

## **Enhancing Interactional Competence Through the Use of English Expressions**

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### **Abstract**

An exploratory study was conducted on the use of common English expressions in accountancy and business courses in a Singapore university. The aim of the study was to investigate the use of English expressions required by students to engage in effective communication at their workplace either during their internship period or upon graduation. Data garnered through a quiz, an online survey, semi-structured focus group interviews with students, and face-to face interviews with business professionals were analysed through descriptive statistics and qualitatively to gather the perceptions of students and business professionals on the use of English expressions such as common idioms, proverbs and catchphrases relevant for workplace communication. The study found that students' interactional competence can be enhanced by increasing their learning engagement through relevant communicative activities that include English expressions in the physical and/or virtual classroom.

### **Keywords**

Communication skills, interactional competence, English expressions, workplace preparedness, English for specific purposes

## **1 Introduction**

A graduate from a reputable Singapore business school on his first day of work was asked by one of the managers, "What's the feather in your cap?" This expression confounded the new hire as he was not able to comprehend the meaning of the phrase "feather in your cap" to respond appropriately. A recount of this and similar anecdotes during a networking session with the industry professionals formed the trigger to this study on identifying and exploring the perceptions of students and business professionals on the use of English expressions that include idioms and catchphrases.

Many businesses require their employees to possess good English communication skills considered necessary for the globalized workplace. Communication skills refer to the ability to convey information

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effectively and top the list of what most employers look for in employees and job candidates (Global English, 2016). Surveys in this area of study indicate communication skills are lacking in new college graduates. Cai & Liao (2010) suggested in order to meet the demands of a globalized economy, university students must possess communicative competence in English.

While English is the medium of instruction in Singapore schools, majority of students lapse into Singlish, a blend of Singaporean dialects with English that does not follow the conventions of Standard English (Harbeck, 2016). As a result, English expressions such as idioms, proverbs or catchphrases when used at the workplace, particularly with global audiences, could result in a failure to understand intended messages, thus leading to communication breakdown. Majority of Singapore students are considered non-native speakers of English and tend to misinterpret commonly used English idioms, proverbs and/or catchphrases. This could lead to undesirable outcomes such as failing to meet business objectives, inefficiencies due to misinterpretation, or even loss of self-esteem, thus leading to their inability to manage effective communication.

There is a need for students to develop their interactional competence in order to participate in the interpretation and expression of messages, and negotiation of meanings. Hence, it may be useful for accountancy/business English classroom discourses in tertiary education to incorporate the use of English expressions. The aim of this study is to explore the perspectives of students and business professionals on use of English expressions in a tertiary education context and the need to reinforce learning activities in the curriculum to enhance interactional competence of students.

## **2 Interactional Competence**

Singapore workplace is a global forum for interaction as it is a hub for international trade (Economic Development Board, 2019). Global English reports 67% of the chief executive officers who participated in an IBM survey considered communicative competence, a term coined by Dell Hymes in 1966, to be the key success factor in the globalized workplace (2016). The ability to use language correctly to communicate appropriately and effectively in a variety of situations is often referred to as communicative competence. Communicative competence can be described as the intuitive functional knowledge and control of the principles of language usage (Hymes, 1972). Communicative competence extending to interactions at the workplace could then be referred to as interactional competence.

Hymes' ideas were the basis for an applied linguistic theory of communicative competence related to linguistic acts in social situations (Canale & Swain, 1980). Communicative competence, therefore, refers to the ability to use language, or to communicate, in a culturally appropriate manner in order to make meaning and accomplish social tasks with efficacy and fluency through extended interactions (Tarvin, 2015). When a non-native (L2) speaker does not understand how a native language (L1) speaker will interpret a message, the intent of the encoded message and the impact of the decoded message will not be the same. Singapore students considered as L2 speakers, often find themselves conversing with L1 speakers in the globalized workplace. There are possibilities for cultural miscues that prevent the message or idiomatic language to be understood as intended. This leads to the need for developing the curriculum to include a communicative course syllabus such that L2 speakers are able to achieve these communicative tasks in extended interactions that occur in the workplace so that they have the skills and understanding to interpret and formulate messages with appropriate socio-cultural intent (Hall & Pekarek Doehler, 2011). Hyme's concept of communicative competence also extends to language usage that governs interactions at the workplace when conversing, problem solving, and networking with management, colleagues or clients.

While communicative competence has been well developed in the literature over the last five decades, interactional competence is a relatively recent notion. Many researchers have attempted to define and

clarify the concept of interactional competence with varying levels of overlapping ideas. Interactional competence requires a shared knowledge in addition to pragmatic competence (Young, 2011). Todhunter (2007) defines interactional competence as “the ability to appropriately and effectively participate in conversations” (p. 605). L2 speakers must know when and how to take a stance in an interactive setting as well as when and how to respond to another interlocutor. While communicative competence research informs interactional competence, interactional competence develops in context-specific situations where language learners participate with more experienced interlocutors in specific interactions (Young, 2011). In other words, interactional competence develops as students participate in context-specific conversations, and necessary for “competent participation in a community’s significant practices” (Hall, 1995, p. 39). The development of such skills requires a systematic interactive practice by students. Jenks (2013) thus summarises interactional competence (IC) as the ability to jointly communicate in setting-specific ways; it is about using communicative resources to co-construct understanding and co-accomplish context-specific goals. According to Jenks, talks in physical or online classrooms, which are examples of communicative setting, require not only the display of pragmatic competence, but also a negotiation of communicative norms and conventions, described as a key feature of interactional competence.

