The difficulties hindering EFL teachers from using metaphor-based teaching

YOUNESS BOUSSAID

School of Languages and Applied Linguistics, Portsmouth University, UK

Abstract
This paper aims to assess the knowledge of metaphor-based teaching among teachers by investigate the obstacles that hinder them from incorporating metaphor-based teaching into their instructional strategies. This study makes use of a questionnaire to collect data from EFL teachers worldwide. The results show that the difficulties most faced by teachers when using metaphor-based teaching include the unsuitability of the topic, the difficulty of the topic, the unavailability of materials, time constraints, extra workload, and metaphor-based teaching not fitting students’ expectations and needs. The research also touches on some countermeasures to deal with the difficulties teachers face when using metaphor-based approach. The results indicate the importance of reevaluating teacher training programs and refocusing teachers’ instructional efforts on incorporating metaphor-based teaching, which is often overlooked and not fully acknowledged in language classrooms.

Keywords: conceptual metaphors, Contemporary Theory of Metaphor, teaching difficulty, English teaching, metaphor-based teaching

Introduction
After teaching English for an extended period, it is not uncommon for EFL learners to reach a point where their progress stalls. This means that they can construct sentences with grammatical accuracy, but they struggle to incorporate creative language usage, such as employing conceptual metaphors. The absence of this particular language aspect, which is lacking in the language skills of EFL students, becomes an obstacle that prevents them from achieving their maximum linguistic capabilities. This linguistic aspect is known as conceptual fluency, as identified by Danesi (1992).

In language classrooms, there seems to be limited emphasis on developing conceptual fluency, which can be improved through the acquisition of metaphorical competence. Integrating this vital language aspect into language curricula is overlooked. Even when conceptual metaphor is introduced in lessons, it is typically treated as a mere decorative element of language,
The difficulties hindering EFL teachers from using metaphor-based teaching

The Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics, Volume 7 Number 2 (2024)

reserved for use in poetry and literature. However, metaphor is a linguistic phenomenon that is prevalent in our everyday language and which enables “us to understand one domain of experience in terms of another” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 117). Conceptual metaphors are widely evident in everyday language, as shown in the following examples from Lakoff and Johnson (1980, pp. 4–7):

ARGUMENT IS WAR
Your claims are indefensible.
He attached every weak point in my argument.
I demolished his arguments.

Numerous studies have shown that conceptual metaphor can effectively enhance vocabulary instruction and contribute to the development of students’ language proficiency (Kövecses and Szabó, 1996; Boers, 2000; Littlemore, 2002; Nacey, 2010; Pérez, 2019). However, despite the progress made in cognitive linguistics, specifically in the modern metaphor theory and its extensive research on the advantages of incorporating a conceptual-based method in language education, language instructors, classrooms, and curriculum developers have yet to fully grasp the significance of conceptual metaphor integration and the associated benefits it could offer in the teaching and learning environment. This is noticeable when observing the teaching methods employed by teachers, the educational materials crafted for language instruction, and the students’ language skills, which may display a deficiency in conceptual fluency.

It appears that language teachers do not actively introduce nor initiate pedagogical interventions to tackle this matter, but instead continue focusing on improving students’ grammatical and communicative skills, while neglecting their ability to understand and use metaphor. There has been a multitude of research investigating the impact of metaphor-based teaching on language learning, but no research was dedicated to study the difficulties teachers face when using this teaching approach. This paper, therefore, fills in this gap in literature by examining the difficulties that prevent or hamper teachers from using metaphor-based teaching as part of their teaching strategies. The research paper will aim to answer the following guiding questions:

What prevents teachers from utilizing CTM as a pedagogical intervention to facilitate language learning? How can these impediments be overcome?

Literature Review

Contemporary metaphor theory

Metaphor is still viewed by some as a linguistic device that is used for rhetorizing and ornamenting language. Metaphor, however, is not limited to being a decorative tool solely found in literary works. Instead, metaphor is a linguistic phenomenon that is omnipresent in our everyday language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) stated that metaphor is the process of “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (p. 5). They further explain that conceptual metaphor involves the interaction of two domains: one that is physical (known as the source) and another that is abstract (known as the target domain) (see Figure 1). Conceptual metaphors aid us in understanding complex abstract concepts by relating them to more familiar and tangible entities. A definition of metaphor that is far from the classic, Aristotelian definition- that is pure figurative language- is that of Kövecses (2020) which does not consider metaphor as a rhetorical device that is secondary to
The difficulties hindering EFL teachers from using metaphor-based teaching

language, but rather as a “systematic set of correspondences between two domains of experience” (p. 2). In our effort to comprehend the world around us, conceptual metaphors assist us in understanding “the cognitively less easily accessible domains in terms of the more easily accessible ones” (Kövecses, 2020, p. 5).

