International Journal of Research in English Education (IJREE)

Original Article **Published online: 30 March 2025**

The Impact of Task-Based Assessment on Iranian Male and Female EFL Learners' Idiomatic Knowledge

Shirin Afshari[1], & Davood Taghipour Bazargani[1*]

* Correspondence:
bazergani@iaurasht.ac.ir
1. Department of English Language, Rasht Branch, Islamic Azad University, Rasht, Iran

Received: 12 November 2024
Revision: 24 February 2025
Accepted: 22 March 2025
Published online: 30 March 2025

Abstract

Task-based language assessment (TBLA) is a framework for language testing that takes the task as the fundamental unit for assessment and testing. This study was designed to investigate the impact of TBLA on Iranian Male and Female EFL learners' idiomatic knowledge. To fulfill the objective, 40 learners ranging from 18 to 25 in age and studying at Bayan English Institute in Rasht, Iran, were selected from among 100 participants based on their performance on quick placement test (QPT). The study employed a true-experimental design in which the participants were randomly assigned to two experimental groups and two control groups. First, a pretest of idioms was administered. Then, the experimental groups received a sixteen-session treatment that was the treatment of Task-Based Assessment. Meanwhile, the control groups received a sixteen-session placebo. A posttest of idioms was then administered to all the participants. The use of UNIANOVA revealed that the experimental groups outperformed the control groups in learning idioms. Based on the findings of the present study, all stakeholders, particularly material developers and teachers are proposed to include idioms in language teaching so that remarkable opportunities for improving idiomatic knowledge among learners would be provided.

Keywords: idiom, idiomatic knowledge, task, task-based assessment

© The Author(s).
Publisher: Science Academy Publications.

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

1. Introduction

Language learning process is very complicated and multi-dimensional. Among the many dimensions, vocabulary knowledge is of crucial importance and has attracted substantial attention. As Zarei and Sahami Gilani (2013) maintain, vocabulary learning is the main component of language and knowledge acquisition. At the same time, vocabulary is not confined to words; a language is also replete with routine language items, particularly idioms, which are metaphorical expressions (Rodriguez & Winnberg, 2013). One of the components of figurative language is idioms. Idioms are one of the most frequently utilized figures of speech in everyday life in every language. Idioms are so commonly used that L2 learners would come across them in all forms of discourse such as conversations, lectures, books, and newspapers (Cooper, 2012) and "especially in movies and TV" (p. 234).

Native speakers use a plethora of idioms during the course of each day. In this regard, Cakir (2011) state that people sometimes flourish their opinions with these cultural-specific expressions, and it requires an efficient competence in the target language to achieve successful communication. Different scholars have come up with different definitions of what comprises an idiom. Most scholars have agreed that the important features of idioms are that (1) idioms are often but not always nonliteral or semi-literal; (2) they often have a rigid structure, and (3) idioms are multiword expressions. Idioms are nonliteral because their meanings cannot be fully deduced from the interpretation of their parts. Idioms are a class of multi-word units "which pose a challenge to our understanding of grammar and lexis that has not yet been fully met" (Fellbaum, 2006, p. 390).

Since an important part of acquiring proficiency in a language, especially for foreign and second language learners, is the construction and maintenance of a large range of idiomatic expressions, many researchers have focused on the field of idiom and related studies (Guo, 2019). In the English language, idiomatic expressions are spontaneously used by native speakers daily. It is an essential part of the English language lexicon and vocabulary. Idiomatic expressions are, therefore, considered unavoidable for non-native speakers of English. As a result, Non-native English speakers have to get used to using these expressions.

Non-native speakers of English should learn idioms and practice using them in parallel with native speakers. As such, it is imperative to include idiomatic expressions in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms and teaching materials. Since the 1970s and 1980s, researchers and practitioners have been interested in task-based approach to teaching different aspects of language including idioms. TBLA is a way of providing information about language learning in authentic settings. Task-based assessment uses tasks as core vehicles to activate and observe language being used to achieve real-life purposes and derive interpretations of what test takers or learners can do with their language ability (Bachman, 2002; Ellis, 2003; Norris, 2016). It has been claimed that traditional methods of teaching idioms make students demotivated and bored (Moslehi & Rahimi, 2018).

In TBLT, students learn language by doing tasks. Thus, tasks are considered as vehicles for language teaching (Ellis, 2003). Long (1985) proposed task as an appropriate way to identify learners' needs, organize opportunities for language acquisition, and measure students' progress. Choosing the right type of tasks and using them in the right place can help learners to learn and communicate more effectively. Well-designed tasks not only increase the quantity, quality, frequency, and variety of language practice but also enhance the possibility for the development or use of language in ways that support cognitive development and increased language skills (Hosseini, 2007; Razavi Hejrati, Taghipour Bazargani, & Saharkhiz Arabani, 2017). Tasks are not to study language forms; they are focused on meaning-making through forms (Branden, 2006; Willis & Willis, 2007). Therefore, TBLT is a good method; it is real-life because the students are involved in real-life processing (Nunan, 2004). It is also believed that the quickest way to change student learning is to change the assessment system (Andrews, Fullilove, & Wong, 2002).

