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CONTEXTUAL CLUES AND ENGLISH METAPHORS AMONG TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ANJOUAN ISLAND, COMOROS

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Abstract

The primary idea regarding students' comprehension of English metaphors focuses on the significance of metaphors in learning a language, the difficulties students might encounter, strategies for enhancing understanding, and the use of metaphors in language teaching. On the basis of this assumption, the study investigates contextual clues pertaining to English metaphors used by teachers and students in secondary schools on the island of Anjouan, Comoros. For this study, a descriptive methodology that combined quantitative and qualitative techniques was employed. A sample of 206 participants, comprising 200 students and six of their English language teachers, provided information. The results of the research indicate that educators frequently use teaching methods that focus on elucidating the metaphorical meanings within contexts, reinforcing the notion that a direct emphasis on context improves understanding. The research concludes that contextual hints assist students with the interpretation and comprehension of English metaphors, as teachers' intentional use of context like providing explanations based on familiar scenarios or cultural references greatly helps learners in deciphering metaphors. Considering the study's conclusions, it is recommended that classroom activities should promote students' analysis of metaphors across various contexts to enhance comprehension abilities.

Keywords: English language, Metaphors, Comprehension, Proficiency, Context, Clues.

Introduction

The role of metaphors in education has garnered increased focus as both a linguistic element and a lens through which to view educational culture and practices (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2023). This suggests that metaphors can condense a whole philosophical viewpoint into a single, understandable picture. Educators employ metaphors to rationalize their teaching approaches and enhance their students' understanding effectively. Metaphor involves making direct comparisons between two seemingly unrelated subjects, serving as a rhetorical technique that draws parallels between a primary subject and a secondary one in some fashion (Lu, 2021). It represents a deeper degree of critical thinking needed to comprehend by connecting concepts, in addition to being a sophisticated mechanism of mind and cognition (Mácha, 2019).

Meanwhile, several factors, including as language proficiency, cultural background, and educational environment, can influence one's capacity to interpret English metaphors in a foreign language like English (Al-Mashhadani et al., 2024). Research has shown that students' ability to understand the basic ideas and cultural allusions that are present in metaphors can have an impact on how well they

understand them (Wang & Sun, 2024). Therefore, when analyzing students' comprehension of English metaphors, Anjouan Island's language and cultural heritage must be mentioned. According to Ritchie (2006), metaphors frequently enable us to convey subtleties of thought and emotion that would be difficult to convey in other ways. Metaphors can be represented by signs, gestures, drawings, or other symbols and are not only language components but also integral aspects of our everyday life (Littlemore, 2014).

Most people do not often think about the constant use of metaphors in texts and conversations; they just happen to be a part of language. Understanding how students grasp English metaphors is important for language learning. This includes recognizing why metaphors matter, the difficulties students face, ways to help them understand better, and how to use metaphors in teaching. Studying this topic means looking at the theories and methods used to analyze how students interpret metaphors. It also involves exploring the knowledge and thinking skills needed to understand metaphors. Metaphors are figures of speech where one idea is used to explain or describe another (Ravindra, 2018). They are essential to language and communication because they make abstract or difficult concepts easier to understand and relate to. It is crucial to comprehend metaphors in order to communicate and understand language effectively. Methods used to assist students in learning the intended course material and creating attainable goals for the future are referred to as teaching techniques. Learning English presents special difficulties for high school students in Anjouan, Comoros, especially when it comes to understanding English metaphors.

Literature Review

Using metaphors, teachers can effectively integrate teaching associations, give students focused inspiration and advice, and help them grasp words in a more vivid and tangible context. When students grasp the idea of metaphor, they are learning a complex and significant ideographic unit rather than just a single word (Lakoff and Johnson, 2020). Additionally, metaphors can be found in a variety of discourses, including journalism (Akimtseva 2020), politics (Chahbane & Zrizi 2023), advertising (Selmistratis et al. 2024), law (Wang & Tu 2018), health (Rossi 2021), science (Duner 2015; Falkner 2016), and many more. In this process, vocabulary is also crucial. The relevant schemata won't be triggered if the words in the linguistic expressions are unintelligible (Littlemore 2022).