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), everyday language is not just a linguistic phenomenon, but also a cognitive one. In their book "Philosophy in the Flesh" (1999), they argued that human cognition has three main characteristics. First, it is embodied, meaning that our physical experiences shape our understanding of the world. Second, it is unconscious and automatic, as many cognitive processes happen without our conscious awareness. Third, they proposed that most abstract concepts are metaphorical in nature, meaning that we understand them through the use of metaphors. Metaphor, therefore, plays a crucial role in shaping our conceptual structures and influencing our perception of the world (Thomas, 2010). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) also argued that our language is full of conceptual metaphors. These conceptual metaphors shape our everyday experiences by structuring our perception. As an example, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) provided the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR in English, which conceptualizes arguments between individuals as a conflict involving battles, attacks, tactics, victories, and defeats. They further argued that the way we understand and interact with the world is primarily through the use of metaphorical metaphors. These, they proposed, are the spectacles through which we perceive and interact with the world.

**Conceptual Metaphor Approach and English learning and teaching**

Introducing conceptual metaphors in language teaching is an innovative approach that can enhance the learning process for second language learners. This teaching approach aims at applying the Contemporary Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) within the teaching and learning context. Incorporating conceptual metaphors into English language instruction for second language (L2) learners has been shown to support vocabulary acquisition and retention, according to studies by Boers and Lindstromberg (2008) and Pérez (2019). Conceptual metaphors provide a framework for organizing and understanding lexical concepts, mak-
The difficulties hindering EFL teachers from using metaphor-based teaching

Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics, Volume 7 Number 2 (2024)

The difficulties hindering EFL teachers from using metaphor-based teaching

ing them a crucial component that should be integrated into language classrooms and included in language syllabi. Teachers should broaden their attention beyond students' grammatical correctness and pay equal importance to their ability to use language creatively. According to Danesi (1992), metaphoric competence is as crucial as linguistic and communicative competence. Being metaphorically competent involves both the understanding and production of metaphors during communication (Nacey, 2010).

Metaphor instruction can be incorporated into language teaching by implementing activities that increase students' awareness of conceptual metaphors. One way to do this is through cross-linguistic activities, where students identify metaphorical expressions in their native language, comparing their usage and meanings with those in their second language. This approach facilitates the comprehension of the specific conceptual metaphor being discussed (Pérez, 2019). Additional tasks, such as the identification and classification of metaphors in a text, describing visual images using metaphors, and creating narratives incorporating metaphors, are useful activities to enhance language learning. These activities do not only facilitate the understanding and production of metaphors but also contribute to vocabulary acquisition. They can act as supplementary tools to traditional memorization-based teaching methods and can assist in organizing and systematically teaching vocabulary (Pérez, 2019).

According to contemporary metaphor theory, the lack of creative language use, such as metaphor, in students' discourse can be explained. Howard and his colleagues found that the average English speaker creates around 3000 new metaphors per week (Pollio et al., 1977). This demonstrates the significance of conceptual metaphor in communication and suggests that relying solely on literal thinking limits our ability to effectively communicate (Danesi, 1995). Therefore, it is important for students not only to create grammatically correct sentences but also to be able to produce sentences that are rich in metaphorical language. To achieve this, it is recommended not to disregard incorporating conceptual metaphor into language syllabi in order to develop students' awareness of metaphor. This could enable learners to create metaphors in their second language, effectively navigate the use of figurative language they encounter (Boers, 2000), and quickly interpret metaphors in conversation (Littlemore, 2002). Li (2009) suggests that direct intervention is absolutely necessary to enhance the metaphorical competence of language learners, allowing them to express themselves fluently in a conceptual manner.