Instructional conversation can provide a natural interaction within a classroom setting where interactional competence can be developed as students learn about curricular concepts using the language of the L1 speakers. Formal instructional activities provide students with opportunities to initiate target language conversations including the use of English expressions. Interactional competence, along with its associated pedagogies provide goals for teachers to help their students interact effectively. With such aim in mind, the three research questions addressed in this study are:

1. What are students’ perceptions on the use of English expressions that are often used in workplace interactions?
2. What are business professionals’ perceptions on students’ interactional competence in using English expressions at the workplace?
3. How can English expressions be incorporated into the learning activities to enhance interactional competence in students?

## **3 Method**

### **3.1 Participants**

Purposive sampling involving accountancy/business students and professionals from relevant industries was used in this study to explore their perspectives on the use of English expressions very specific to the context. A total of 62 students in Year 2 taking the accountancy and business modules taught by the two researchers were invited to take part in the study. While 51 and 36 students attempted the survey and quiz, respectively, 25 of these participated voluntarily in five focus group interviews (FGIs). A total of five business professionals took part in the face-to-face interviews conducted at their office venues that were convenient for discussions. The business professional group comprised (1) a partner of the big 4 Singapore accounting firm, (2) a finance director from the public sector, (3) a human resource director from an MNC, (4) a CEO of technology company, and (5) a director of an insurance firm.

### **3.2 Instruments**

Four instruments namely, survey, quiz, focus group interviews with students, and interviews with business professionals (or employers) were used to garner data for this study.

### 3.2.1 Survey


Fifty-one students successfully completed an online survey (Appendix A). The online survey was conducted to elicit responses on the need for learning English expressions. The survey comprised nine questions, seven of which were arranged on a Likert scale with four options ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*. Of the remaining two questions, one was a sample contextual quiz question and the other an open-ended question designed to elicit any additional information that the respondent might have to offer on the topic.

### 3.2.2 Quiz

Ten contextual questions were included in this pen-and-paper quiz intended to test the students' understanding of the commonly used English expressions (Appendix B). Relevant expressions were extracted from business articles in newspapers and magazines and served as prompts in the quiz. Each prompt was provided with options for the student to select the most appropriate one. An example of a prompt in the quiz is shown in figure 1. An additional question was added to the quiz to assess their confidence level in using English expressions in conversations in school or at the workplace.

Figure 1

A Quiz Item from Appendix B

<p>6. From <a href="https://www.nst.com.my/property/2018/02/330899/lock-stock-barrel-rise-disruptive-technologies">https://www.nst.com.my/property/2018/02/330899/lock-stock-barrel-rise-disruptive-technologies</a></p>  <p>The expression 'Lock, stock &amp; barrel' refers to:</p>	<p>Completely, in its entirety</p>	<p>Businesses are locked due to cash crunch</p>	<p>Stocks slip due to failed trade talks between the US and China</p>
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### 3.2.3 Focus group interviews

In addition to the survey and quiz, an additional tool, FGIs were used to ferret for inputs by students who voluntarily participated in this study to share their experiences. The FGIs were semi-structured interviews (Appendix C) with the interview guides being sent to the participants two days ahead of the scheduled discussions. The FGIs were scheduled over five separate sessions, each of 40-minute duration involving five students. The semi-structured interview guide comprised seven questions with the final question requiring the students to rank their preferred mode of learning for the English expressions.

### 3.2.4 Interviews

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the employers on five separate occasions. The interview guide for the employers comprised six questions (Appendix D) that required the respondents to share their perceptions and experiences on their interactions with the interns and new graduates with reference to the use of English expressions at the workplace.

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 Students' perceptions on the need for learning English expressions

The survey analysis indicated that out of the 51 students who responded to the survey, only 14 indicated that they understood the meaning of the expression “pared to the bone”. In contrast 38 of them interpreted the expression “don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater” correctly when provided with the context.

Eighty-eight percent of the students concurred with the viewpoint that learning English expressions would enhance their communication skills at work. 92.2% also strongly agreed that it should be taught before sending students out on internships and that they will be better able to engage in workplace communication with this knowledge. Majority of the students agreed that they will be able to better understand workplace communication if taught the use of the English expression in the accountancy/business courses at SIT. However, 58.8% were not in favour of direct instruction for this. A summary of the analysis of the students’ responses to the online survey is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Online Survey Responses*