According to the idea of metaphorical cognition, a word might become a context-related polysemous concept based on various cognitive associations in various circumstances (Tolkinova, 2025). Therefore, one does not need to recall the alphabetical order of words like "expand" and "extend" after encountering them; instead, they can deduce their meaning from prior experiences. The theory of metaphorical cognition states that a word can become a polysemous idea related to the situation based on various cognitive associations in various circumstances (Tolkinova, 2025). Consequently, one does not have to commit words like "expand" and "extend" to memory by spelling them out in alphabetical order; rather, one can deduce their meaning from prior experience.

In metaphor analysis, we frequently combine the source and target domains into a single category that includes the characteristics they share (Sander, Blochowiak, & Gerber, 25). Incorporating the source domain into this knowledge framework activates the reader's or listener's existing knowledge of the destination domain. Prior research indicates that when a source domain does not align with the target domain's schema, there are issues with understanding metaphorical statements (Peng & Khatin-Zadeh, 2023). The metaphor is a flexible and multifaceted item in linguistics that can be employed as a component, tool, linguistic resource, transmitter inductor, and cognitive tool (Lakoff and Johnson, 2020). The more metaphorical language is employed, the more likely it is that communication will fail. The language is more literal and the meaning is simpler to understand when there is a slight discrepancy between the proposition stated and the intended meaning. This opinion is particularly supported by Sperber and Wilson (2025). They contend that the

difference between literal and metaphorical language is determined by the size of the gap. Stated otherwise, the notion that is expressed is the one that is derived from a literal reading of the words employed.

Theoretical Framework

The Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), created by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in 1980, was used to underpin the study. CMT examined metaphors in general and how people understand them. It expands on the idea that metaphors are more than just literary or rhetorical strategies; they are essential to human cognition (Johnson, 2024). The idea clarifies how shared conceptual frameworks, social behaviors, and cultural norms are reflected in metaphors (Garello, 2024). This indicates that metaphors pertaining to time, power, and the body differ among cultures, demonstrating the cultural influence of metaphors on cognition.

Meanwhile, CMT has been challenged for not having enough empirical evidence in various areas, despite its strong theoretical arguments. According to some detractors, CMT goes beyond the metaphor notion (Russill, 2010). It can be challenging to discern between what is merely a part of common conceptual thought or linguistic expression and what is a metaphor due to the overly broad definition of metaphors. According to the hypothesis, metaphorical concepts and their meanings are largely consistent across speakers and cultural contexts.

CMT has occasionally come under fire for taking too many linguistic and cognitive elements to be metaphorical (Guo, 2025). Critics contend that not all conceptual structures are metaphorical and that other cognitive processes, rather than merely metaphors, may be more appropriate for explaining some events (such as reasoning or comprehending). Metaphor's significance also stems from the relevance of the discursive and dialogic communication features that are present in today's culture, where information transfer is just as important as knowledge production (Cambrussi and Fernandes, 2024). To put it another way, metaphors are employed to convey many distinctions inside a sentence, and we can utilize them to decide whether we want to moderate or stress a particular point.

Methodology

Research Design

To help establish the pertinent facts that the research aims to establish without necessarily altering the study's variables, a descriptive design was chosen. This is founded on a cross-sectional research design that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Additionally, the qualitative research style predominated, while the researchers also employed a quantitative research approach, which was designed by a well-crafted questionnaire. The design was chosen with the knowledge that, in order to save the researchers' time and money, the study necessitates the simultaneous collection of data from a large number of respondents. The design was chosen because it generates more thorough information on the study from a range of sources and enables the description and analysis of people's ideas and viewpoints.

Population of the Study

There are twelve government and public secondary schools in Anjouan Island. 15 teachers and 6923 pupils from public secondary schools on Anjouan Island, Comoros, made up the study's population of 6938.

Sample Size

This represents the entire number of study participants. The study used random sampling to select three public/government secondary schools: CR Hombo, Domoni, and B.B. Mtrouni. Simple random selection was used to select the senior three students, while purposive sampling was used to select

the teachers. In order to determine the sample size, Slovene's formula was used to further analyze the population of senior three students.

In the three chosen schools, there are 400 senior three pupils and six English teachers. $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$

N stands for population size, n for sample size, and e for constant, which is equal to 0.05.