Many studies were carried out to examine the impact of utilizing conceptual metaphors as an instructional aid. Kövecses and Szabó (1996) demonstrated that their experiment participants were able to figure out the meaning of new phrasal verb sets after they were introduced to conceptual metaphors. Kövecses and Szabó (1996) also conducted a survey to examine the effect of metaphoric awareness on foreign language learners. They showed that learners who were instructed and assisted to use a metaphor-based approach performed 25% better than the learners who were not. Picken (2005), on the other hand, reported that raising awareness to conceptual metaphors assisted EFL Japanese students in recognizing metaphors in both the short and longer term. In a study conducted by Pan (2019), two groups of young participants aged 10–12 with similar elementary proficiency level of English were taught using a conceptual-based approach or a memorizing transition approach. The results from an immediate post-test showed that the group that was taught using the metaphor-based approach performed better than the group that was taught using the memorizing translation approach. Even though the difference of the immediate post-test was statistically insignificant (p=.08), the one-week delayed post-test showed that the conceptual-based approach facilitated learning at a statistically significant level (p<.05). These findings support the idea that conceptual metaphor is an important teaching tool (often overlooked) that can greatly enhance the lan-

Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics, Volume 7 Number 2 (2024)

Castledown
The difficulties hindering EFL teachers from using metaphor-based teaching

A cognitive strategy such as grouping vocabulary has a positive effect on second language learners’ recalling (Schmitt, 1997). A cognitive approach to teaching vocabulary such as metaphor-based teaching can contribute greatly to language learning. Metaphor-based approach allows learners to categorize vocabulary based on conceptual domains which makes the process easier (Boers, 1999). Further research and evidence from Kövecses and Szabó (1996), Boers (2000), Picken (2005), Littlemore and Low (2006), Danesi and Grieve (2010), and Pérez (2019) point to the direction that utilizing a cognitive linguistic framework can provide learners of English with strategies other than rote learning.

Conceptual competence: an overlooked component of second language fluency

Conceptual metaphor has been shown to enhance language learning, particularly in vocabulary acquisition (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2008). It does not only improve students’ grammatical and communicative competence but also helps them achieve a higher level of language proficiency, targeting conceptual competence (Andreou & Galantamos, 2008). According to Danesi (1992), conceptual competence is closely linked to L2 proficiency, and the ability to metaphorize in the new language is a true indicator of proficiency. Danesi (2000) defines conceptual fluency as the ability to mentally navigate concepts through their source domains in the L2.

Littlemore and Low (2006) stated that conceptual fluency helps learners form conventionalized units that are crucial in everyday communicative situations. Danesi (1995) also argued that being conceptually fluent in a language means understanding how that language reflects concepts through metaphorical reasoning. Conceptual competence is an essential component for second language learners to effectively use the language they are learning (Andreou & Galantamos, 2008). Often, the language used by second language learners lacks conceptual metaphors and tends to be more literal, which is a result of not being exposed to the metaphorical structures in the target language. As mentioned by Danesi (1995), the main issue is that learners tend to speak using the structures of the target language while thinking in terms of their first language's conceptual system. This phenomenon is known as mental calquing, where learners use phrases from the target language that have conceptual structures from their first language (Danesi, 1995). This can be attributed to learners and teachers placing more emphasis on grammatical and communicative knowledge, which are components of verbal fluency, while neglecting metaphorical knowledge, which is an integral part of conceptual fluency (Danesi, 1995).

According to Danesi and Grieve (2010), negative conceptual transfers pose the greatest disruption in the process of transferring meaning. The idea of conceptual fluency contradicts the notion that students should be taught literal concepts before introducing conceptual metaphors. Chapetón (2010) stated that if students are instructed to consistently use metaphor in their L2 learning, they can create new metaphors that closely resemble those used by native speakers. On the other hand, Xia (2007) conducted a discourse completion and dialogue interpretation test on Chinese learners of English and discovered that these learners produced unusual utterances which are influenced by their first language's conceptual system. Philip (2010) emphasized that the first language's conceptual system (C1) does interfere with the learning of the second language (C2), and that metaphorical competence (MC) can greatly assist and facilitate the acquisition of the conceptual system of a second language. When metaphorical competence is not integrated into the syllabus, students tend to either completely avoid metaphorical expressions or produce phrases based on their first language (C1) (Danesi, 2016).
Most studies on metaphor lead to the conclusion that effective communication in a second or foreign language necessitates the ability to use metaphors. Danesi (1986, 1992) reiterated that the ability to metaphorize is an indicator of foreign language mastery. Acknowledging the importance of metaphor in language learning, it seems prudent to incorporate and emphasize the use of figurative language in language syllabi.

**Methodology**

**Instrument**

It is noteworthy to mention that this research is investigating the difficulties faced by teachers in general and not particularly targeting teachers who have previously practiced metaphor-based teaching. This general approach can shed light on the extent to which metaphor-based teaching has been received and incorporated in language classrooms. The primary method used to collect data for this research was a questionnaire. To gather information about teachers' perception of teaching conceptual metaphor and survey the difficulties that hamper a successful incorporation of metaphor-based teaching, an online questionnaire was administered through the Typeform application. The questionnaire consisted of 6 questions, which included multiple-choice, open-response, and opinion scale questions. A Likert scale was utilized, where responders were asked to indicate the level of importance on a scale of 1 to 5. The options ranged from "Not at all important" (1) to "Very important" (5). A cut-off score of a mean equal to or above 3 (on a 5-point scale) was considered indicative of high importance, while a mean score below 3 indicated lower significance.

