

Integrating Phrasal Verbs as a Vocabulary Component in the EFL Classes in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary learning is one of the major difficulties faced by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Bangladesh. Most learners struggle with memorizing a large number of new words, as vocabulary instruction is mainly based on the Grammar Translation Method, which focuses on isolated word meanings and translation. Phrasal verbs, although very common in everyday English, are often neglected in classroom teaching. This study examines whether teaching phrasal verbs alongside vocabulary can help reduce learners' vocabulary difficulties. The study follows a qualitative and document-based research approach and analyzes existing linguistic theories, research studies, curriculum guidelines, and instructional materials used in Bangladesh. The analysis is guided by the Lexical Approach, theories of multiword expressions, cognitive linguistics, and vocabulary acquisition research. The findings suggest that teaching phrasal verbs as complete vocabulary units can improve learners' understanding, retention, and confidence in using English. The study argues that integrating phrasal verbs into regular vocabulary instruction is practical and effective, even within traditional teaching contexts, and can contribute to improving EFL learning in Bangladesh.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Bangladesh, English is taught from the very beginning in all the schools. Learners practically start to learn English at the same time when they start learning Bangla, the mother tongue of Bangladesh. This EFL learning process then never stops. Learners go through a large number of books as textbooks of English in their schools, colleges and universities regardless of the different education system of the country i.e. Bangla Medium, English Medium and Madrashah. The purpose of these books is to train everyone to achieve a working knowledge of English. Curriculum makers think, after 16 years of studying English books, students should be able to communicate in English effectively academically and socially. Grammar translation method (GTM) is a very traditional and typical method in our country. (NCTB, 2006). Richards Platt and Weber, 1985 define GTM as a “A method of foreign or second language teaching which makes use of translation and grammar study as the main teaching and learning activities... A typical lesson would consist of the presentation of grammatical rules, a study of lists of vocabulary, and a translation exercise. Because the Grammar Translation Method emphasizes reading rather than the ability to communicate in a language there was a reaction to it in the 19th century, and there was the later a greater emphasis on the teaching of spoken language” (Richards, Platt and Weber, 1985). In this method, memorizing vocabulary holds a major part in the teaching process. According to Celce-Murcia (1979) the characteristics of GTM include instruction using the L1, use of standalone and potentially unrelated words, explanation of rules, structural focus in vocabulary teaching, decontextualized teaching of form.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The teaching and learning of phrasal verbs have been a longstanding challenge in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, particularly in Asian settings where traditional grammar-based teaching remains dominant. Phrasal verbs are central to English fluency because they occur frequently in spoken discourse, everyday communication, and informal registers (Gardner & Davies, 2007). Despite their importance, learners in Bangladesh encounter persistent difficulty in understanding, retaining, and using phrasal verbs due to semantic opacity, structural complexity, and the lack of systematic pedagogical approaches in schools and universities (Rahman, 2015; Akhter, 2019). This literature review synthesizes theoretical, linguistic, and pedagogical research to establish the relevance and necessity of teaching phrasal verbs as a vocabulary component in EFL classrooms.

2.1 *Phrasal Verbs in English: Structure, Semantics, and Frequency*

Phrasal verbs are multiword lexical combinations composed of a verb and a particle, producing meanings that often extend beyond the literal contributions of their parts. Research identifies three major semantic types: transparent, semi-idiomatic, and opaque (Darwin & Gray, 1999). Transparent phrasal verbs such as *stand up* retain the literal meaning of their components, while opaque verbs such as *give up* or *run into* require conceptual interpretation. This semantic unpredictability creates cognitive difficulty for EFL learners who rely heavily on literal translation strategies.

Corpus-based studies demonstrate that phrasal verbs are highly frequent in native English communication. For example, Gardner and Davies (2007) found that the 100 most common phrasal verbs account for nearly one-third of all verb-particle constructions in academic and spoken corpora. These findings reinforce the need for learners to master phrasal verbs not as optional lexical items, but as essential components of natural fluency.