#	Question	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		Total
1	I am able to understand the meaning of Standard English expressions/idioms/catchphrases in business communication.	0.00%	0	5.88%	3	66.67%	34	27.45%	14	51
2	When a report uses “pared to the bone”, I understand what the expression means.	7.84%	4	64.71%	33	17.65%	9	9.80%	5	51
3	Learning English expressions/idioms/catchphrases will enhance my communication skills at IWSP/work.	0.00%	0	11.76%	6	66.67%	34	21.57%	11	51
4	English expressions/idioms/catchphrases should be taught before sending students out on internship programmes such as IWSP	0.00%	0	7.84%	4	70.59%	36	21.57%	11	51
5	I will be able to better understand workplace communication if I am taught the use of English expressions/idioms/catchphrases in my accounting courses at SIT.	0.00%	0	7.84%	4	76.47%	39	15.69%	8	51
6	There is no need for explicit teaching of English expressions/idioms/catchphrases in accounting courses at SIT as I can learn on my own or at my workplace.	7.84%	4	33.33%	17	54.90%	28	3.92%	2	51
7	Accounting courses must include English expressions/idioms/catchphrases used in a typical workplace setting.	1.96%	1	15.69%	8	66.67%	34	15.69%	8	51
8.	<p>A newspaper carried the following extract:</p> <p>But Jenkins [the new CEO] can’t play too fast and loose with the investment bank. It contributes more than half Barclays’ profits; profits it dearly needs to build up the capital reserves demanded by regulators. Shareholders want to know he won’t throw out the baby with the bath water.</p> <p>Sunday Times, 10 Feb. 2013.</p> <p>What does the phrase “...won’t throw out the baby with the bath water” mean?</p>	<p>Rejecting the essential along with the inessential</p> <p>38 (74.51%)</p>		<p>Throwing the reports in the dustbin</p> <p>9 (1.96%)</p>		<p>Cleaning up the mess</p> <p>4 (7.84%)</p>		<p>Making a fresh start</p> <p>8 (15.69%)</p>		

In response to the open-ended question in the online survey, students commented that learning of English expressions is “Great to learn and best if embedded into the curriculum”, “Must learn, because we don’t understand...we don’t use”, and “Definitely recommend for all students as it will be helpful.”

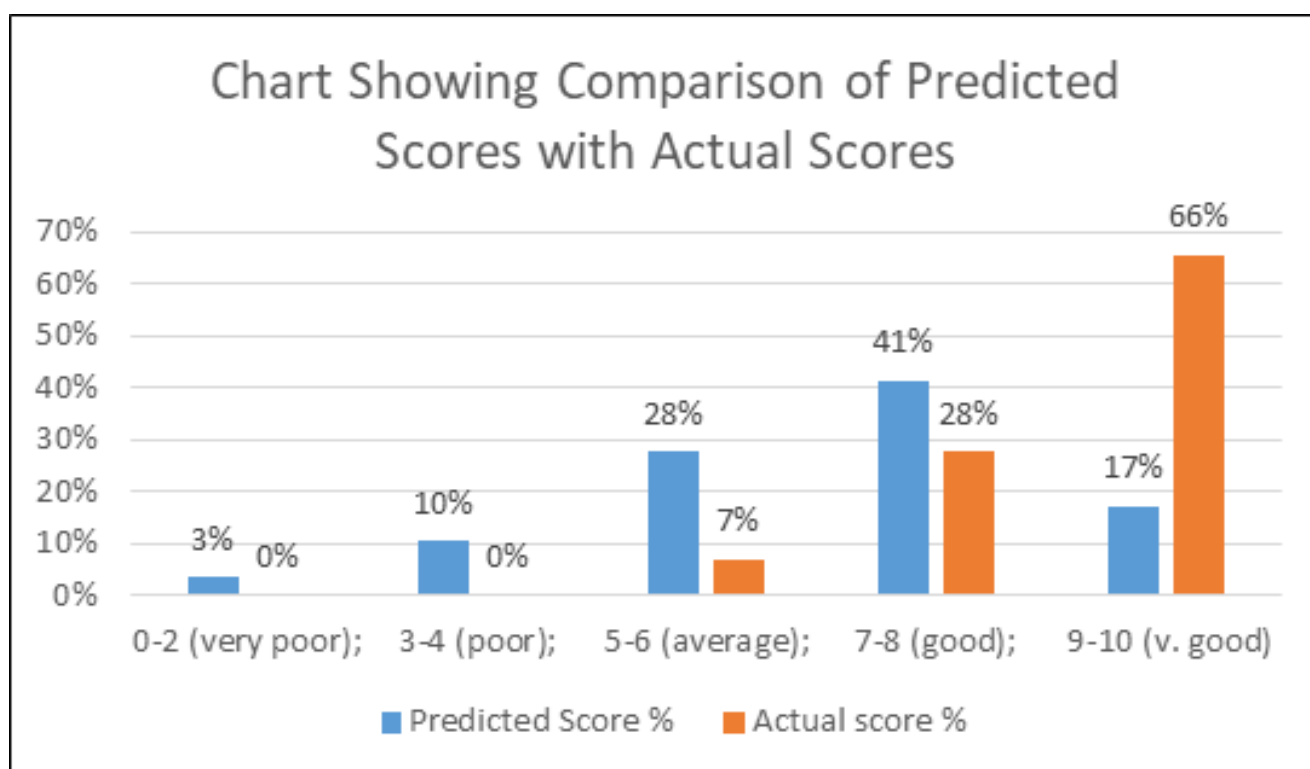
#### 4.2 Students’ interactional communication competence

An analysis of the 10 contextual quiz responses revealed while 66% of the students had scores in the range of 9-10 (Table 2), only 17% predicted achieving scores in this range. The analysis further showed that 13% of the students predicted a score of less than 5, however none were placed in this range. These observations, where actual scores belie the predicted scores can be attributed to students lacking confidence in using English expressions in their interactions. This lack of confidence could mean that students would then hesitate to initiate conversations or probably respond ineptly when drawn into conversations.