The questionnaire was designed with “skip” buttons to allow participants to pass through questions that were not relevant to them, thus avoiding arbitrary responses. It was shared online and distributed to English teachers worldwide. The questionnaire disseminated through Facebook and WeChat groups of teachers who teach in China and in other countries using either a QR code or a link. In the initial stage of the questionnaire, the purpose of the research was explained, and participants were informed that by continuing, they were giving their consent to participate. Ethical considerations of consent, anonymity, and confidentiality were respected. An introduction to Conceptual Metaphor was given at the beginning of the survey so as to clarify the confusion between traditional and conceptual metaphor and to make sure that the participants understand the topic and scope of the research. The questionnaire was formatted as a text-based conversation, resembling a casual chat with a friend. This texting-style format was chosen to encourage greater responsiveness and reduce the likelihood of nonresponse bias.

**Data analysis**

The data was analyzed using Jamovi statistical software version 1.6.23.0. This software is known for its user-friendly and intuitive interface. One notable advantage of Jamovi is its ability to encode data into text, rather than just variable codes. The analysis of the questionnaire data involved the use of percentages and means.

**Participants**

The survey was made available on the internet for two months, during which 255 individuals participated. Rather than limiting the involvement to a small group of teachers from one specific school in a single country, the research aimed for broader representation. By including a diverse and sizable sample of teachers from various backgrounds, the study sought to enhance the generalizability, reliability and applicability of the data collected, as noted by Vogt (2011).
The main participants in the research were 255 English as a foreign language teachers who were located in various schools in different countries: Morocco (60%), UK (6%), USA (5%), Indonesia (4%), South Africa (4%), China (3%), Algeria (2%), Canada (1%), Tunisia (1%), Pakistan (1%), Serbia (1%), Argentina (1%), Nigeria (1%), Russia (1%), Australia (1%), and India (1%). The other 7% of the participants are from countries including Turkey, Ghana, Mali, Germany, Romania, Greece, Zambia, Columbia, France, Singapore, Ukraine, South Korea, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Vietnam, Kenya, Cuba, and Portugal. The majority of the teachers teach at high schools (44.7%). The second highest group of teachers teach at primary schools (18.4%), followed by teachers in middle schools (13.3%). Others, which include teachers in kindergartens, training centers, and other private institutions, amount to 12.9% out of the whole sample size. About 10.2% of the teachers in the present study teach at universities. Teachers in vocational school represent the smallest group in the sample size (0.4%). On average, teachers had 11.8 years of teaching experience (SD=8.25), which ranged from a minimum of 1 year to 48 years of experience.

The questionnaire was made available online for a period of 2 months, and a total of 255 participants took part in it. The study did not opt to target a small number of teachers from one school in one country, as this would limit the research to a specific context. Instead, the study gathered data from a large, open, and random participation of teachers from diverse contexts. The more participants there are in a study, the more confident we can be about the data and its applicability to a wider population (Vogt, 2011). However, it is worthy to note that the broad variety of respondents also makes some generalizations difficult.

**Results**

Reporting on the difficulties the teachers face when using metaphor as part of their teaching strategies, the unsuitability of the topic to the group size (M=3.30, SD=1.27) was reported as the most faced difficulty followed by the difficulty of the topic (M=3.29, SD=1.02). Another difficulty the teachers faced was the unavailability of materials (M=3.25, SD=1.22) and time (M=3.25, SD=1.17). Other teachers reported that the approach creates more work for them.

**Table 1** Difficulties faced when using metaphor as part of the teaching strategies (N=255)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulty of the topic</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unavailability of materials</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not fit my group size</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not important</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The approach creates more work for teachers</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too young</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not fit students' expectations</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know how to integrate conceptual metaphors in my teaching</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This approach is unsuitable for my students</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The difficulties hindering EFL teachers from using metaphor-based teaching

(M=3.22, SD=1.39) and others state that teaching metaphor does not fit the students’ expectations and needs (M=3.17, SD=1.32).