Considering the importance of preparing and compiling suitable educational materials to strengthen the students' knowledge of idioms, and based on the appropriate educational approach to strengthen them, especially the language-oriented task, the purpose of this research was to examine the probable effect of TBLA on EFL students' knowledge of idioms.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In recent years, figurative idioms have attracted a great deal of attention from pedagogical point of view, although they were neglected before the 20th century. Nowadays, these inseparable aspects of human language are very frequent in everyday language use. Idioms play an important role in foreign language learning. Most English speakers say about 20 million idioms per lifetime; hence, using proper figurative language would be a sign of native-like speech in every language. On the other hand, teaching and learning idioms is one of the most difficult areas of learning a second

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

language. Idiomaticity has recently attracted considerable attention in linguistics, psycholinguistics, and psychology (Cacciari & Tabbosi, 1993).

There is a common assumption that the more words a learner knows, the larger the learner's vocabulary knowledge. However, there is another dimension to vocabulary knowledge that should be considered, namely how far a learner knows the combinatory possibilities of a word. Some linguists call them 'lexical phrases' or 'lexical items', others prefer the term 'multi-word chunks' or just 'chunks' of language (Moon, 2001).

Miller (1956) coined the term 'chunking'. It is the development of permanent sets of associative connections in long-term memory and is the process that underlines the attainment of automaticity and fluency in a language. Whatever the term, they are an important feature both in language use and language acquisition. These multi-word chunks or expressions are namely: idioms, proverbs, sayings, phrasal verbs, and collocations. This aspect of vocabulary knowledge has until recently been largely ignored. In spite of the evident difficulties associated with learning idioms, learning large idiomatic expressions is necessary for foreign language learners. Iranian EFL learners especially at higher levels often fail to use appropriate idioms for what they really mean in English. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no studies have been conducted in Iran that investigate whether the problem is the shortage of idiom knowledge or lack of recognition of how and when to use the current known structures as a result of confusion and miscomprehension of English language classes. Furthermore, to improve learners' receptive skills besides their productive skills, educators should teach learners the most frequently used idioms.

2. Literature Review

TBLA is a framework for language testing that takes the task as the fundamental unit for assessment and testing. In the early 1990s, the field of education called for a new paradigm of assessment, widely known as an alternative assessment (Ghazizadeh & Taghipour Bazargani, 2019), which measured and emphasized the ability to use knowledge; attempts such as developing performance assessments were made to meet this goal (Norris, 2016). Emergence of TBLT has inevitably led to proposals for TBA. In fact, according to Bachman (2002), the use of tasks for assessment purposes in language testing was on the scene long before the advent of TBLT.

> What was the new was not the use of task to assess general language proficiency but for assessing whether learners were able to perform specific target task. When assessing general proficiency, the assessor makes a judgment of the learner's performance of a task based on a rating scale that specifies the different abilities being assessed and the level achieved. (makhopadhyay & Sudharshana, 2022, p. 51)

Common tests such as TOEFL and IELTS assess skills and proficiency in this way. However, in TBLA, the assessment is based on the performance of the task. "TBA does not simply utilize the real-world task as a means for eliciting particular components of the language system, which are then measured or evaluated; instead, the construct of interest is performance of the task itself" (Long & Norris, 2000, p. 600). Any discussion around TBA and task-based instruction should necessarily scrutinize the meaning of tasks. More specifically, tasks have been defined as "the real-world activities people think of when planning, conducting, or recalling their day," such as responding to email messages, making a sales call, attending a lecture, or a business meeting (Long, 2015). Along these lines, TBLA can be classified as assort of performance assessment task (Brindley, 2013; Brown, 2004) for TBA differs from traditional language testing in which a structural view of language was paramount.

2.1 What Is Assessment and Why Is It Important?

First and foremost, assessment is important because it drives students' learning (Brown, 1990). Assessing students' performance is an important aspect of learning and teaching, which includes several components employed by instructors to draw conclusions about their achievements (Ma & Zhou, 2000). The aim of assessing performance is to improve students' learning processes, motivation, self-esteem and thinking (EL-Koumy, 2004). In addition, good assessment can help students become more effective self-directed learners (Hammond, 2006).

Effective assessment can determine the degree to which students have met the intended learning outcomes for a course or program. Assessment also directs both the students' and instructors' attention to what is important (Boud & Falchikov, 2007). It has also been claimed that it is only when faced with assessments that students truly engage with the course material (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007).