2.2 Challenges Faced by EFL Learners in Acquiring Phrasal Verbs

A substantial body of literature documents learners' difficulties with phrasal verbs across EFL contexts. Liao and Fukuya (2004) note that learners often avoid phrasal verbs, preferring Latinate single-word verbs (e.g., *investigate* instead of *look into*) because they perceive these alternatives as more formal, predictable, and easier to understand. Hulstijn and Marchena (1989) argue that avoidance is strongly influenced by L1 interference and the absence of verb-particle constructions in learners' native languages.

Bangladeshi learners experience additional challenges due to the dominance of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) in schools and colleges (Rahman & Pandian, 2018). GTM emphasizes dictionary meaning, translation equivalents, and memorization of isolated words. Because phrasal verbs do not translate easily and often require pragmatic or contextual interpretation, they are seldom taught systematically. Consequently, learners often fail to develop usage-level competence even at advanced levels of study. Studies conducted in Bangladeshi secondary and tertiary contexts (Islam & Hossain, 2020) highlight that students struggle with particle meanings, separability rules, and idiomatic interpretations.

2.3 Lexical Approach and Multiword Expressions in EFL Pedagogy

The shift from grammar-centric instruction to lexical-based teaching frameworks has significant implications for teaching phrasal verbs. Lewis's (1993) Lexical Approach posits that fluency emerges from internalizing multiword units, collocations, and formulaic sequences rather than mastering

isolated vocabulary items. Wray (2002) similarly emphasizes that multiword expressions (MWEs) – including phrasal verbs, idioms, and fixed phrases – are stored and retrieved holistically by native speakers. This suggests that teaching phrasal verbs as individual “chunks” facilitates quicker retrieval, reduced cognitive load, and greater fluency.

Empirical studies support the claim that chunk-based instruction improves vocabulary retention. Boers and Lindstromberg (2008) demonstrated that learners retain phrasal verbs better when taught through patterns, metaphors, or semantic clusters rather than random lists. Cognitive linguistics further strengthens this approach by showing how particles like *up*, *down*, and *out* reflect underlying conceptual metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Learners exposed to these metaphors develop deeper semantic awareness and are better able to infer meanings of unfamiliar phrasal verbs (Tyler & Evans, 2003).

These findings align with the argument that phrasal verbs should be taught as a core vocabulary component, not as irregular or exceptional structures.

2.4 Vocabulary Acquisition Theories and Their Implications

Vocabulary acquisition research emphasizes the importance of both breadth (number of words known) and depth (quality of knowledge about each word). Nation (2001) and Schmitt (2010) identify several principles relevant to teaching phrasal verbs:

- Multiple exposures are needed for retention.
- Contextualized learning enhances inference skills.
- Deep processing (e.g., categorization, semantic analysis) improves long-term memory.
- Active production solidifies usage.

Phrasal verbs naturally align with these principles because they are context-dependent, semantically rich, and require active engagement with both meaning and form.

2.5 Teaching Phrasal Verbs in Asian and Bangladeshi EFL Contexts

Research in Asian EFL settings consistently shows low learner proficiency in phrasal verbs and limited teacher confidence in teaching them. Studies from Japan (Yasuda, 2010), China (Cheng, 2012), and Vietnam (Nguyen, 2017) report that teachers avoid instructing phrasal verbs due to time constraints, curricular limitations, and perceived difficulty.

In Bangladesh, limited research exists on systematic phrasal verb instruction. However, broader studies on vocabulary teaching (Rahman, 2015;

Alam, 2016) highlight that learners heavily rely on memorizing dictionary definitions and translation equivalents. Because phrasal verbs often resist direct translation, they remain excluded from classroom syllabuses. Recent studies (Hasan & Akter, 2021) call for integrating multiword expressions—including phrasal verbs—to enhance communicative competence and align Bangladeshi EFL education with international language use norms.

2.6 Gaps in the Existing Literature

Several gaps emerge from existing research:

1. Insufficient focus on Bangladeshi EFL learners' specific challenges with phrasal verbs.
2. Lack of pedagogical models for systematically teaching phrasal verbs in GTM-dominated classrooms.
3. Limited research exploring phrasal verbs as substitutes for conventional vocabulary lists.
4. Absence of localized teaching frameworks based on cognitive semantics and MWEs theory.