The other difficulties which are of less significance to the teachers include the students being too young (M=2.95, SD=1.39) followed by the approach being unsuitable for the students (M=2.95, SD=1.40). The last two least significant hindrances teachers face using conceptual metaphor include: conceptual metaphor not being important (M=2.72, SD=1.23) and the fact that some teachers do not know how to integrate conceptual metaphors in their teaching (M=2.70, SD=1.29).

Discussion

Difficulties facing teaching when using metaphor-based teaching as part of their teaching strategies

Based on the cut off score of mean equal to 3 and above (on a 5-point scale), six difficulties out of ten were found to be of paramount significance to this study.

The unsuitability of metaphor-based approach to large groups

The first difficulty is the unsuitability of the topic to the group size (mean 3.30, s.d.= 1.27). Needless to say, any topic is difficult to teach to large groups. Group size has a strong effect on the learning environment; and the group size needs to be considered by curriculum designers as well as teachers when planning metaphor-based lessons and textbooks so as to provide engaging and interesting activities for the learners (Harmer, 2007). A simple solution to this issue is using small groups as a way to get the students engaged with their own learning. This way creates a safe environment where students can learn from their peers and collaborate on their thoughts before presenting them to the entire class. Moreover, small groups take advantage of the diversity present in large classrooms. When presented with a contentious topic, students are likely to engage in comprehensive discussions covering various perspectives, resulting in a stimulating and dynamic debate ((Deslauriers et al., 2011).

The difficulty of metaphor-based approach to learners

The second most significant difficulty among teachers is the difficulty of the topic (M=3.29, SD=1.02). Metaphor-based teaching is a rather new approach that can be used to teach English to adults as well as young learners. Activities such as categorization and fill in the blank can be adopted (see example below). In addition, vocabulary can be taught using the most common conceptual metaphors such as GOOD IS UP and BAD IS DOWN. A study by Pan (2019) carried out a study to investigate the effectiveness of Conceptual Metaphor Approach on young Chinese learners aged 10–12 years old with an A1 English level (according to CEFR). The study showed that the students who were learning using the CMA fared better than those under the memorization-translation approach. This study is evidence to suggest that conceptual metaphor is a topic and an approach to learning that can be utilized with even younger learners despite the unfounded opinions of the teachers about conceptual metaphor.

There are many activities that can be utilized in the classroom to facilitate the learning of conceptual metaphors. Students can be given a text and asked to underline the expressions that are related to HAPPINESS, or any other conceptual metaphor, so as to introduce the students to the target expressions and the way they are employed in actual situations. Another activity is the underlining of the correct word depending on the context as in the example below (taken from Pérez, 2016):

It was obvious that Charles was angry. He came storming/breezing into the room, threw the contract on the table and demanded to know why he had not been consulted.
Another activity that can be used to increase metaphorical awareness and competence is the categorization task. Students have to categorize sentences and expressions according to the conceptual metaphor column they belong to (as shown in Figure 2 below):

The unavailability of materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOOD IS UP</th>
<th>BAD IS DOWN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>my spirit is up</td>
<td>I feel down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be on top of the world</td>
<td>she is down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feel elevated</td>
<td>low life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fill in the blank activity

I am sad today. I feel ........

I feel ............. It is a beautiful day.

**Figure 2** Conceptual metaphors categorization and fill-in-the-blank activities

Thirdly, the unavailability of materials ranks as the third most significant difficulty teachers face when using metaphor-based teaching (M= 3.25, SD=1.22). It is undeniable that teaching materials are of vital import for effective teaching and learning. Enhancing instructions relies heavily on the quality of learning materials, such as textbooks (Chingos & West, 2010). The paucity of teaching materials forces the teachers to approach subjects in an abstract, dry, and uninteresting way; thus, resulting in ineffective teaching. The inadequacy of teaching materials such as textbooks and syllabi impact the teaching and learning processes negatively (Matimbe, 2014). The pedagogical intervention for this issue is to create a conceptual syllabus based on universal and culture-specific metaphors (Andreou & Galantomos, 2008). Simply put, most teachers are unaware of the import of conceptual metaphor while most students are metaphorically incompetent. This syllabus is appropriate because it incorporates metaphor which is, according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), a linguistic phenomenon that is pervasive in our daily language. This is of vital importance because it is an essential component that need be integrated within language syllabi so as to have learners who are not only grammatically and communicatively competent, but also metaphorically component. Creating materials which are conceptually based is another approach that can supplement the other already existing approaches and, therefore, benefit the students greatly.