Assessment is the systematic basis for making inferences about the learning and development of students. It is the process of defining, selecting, designing, collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and using information to increase students' learning and development. Assessment is the ongoing process of gathering evidence of what each student actually knows, understands, and can do. The measurement of student learning through assessment is important

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

because it provides useful feedback to both instructors and students about the extent to which students are successfully meeting course learning objectives (Safarzadeh & Taghipour Bazargani, 2023).

2.2 Why Should Idioms Be Taught?

One of the most valuable ways you can develop your English-speaking skills is to learn English idioms. Idioms are traditionally defined as fixed multi-word phrases whose meanings cannot be predicted from the literal meanings of individual words that constitute those phrases. Lundblom and Woods (2012) emphasized the importance of understanding idioms. They believe that idioms are clearly presented in academic settings; consequently, failure to comprehend idioms could affect academic performance, written composition, reading comprehension, and vocabulary, especially because the occurrence of idioms in classroom language increases as students advance in age and grade.

According to Asl (2013) and Wray (2000), idioms received less attention particularly in EFL settings because teachers try to simplify the English language to their students and most of the focus is directed to grammar rules. Recently, Khan and Daşkin (2014) presented through their analysis of teacher-trainees' materials and they hardly found idiomatic expressions to teach English learner. This lack of understanding of idiomatic expressions then can lead to communication failure.

Thus, it becomes clear that idioms are very important in EFL/ESL contexts where L2 learners' language proficiency might be assessed on the basis of their understanding of idiomatic expression. This means that the more idioms one knows, the more native-like one's English will sound. Additionally, by learning idioms, one accordingly learns about the culture of the community that speaks the language (Al-kadi, 2015).

2.3 Significance and Objectives of the Study

It is hoped that the findings of this study contribute to the improvement of Iranian Intermediate EFL learners' idiomatic knowledge. In fact, this study would be significant, because it raises all beneficiaries' awareness toward using TBLA in learning idioms, which can develop Iranian intermediate male and female EFL learners' idiomatic knowledge. As it is stated above, there has been no research done regarding the impact of task-based assessment on Iranian male and female EFL learners' idiomatic knowledge. In this regard, this study tried to fulfill a three-fold purpose: firstly, it aimed at finding the direct effect of task-based assessment on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' idiomatic knowledge. Secondly, it examined whether there is a difference between Iranian intermediate male and female EFL learners' idiomatic knowledge. Ultimately, it aimed at investigating the combined effect of task-based assessment as the independent variable of this study and gender as the moderator variable on Iranian EFL learners' idiomatic knowledge. To fill the gap in literature regarding this controversial issue, the following research questions were answered in the present study:

RQ1: Does task-based assessment have any statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' idiomatic knowledge?

RQ2: Is there any statistically significant difference between intermediate male and female EFL learners' idiomatic knowledge?

RQ3: Does gender interact with the modality of assessment in such a way as to produce a differential impact considered statistically significant on Iranian EFL learners' idiomatic knowledge?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

Forty learners of English as a foreign language in the 18 to 25 age range were selected from the total population of 100 EFL learners based on their scores obtained from Oxford Quick Placement Test (QPT). The participants were male and female intermediate EFL learners, and they were selected from Bayan English Institute located in Rasht, Iran. They were randomly divided into experimental and control groups. Additionally, two instructors at the institute cooperated in the study. Both instructors were in the midst of their doctoral studies in the field of TEFL. They had over ten years of teaching experience in teaching English as a foreign language in Iranian context.

3.2 Research Design

The present study supplied a true-experimental design, the most reliable experimental design, as it uses randomized selection strategies and supplies the highest possible degree of control (Hashemi, 2014). In this regard, the present research followed one of the subcategories of true-experimental design i.e., factorial design, for the sake of higher internal validity. Selecting the participants of the study was based on random sampling. In this way, the selection was

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

based entirely on probability and chance; hence, minimizing the effects of any extrinsic or specific factors (Dornyei, 2007).

Independent variables	Level 1	Level 2
Task-based assessment	Experimental group	Control group
Students' gender	Male	Female

Fig. 1. The design of the study (Factorial design)

3.3 Instruments

The data required for the current study were accumulated quantitatively. Furthermore, the main data collection instruments in this study were paper and pencil tests. More specifically, the main instruments employed in this study consisted of a sample copy of QPT, a pretest and a posttest of idiomatic knowledge.

3.3.1 The Oxford Quick Placement Test (QPT)

In order to guarantee and ensure the homogeneity of the participants of this research and to fulfill the goals of the research, version 1 of the Oxford Quick Placement Test was distributed among all the participants in order to determine their level of proficiency. At first, the reliability and validity of the test were examined and the test was considered as both reliable and valid. There were 60 multiple-choice questions in the test. Part one contained 40 questions and there were 20 questions in part two. Participants had 30 minutes to answer the questions. Forty learners out of 100 participants whose score were between 30-47 were selected for the purpose of this study and randomly were assigned into four groups including two experimental and two control groups.