Where N is the population size, n is the sample size, e is constant and equal to 0.05.

$$n = \frac{400}{1+400(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{400}{1+400(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{400}{1+1}$$

$$n = \frac{400}{2}$$

$$n = 200$$

Table 1: Target population, sample size, and sampling techniques

Category of Respondents	Target Population	Sample Size	Sampling Technique
Teachers	6	6	Purposive Sampling
Students	400	200	Simple random sampling
Total	406	206	100

Sampling techniques

Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to pick English teachers for this study from the three government schools. These teachers' opinions are especially helpful for the study since they have a thorough awareness of the language ability and learning difficulties of the pupils. The research attempts to collect focused, pertinent, and perceptive data to support the study's goal by specifically selecting teachers who have a great deal of experience and familiarity with the curriculum.

Simple Random Sampling

This was employed to draw statistical conclusions about population. This is because it is the most effective way to minimize the influence of possible confounding variables and guarantee excellent internal validity. The pupils were chosen using this process.

Research Instruments

Questionnaires

The questionnaire was distributed and administered on sampled students. Options on the questionnaire were arranged according to the study's factors and demographic parameters. Strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1) were the response modes and scoring system specified in the questionnaire. Because it averages the minimum Likert scale of 3 and the maximum Likert scale of 7, the four-point scale was chosen (Zeng, Wen & Jeon, 2025).

Interviews Guides

Interview schedules were set up to get information from teachers. They were utilized because they assist in providing detailed information that is nearly impossible to obtain with a questionnaire alone. Additionally, they are helpful in gaining insights, experiences, and comprehension of the issue being studied (Tisdell, Merriam, & Stuckey-Peyrot, 2025). To better understand teachers' experiences and the significance they assign to them, information regarding their opinions, beliefs, and feelings was gathered through interviews.

Data Collection Methods

Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered, and a variety of research tools were employed in the study. Likert-scale items were used in the study to assess participants' self-reported knowledge and application of English metaphors. This approach provided a thorough evaluation of the students' experiences and abilities by enabling the teacher participants to rate the students' mastery of English metaphors on a scale. This method allowed the study to collect important data on how effectively participants understood and applied the concept.

Validity and Reliability of the Research Instruments

Validity

Face and content validity were established following a pilot study to ensure the dependability of research tools. To determine the face validity of the instruments, the pilot group was asked to assess the face value of the study items and provide suggestions. These are used to change relevant things when necessary. The content validity of the instruments was assessed by extrapolating from the pilot survey scores of similar items to establish the level of items that generalized throughout a broad region of the main study sample. The following formula was used to calculate the Content Validity Index (CVI):

$CVI = \frac{\text{Total number of items marked valid}}{\text{Total number of items}}$

Number of items marked valid

This formula represents the proportion of items that were judge as valid out of the entire set of items.

Therefore, CVI for each instrument was established as follows:

Questionnaire for Students: $8/10 = 0.80$

Interview Guide for Teachers: $9/10 = 0.90$

Table 2: Validity of the Research Instruments

Instrument	No. of Items	Validity Result (CVI)	Interpretation
Questionnaire for Students	10	0.80	Good
Interview Guide for Teachers	10	0.90	Excellent

The following George and Mallery (2018) scale for interpreting CVI scores was used:

- 0.90 and above: *Excellent*
- 0.80 to 0.89: *Good*
- 0.70 to 0.79: *Fair*
- Below 0.70: *Poor*

According to this scale, all instruments' validity results were assessed as "Good" or "Excellent," indicating that, according to expert judgment, the items are pertinent, understandable, and sufficiently cover the constructs under investigation.

Reliability of Research Instruments

Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient test in SPSS version 25 was used to evaluate the study instruments' reliability. Additionally, the applicability and internal consistency of the study tools were assessed through pilot testing and expert assessment. A purposively chosen group from a high school on Anjouan Island, Comoros, received the equipment for the pilot project. Ten senior three students made up this experimental group. Before moving forward with the primary data gathering, this pilot testing helped to find any problems with the instruments and guaranteed their dependability. The following is a summary of the reliability findings for the interview and questionnaire data:

Table 3: Reliability of the Questionnaires

Instrument	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Interpretation
Interview Guide for Teachers	9	0.82	Good
Questionnaire for Students	10	0.81	Good

George and Mallery (2018) scale for interpreting reliability scores was used for the questionnaire tools:

- 0.90 and above: *Excellent*
- 0.80 to 0.89: *Good*
- 0.70 to 0.79: *Fair*
- Below 0.70: *Poor*

Expert assessment and pilot testing ensured the interview guide's dependability. This procedure made sure that the items in these guides were internally compatible with the research goal and consistently measured the intended constructs.