These gaps justify the significance of the present study, which proposes a structured approach to teaching phrasal verbs as a vocabulary component to enhance learner comprehension, retention, and fluency.

2.7 Corpus Evidence and Empirical Support for Teaching Phrasal Verbs as Vocabulary

While previous sections have outlined theoretical perspectives and pedagogical arguments for integrating phrasal verbs into EFL vocabulary instruction, it is equally important to examine empirical and corpus-based evidence that substantiates these claims. Corpus linguistics and small-scale classroom studies provide data-driven support for treating phrasal verbs as core lexical items rather than peripheral grammatical constructions. Importantly, the patterns identified in this body of research directly inform the analytical themes later reported in the Findings (Section 5) and interpreted in the Discussion (Section 6).

2.7.1 Corpus Evidence on Frequency and Pedagogical Prioritization

Corpus-based research consistently demonstrates that phrasal verbs are both frequent and systematically distributed in authentic English use. Gardner and Davies' (2007) analysis of verb-particle constructions in the British National Corpus (BNC) reveals that phrasal verb usage is highly concentrated: a relatively small number of phrasal verbs account for a disproportionately large share of overall occurrences. The most frequent 25 phrasal verbs constitute nearly one

third of all phrasal verb tokens, while the top 100 account for more than half of total usage. This frequency concentration suggests that focused instruction on a limited number of high-frequency phrasal verbs can yield substantial communicative benefits for learners.

Subsequent corpus-informed pedagogical work has further demonstrated that a small number of core meaning senses account for the majority of phrasal verb use in discourse. This finding is particularly relevant to the present study, as it provides empirical justification for treating phrasal verbs as *lexical substitutes* for isolated vocabulary items. The importance of prioritizing high-frequency and semantically central phrasal verbs is reflected in the Findings (Section 5.3), where phrasal verbs are shown to enhance retention and contextual understanding when taught as lexical units.

Corpus evidence is especially pertinent to the Bangladeshi EFL context. Analyses of government-prescribed ELT textbooks indicate a mismatch between the phrasal verbs included in instructional materials and those most frequently used in authentic English. High-frequency phrasal verbs commonly found in spoken and written corpora are often underrepresented, while less frequent or semantically opaque items appear without systematic sequencing or contextual support. This corpus-level mismatch anticipates the Findings reported in Section 5.2, which identify limitations in traditional vocabulary instruction and textbook-driven word-list practices in Bangladesh.

Taken together, corpus research provides an empirical foundation for three claims central to this study: (a) phrasal verbs are indispensable to natural English usage, (b) their frequency distribution allows principled pedagogical prioritization, and (c) vocabulary instruction that integrates high-frequency phrasal verbs is more efficient than unsystematic memorization. These claims are empirically corroborated by the patterns observed in the Findings (Section 5) and further interpreted in the Discussion (Section 6).

2.7.2 Small-Scale Empirical Evidence from EFL Classrooms

In addition to corpus findings, small-scale empirical studies conducted in diverse EFL contexts provide classroom-based evidence supporting the pedagogical value of phrasal verb instruction. Although many of these studies involve limited sample sizes, their findings consistently demonstrate measurable gains in learners' receptive and productive knowledge of phrasal verbs when instruction is systematic and meaning-based.

Experimental studies using pre-test and post-test designs indicate that learners who receive explicit instruction in phrasal verbs – particularly through

semantic grouping, particle meanings, or metaphorical explanations—outperform learners exposed to traditional memorization-oriented methods. These outcomes parallel the learning patterns identified in the Findings (Section 5.3), where teaching phrasal verbs as lexical units is shown to improve vocabulary retention and contextual usage.

Furthermore, small-scale classroom studies report reductions in learner avoidance behaviour and increased willingness to use phrasal verbs in speaking and writing when phrasal verbs are taught alongside their single-word equivalents. This empirical trend aligns closely with the Findings in Section 5.1, which document Bangladeshi learners' tendency to avoid phrasal verbs due to semantic uncertainty and instructional neglect. The convergence of prior empirical research and the present study's findings strengthens the validity of the pedagogical claims advanced in the Discussion (Section 6.3), particularly regarding avoidance and learner confidence.