3.3.2 Pretest and Posttest

In order to assess the idiomatic knowledge of the participants at the beginning and before the introduction of the treatment, a teacher-made test as pretest was run to all four groups to perceive the primary differences among groups and participants in relation to their idiomatic knowledge. The main purpose of implementing pretest was to determine the baseline through which the performance of the participants on the posttest could be assessed. Ultimately, a posttest was administered to the participants of both experimental and control groups to measure participants' progress after they received the treatment and the placebo. The content of the tests was based on a representative sample of L2 idioms that appeared in Idioms and Phrasal Verb (2009) for intermediate level.

3.3.3 Treatment

The treatment procedure consisted of several stages, including pre-assessment, input exposure, consciousness-raising, controlled practice, communicative practice, post-assessment, ongoing feedback, individualization, authentic resources, cultural context, and metacognitive reflection. Before commencing the treatment, a pre-assessment was conducted to gauge the students' existing idiomatic knowledge. This assessment aimed to determine their familiarity with idiomatic expressions and served as a baseline for measuring progress throughout the treatment procedure.

The treatment procedure began with extensive input exposure to idiomatic expressions. Various activities were employed to involve students in authentic language contexts where idioms were naturally used. These activities included reading authentic texts, listening to audio materials, watching videos, and engaging in contextualized practice such as role-plays and problem-solving activities. Following input exposure, consciousness-raising activities were implemented to help students become aware of idiomatic expressions. Explicit instruction was provided, offering clear definitions and explanations of idioms. Examples were presented and analyzed to highlight their structure, meaning, and usage patterns. Paraphrasing, translation, and conceptual mapping techniques were employed to facilitate comprehension.

Structured practice activities were utilized to reinforce students' understanding and usage of idiomatic expressions. Fill-in-the-blanks exercises required students to select appropriate idiomatic expressions from given options. Matching exercises paired idioms with their meanings or corresponding situations. Sentence completion tasks prompted students to incorporate idioms into sentence fragments. Transformation activities challenged learners to rewrite sentences using idiomatic expressions. Meaningful communication and integration of idiomatic expressions were promoted through

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

various communicative practice activities. Students engaged in discussions, debates, and role-plays on topics related to idioms. Writing tasks such as stories and essays encouraged students to incorporate idioms effectively. Opportunities for access to authentic materials were created to expose students to idioms in natural language contexts.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the treatment procedure, a post-assessment was conducted similar to the pre-assessment. This assessment measured students' progress and improvement in idiomatic knowledge, providing valuable data for assessing the impact of the treatment. Throughout the treatment procedure, ongoing feedback was provided to students. Error correction and scaffolding support were offered to help students understand and use idiomatic expressions correctly. Instruction was individualized based on learners' needs and proficiency levels, ensuring that each student received appropriate guidance and assistance. Supplementing the treatment procedure, authentic resources such as online language resources were employed. Metacognitive reflection was encouraged, prompting students to think about their own learning process. Reflection activities helped students identify effective strategies for improving their idiomatic knowledge and usage.

The TBLT instructor used Willis's and Willis's (2007) model to implement the tasks. Willis's model includes the following phases: a pre-task, task cycle, and language focus. In the pre-task phase, the instructor activated students' background knowledge through a warm-up to performing the task, which was done by asking questions relevant to the topic of the task. In this phase, the instructor ensured that the students understood the task's instructions by explaining to them thoroughly.

In the task cycle, the students first performed the task, and then they got prepared to report to the class either orally or in a written mode about how they planned to undertake the task. Afterwards, in the third phase of the task cycle, i.e., the report stage, some pairs or groups were selected to report how they planned the task to the whole class. In the language focus phase of Willis and Willis's model, the instructor followed two stages: analysis and practice. In the analysis stage, the instructor examined and talked about the target features of the task, namely the past passive voice. Finally, in the practice stage, he dwelled on the linguistic forms by reviewing the words, past passive voice, and patterns in the task trying to direct students' attention to the intended linguistic features of the task (Willis & Willis, 2007).

3.4 Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

The participants in the present study were homogenized through a sample copy of QPT. Among the 100 learners who participated in the test, 40 language learners obtained a passing score and were considered as intermediate level and were selected as the participants of this research. The participants were randomly divided into one experimental and one control group. Next, before the treatment, a pretest was conducted to find out the initial differences among the experimental and control groups regarding their idiomatic knowledge. Eventually, to check the progress of the participants after receiving the treatment, a posttest was conducted for the participants in both experimental and control groups.

The present study aimed to investigate the impact of task-based assessment on Iranian intermediate male and female EFL learners' idiomatic knowledge; therefore, there is one independent variable (task-based assessment), one moderator variable (gender), and one dependent variable (idiomatic knowledge). As a result, the univariate analysis of variance (UNIANOVA) and independent samples t-test were used as the statistical tests of this study. These tests helped the researcher assess the direct effect of the independent variable and moderator variable of this study (i.e., task-based assessment and gender) on the dependent variable, namely idiomatic knowledge. The interactive effect of independent variable and gender on the dependent variable was also evaluated.