Table 2

*Comparison of Students’ Predicted Scores in the Quiz Questions versus their Actual Scores*

	Predicted Score		Actual score	
	Number of students	%	Number of students	%
0-2 (very poor)	1	3%	0	0%
3-4 (poor)	3	10%	0	0%
5-6 (average)	8	28%	2	7%
7-8 (good)	12	41%	8	28%
9-10 (v. good)	5	17%	19	66%
	29	100%	29	100%
Option not selected	7		7	
Total	36		36	



### 4.3 Students perceptions on knowledge of English expressions.

During the FGIs, majority of the students indicated they have heard of common catchphrases such as ‘strike while the iron is hot’, ‘make hay while sun shines’, ‘devil is in the details’. Students concurred with one another that they are often able to understand when they hear these phrases but are unable to use them in authentic situations. Most of the interviewees recalled being taught some of these phrases in the early stages (primary school) of their education. However, as these were taught with an assessment-related purpose, it led to students memorizing such phrases to meet assessment criteria. Hence, these phrases were not built into their repertoire of spoken English. This was evident in sharing of a student’s embarrassing experience at not being able to comprehend her supervisor’s instructions when she was asked to submit a budget proposal on cost cutting measures, ‘pared down to the bone’. Other students opined while facts and numbers were more important in accountancy profession, knowledge of English expressions cannot be ignored for a better workplace communication.

All the interviewees agreed that they would benefit from the knowledge of English expressions and their applications, especially in the global workplace. However, the students were not in favour of teaching and assessment of such expressions in their programme of study. As one student remarked that she “*does not see the need for it to be taught explicitly, but good to be taught as such phrases are often used by some people at the workplace.*”

In response to Question 7 (Appendix C) on the instruction of English expressions, 63% of the students indicated their top two learning choices are for the phrases to be embedded in the curriculum and role play. The least preferred choices were learning activities related to close passage, and drill and practice (Table 3).

Table 3

*Preferred Mode of Learning Activity of English Expressions/Idiomatic Language*

Choice	Number of students selecting the preferred learning activity					
	Role Play	Reading comprehension	Close Passage	Embedded in the curriculum	Drill and Practice	Total
1 <sup>st</sup> Choice	6	2	1	8	2	19
2 <sup>nd</sup> Choice	6	2	3	4	4	19
3 <sup>rd</sup> Choice	3	4	4	2	6	19
4 <sup>th</sup> Choice	3	8	5	2	1	19
5 <sup>th</sup> Choice	1	3	6	3	6	19
Total	19	19	19	19	19	

### 4.4 Professionals’ perceptions of interactional competence

All five business professionals, who were interviewed, agreed that the knowledge of English expressions would benefit the students at their workplace. In the words of a senior public accountant, “*It is useful, especially to emphasize a point and add flavor or impact to discussions and especially during presentations.*” A director from a reputable insurance company stated that students should pick up the knowledge of English expressions as it enhances their cultural quotient and enables them to communicate effectively in the global workplace. Another interviewee, a human resource consultant at an MNC, was of the view that accountants in general may not need idiomatic language skills. These phrases are often used by management/consultants and less so by the operational staff. However, such idiomatic language could be used during recruitment and other workplace conversations. He concluded that in a global landscape, the use of English expressions is important and hence students should pick up the knowledge of such.

Another interviewee holding a senior management position at a business software company went on to suggest that the knowledge of English expressions can be taught to the students in an engaging manner through activities like mock interviews, everyday conversations, and through technology. According to her, skills that differentiate average from great employees is communication, and in her words:

*The ability to express and tell stories that often captivates people much more effectively. Phrases, idioms etc. are so catchy ... and as one journeys through his/her career and moves into leadership roles, these skills are even more important for effective persuasion, influence and communication.*

The global and diverse nature of the workplace requires students to be equipped with the knowledge and skills on the use of English expressions. One of the interviewees, a partner in the Big 4 accounting firm shared, “it is important, because tomorrow our staff will be travelling to other countries. We have people travelling to UK and Australia, and they should be able to acquire the use of these English expressions to participate in conversations.” He further added, “It is very important for the interns to have a good command of the spoken language as they are being constantly assessed for their employment potential and career progression.” While on the topic of teaching the English expressions in school, he suggested “English expressions should be embedded within the accounting curriculum as part of the spoken discourse.”

## 5 Discussion and Conclusion

This section discusses the major findings garnered through a quiz, an online survey, semi-structured focus group interviews with students, and face-to face interviews with business professionals on the use of English expressions relevant for workplace communication. The major findings endorse the benefits of knowing English expressions that enhance interactional competence at the workplace. The findings can be summarized as the following.

