

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides the introduction of the study. In this chapter, some significant points are explained. First, the background of the study explains why the researcher is interested in exploring the challenges and strategies of understanding English idioms by students. The research questions that serve as the guidance for the analysis are also presented in this chapter. In addition, the aims of this study are also presented in this chapter. The significance of this research is also explained. Finally, the chapter organization showing the description of each chapter is shown.

### **Background of the Research**

A language is a form of culture from where the language originates. In human life, language and culture seem inseparable, especially in the world of linguistic education on how the language is formed from the existing cultures used by the native speakers. According to J. Bennet, M. Bennet and Allen (2003), someone who learns a language without learning the culture of that language risk, becoming fluent fools. One of the cultures of language is idioms, idioms are the construction of words or expressions whose meaning cannot be interpreted literally. Understanding idioms is an essential part of learning and using a language because it is a big part of one's culture. It is crucial for researchers, teachers, and students to understand how EFL learners acquire and use idioms in the process of communicating and improving their proficiency in order to find the most effective way of language learning.

Understanding and using idioms correctly can facilitate the process of communication using the English language. Belousova (2015) argued that comprehension and the fluent use of idioms could be seen as a symbol of language skills, as it could be an effective way to help students develop their communication skills in the everyday context. McDevitt (1993) said that idioms are often used in common situations. It is known for English native speakers to use idiomatic expressions daily, and it becomes a challenge for non-native speakers to overcome (Thyab, 2016). Ruhl (1989) stated that learners have difficulty in understanding the meaning and structure of new languages. This is an important issue that should be considered before teaching language items for L2 students. This issue is able to illustrate the fact that while learning idioms, L2 students could experience problems that will affect their communication with the native speakers. Such idioms pose a potential issue for both English native speakers and English second language learners (Cooper, 1998).

Non-native speakers find it difficult to understand for several reasons. The study done by Alhaysony (2017) showed that during the process of understanding English idioms, the students face some difficulties. The first difficulty is the differences between students' proficiency levels. Liontas (2002) stated that L2 students understood the idiomatic meaning literally and then took some figurative explanations. Moreover, students often used strategies to predict the meaning of idioms, guessing the meaning of idioms from the context, and seeking the relationship of an equivalent expression in their native language. Al-Khawaldeh et al. (2016) found that students' ability to understand idioms was still very poor. The students were not even aware of the frequently used idioms even though they had a desire to learn them. Shahidipour and Tahririan (2018) stated that idioms are very difficult to learn because it is not a part of the learning system and it is not included in the syllabus. In addition, there is a

significant difference in the strategy used by both successful and less successful students in learning idioms.

Despite the number of studies related to the investigation of the challenges and strategies in understanding idioms already exist; in Indonesia itself, the issue is rarely addressed. Idioms are difficult to master by the students because they have no meaning that corresponds to the definition of each word from its constituent. The previous studies (Alhanosy, 2017; Shahidipour & Tahririan, 2018; Al-Khawaldeh et al, 2016) have investigated the same area of study using mix method and quantitative method. On the other hand, the researcher for this study used a qualitative research method to get real and better results based on the L2 language learners' experience. Investigating how idiomatic expressions are interpreted and processed by the second language or foreign language learners is an issue that should be explored further in order to find the most effective strategy to interpret a figurative language of the learners' target language in Indonesia.

The use of idioms will always be found in the communication process both written and oral. In the English Language Education Department (ELED) at one private Islamic university, there is no particular discussion on idiomatic expressions except only in one class that learn to prepare student to conduct the proficiency test namely Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) where one of the discussions is understanding the American idioms.

Based on the researcher's prior observation, many students lack of understanding of the idioms they found along the learning process. This situation may be caused by the idea that idioms and other expressions are deemed to be less important than the grammars. Indonesian learning curriculum only includes idioms and other expressions as a minor part of the subject, so many students have a hard time understanding the meaning of the idioms themselves; this

situation results in a disruption to their learning experience. This research aims to explore the challenges and strategies that students use to understand the idioms.