4. Results

To evaluate the reliability of the QPT and the idiomatic knowledge test, a preliminary study was conducted involving a sample of 20 EFL learners. The obtained results for the Cronbach's Alpha, which showed the consistency of the measurements, have been summarized in Table 1.

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

Table 1. Reliability statistics (Pilot study)

		Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	N of sample
OPT		.82	60	20 EFL students
idiomatic knowledge test	part 1 (the correct meaning)	.74	5	20 EFL students
	part 2 (Sentence rewriting)	.77	5	20 EFL students
	part 3 (definition completion)	.79	5	20 EFL students
	part 4 (Rearrange the words)	.80	5	20 EFL students
	part 5 (matching)	.73	6	20 EFL students
	part 6 (the correct answer)	.75	5	20 EFL students
	part 7 (word selection)	.83	4	20 EFL students
	part 8 (Writing the meaning)	.87	4	20 EFL students

In order to ascertain the language proficiency level of all participants involved in the study, QPT, version 1 was employed. This assessment consisted of a 60-item examination. The scoring rubric provided by the QPT indicated that scores ranging from 0 to 29 denoted an elementary level of proficiency, while scores falling within the range of 30 to 47 were indicative of an intermediate level. On the other hand, scores between 48 and 60 were considered at the advanced level of language proficiency. The results of descriptive statistics for the QPT are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the QPT

Statistics		
OPT		
N	Valid	40
	Missing	0
Mean		38.1000
Median		38.0000
Mode		37.00[a]
Std. Deviation		1.79458
Variance		3.221
Skewness		-.185
Std. Error of Skewness		.374
Kurtosis		-.263
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.733
Range		8.00
Minimum		34.00
Maximum		42.00
Sum		1524.00

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

Based on the descriptive statistics provided for the learners' performance on the QPT, the relatively narrow range of scores (from 34.0 to 42.0) suggested that the participants showed a degree of homogeneity in their language skills. The mean score of 38.10 indicated the average performance of the participants on the test. The median score of 38.00 indicated that half of the participants scored above this mark, while the other half scored below it, which suggested a balanced distribution of scores around the middle point, further supporting the notion of homogeneous proficiency. The standard deviation of 1.79 reflected the spread of scores around the mean.

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

At the beginning of the study, all participants engaged in the pretest phase. The primary goal was to establish a foundational measure against which advancements observed in the posttest could be analyzed and interpreted. Following the completion of the treatment procedure, in order to assess the potential impacts of the TBA on the idiomatic knowledge of EFL learners and their progress within their respective groups, a posttest was conducted. Table 3 presents the findings derived from the descriptive statistics concerning both pretest and posttest scores.

Table 3. Group statistics for the pretest and posttest scores

Group	Gender			Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Control	Female	Pair 1	Pretest	12.10	10	1.79
			Posttest	12.30	10	1.70
	Male	Pair 2	Pretest	10.90	10	1.66
			Posttest	11.10	10	1.52
	Total		Pretest	11.50	20	1.79
			posttest	11.70	20	1.68
Experimental	Female	Pair 1	Pretest	11.00	10	1.49
			Posttest	15.20	10	1.03
	Male	Pair 2	Pretest	10.70	10	1.33
			Posttest	13.80	10	1.13
	Total		Pretest	10.85	20	1.38
			posttest	14.50	20	1.27

Descriptive statistics for the pretest and posttest of idiomatic knowledge showed that the pretest mean scores for the control group (female) and experimental group (female) were 12.10 and 11.00, respectively. The standard deviations for these groups were 1.79 and 1.49, respectively. Similarly, the pretest mean scores for the control group (male) and experimental group (male) were 10.90 and 10.70, with standard deviations of 1.66 and 1.33, respectively. For the posttest, the control group (female) had a mean score of 12.30 with a standard deviation of 1.70, while the experimental group (female) had a mean score of 15.20 with a standard deviation of 1.03. The control group (male) had a posttest mean score of 11.10 and a standard deviation of 1.52, whereas the experimental group (male) had a mean score of 13.80 with a standard deviation of 1.13.

Pairwise comparisons were also performed between the control and experimental groups to gather insights into the nature and direction of the differences. Table 4 presents the results of pairwise comparisons conducted for the posttest scores between the control group and the experimental group.

Table 4. Pairwise comparisons between the control and the experimental groups in the posttest

Dependent Variable: Posttest						
(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.[b]	95% Confidence Interval for Difference[b]	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Control	Experimental	-2.800*	.435	.000	-3.683	-1.917
Experimental	Control	2.800*	.435	.000	1.917	3.683

Based on estimated marginal means
*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.
b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni.