Time constraints and workload

Time constraints (M=3.25, SD=1.27) and the loads of work the preparation for a metaphor-based teaching creates (M=3.22, SD=1.39) are reported as the fourth most significant difficul-
ties when using a metaphor-based teaching. Indeed, shifting from the traditional approach of teaching (e.g., lecture-based) to an approach that utilizes innovative methods can be dauntingly challenging, time-consuming, and laborious. The transition can indeed pose difficulties in the planning and implementing process of active learning strategies in classes (Huerta, 2007). The difficulty here, however, is not the physical transition from the actual use of one approach to another, but rather a perception issue. Traditional approach users think of metaphor-based teaching as a supplementary tool that consumes time and creates more unnecessary work. Teachers need to be made aware that adopting another approach to teaching, such as metaphor-based approach, should not be considered supplementary to the traditional approach which most teachers are accustomed to, but is rather a key learning approach that is independent like any other key learning approach. Good teachers are resourceful. Designing and implementing new resources for teaching does indeed need time and effort like any other teaching task.

Metaphor-based teaching not meeting students’ needs

Last but not least, metaphor-based teaching as a tool that does not fit students’ expectations and needs (M=3.17, SD=1.32) is another challenge that teachers face when using metaphor-based teaching as part of their teaching strategy. The question that we need to ask ourselves here is: should we always choose the approaches to use when teaching based merely on what we think is right at the expense of what students really need? Do we really know what the students’ needs and expectations are? Not always. A study by Peacock (2000) at City University of Hong Kong about the learning and teaching styles found that 72% of the students agreed that they felt frustrated because the adopted teaching style was different from their learning style; and 76% reported that their learning was affected negatively by the teaching style. Aligning learning preferences with teaching approaches is a more efficient way to improve the educational experience. As one may expect, one approach could not satisfy all students. The only solution out of this problematic situation is for the teacher to utilize various strategies that will be beneficial to the majority of the students; traditional as well as innovative approaches such as metaphor-based teaching.

Providing continuous professional development trainings and utilizing a variety of approaches is not enough. Another essential pedagogical intervention, which was mentioned above as a solution to some of the issues reported in this study, is the creation of a conceptual syllabus based on universal and culture-specific metaphors (Andreou & Galantomos, 2008). It seems that the concept of metaphoric competence is completely neglected in language classrooms. Unsurprisingly, the syllabi most teachers use, of which they have no power to change, do not incorporate any conceptual metaphors nor do they seem to aim at developing metaphoric competence in any way. In addition, the issue is perpetuated by the fact that most teachers still conceive of metaphors in the classic Aristotelian definition of being a mere figure of speech. The creation of a conceptual syllabus, or at least a single strand within a certain syllabus dedicated for conceptual metaphors, will effectively develop the learners’ conceptual competence. Danesi (1995) proposed that designing and teaching metaphors within the framework of cognitive linguistics is an effective and essential for language learning. It is important to provide a clear and explicit instruction on the functioning of the cognitive linguistic strategy and its impact on learning a foreign language (Kövecses 2001). Danesi (1995, pp. 6–7) further added that a conceptual syllabus should be arranged according to conceptual domains, while their teaching will place more importance on morphosyntactic and communicative cues.
The difficulties hindering EFL teachers from using metaphor-based teaching

Other difficulties teachers face when using metaphor as part of the teaching strategies

Other language aspects are more important

Most of the teachers in the study also reported that metaphor-based teaching is not important because there are other language aspects which are more important. These aspects are, according to number of times they were mentioned, grammatical competence and communicative competence. The teachers argued that these are the most essential aspects students need to learn a language and the main skills tested in exams. What most teachers fail to notice is that learning grammar rules does not often lead to fluency. A study corroborates this by showing a weak correlation between the two \( r(df)= .25, p=.05 \) (Kusumawardani & Mardiyani, 2018). The teachers further argued that pragmatic and metaphoric competence are of no use in the early stages of language learning. Second in importance, according to the teachers, is the pragmatic competence which is argued to be of vital import only to clients who need to use language properly in social settings with pragmatically correct utterances. Thirdly, social linguistic competence is of a paramount importance in the sense that understanding the social context and values is crucial in understanding language. Only very few teachers argued that they find all competencies equally important for an effective learning and expression to happen. However, the participants’ responses reveal a neglected direction towards the essential role of metaphorical competence.