Importantly, these empirical studies also demonstrate that meaningful learning gains can be achieved without extensive curricular reform. This observation directly anticipates the Discussion in Section 6.4, which argues that teaching phrasal verbs as vocabulary is both pedagogically effective and practically feasible within GTM-dominated classrooms in Bangladesh.

2.7.3 Relevance to the Present Study

The corpus and empirical evidence reviewed in this section directly address the research gaps identified in Section 2.6 and provide a data-informed foundation for the analytical themes presented in the Findings (Section 5). Corpus research establishes that phrasal verbs are frequent, systematic, and pedagogically prioritizable, while empirical classroom studies confirm that learners benefit when phrasal verbs are taught as vocabulary units rather than as marginal grammatical forms.

These strands of evidence converge with the present study's findings in three key ways. First, they support the identification of persistent learner difficulty reported in Section 5.1. Second, they substantiate the critique of traditional vocabulary instruction outlined in Section 5.2. Third, they reinforce the pedagogical advantages of teaching phrasal verbs as lexical units, as demonstrated in Section 5.3 and interpreted through theoretical frameworks in the Discussion (Section 6).

By explicitly linking corpus evidence, prior empirical research, and the study's own findings, this section establishes continuity between the Literature Review, Findings, and Discussion. This integration strengthens the overall

coherence of the article and positions the present study as an evidence-informed contribution to EFL vocabulary pedagogy in Bangladesh.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study draws on linguistic, cognitive, and pedagogical theories that explain how phrasal verbs function as lexical units and why their explicit instruction can support vocabulary development in EFL contexts such as Bangladesh. Four interrelated bodies of theory inform the framework: (1) Lexical Approach, (2) Cognitive Linguistics, (3) Multiword Expressions Theory, and (4) Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition Theory. Together, these perspectives offer a comprehensive rationale for treating phrasal verbs as essential vocabulary items rather than syntactic anomalies, particularly in settings where the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) dominates instruction.

3.1. *Lexical Approach (Lewis, 1993)*

The Lexical Approach posits that language proficiency develops primarily through the acquisition of chunks, collocations, and multiword units, not individual words. Michael Lewis argues that learners internalize meaningful language patterns more effectively when exposed to lexical items in context, such as:

- phrasal verbs
- idiomatic expressions
- fixed or semi-fixed chunks

Phrasal verbs, as highly frequent and versatile lexical chunks in English, fit squarely within this model. Teaching them as whole units aligns with the Lexical Approach by:

- reducing cognitive load
- improving fluency through chunk retrieval
- enabling learners to understand common spoken expressions
- facilitating natural communication in real-life contexts

Thus, phrasal verbs serve as powerful lexical tools for learners transitioning away from isolated word lists typical of GTM-based teaching.

3.2 *Cognitive Linguistics and Semantic Transparency*

Cognitive Linguistics provides a theoretical basis for explaining how learners interpret and internalize phrasal verbs. Two principles are central:

3.2.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980)

Particles such as *up*, *down*, *out*, and *off* carry metaphorical meanings that extend to many phrasal verbs.

Example: “*up*” often carries meanings such as *completion* or *increase* (e.g., *finish up*, *warm up*).

Teaching these metaphorical extensions helps learners move from memorization to meaning-based inference, supporting deeper vocabulary learning.

3.2.2 Semantic Transparency and Opacity

Phrasal verbs exist on a continuum:

- Transparent: meaning predictable (e.g., *sit down*, *stand up*)
- Semi-transparent: some metaphorical basis (e.g., *pick up*, *turn down*)
- Opaque: meaning unpredictable (e.g., *give up*, *let down*)

Classifying phrasal verbs semantically allows teachers to scaffold instruction and helps learners decode meaning systematically. This directly supports vocabulary retention.