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

The mean difference between the two groups in the posttest was -2.80 with a standard error of 0.43. The p-value obtained (Sig.) was 0.00, indicating that the observed mean difference was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. The findings suggested that there was a significant difference between the control and experimental groups in terms of their posttest scores. The experimental group had a higher mean in the posttest score compared to the control group, as indicated by the positive mean difference of 2.80 in the second row. This result implied that the task-based assessment applied to the experimental group had a positive impact on the posttest scores. The pairwise comparisons were also made for the female and male groups. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Pairwise comparisons between male and female groups

Dependent Variable: Posttest						
(I) Gender	(J) Gender	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.[b]	95% Confidence Interval for Difference [b]	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Female	Male	1.300*	.435	.005	.417	2.183
Male	Female	-1.300*	.435	.005	-2.183	-.417
Based on estimated marginal means						
*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.						
b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni.						

The results were also examined for the effect of task-based assessment on posttest scores, considering the factors of group and gender. The results are in Table 6.

Table 6. The Interaction between group and gender

Dependent Variable: Posttest				Group * Gender	
Groups	Gender	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Control	Female	12.300	.435	11.417	13.183
	Male	11.100	.435	10.217	11.983
Experimental	Female	15.200	.435	14.317	16.083
	Male	13.800	.435	12.917	14.683

For the control group, the mean of the females in the posttest was 12.30 with a standard error of 0.43. This suggested that, on average, female participants in the control group scored 12.30 on the posttest. The 95% confidence interval for the mean score in the posttest ranged from 11.41 to 13.18. The mean of the males in the posttest score was 11.10 with a standard error of 0.43.

5. Discussion

The salient point this study clarified was to analyze the effects of task-based assessment on idiomatic knowledge among Iranian male and female EFL learners. It achieved some momentous results in an attempt to find the answers to the three questions of whether task-based assessment have any statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' idiomatic knowledge, whether there is any statistically significant difference between intermediate male and female EFL learners' idiomatic knowledge, whether gender interact with the modality of assessment in such a way as to produce a differential impact considered statistically significant on Iranian EFL learners' idiomatic knowledge. Based upon the findings of the current study, utilizing task-based assessment was effective and had statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL learners and may lead to pushed output and familiarity with communication in target

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

language. However, exactly how these positive effects on language learning are achieved requires more and more rigorous researches.

As evidenced in the results section, the development within groups from the pretest to the posttest for the control group that received traditional instruction was not statistically significant. The experimental groups that received instruction through task-based, however, made a salient development from the pretest to the posttest. This fact indicated that using task-based assessment within the materials had been considerably effective in improving EFL learners' idiomatic knowledge. Although the female and male learners in both control and experimental groups' performances were approximately the same at the beginning of the study, there was a remarkable difference between the groups on the posttest. In fact, the experimental groups outperformed their counterparts in the control groups. It can be considered that there is a significant difference between the effects of task-based assessment and traditional instruction on the learners. Ultimately, the first and the second null hypotheses were rejected, while the third null hypothesis was supported.

The declaration of the present study is in line with the discussion that Norris (2016) argues that TBLA provides the opportunity to examine multiple aspects of language ability and development, such as accuracy, fluency, complexity, procedural knowledge, and pragmatic proficiency through a single performance. He argues that TBLA has positive washback effects in that it triggers educators and teachers to reconsider how teaching and learning happen. As an illustration, after TOEFL IBT was introduced using academic tasks, the emphasis of instructional approaches in Europe shifted towards teaching language skills and strategy. In light of these advantages, Norris (2016) highlights a couple of challenges in using TBLA, such as task selection, replication of authentic context, assessment of task performance, and generalization of the task performance to real-life situations.

Furthermore, Brindley (2013) puts forth a couple of advantages for TBLA, with particular attention given to classroom-based assessment. He states that TBLA directs teachers' and students' attention to using language as a tool for communication rather than focusing on language knowledge as an end, which is the case with most traditional language testing methods. Additionally, "TBLA integrates learning process and assessment through the use of attainment targets directly linked to course content and objectives" (Brindley, 2013, p. 2). TBLA lays the groundwork for language learners to receive diagnostic feedback to compare their task performance with the clear performance criteria. Furthermore, TBLA utilizes various forms of reporting the assessment outcome in terms of performance comprehensible to non-specialists. This would foster communication between the people who want to use performance information and the educational institutions (Brindley, 2013).

Moreover, De Ridder, et al.'s (2007) study examining the effects of a task-based approach on improving L2 learners' automaticity concluded that the task-based approach stimulated the process of automatization better than a purely communicative course with a robust systematic component. In addition, Dadari (2012) investigating the impact of task-based writing on EFL learners' writing performance and creativity demonstrated that learners benefited significantly from task-based writing in terms of both their writing and creativity.