*Competency in using English expressions during interactions are beneficial to the interlocutors in a globalized workplace.* Students in Singapore usually interact with people from multi-national and multi-cultural backgrounds. Both groups of participants in this study, students and business professionals alike emphasised the usefulness and benefits of acquiring the knowledge of English expressions for workplace interactions. Chang (2004) states that in order to maintain their position in today’s competitive market, graduates need to possess excellent English communication skills that will help them develop self-confidence and present their projects with greater clarity which resonate with the findings in this study.

*Students face challenges when interacting with people at school or at their workplace due to their lack of competence in the use English expressions.* Students hold the view that they would be disadvantaged if they were not equipped adequately with knowledge of English expressions, especially in the workplace. This is because they could misinterpret communication with their supervisors and/or colleagues, thus leading to undesirable outcomes such as incorrect execution of a given instruction, or not contributing to discussions, both of which could negatively impact their careers. Similar views were reported by Myles (2009) in his research that L2 Engineering students in a Canadian University faced challenges around conversational aspects of communication, especially in the conversations that involved English expressions during their internship placements. These interns reported their frustration in trying to communicate with their L1 co-workers who often used English expressions in their speech. The inability to understand and use idiomatic language was challenging for many of the interns which led them to realise they required adequate practice to engage appropriately in conversations. The experience of Singapore students is similar to that of the interns thereby suggesting that Singapore students need to improve their communication with reference to the use of English expressions through practise before embarking on their internships.

*Students prefer non-didactic methods for the learning of English expressions.* While the students understood the benefits of learning English expressions, they were not in favour of direct instruction



for learning and assessment. Instead, they expressed a preference for learning activities that included role-plays, debates, context-specific conversations, all of which include English expressions. Thus, the practice provided through these activities would help students to develop better interactional competence. Tarvin (2015), similarly reports interactional competence develops in students as they learn about curricular concepts using the language of the globalized workplace speakers.

Students' perspectives garnered from the FGIs suggested that rote learning or direct instruction of the English expressions in the classroom did not benefit them for real time use as they tend to forget the meaning of these expressions once the assessment was over. However, communicative activities incorporating English expressions would give them the required practice as they mirror real time interactions. Thus, when students experience pedagogical opportunities for communicative practice using authentic contexts rather than isolated drill and practice, their ability for natural use of the language with English expressions develops. Implication for the teacher is to revise the course syllabi to better aid students in the development of their interactional communication skills with reference to English expressions.

In the additional input segment of the FGI guide, students indicated that they would like to learn the use of English expressions through the e-learning mode on their tablets or smartphones as this would afford them greater convenience in terms of time and access. This view resonates with Mentor (2018), who reports that mobile phones and tablets have become devices of choice for consuming and producing content. Therefore, leveraging learning through such methods will allow students to become active participants. According to Kessler (2018), technology-mediated social interactions dominate students' lives and leveraging these interactions to benefit students and engage them in learning experiences encouraging them to practice language that could include the English phrases and expressions. In a study conducted by Ekinici and Ekinici (2017), 20 preparatory class students of a state university in Turkey reported mobile applications (apps) motivated them to learn the language and that the authentic materials in the apps led to meaningful learning. Delivering content on such devices also can cater to different learning styles thereby providing students' ownership of learning and engagement (Mentor, 2018). Similar studies of Chen, Hsieh, and Kinshuk (2008) also showed that L2 learners enjoyed English language learning via mobile phones.

It can thus be concluded that in order to develop interactional competence in students, curriculum should include authentic materials from the workplace, implementation of communicative activities such as workplace conversations and simulated interviews. E-learning can further enhance the interactional competence in students, the digital natives.

## Appendix A

### Survey (Students)

**Purpose:** This research project is conducted by Ms Junaitha Gaffoor, CA and Dr Padma Rao of Singapore Institute of Technology. The purpose of this study is to elicit students' responses on the need for learning English expressions at the workplace.

**Informed Consent:** Participation in this survey is voluntary. The collected data will be used for curriculum development and research purposes. All your responses will remain confidential. You are free to withdraw from this survey at any time you wish to do so. Please ✓ the following box to indicate your agreement to participate in this study.

I agree (please tick '✓')

## Survey Questions

Items	Please select only 1 out of the 4 options			
1. I am able to understand the meaning of Standard English expressions/idioms/catchphrases in business communication.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
2. When a report uses “pared to the bone”, I understand what the expression means.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
3. A newspaper carried the following extract: But Jenkins [the new CEO] can’t play too fast and loose with the investment bank. It contributes more than half Barclays’ profits; profits it dearly needs to build up the capital reserves demanded by regulators. Shareholders want to know he won’t throw out the baby with the bath water. Sunday Times, 10 Feb. 2013. <i>What does the phrase “...won’t throw out the baby with the bath water” mean?</i>	Rejecting the essential along with the inessential	Throwing the reports in the dustbin	Cleaning up the mess	Making a fresh start
4. Learning English expressions/idioms/catchphrases will enhance my communication skills at IWSP/work.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
5. English expressions/idioms/catchphrases should be taught before sending students out on internship programmes such as IWSP (Integrated Work Study Programme).	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
6. I will be able to better understand workplace communication if I am taught the use of English expressions/idioms/catchphrases in my accounting courses at SIT.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
7. There is no need for explicit teaching of English expressions/idioms/catchphrases in accounting courses at SIT as I can learn on my own or at my workplace.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
8. Accounting courses must include English expressions/idioms/catchphrases used in a typical workplace setting.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
9. Any other comment(s)/thought(s) that you would like to share with us:				

Thank You for Participating in the Survey!

