

MODERN APPROACHES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF FUNCTIONAL LITERACY IN LEARNING ENGLISH

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Abstract: Problem: In the contemporary world, English language education is very diverse and full of different information from the very basic to advanced level. There are a huge number of bloggers, books, courses, and methods of studying. However, many people still experience problems with speaking in English. Lack of confidence fluency in speech is very common among people and especially among students. They might know how to make a sentence, they may have advanced grammar, but in ordinary daily speech, these skills are not as necessary. Students are often functionally illiterate while communicating with native speakers as well as among themselves. In the questionnaire, main part of students claimed, that they have poor knowledge of casual phrases used daily, and they do not know how to correctly speak with others in a friendly and unofficial environment.

Aim: To develop students' speaking skills and their functional literacy by using lexical approach and a book that was created for this project, which will be referred to as *Project book*.

Goals:

- To create a handbook and a website with a convenient design and useful content for students.
- To make and carry out the experiment of implementing the book in English learning process.
- Analyze, summarize data and conclude whether the chosen approach is efficient to solve the problem or not.

The actuality: After analyzing the state program for the implementation of the language policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2022-2025, it was concluded that developing functional literacy appears to be actual in learning languages in order to function effectively in the community of native speakers as well as in a school environment in a daily base.

The object of my project are school students and people with Intermediate English level.

The subject of my project is the level of students' speaking skills.

The hypothesis: The students that study and practice daily English vocabulary with the help of *Project book*, will improve their English-speaking skills, functional literacy and confidence.

The scientific novelty of this project is that daily phrases, idioms and author's exercises were selected, systemized and optimized for the further used by students who pursue multidimensional development of their English skills.

The practical significance is that school students, tutors, parents and those, who study daily English, both in urban and rural schools, can use the book and then apply its contents in real life and social media and improve their speech.

The methods of research are literature review, content analysis, comparative analysis, experiment.

Keywords: *English vocabulary, idioms, phrases, functional literacy, English speaking, speech, everyday speech, statistics.*

1. Literature review

"The purpose of teaching speaking in a foreign language lesson is the formation of such speaking skills that would allow the student to use them in non-educational speech practice at the level of generally accepted everyday communication." [1] (*translated from Russian*)

For a person who is learning a language for communication, knowledge of grammar and advanced vocabulary is meaningless, unless the person cannot organize their thoughts in spoken form and in everyday speech with English speakers. This phenomenon is explained by the concept of **functional literacy**.

Functional literacy implies a set of skills that are necessary in human life for existence and communication in the modern world.

According to the ACTFL learning connects [2], According to the ACTFL Learning Connects [2], learning a language improves cognitive function, which improves learning outcomes. This contributes to educational advancement. As a result, gaining linguistic proficiency and a large vocabulary is essential for establishing functional literacy.

"Furthermore, knowing English is supposed to be important for society members who are out science but keen on watching films and getting great pleasure in such fields."

“In other words, many of the world’s top films, books and music are published and pronounced in English.” [3]

According to Voyce Li (2017) [4], using social media in English language environment helps students learn the language and practice it. “In fact, the integration of formal and informal learning has been suggested as a way to enhance formal language learning.” [4] [5]

Watching and listening to media and communicating in SNS are important for enhancing vocabulary, listening and speaking skills. In order to develop confidence for engaging in such environments in students, I collected phrases used by native speakers for everyday speaking in a book and created tasks to practice them.

2. In the classroom

For students, speaking and knowing everyday phrases is important for summative assessments when constructing a dialogue or monologue. For instance, one of IELTS speaking test’s criteria is **Lexical Resource (LR)**, which refers to the natural use of a broad range of vocabulary, including uncommon phrases and idiomatic language. [6]

Unfortunately, middle-school English program does not fully realize students’ expectations how to speak naturally. That is why students’ speech is usually primitive and lacks confidence. For the purpose of solving this problem, I considered several important aspects, such as:

2.1 Motivation

Motivation and interest extensively help in the educational process. Changes and new methods of teaching are a great stimulus for students and their teachers for improving study processes and speaking skills in the classroom. Nowadays, the use of films, music, TV-shows and social media in the study process is getting more and more popular. Due to the beginning of social media era, teenagers frequently spend time while watching, reading or listening something in the Network.