The findings of this study are consistent with those of Norris (2009, p. 587), explaining that language education can benefit "from the actual uses to which assessments are put, the contexts in which they are used, and the individuals or groups who are using them". In a similar vein, Abdollahi and Izadpanah (2021) investigated the washback impact of task-based assessment on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning and grammatical ability. It was found that by removing the pre-test factor, the covariance, the task-based evaluation's washback impact makes the grammatical and vocabulary learning of students better. The results were in harmony with findings of the current study and showed that TBLA as an academic measurement device can nicely replace the traditional evaluation techniques. The findings of this study, therefore, mostly confirmed the results of the aforementioned studies and showed that task-based assessment can be a powerful tool in teaching and learning idiomatic expressions.

6. Conclusion

The present study ascertained the positive effects of TBA on Iranian male and female EFL learners. The findings of this study suggested that the learners who experienced TBLA performed better and significantly improved with respect to their idiomatic knowledge. TBA has gained importance in the field of language testing with the increasing emphasis on the communicative aspect of language testing and performance-based assessment practices in the real-life contexts. The use of language tasks as the assessment tools in learner classrooms generates the evaluative information on the pupils' authentic language performance (McKay, 2006). More particularly, the assessment tasks may be developed in accordance with the specific needs of the language learners, and these tasks may be integrated into the language instruction with formative purposes. It is worth mentioning that using TBA develops L2 idiomatic knowledge among EFL learners. In other words, involving learners in learning idioms supplies them with a variety of perspectives,

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

structures, and vocabulary that enhance their language proficiency and accuracy in using them. Consequently, it would be a beneficial choice in improving the idiomatic knowledge. This study suggests language teachers and learners, English institutes, and other stakeholders in the field of language teaching and learning use TBA as an advantageous and precious source in the process of teaching idiomatic expressions.

6.1 Pedagogical Implications of the Study

The current study perceived the positive effects of task-based on idiomatic knowledge of Iranian male and female EFL learners. The findings of the present study revealed that using task-based assessment can help the learners improve their idiomatic knowledge and perform better in this skill. Based on the result of this research task-based assessment tasks can be incorporated into the advancement of English idioms learning and also as a teaching method, it motivates and makes learners more interested in learning idioms and using them accurately.

Furthermore, the findings of this study can be beneficial for all stakeholders in the field of language teaching and learning, language institutes and learners, teachers, and teacher trainers are among those who can use the findings of this study to improve the condition and status of language teaching in the context of Iran. In particular, the findings of the present study can be advantageous for those material developers and teachers who treat the learners as intelligent human beings with thoughts, feelings and experience. Those who motivate the learners and provide opportunities for them in order to maximize their cognitive, affective and personal engagement with the text during the process of learning.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

Certain limitations were involved in the present study. One limitation was the number of participants involving a sample of 40 intermediate EFL learners from Bayan English Institute in Rasht, Guilan which may confine the findings of the study and limits the generalization of it. It indicates that a small size of population was considered. Therefore, the study should involve more participants at different proficiency levels in order to generalize the results for larger groups. In order to reach much more reliable findings, further studies should be done with more participants from different Iranian institutions. Another limitation of the present study was the age of the participants that ranged from 18 to 25. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to other learners with other range of ages.

6.3 Suggestions for Further Research

Taken the limitations of the present study into consideration, the researcher would like to give some suggestions related to this research. The following points are suggested for further research:

- The present study was administered with a limited sample within a short period of time. In order to achieve more precise and reliable results, it will be beneficial that future research consider a larger sample over a longer period of time.
- The current study exclusively examined the intermediate level EFL learners' idiomatic knowledge. Further research can investigate other proficiency levels including beginner, upper intermediate or advanced level learners' idiomatic knowledge development as a consequence of task-based assessment.
- The data were gathered from learners aged 18-25. Further research can examine varied age groups.
- Further research can investigate other language skills, including listening, reading, speaking and writing.

References

Al-Kadi, A. (2015). Towards idiomatic competence of Yemeni EFL undergraduates. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 6*(3), 513-523. https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0603.06

Andrews, S., Fullilove, J., & Wong, Y. (2002). Targeting washback: A case-study. *System, 30* (2), 207-233. https://dio 10.1016/S0346-251X(02)00005-2

Asl, F. M. (2013). The impact of context on learning idioms in EFL classes. *TESOL Journal, 37*(1), 326-348.

Bachman, L. F. (2002). Some reflections on task-based language performance assessment. *Language Testing*, *19*(4), 453-476.

Bloxham, S., & Boyd, P. (2007). *Developing effective assessment in higher education: A practical guide*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

Boud, D., & Falchikov, N. (2007). *Rethinking assessment in higher education: Learning for the longer term*. London: Routledge.

Branden, K. V. (2006). *Task in action: task-based language education from a classroom-based perspective*. New castle: Cambridge Scholars' Press.

Brindley, G. (2013). Task-based assessment. *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*, *20*(2), 1-6.

Brown, J. D. (2004). Performance assessment: Existing literature and directions for research. *Second Language Studies*, *22*(2), 91-139.