Data Collection Procedure

The researchers visited the chosen schools for introduction and familiarization after receiving approval for the study from Kampala International University's Director of Higher Degrees and Research (DHDR). The respondents were asked to give their consent to participate in the study. After the respondents' responses were gathered, the data was processed and analyzed.

Data Analysis

SPSS was used for quantitative data analysis, while content analysis was utilized for qualitative data. The mean was employed to examine the study's goal while frequency and percentage were utilized to describe the respondents' demographic characteristics as shown below:

Table 4: Mean range table and interpretation

Mean Range	Likert Scale	Interpretation
1.0 - 2.0	Strongly Disagree	Poor
2.1 - 3.0	Disagree	Fair
3.1 - 4.0	Agree	Good
4.1 - 5.0	Strongly Agree	Very Good

Ethical Considerations

Respondents gave their informed consent after the researchers defended the study's applicability. This was done to prevent the respondents from feeling anxious because they were informed about the kind of information the researchers were looking for, why, and how they would be expected to engage in the study. Regarding any sensitive information, the researchers offered respondents the opportunity to decide whether or not to participate without any significant inducement, promised them of anonymity, and fully described the need for such information. To ensure confidentiality, the researchers kept the information they acquired from the respondents anonymous by not sharing it. The respondents received no compensation for taking part in the survey.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

Table 5: Descriptive statistics for the effect of contextual clues on English metaphors used by teachers

English Metaphor	Mean	Interpretation
I explicitly teach metaphor in my English lessons	3.33	Good
I usually use different types of metaphor in teaching English	3.33	Good
I use contextual factors like cultural context, student's background, language level of students when teaching English metaphor	2.83	Fair
I encourage the students to learn metaphor in my English classes	3.50	Good
I encourage students who have difficulty in understanding metaphor because cultural differences	3.33	Good
I use metaphor in teaching English to help students develop proficiency in English language	3.50	Good
I encourage students to create their own metaphors during lessons	2.67	Fair
I provide examples of metaphors from students' native languages to help them understand English metaphors better	2.33	Fair
I assess students' understanding of metaphors through specific tasks or assignments	3.50	Good
Average Mean	3.25	Good

Key: 1.0 -2.0, Poor; 2.1-3.0, Fair; 3.1 - 4.0, Good; 4.1 – 5.0, Very Good

Source: **Primary Data (2025)**

Both teachers and students had a generally positive assessment of the teaching and learning of English metaphors, as indicated by the results in Table 5; the key indicates that the overall average mean score of 3.25 places it in the "Good" category. This shows that most of the respondents concur that metaphors are actively and successfully used into lessons by teachers.

With a mean score of 3.33, methods like clearly teaching metaphors in courses and making regular use of various metaphor types throughout instruction are particularly well-liked. Additionally, with a mean score of 3.50, which indicates "Good" practice in these areas, teachers are seen as encouraging students to learn and develop metaphors as well as to understand them through specific assignments. Although they received a little lower score of 2.83, which is classified as "Fair," teachers are also observed to take cultural and background elements into account when teaching metaphors, indicating considerable space for development in this area.

However, other activities are less prevalent or given less attention, like encouraging students to develop their own metaphors during courses (mean=2.67, "Fair") and giving instances of metaphors from their home languages (mean=2.33, "Fair"). These results suggest that although the existing teaching strategies are generally successful and culturally sensitive, more incorporation of examples in the native tongue and metaphors created by the students may improve comprehension. Overall, the results show that teachers primarily use contextual cues, such as culture and background elements, to help students understand metaphors and advance their English language skills.