For example, K. Donaghy advocates the usage of pop media content in the educational process. He claims that that since movies and television are such a big part of students' lives, incorporating them into language lessons makes perfect sense. The motivational power of film also increases the fun and enjoyment of learning a language. [7]

According to M.S. Yadav “Consequently, social media’s systematic and scheduled use also opens up the doors for comparison between native and non-native speech, dialectical distinction, and socio-pragmatic variation.” [8]

An excerpt from Askwonder.com argues that: “Only 22% of the 2.5 billion internet users worldwide watch short films, and 65% of them have viewed a vlog. While the largest portion of them watch video on social media platforms like YouTube and Facebook.” “3.25 billion hours of video viewing per month.” [9]

Therefore, using all the methods above in EL studying through learning phrases that are useful in everyday communication will make it easier for students to understand the idiomatic language of native speakers better, which will motivate them to learn the language in new ways and develop their English skills simultaneously.

2.2 Style of learning

The study, which was released in Nature Human Behaviour, was headed by cognitive psychologist Weizhen (Zane) Xie, Ph.D., a post-doctoral associate at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS). They found that some words are more memorable than others. Their findings are consistent with the hypothesis that memories are hardwired into neural networks and that memories are sought after by the brain in a manner similar to how search engines find information online. [10]

When a person expands on his understanding of a term, he considers it in many contexts. This works because our minds recall information by connecting it to other information. The word will stick in your mind more firmly the more associations you make with it. [11]

To sum up, the most convenient and efficient method of learning new phrases and words is the implementation them in the context, which is related to the brain’s associative function of memorizing information.

The assignments, suggested in my research, included the various types of memorizing information with associations in context. For example, logical construction of the sentences using the new word, pictures related to phrases, associations with daily and easy communications.

2.3 Flipped learning

Project handbook was created for a personal fulfillment. Since the majority of students and people, on average, perceive information visually, the activities in the book's content do not require audio or video materials. From 60% to more than 70% of information is received by a person visually, according to a number of sources. [12]

In the current innovative time, people use more and more useful methods to learn languages. One of the efficient is a flipped learning. It is an educational technique, where students learn all the material on their own and then put it into practice in class. [13] Students can practice this modern technique of independent research and analyze data by using this book.

2.4 Context

The self-confidence and beliefs of the students are largely dependent on the teachers. The teachers must inspire and motivate the students to have self-confidence and speak English in public with assurance. [14] The introduction of new interactive learning methods and speaking vocabulary will benefit pupils in this regard and excite them.

Native speakers have been hearing idiomatic expressions in everyday speech since they were born. Whatever age your learners are, it is essential they feel comfortable while implementing these expressions in their speech and in writing assignments. [15] [16]

Along with their growing motivation and improving skills by using media, it can also be helpful for their summative assessments and academic endeavors.

Primary research

A primary qualitative and quantitative survey conduction made it possible to understand how well Intermediate level students know an idiomatic language and speaking phrases. The survey had also revealed which types of exercises are most beneficial and interesting for students.

Subjects: students with Intermediate English level

1. Content

For the first survey, I took the most common exercises in English language learning textbooks.

ФИО (Full name):

Пол (Gender):

Возраст/класс (Age/Grade):

Как Вы обычно лучше воспринимаете информацию? (How do you usually perceive information better?)

Визуально/На слух/Иным способом? (Подчеркните) (Visually/On sound /Otherwise? (underline))

Какое(-ие) упражнение было проще/интереснее для Вас? (Which exercise(s) was easier/more interesting for you?)

1) Подчеркните нужную фразу для перевода

1. Кажется, она в отчаянии из-за экзаменов.

She seems to be down in the dumps/deep down after exams.

2. Думаешь у этого диалога есть смысл?

You think this conversation has a point/gives a shot?

3. Пожалуйста, не беспокойте меня. У меня много работы

Please, don't bother me/don't get on my nerves, I have a lot of work .

2) Поставьте части предложения в нужном порядке

1. We have/how/no idea/people will/on our project/react/so/play it by ear./we shall have to

2. I/making scenes/don't like/right now/I am/but/running out of patience.

3. I'm/they got/afraid/their wires crossed/printed the wrong book./and/he

3) Выберите (одно) нужное описание картинки из списка



Fig. 1. Task with pictures from the test.