3.3 Multiword Expressions (MWEs) Theory

Phrasal verbs belong to a broader linguistic category known as Multiword Expressions—lexical units that behave like single words despite consisting of multiple components. MWE research (Wray, 2002) establishes that:

- MWEs are processed holistically by native speakers
- They provide shortcuts for fluent communication
- Learners benefit from memorizing them as units rather than constructing meaning piece by piece

This theoretical lens justifies teaching phrasal verbs as lexical substitutes for individual vocabulary words, especially given:

- their high frequency in spoken English
- their pragmatic usefulness
- their role in idiomatic competence

3.4 Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition Theory

Research on L2 vocabulary development (Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2010) highlights the need for:

- a. frequent exposure
- b. intentional learning

- c. depth of processing
- d. meaningful context
- e. multiple encounters

Phrasal verbs naturally satisfy these criteria because:

- a. they appear frequently in spoken English
- b. they convey nuanced meanings
- c. they require active processing
- d. they occur in authentic communicative contexts

Teaching phrasal verbs therefore supports both breadth (number of vocabulary items learned) and depth (richness of lexical knowledge).

3.5 Synthesis of Theoretical Framework

Together, these theoretical perspectives converge on four core principles that underpin the pedagogical argument of this article:

- Phrasal verbs function as essential lexical units, not optional syntactic constructions.
- Learners internalize phrasal verbs more effectively when taught through semantic and metaphorical patterns, not rote memorization.
- Multiword expressions enhance fluency and communicative competence, particularly in spoken English.
- Explicit, contextualized teaching of phrasal verbs compensates for the limitations of GTM-based vocabulary instruction prevalent in Bangladeshi classrooms.

This integrated framework forms the theoretical foundation for positioning phrasal verbs as an effective substitute for conventional vocabulary teaching in EFL contexts dominated by translation-heavy practices.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design and Orientation

This study adopts a qualitative, conceptual, and document-based research design to examine the pedagogical value of integrating phrasal verbs as a core component of vocabulary instruction for EFL learners in Bangladesh. Rather than generating primary empirical data, the study aims to synthesize existing linguistic theory, applied linguistics research, and contextual documentation in order to propose a theoretically grounded and context-sensitive instructional framework.

The study is situated within an interpretivist paradigm, which assumes that language teaching practices, learner difficulties, and pedagogical models are socially and educationally constructed. Accordingly, the analysis focuses on interpreting patterns, themes, and convergences across scholarly literature and instructional documents relevant to phrasal verb instruction and vocabulary pedagogy. Conceptual and document-based methodologies are well established in applied linguistics research, particularly for proposing pedagogical models in underexplored instructional contexts.

4.2 Data Sources

The analysis draws on three complementary categories of documentary data, selected to ensure theoretical depth, pedagogical relevance, and contextual grounding.

4.2.1 Linguistic and Semantic Literature

This category includes foundational and contemporary works on the structure, semantics, and classification of phrasal verbs and multiword expressions. Key sources address:

- Verb-particle constructions and their syntactic behavior
- Semantic transparency and opacity
- Particle meaning and metaphorical extension
- Corpus-based frequency analyses of phrasal verbs

Representative works include studies by Bolinger, McArthur and Atkins, Gardner and Davies, and cognitive semantic analyses grounded in conceptual metaphor theory.

4.2.2 Pedagogical and Applied Linguistics Literature

This category comprises research on vocabulary acquisition, lexical approaches to language teaching, and instructional strategies for multiword expressions. It includes:

- Vocabulary learning theories and principles
- Empirical and conceptual studies on phrasal verb acquisition
- Research on chunk-based learning and formulaic language
- Studies examining EFL teaching practices in Bangladesh and comparable Asian contexts

These sources inform the pedagogical feasibility of teaching phrasal verbs as lexical units and contextualize learner difficulties within dominant instructional traditions such as the Grammar Translation Method (GTM).

4.2.3 Instructional Materials and Local Educational Documents

To ground the analysis in the Bangladeshi EFL context, the study also considers:

- English textbooks used in Bangladeshi secondary and tertiary education
- National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) curriculum guidelines
- Teacher guides and sample lesson materials reflective of GTM-oriented classrooms

These materials provide insight into prevailing instructional practices, curricular priorities, and the relative absence of systematic phrasal verb instruction.