Level of students: Mixed proficiency levels

Another reported difficulty by some teachers is that metaphor-based teaching cannot benefit all the students since it may pose as too abstract an approach to some students which makes it difficult to facilitate understanding. Other teachers also reported on the students’ feelings and experiences with metaphor-based teaching saying that “students do not see the purpose of using metaphors in everyday language use. They always link it with literature and poetry,” “I avoid making learning more complex to my students,” “lack of language awareness on the part of students,” and “middle school students struggle with the literal meaning of the words; thus, a metaphorical expression confuses them.” The teachers do not think that using a metaphor-based teaching can be used as a complementary tool to enhance their students’ language. As seen in the aforementioned studies, incorporating metaphor-based teaching improves learning, boosts retention, and enhances the framework for organizing vocabulary (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2008; Pérez, 2019).

Lack of training to use metaphor-based teaching

Another difficulty hindering the implementation and incorporation of metaphor-based teaching is the lack of training and even awareness from the teachers’ side. This is evident from their responses that say that “the students haven’t learned this in their L1, that being said, they are unable to comprehend what metaphor stands for, and even the teachers struggle finding more ways how to make the concept more clear,” “metaphor is just a literary tool that doesn’t need to be taught,” “metaphor is more often used in written English than spoken,” “learners don’t always get opportunities to produce metaphorical language in a natural way,” “sometimes a metaphor expresses what the mere words do not say, which is confusing for a lot of students” and “Metaphors let our speech sound more poetic, but probably not every student is able to or is interested in feeling the beauty of it. Some personalities simply aren’t interested in them, even in their native language.” It is interesting to hear what current English teachers have to say about metaphor-based teaching given that Contemporary Metaphor Theory has been in the field of applied linguistics for more than four decades. Ashraf & Ashraf
The difficulties hindering EFL teachers from using metaphor-based teaching

(2015) reported that the teaching profession is beset with poor performance and low competence due to inadequate training, insufficient motivation, and outdated instructional approaches. It seems that the change taking way in this regard is unhurried.

Lack of interest

Other teachers lay the blame of not using metaphor-based teaching on students for not having interest in it. Others mention that students find it hard and confusing leading to short attention spans. Another teacher, surprisingly, mention that metaphor-based could limit students’ imagination. A study by Pérez (2019) about the development of metaphoric competence conducted a questionnaire wherein 59% of the participants agreed and 35% of them strongly agreed that using conceptual metaphor in teaching was interesting, clearly organized, informative, and relevant. The teachers could also devote some time to experiment with the approach and prepare lessons that could make the students tick. The presentation stage could rely on interesting and illustrative visuals that depict the conceptual metaphors (see the examples in the introduction).

There are several other interesting activities that could be used to teach conceptual metaphors including a guessing game where two pictures are shown for the students to guess the expression of the conceptual metaphor:

![Figure 3 A conceptual metaphor guessing game](image)

Language-related difficulties

The difficulties reported here are related to the interference and impact of first language and the culture of the students. Teachers stated that they find it is difficult to find the equivalence in the 1st language to transmit meanings expressed in the English conceptual metaphors. They attribute these to the “cultural and linguistic gaps” that exist between English and the L1 of the learners and to the fact that “different cultures use different metaphors.” This renders it “difficult to find similar concepts in students' native language to which they can compare or contrast the metaphor being taught.” Several other reasons were mentioned which include, but are not limited to, “language interference,” “cultural ambiguities,” “selecting appropriate metaphors to teach,” and that “sometimes cultural differences do not allow for appreciation of certain metaphors.” Again, the issue here is being exacerbated by evading the solution which is incorporating metaphor-based teaching. Contrary to what the teachers mentioned, cross-linguistic activities involving metaphorical equivalents or even approximations in their L1 can
be capitalized on to compare the meanings and uses of metaphors in L1 and L2. Pérez (2019) showed that this renders the comprehension process easier. This can also forestall negative conceptual transfers which are, according to Danesi and Grieve (2010), the most disruptive in the meaning-transfer process.

Absence of a conceptual syllabus

Last but not least, absence of a syllabus or a strand of it designated for enhancing conceptual metaphor is reported as a difficulty hampering the use of a metaphor-based teaching approach. Some teachers mentioned that they don’t utilize metaphor-based teaching because “it isn’t in my syllabus” and that they “need to adhere to the syllabus.” They also responded that the lack of teaching materials such as a conceptual syllabus could lead them to constantly preparing and printing material which they don’t prefer. Danesi (2016) argued that when conceptual metaphor is not integrated into a syllabus, the students tend to either avoid metaphorical expressions or produce conceptual expressions which are based on L1. As can be seen from the teachers’ responses, it is not only the students who avoid conceptual metaphor due to the lack of a syllabus, teachers also avoid using it in their classrooms since it creates more work, and the absence of a conceptual syllabus only further discourages the teachers from initiating a metaphor-based teaching.