## Appendix B

### Quiz (Students)



Name/Matric Number : \_\_\_\_\_

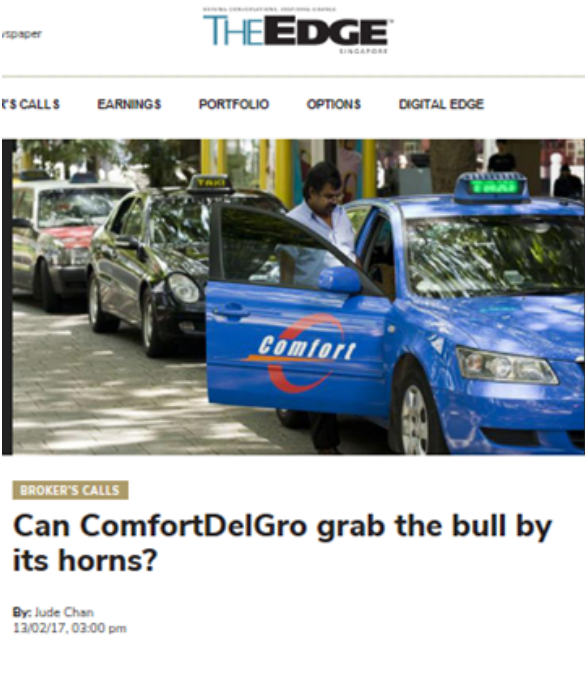

**TASK:** Duration 15 minutes.


**INSTRUCTIONS:** 10 phrases/expressions commonly used in the business context are provided below.

You are required to identify the most suitable meaning to the phrase from the options provided. Indicate your response by circling the response as shown in the highlighted example below.

<p><u>Example:</u> A newspaper carried the following extract:          But Jenkins can't play too fast and loose with the investment bank. It contributes more than half Barclays' profits; profits it dearly needs to build up the capital reserves demanded by regulators. Shareholders want to know he won't throw out the baby with the bath water.          Sunday Times, 10 Feb. 2013.  <i>What did the phrase "...won't throw out the baby with the bath water" mean?</i></p>	<p>Rejecting the essential along with the inessential</p>	<p>Throwing the reports in the dustbin</p>	<p>Cleaning up the mess</p>
<p>1. From <a href="https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/i-d-do-it-again-at-the-drop-of-a-hat-pioneer-fighter-pilot-looks-10671060">https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/i-d-do-it-again-at-the-drop-of-a-hat-pioneer-fighter-pilot-looks-10671060</a>           Channel News Asia reported in one of its recent articles online with the following headline:   <b>'I'd do it again at the drop of a hat': Pioneer fighter pilot looks back on 50 years of the RSAF</b>           "At the drop of a hat" refers to?</p>	<p>Utmost dedication</p>	<p>Without hesitation</p>	<p>Obedience to authority</p>
<p>2. Read the following conversation between the CEO and HR manager.   <b>CEO:</b> Why is our turnover higher than the industry average?   <b>HR Manager:</b> From the exit interview, I gather that our pay scales are not competitive, and they are leaving for greener pastures.   <b>CEO:</b> Well, from research, pay can't be the only factor. If we just focus on pay, then we are barking up the wrong tree. Have we looked at the non-financial rewards?   <i>What did the phrase "...barking up the wrong tree." mean?</i></p>	<p>Doing the wrong thing</p>	<p>Focused on the impossible</p>	<p>Suggest a mistaken emphasis</p>

<p>3. A newspaper carried the following extract:</p>  <p>“Having a realistic view of the threat landscape will ensure that we will not get caught out in case of a large-scale cyber attack.”</p> <p>For now, the plans and measures so far are a good start.</p> <p>With a broad strategy and partnerships in place, what is needed now is action and implementation. <u>The devil is always in the details.</u></p> <p><a href="http://www.todayonline.com/commentary/time-cyber-security-plans-swing-action">http://www.todayonline.com/commentary/time-cyber-security-plans-swing-action</a> 29 Sept,2017</p> <p><i>What did the phrase “...The devil is always in the details.” mean?</i></p>	<p>Too much emphasis on the details to the detriment of the project</p>	<p>To focus less on the details and concentrate on the bigger issues</p>	<p>The details of a plan, while seeming insignificant, may contain hidden problems that threaten its overall feasibility</p>
<p>4. From <a href="https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/110870080">https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/110870080</a></p> <p>The Canberra Times published the following article by Frank Cranston</p>  <p>What does the expression ‘Eager beaver’ mean?</p>	<p>A zealous person who tries to impress others with enthusiasm and hard work</p>	<p>A compassionate person who sacrifices him/herself in the service of others</p>	<p>A philanthropist who donates generously for the welfare of the organisation</p>

