh, 2024).

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Project IDIOM-QUEST was effective in improving both comprehension and application of idiomatic expressions, as evidenced by significant gains in test scores, role-play performance, and spontaneous use of idioms.
2. Learners were more engaged when idioms were taught through contextualized, narrative, and interactive formats, supporting the principle that meaningful exposure enhances retention.
3. Baseline deficiencies confirmed that without explicit interventions, pupils would continue to struggle with idioms, echoing national assessment trends.
4. The module fostered motivation and confidence, helping pupils overcome initial reluctance to engage with figurative language.
5. Teacher reflections highlighted sustainability concerns, particularly the time needed to design adventure modules, but also affirmed the potential for replication, adaptation, and institutional support to ensure long-term integration.

Recommendations

In light of the study's results and conclusions, the following recommendations are offered:

For Pupils: Continue practicing idioms through varied tasks such as storytelling, journaling, and peer dialogues to reinforce comprehension and promote long-term retention.

For Teachers: Integrate contextualized and gamified idiom instruction into regular English lessons. Teachers may collaborate in creating a shared bank of idiom modules to lessen workload and promote sustainability.

For School Administrators: Provide support in terms of training, materials, and time allocation for teachers implementing innovative interventions like Project IDIOM-QUEST. This may include printing modules, supplying visuals, or organizing peer-sharing sessions among teachers.

For Curriculum Developers: Consider embedding idiom instruction systematically within English learning materials across grade levels, ensuring gradual exposure from lower to higher grades.

For Future Researchers: Replicate the study in different contexts (other grade levels, schools, or districts) to validate its effectiveness further. Future research may also explore the integration of digital or multimedia-based idiom quests to enhance motivation and scalability.

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