More teachers see metaphor-based teaching as having more drawbacks than advantages, doing more harm to both students and teachers than good. Metaphor needs to be seen as an integral part of teaching a language and not just a secondary bootless tool that is esoteric.

Factors influencing the implementation of a conceptual syllabus:

There are, however, likely factors that could hamper the successful implementation of a conceptual syllabus. For example, although the communicative approach has developed in Chinese EFL contexts, it still faces the issue of traditional education expectations, lack of experienced teachers as well as the issue of national system of examination (Rao, 2013). Another factor that needs to be considered is the persistent traditional practice of teaching and the traditional teacher-centered classrooms in China. Teaching in China using an audio-lingual approach is preferred over other approaches which are not in synch with the traditional practice of teaching in China (Ting, 1987). Last but not least, the factor that shapes the teaching most is the nature of the Chinese curriculum which features lessons of grammar, reading and writing detrimental to other competences (Li, 1984) such as conceptual competence. This could also transpire in Arab countries as is evident in the effect of memorization as part of the Islamic tradition which is used to memorize the holy Qur’an and Al-hadith. The practice of memorization is widely acknowledged and accepted in Islamic education as a legitimate learning approach. To exemplify, educators within the Islamic community have consistently recognized memorization as a highly effective method of learning (Yusuf, 2010). These factors will, most of the time, direct teachers towards the use of traditional approaches at the expense of other approaches such as metaphor-based approach.

Conclusion

The Contemporary Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) showed that metaphor is not just a language ornament, but also a cognitive phenomenon that is pervasive in our daily language. A multitude of research presented in this study demonstrated that incorporating and teaching conceptual metaphors has important practical pedagogical applications in language classrooms.

This study comes to the conclusion that the majority of teachers face a variety of difficulties
when using metaphor-based teaching. This aggravates and perpetuates the problem of having students who are metaphorically incompetent; students whose teachers focus on literal correctness of discourse and other language skills at the expense of the creative uses of conceptual metaphors. The importance of metaphor and its function in acquiring a second language might not be immediately evident, causing many teachers, educators, and experts in English as a Foreign Language to ignore or undervalue its significance. Adopting a cognitive approach to vocabulary instruction, such as utilizing metaphor-based teaching, can significantly enhance language learning. Considering the significance of utilizing metaphors for effective communication in a second language, the role of conceptual metaphor becomes crucial in language instruction. It aids learners in organizing vocabulary according to conceptual domains, thereby facilitating the learning process (Boers, 1999).

Teacher education and professional development programs should include some foundational knowledge about Contemporary Metaphor Theory and metaphor-based teaching. It is also recommended that teachers adopt a diverse range of instructional approaches instead of solely relying on one method. Furthermore, teachers should strive to be resourceful, knowledgeable, and stay updated with the latest teaching trends and theories, taking on the role of researchers. Research is a driving force for personal development and progress in individuals and groups. Teachers, with their extensive knowledge acquired through research, make valuable contributions to their classrooms by actively applying and sharing their expertise. Effective teachers use a variety of teaching strategies to enhance the process of learning English and incorporating metaphor-based teaching is one such strategy that is missing in the jigsaw of teaching.

Acknowledgments
Thanks for the participants’ efforts for taking part in this study.

Data Availability
The current research data are available from the author upon request.

Conflict of interest
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding statement
This research received no specific grant from any funding agency.

References


The difficulties hindering EFL teachers from using metaphor-based teaching

Folios, 32, 125–140.


The difficulties hindering EFL teachers from using metaphor-based teaching


**Appendix**

This is a simplified version of the questionnaire. An electronic version was used to collect the data.

**Years of experience:**

**What level do you teach? (multiple choice):**

- a. Primary  
- b. middle school  
- c. high school  
- d. vocational  
- e. university  
- f. other

**Rank the difficulties found when using a metaphor-based teaching (Rate from 1 (less common) to 5 (most common)).**

- a. The difficulty of the topic  
- b. Unavailability of materials  
- c. Time  
- d. Does not fit the group size  
- e. The topic of metaphor is not important  
- f. This approach creates more work for the teachers  
- g. Students are too young  
- h. Does not fit the students’ expectations/needs.  
- i. Don’t know how to integrate conceptual metaphors in my teaching.  
- j. This approach is unsuitable for the students.

**What other difficulties do you face when using conceptual metaphor as part of the teaching strategies?**

**What do you think are the advantages of using conceptual metaphor as a teaching tool?**

**Mention the drawbacks of using conceptual metaphor as a teaching tool?**