<p>5. The Edge online newspaper carried the following extract:</p>  <p>The road ahead is paved with challenges for land transport operator ComfortDelGro. Its taxi business, in particular, faces off with third-party taxi apps and the twin threat of private-hire car service providers Grab and Uber.</p> <p><a href="https://www.theedgesingapore.com/smr/?q=article/can-comfortdelgro-grab-bull-its-horns">https://www.theedgesingapore.com/smr/?q=article/can-comfortdelgro-grab-bull-its-horns</a>, 13 Feb 2017</p> <p><i>What did the phrase “...grab the bull by its horns.” mean?</i></p>	<p>Manage and explain to its management on the challenges</p>	<p>Take positive action to avoid the issues</p>	<p>To confront a problem head-on and deal with it openly</p>
<p>6. From <a href="https://www.nst.com.my/property/2018/02/330899/lock-stock-barrel-rise-disruptive-technologies">https://www.nst.com.my/property/2018/02/330899/lock-stock-barrel-rise-disruptive-technologies</a></p>  <p>The expression ‘Lock, stock &amp; barrel’ refers to:</p>	<p>Completely, in its entirety</p>	<p>Businesses are locked due to cash crunch</p>	<p>Stocks slip due to failed trade talks between the US and China</p>

<p>7. Excerpt from an online article in Channel News Asia</p> <p><small>★ Commentary   Commentary</small></p> <p><b>Commentary: Razer chose to list in Hong Kong. Has Singapore lost its competitiveness?</b></p> <p><small>A few high-profile companies have chosen to list in Hong Kong rather than Singapore. One NUS Business School observer discusses if there's cause for concern and what Singapore can do to shore up its competitiveness.</small></p>  <p><small>File photo of Razer CEO Tan Min-Liang. (Photo: AFP/Rozlan Rahmani)</small></p> <p>The next thirty years is a period of opportunity, as China surges forward in its aim to become a fully developed country when it celebrates the 100th anniversary of the People's Republic of China in 2049.</p> <p>For now, Singapore will have to take a leaf from the book of Chinese idioms: <u>Strike while the iron is hot</u>. In other words, tap on the increased spending and liquidity the Chinese market potentially offers as its economy develops and incomes rise.</p> <p><a href="https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/commentary/razer-listing-hong-kong-singapore-stock-exchange-competitiveness-10232180">https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/commentary/razer-listing-hong-kong-singapore-stock-exchange-competitiveness-10232180</a>, 15 May 2018</p> <p><i>What did the phrase "...strike while the iron is hot" mean?</i></p>	<p>To act on an opportunity promptly while favourable conditions exist</p>	<p>To hit the iron and make something when it is hot</p>	<p>To make the most of the iron before it gets cold</p>
<p>8. Excerpt from an online article on dailyitem.com</p> <p><small>Apple shares sink with sales outlook</small></p> <p><small>Jan 6, 2019</small></p> <p>"In the modern iPhone era, last night was clearly Apple's darkest day," said Dan Ives, director of equity research at Wedbush Securites. "(It) represents a challenging growth period ahead for the company."</p> <p>In a letter to Apple shareholders, CEO Tim Cook wasted little time in placing the blame for the company's bad news.</p> <p>"Lower than anticipated iPhone revenue, primarily in greater China, accounts for all of our revenue shortfall to our guidance and for much more than our entire year-over-year revenue decline," he said.</p> <p>Ives called China "<u>Apple's Achilles heel</u>," and he used Apple's update to slash his price target on the company's stock to \$200 a share from \$275.</p> <p><a href="https://www.dailyitem.com/business/apple-shares-sink-with-sales-outlook/article_fe634365-c9a3-5721-aaf3-7724709be635.html">https://www.dailyitem.com/business/apple-shares-sink-with-sales-outlook/article_fe634365-c9a3-5721-aaf3-7724709be635.html</a>, 6 Jan 2019</p> <p><i>What did the phrase "Apples Achilles heel" mean?</i></p>	<p>A strong spot in something which is otherwise weak</p>	<p>A weak or vulnerable spot in something which is otherwise strong</p>	<p>An opportunity which allows the company to leapfrog into new territories</p>