1.Down in the dumps

2.Get your wires crossed

3.Don't bother me

2. Results

4.The mind boggles

5.Mad as hornet

6.It has a point

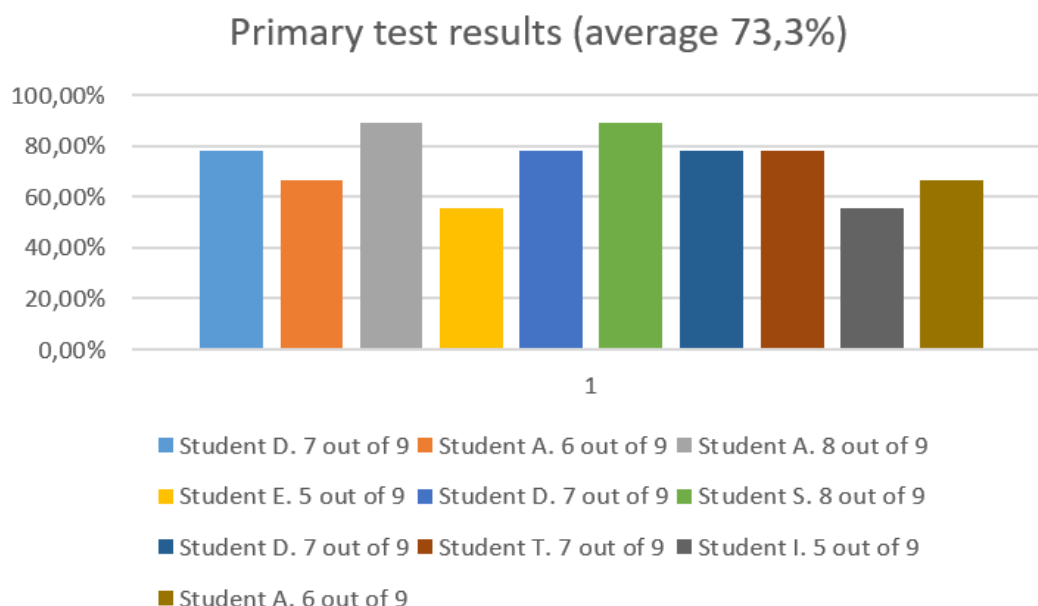


Fig. 2. Primary test results.

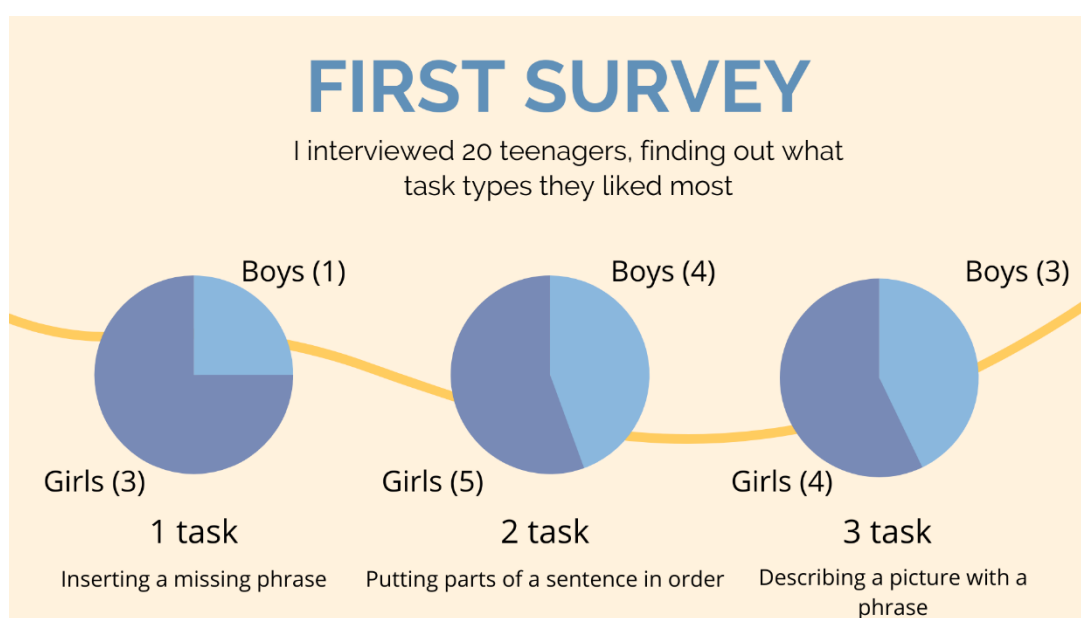


Fig. 3. Statistics of students' preferences.

From the primary research, I identified, that the tasks with a choice of small number of ready answers is too simple and not effective. According to the survey, most students like tasks that require logical thinking more, although they are more difficult.

Experiment

To implement the idea of introducing the study of idiomatic language into the school program, as well as for convenient self-study, I created a book with a dictionary and assignments for it. The book also includes the examples of using phrases and answers to tasks and test for evaluation.