It became evident from the teacher interviews that most of them frequently use metaphors in their English classes. They consider metaphors to be useful instruments for enhancing comprehension. "I usually use metaphors that are simple, easy to understand, and that students can relate to in their daily lives," stated one educator, demonstrating their belief that simple and well-known metaphors assist students in making connections between new concepts and their existing knowledge. The

majority of teachers believed that metaphors improved pupils' comprehension of English, despite some stating that they had not received official training in this area. According to one educator, "using metaphors helps students understand lessons because they connect the material to what they already know or their own experiences" emphasizing how metaphors can clarify concepts. Additionally, the teachers said that pupils are more engaged and active when they employ metaphors in the classroom. Metaphors can boost student motivation, as seen by one teacher's statement, "Whenever I use metaphors, I see that the students seem more interested and motivated to engage with the lesson." But they also acknowledged certain difficulties. They said that some metaphors are difficult for children to understand because they are excessively abstract or culturally foreign. Cultural variations can occasionally make metaphors less effective or perplexing. One teacher said, "Some metaphors are very abstract or do not fit with the students' cultural background, so it's difficult for them to understand the meaning."

Teachers take into account the linguistic proficiency and cultural background of their students when selecting or modifying metaphors. In order to help students better grasp, one educator stated, "I try to pick metaphors that are not only simple but also relevant to their culture." Teachers frequently adapt metaphors to meet the needs of their pupils. As one educator put it, "I change the complexity of metaphors depending on their language skills, sometimes making them easier or more familiar." In general, educators think that modifying metaphors to the unique circumstances of each student helps improve comprehension.

Therefore, teachers believe that metaphors are a great tool for teaching and learning English. They contend that selecting metaphors according to pupils' linguistic and cultural backgrounds is crucial to ensuring their comprehension. However, metaphors can occasionally be too abstract or unfamiliar for students, which makes comprehension more difficult. Metaphors are beneficial to students' acquisition of new vocabulary and concepts, particularly when they are connected to personal experiences. The teachers concur that employing metaphors in a way that is sensitive to cultural differences and appropriate for students' language proficiency can significantly increase the clarity of teachings and enhance student engagement.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study show that in order to understand popular English metaphors used in secondary classes on Anjouan Island, both teachers and students actively rely on contextual information. The notion that a clear emphasis on context improves understanding is supported by the fact that teachers frequently use teaching tactics that place an emphasis on elucidating the metaphorical connotations within situations. For example, teachers clarified metaphors by relating them to familiar experiences or cultural allusions, which is consistent with Lakoff and Johnson's (2020) hypothesis that metaphors are embedded in everyday cognition and are better understood when anchored inside relevant settings.

Learners often relied on contextual cues to deduce meanings, particularly in situations when metaphors were less clear. To activate existing information and determine the intended metaphorical sense, several students explained that they understand metaphors by examining the surrounding words, sentences, or situations. This procedure supports Littlemore's (2022) claim that learners' approaches to comprehending metaphors differ depending on elements like the metaphor's transparency and context. Most of the students stated that they decoded the meaning of foreign metaphors by using contextual cues, such as the conversation topic or visual cues.

The findings further support Glucksberg's (2011) theory that comprehending metaphors entails activating shared knowledge about the source and target domains by demonstrating that learners can more easily perceive metaphors that are culturally recognizable or often used in everyday language. By bridging the gap between tangible experiences and abstract metaphorical meanings, teachers' use of concise, contextualized explanations made it easier for students to comprehend the figurative language. Overall, the use of contextual cues by both teachers and students emphasizes how crucial it is to include metaphors into meaningful conversation and contextual settings to successfully comprehend them and, eventually, acquire language proficiency.

Conclusion

The study concludes that contextual clues are instrumental in helping students interpret and understand English metaphors. Learners greatly benefit from teachers' intentional use of context, such as giving explanations based on well-known circumstances or cultural allusions. Through active interaction with environmental or textual signals, learners improve their ability to infer meanings from abstract concepts. These revelations emphasize the need for contextualized teaching strategies that purposefully draw attention to hints present in settings and language.

Recommendations

The study recommends that English language teachers should always include contextual explanations when teaching metaphors. To improve students' inferencing skills, classroom activities should encourage students to investigate metaphors in diverse contexts, while teacher preparation programs should focus on methods for highlighting contextual cues and guiding meaning development. Contextualized metaphors must be used in curriculum design to promote deeper learning.

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