<p>9. Excerpt from an online article</p> <p>In 2007, when new management came in, the firm embarked on several changes concurrently: expanding its clientele, expanding abroad and expanding its range of services.</p> <p>After all, <u>if a new broom sweeps clean</u>, what more a whole new slate of leaders? Says Roy Chiang, who became chief executive officer in 2007: "We had a fresh look at the company."</p> <p>The transformation was aided by former heads of department who decided "to let younger guys take the reins", he adds.</p> <p><a href="https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/hub-projects/leaders-of-transformation/fresh-take-on-facilities-management">https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/hub-projects/leaders-of-transformation/fresh-take-on-facilities-management</a> 17 Jul 2018</p> <p><i>What did the phrase "A new broom sweeps clean" mean?</i></p>	<p>New cleaners tend to sweep better</p>	<p>Someone with a new perspective can make great changes</p>	<p>New people on the job tend not to do their jobs well.</p>
<p>10. Excerpt from an online article</p> <p>Early this fall, Chicago-based United Airlines quietly updated its MileagePlus loyalty program to change the way that some loyalty members will earn elite status.</p> <p>To qualify for top-tier 1K elite status in 2018, passengers are required to fly 100,000 miles and spend at least \$12,000 with the carrier. Starting in 2019, that spend component is moving up 25% to \$15,000. Six weeks later, American Airlines made an identical change for the top Executive Platinum tier in its AAdvantage program.</p> <p><u>Moving the goal posts</u> for elite status qualification will help put United and American on more of a competitive playing field with Delta, which requires \$15,000 in spend and 125,000 flown miles for its top Diamond tier. But it will also make it harder for some travelers on the two carriers to earn elite status.</p> <p><a href="https://skift.com/2018/12/13/higher-standards-for-airline-elite-status-dont-bother-elite-travelers/">https://skift.com/2018/12/13/higher-standards-for-airline-elite-status-dont-bother-elite-travelers/</a> 13 Dec 2018</p> <p><i>What did the phrase "moving the goal posts" mean?</i></p>	<p>Changing the goalpost so that it easier for the footballers to score</p>	<p>Keeping to the rules or aims so that it is easier to achieve</p>	<p>Changing the rules or aims in a situation or activity, in order to gain an advantage and to make things more difficult for the other people involved</p>



Thank you for completing this pre-test. How well do you think you have done? Please circle the option that best reflects the number of correct answer you think you will get:

- a. 0-2 (very poor);
- b. 3-4 (poor);
- c. 5-6 (average);
- d. 7-8 (good);
- e. 9-10 (v. good)

## Appendix C

### Focus Group Interviews (Students)

**Purpose:** This research project is conducted by Ms Junaitha Gaffoor, CA and Dr Padma Rao of Singapore Institute of Technology. The purpose of this study is to explore students' perspective on the use of Standard English expressions- idioms/proverbs/catchphrases at the workplace.

**Informed Consent:** Participation in this focus group session is voluntary. Please be assured of anonymity. All your responses will remain confidential. You are free to withdraw from this group discussion at any time you wish to do so.

I agree (please ✓)

### Questions for FGD

1. Are you familiar with the use of Standard English idioms/proverbs/catchphrases used in the context of business English?
2. Can you recall some commonly used Standard English idioms/proverbs/catchphrases used in the context of business English?
3. Was there an instance where the Standard English idiom/proverb/catchphrase used did not make sense to you? Why/Why not?
4. Can you recall a Standard English idiom/proverb/catchphrase that was used in business English and one that you did not understand? What was your reaction?
5. Do you think the use of Standard English idioms/proverbs/catchphrases should be explicitly taught in your programme of study at the tertiary level? Why/Why Not?
6. Do you think that you would benefit in your future workplace from the explicit teaching of Standard English idioms/proverbs/catchphrases in your tertiary programme? Why or Why not?
7. If the explicit teaching of the use of Standard English idioms/proverbs/catchphrases were to be included in your business module in the Accountancy programme, what type of learning activity will you prefer? Rate the following in the order of your preference from 1-5 (with 1 being most preferred, and 5 being least preferred).

- a. Role Play
- b. Reading comprehension
- c. Close Passage




- d. Embedded in the curriculum  
e. Drill and Practice


Thank You for Participating in the Group Interview!

## Appendix D

### Interview (Business Professionals)

**Purpose:** This research project is conducted by Ms Junaitha Gaffoor, CA and Dr Padma Rao of Singapore Institute of Technology. The purpose of this study is to elicit employer's perspective on the use of Standard English idioms/proverbs/catchphrases at the workplace.

**Informed Consent:** Participation in this interview is voluntary. We seek your permission to use the data to develop materials for teaching/publishing purposes. The materials will not mention any names or refer to other company details. All your responses will remain confidential. You are free to withdraw from this interview at any time you wish to do so.

I agree (please ✓) - To confirm either during face-to-face or in email interviews

#### Interview Questions

1. Do you use Standard English idioms/proverbs/catchphrases such as “to catch a falling knife”, “new broom sweeps clean”, “strike whilst the iron is hot” etc., in your work discussions? Please elaborate.
2. Could you share with us a couple of other examples of the Standard English idioms/proverbs/catchphrases that you generally use in your work discussions?
3. How important do you think the use of Standard English idioms/proverbs/catchphrases is in a work discussion?
4. Have you experienced any situation where the use of the idioms/proverbs/catchphrases were not understood by your staff?
5. Have you faced you any challenges when using idioms/proverbs/catchphrase in your work discussions with the interns/new graduates? If yes, could you elaborate on these challenges and consequences?
6. Do you think it will be useful if students are taught the use of idioms/proverbs/catchphrases in business/accounting modules? Please elaborate how this will be useful in preparing university graduates to be work ready?

Thank You for your Participation!

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