I divided all the selected data into several types of tasks, for better perception in different fields.

1. Tasks with a missing phrase, the answer to which the student must remember from the studied material in order to have a comprehension in what situations the phrase is used.

2. Taken from the primary test. It helps the student to learn how to use phrases and at the same time requires correct grammatical construction. These tasks are longer than the first type, as students like it and they are able to develop logical thinking.

3. Type 3 is a dialogue. There, the student must select and insert a phrase from those provided in the box, in accordance with the situation and the topic of the conversation.

4. Pictures. For students with visual perception, memorization through pictures is easier and more interesting.

For an additional positive effect from the tasks, book's design was specially selected, and created in Canva. It was done so that the children showed interest and could study the material calmly. Mostly I used calm colors, such as blue, green and beige. According to students of Ball State University, blue color can dispose people to the performance of creative tasks and the desire to achieve good results. [17] Passive hues (cold colors such as green and blue) to keep learners calm (Wilson, 1966). [18].

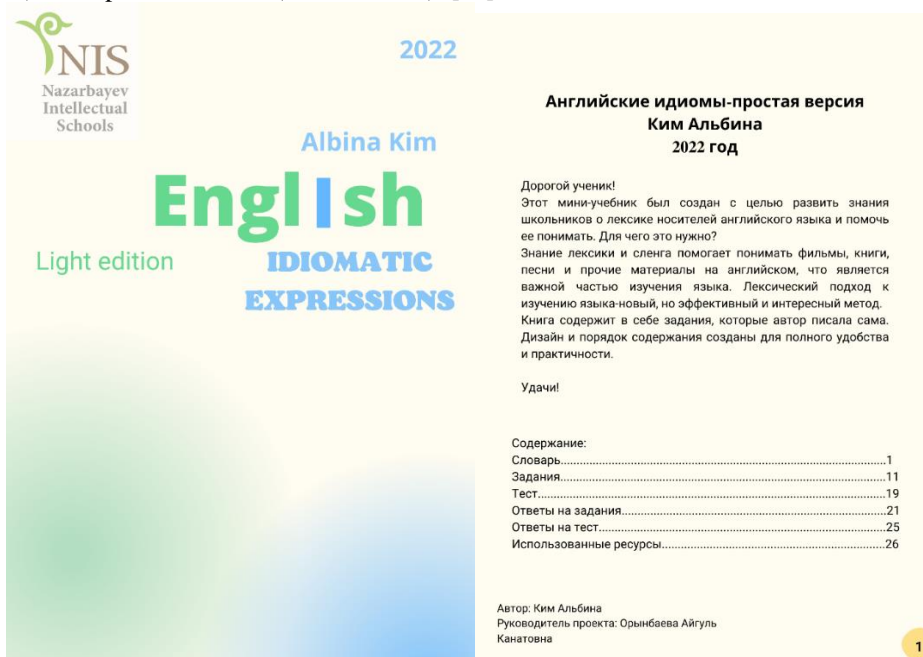


Fig. 4. A book cover.

Fig. 5. A book introduction.