Cacciari, C., & Tabossi, P. (1993). *Idioms: Processing, structure, and interpretation*. Psychology Press: Lowerance Erlbaum Association.

Cakir, I. (2011). How do learners perceive idioms in EFL classes? *Ekev Akademi Dergisi Yıl*, *15*(47), 371-381.

Cooper, T. (2012). Processing of idioms by L2 learners of English. *TESOL Quarterly*, *4*(7), 233-263.

Dadari, L. (2012). The impact of using task-based writing on efl learners' writing performance and creativity. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 2*(12), 60-72.

De Ridder, I., Vangehuchten, L., & Gómez, M. S. (2007). Enhancing automaticity through task-based language learning. *Applied Linguistics, 28*(2), 309-315. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/aml057

El-Koumy, A. S. (2004). Language performance assessment: Current trends in theory and research. *Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), 4*(5), 17- 25. https://ssrn.com/abstract=2365667 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2365667

Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University press.

Fellbaum, C. (2006). Corpus-based studies of German idioms and light verb. *Special Issue of the Journal of Lexicography*, *19*(4), 349-360.

Ghazizadeh, M., & Taghipour Bazargani, D. (2019). Alternative assessment: The impact of self-assessment vs. peer-assessment on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' paragraph writing ability. *Language Teaching Research Quarterly, 10*, 1-13. https://doi.org/10.32038/ltrq.2019.10.01

Guo, Y. (2019). Teaching English idioms to Chinese EFL learners: A cognitive linguistic perspective. *English Language Teaching*, *12*(5), 145-155.

Hammond, D. (2006). *Constructing 21st century teacher education*. Stanford: Teacher education. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487105285962

Hashemi, M. R. (2014), *Understanding research in applied linguistics*, Tehran: SAMT Publication.

Hosseini, S. M. (2007). Task-based language instruction: Unplanned open tasks versus unplanned closed tasks with reference to writing achievement of Iranian EFL university students, *Perspectives in Education*, *23*, 42-46. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333419277

Khan, O., & Daşkin, N. C. (2014). "You reap what you sow" idioms in materials designed by EFL teacher-trainees. *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)*, *8*(2), 97-118. https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/%22You-Reap-What-You-Sow%22- Idioms-in-Materials-by-EFL-Khan

Long, M. (2015). *Second language acquisition and task-based language teaching*. New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell.

Long, M. H. (1985). *A role for instruction in second language acquisition: Task-based language teaching*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Long, M. H., & Norris, J. M. (2000). *Task-based language teaching and assessment*. In M. Byram (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Language Teaching* (pp. 59-693). Longman: Routledge.

Lundblom, E., & Woods, J. (2012). Working in classroom: Improving idiom comprehension through class wide peer tutoring. *Communication Disorder Quarterly, 33*, 202-219. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525740111404927

Ma, J., & Zhou, D. (2000). Fuzzy set approach to the assessment of student-centered learning. *IEEE Transactions on Education*, *43*(2), 237-241.

Makhopadhyay, L., & Sudharshana, N. P. (2022). *Task-based language teaching and assessment*. Singapore: registered company.

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

McKay, P. (2006). *Assessing young language learners.* UK: Cambridge University Press.

Miller, G. A. (1956). The magical number seven, plus or minus two: Some limits on our capacity for processing information. *Psychological Review, 63*, 81-97.

Moon, R. (2001). *Vocabulary Connections: Multi-word items in English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Moslehi, M., & Rahimy, R. (2018). The effect of role-play through dialogues vs. written practice on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' knowledge of English idioms. *International Journal of Research in English Education, 3*(1), 59-66. http://ijreeonline.com/article-1-89-en.html

Norris, J. M. (2009). Task-based teaching and testing. In book: *The handbook of language teaching*, 578-594. doi:10.1002/9781444315783.ch30

Norris, J. (2016). Current uses for task-based language assessment. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 36, 230-244. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267 190516000027

Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-based language teaching*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Razavi Hejrati, S. N., Taghipour Bazargani, D., & Saharkhiz Arabani, A. (2017). On the comparability of strong and weak versions of task-based approaches to improving Iranian elementary-level EFL learners' reading comprehension. *Journal of Language and Cultural Education*, *5*(1), 229-244.

Rodriguez, J., & Winnberg, H. (2013). Teaching idiomatic expressions in language classrooms-like the icing on the cake. Teaching English idiomatic expressions. *Really Learn English, 17*, 106-111.

Safarzadeh, M., & Taghipour Bazargani, D. (2023). Exploring Iranian ESP teachers' assessment practices in online specialized English courses. *International Journal of Research in English Education*, *8*(4), 51-60. http://ijreeonline.com/article-1-816-en.html

Willis, D., & Willis, J. (2007). *Doing task-based teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Zarei, A. A., & Sahami Gilani, M. (2013). L2 vocabulary learning through collaborative techniques. *International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World (IJLLALW), 4*(1), 71-84.

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]