### **Identification of Problem**

The teaching and learning process in the EFL always uses English to communicate. It is believed that it can train students' understanding and improve students' ability to communicate using the target language. The researcher explored the use of the target language and the students' understanding of the language used by the EFL by using preliminary interview. During the preliminary interview, the researcher found that many students had little to none understanding of the culture of the target language, especially English idioms.

English idiom is a distinctive linguistic form of literature from an area that is often used by native speakers and a part of the culture of those English-speaking countries that must also be learned in order to communicate correctly with the native speakers. There are numerous problems found during the observation. First, the students' perception while facing some difficulties in understanding idioms was not always clear. It was because students' proficiency level was different, so they faced different obstacle. The second was about the students' strategies to understand English idioms. Guidance to learn and understand idioms better would definitely help students in their learning process.

Therefore, it is important to recognize the problems because English idioms is not well taught in Indonesia and there is no learning material about idioms in learning English. Learning idioms can help the students to be communicative. EFL students certainly have a desire to be able to communicate with native speakers and learn about the culture in target language. This research can help L2 learners to master English, to develop their communicative skills, and to

learn the target language culture. In addition, the challenges faced by students in understanding idioms and the strategies they use to overcome the problems related to idioms can also be explored.

### **Delimitation of the Problem**

In this research, the researcher focuses on the challenges and strategies of understanding English idioms that they found during the study of English in EFL. To make this research become effective, the researcher limits the exploration of the study to a certain extent. First, the researcher only analyzes the challenges faced by the students in understanding English idioms. Second, the researcher investigates the strategies used by the students to understand the English idioms. Third, the participants of the research are 8 students from ELED at one Islamic Private university in Yogyakarta.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What are the challenges faced by EFL students in understanding English idioms?
2. What are strategies implemented by the EFL students in understanding English idioms?

### **The Objectives of the Research**

Based on the research questions, the objectives of the research are:

1. To explore the challenges in understanding English idioms based on the EFL students perception.

2. To investigate the strategies implemented by the EFL students in understanding English idioms.

### **The Significance of the Research**

The research is expected to serve the benefits and good impacts for many aspects for students, teachers, and future researchers. The explanation is presented below:

**Students.** This research can be used to find the difficulties faced by students in learning idioms and the strategies implemented by the students. The students can use this research as a form of prevention if they face challenges in understanding the idiom and the students could use the strategies found on this research as a reference to understand the English idioms.

**Teachers.** Learning idioms is still rarely done since it is not a part of any curriculum. Teachers are able to use this research as a reference to understand the difficulties faced by students in learning idioms so that they can find the most effective way of teaching idiomatic expressions.

**Future researchers.** The findings of this research can be used by other researchers who are interested in exploring the same area of study. The results of this research are also expected to be a further reference for those who want to research the same area of study from different perspectives and purposes.

## **Organization of the Chapter**

This research contains five chapters. Chapter one consists of the background of the research, identification of the research, delimitation of the problem, research questions, objective of the research, and the significance of the research.

Chapter two is the literature review. It provides the definition of English idioms, challenges in understanding English idioms, and strategies in understanding English idioms. This chapter explains the theory related to the overview of understanding English idioms. In this chapter, the researcher also provides review of related studies and conceptual framework.

Chapter three is the methodology. This chapter explains how the research was conducted by the researcher. This chapter discusses the methods, the instruments, the participants, settings, and data gathering techniques. In this chapter, the researcher also explains how to analyze the data.

Chapter four contains the findings and discussion. This chapter presents the results of the data which are about the challenges faced by EFL students in understanding English idioms and also the strategies implemented by EFL students to overcome the challenges in understanding English idioms. Additionally, the researcher also provides the theories related to the findings.

Chapter five consists of the conclusion and recommendations. This chapter explains the general answers to the research questions and the recommendations from the researcher. In the conclusion, the researcher presents the summary of this study. The second part is the recommendations which are given to teachers, students, and other researchers.