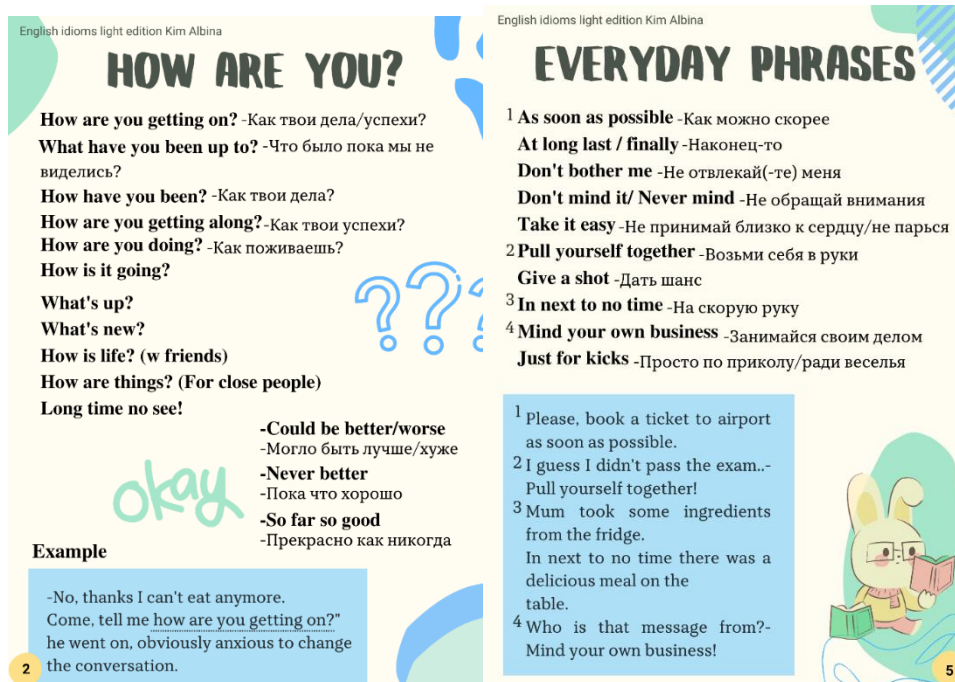


Fig. 6. Greeting phrases.

Fig. 7. Daily phrases.

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PRACTISE TASKS 1 lvl.

1 Complete the sentence with needed phrase

- В глубине души он знал, что она была права.
..... he knew, that she was right.
- Хорошо, возможно твои слова имеют смысл.
Okay, you may
- Ты можешь получить ответ, но я не уверена.
You might get a reply, but

2 Put the parts of the sentence in the correct order

- we/his/cake./Let's say/just for kicks./ate
- high time/It is/this/to end/problem.
- you/I/mean./no wonder/shocked./feel
- crack up/comedy./this/I/always/while watching

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3 Complete the dialogue with phrases from the box


so far so good a whale of time long time no see!
 at long last/finally catch you later!

Rose: Hey Jane!! How is it going?
 Jane: Hi there! What's new?
 Rose: Oh, did you hear the news? Our friend Sarah, wants to organise a dinner with our classmates, on Saturday. What do you think?
 Jane: That's a bit! We might have I haven't seen them for ages!
 Rose: I agree with you., we can take some normal photos, not like at the prom, haha!
 Jane: Then,
 Rose: Bye!


4 Write an idiom to describe the picture



1.



2.



3.

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Fig. 8. level practice tasks.

Experiment Process

For a qualitative experiment, I took students not only from our school, but also from other places. One young woman was even an adult. Despite their different ages and difference in education, their English level remained Intermediate, which made the experiment more fascinating.

Students were given a month to complete all assignments and tests. Throughout the whole time, they communicated in a WhatsApp group chat, which was created so that they were able to practice together, as well as ask questions about the project.

In addition, in order to practice effectively and apply phrases with each other in the communication process, I held a conference in Google Meet, in which participants were talking on different topics, which was quite useful. During their continuous interactions with each other, students were very productive in using the material they have learned.

Evaluation

Comparison of the results of the primary research and main experiment makes it clear that the students have made significant improvements.

The results of solving tasks with idiomatic expressions for students without prior training amounted to a total of 73,3% of correct solutions, taking into account the fact that the primary tasks were even simpler than in the book. While the results of students after passing the book were average 91% on the test, after the main tasks and practice. These statistics showed that the book had an excellent effect on students' knowledge as well as functional literacy, which means that it can be used to teach idiomatic language to people.

During the test conference, students used an average of 15 phrases from the book in the correct context, in different role situations. Additionally, everyone was active in the process of constant communication in the chat, using about 10 phrases a day on various topics. In general, I would estimate the effectiveness of the entire experiment at 85%, since:

- All students successfully completed most of the tasks.
- Pupils showed excellent results in the control test.
- Activity was shown both in correspondence and in a live call with cameras.
- The students used the phrases in the correct context and with the correct spelling.
- The only shortcomings in the activities of the students were the less conferences (comparable to live speech in the classroom) due to the lack of time for the students, as well as the lack of practice in writing texts, which unfortunately was not possible in our conditions.

However, these problems will not arise in the classroom, with other students and the teacher.

Conclusion

The main aim of this project was to improve the English speaking skills and functional literacy among the students with using the lexical approach and specialized book.

During the project, all the goals were achieved, the book was successfully created, the experiment and observations were carried out. The effectiveness of the book has been proven through the results of students and their improvements in speech and vocabulary knowledge. With the help of the textbook and the chosen lexical approach, the established problem- the lack of lexical knowledge for everyday speech can be partially solved, which was noticeable from the results of the study. Thus, based on all the research done, I can say that the project hypothesis confirmed.

The search for approaches and methods for better and more interesting learning of the English language will never stop. Continuous development and interactive tasks are very important in the language learning process. The lexical approach and the study of idiomatic language is a useful and effective method. Since the results of this study and the methods used are promising, this project is waiting for further development.

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