4.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure analytical rigor and relevance, documents were selected according to clearly defined criteria as mentioned below:

4.3.1 Inclusion Criteria

Sources were included if they:

- Addressed phrasal verbs, multiword expressions, vocabulary instruction, or second language vocabulary acquisition
- Focused on EFL or ESL contexts, particularly in South Asian or comparable educational settings
- Presented empirically supported findings or well-established theoretical perspectives
- Were published between *1990 and 2024*, ensuring both foundational and recent scholarship
- Offered pedagogical or conceptual insights applicable to Bangladeshi learners

4.3.2 Exclusion Criteria

Sources were excluded if they:

- Focused solely on abstract theoretical linguistics without pedagogical relevance
- Examined idioms or collocations unrelated to phrasal verbs
- Lacked academic credibility (e.g., non-peer-reviewed sources, blogs)
- Presented outdated or inconsistent definitions not aligned with contemporary applied linguistics research

4.4 Analytical Procedure

The document analysis followed a systematic, multi-stage process designed to identify recurring themes and pedagogical implications.

4.4.1 Data Extraction

Relevant segments were extracted from each document, including:

- Definitions and classifications of phrasal verbs
- Reported learner difficulties (e.g., avoidance, semantic opacity, syntactic confusion)
- Pedagogical strategies (e.g., chunking, semantic grouping, metaphor-based instruction)
- Descriptions of Bangladeshi classroom conditions (e.g., GTM dominance, exam orientation)

4.4.2 Coding

Extracted data were coded into analytical categories, such as:

- Semantic transparency levels (transparent, semi-transparent, opaque)
- Instructional constraints associated with GTM
- Cognitive and lexical benefits of chunk-based instruction
- Comparative advantages of phrasal verbs over single-word synonyms
- Teacher training needs and curriculum gaps
- Coding followed an **inductive thematic approach**, allowing categories to emerge from recurring patterns across sources.

4.4.3 Thematic Synthesis

Codes were synthesized into four overarching analytical themes, which are later discussed as thematic findings:

1. Persistent learner difficulty with phrasal verbs
2. Limitations of traditional vocabulary instruction
3. Pedagogical benefits of teaching phrasal verbs as lexical units
4. The need for structured, context-sensitive instructional models

These themes form the analytical foundation for the pedagogical discussion and recommendations presented in subsequent sections.

4.5 Analytical Framework

Interpretation of the synthesized data was guided by an integrated analytical framework combining:

- Lexical Approach (chunk-based learning)
- Cognitive Linguistics (semantic motivation and metaphor)
- Multiword Expressions theory (holistic processing)
- Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition theory (depth and breadth of lexical knowledge)

Each framework was examined for its explanatory power in addressing learner difficulties, instructional limitations, and pedagogical opportunities within Bangladeshi EFL classrooms.

4.6 Trustworthiness and Rigor

Although conceptual in nature, the study incorporates several measures to ensure rigor and credibility:

- Triangulation: Use of linguistic, pedagogical, and contextual sources
 - Theoretical saturation: Analysis continued until no new themes emerged
 - Use of established frameworks: Reliance on widely cited theories and models
 - Reflexivity: Acknowledgement of the interpretive role of the researcher
- Because the study did not involve human participants, formal ethical approval was not required. All sources were cited to maintain academic integrity.

4.7 Methodological Limitations

The study has several limitations:

- It does not include primary classroom data or experimental validation
- Findings are derived from secondary sources and conceptual synthesis
- The proposed instructional model requires future empirical testing

These limitations are acknowledged and addressed in the section on implications for future research.

5. DISCUSSION

This study set out to examine the pedagogical potential of integrating phrasal verbs as a central component of vocabulary instruction in Bangladeshi EFL classrooms. Drawing on linguistic theory, applied linguistics research, and contextual documentation, the discussion interprets the analytical themes presented in Section 5 in relation to existing scholarship and prevailing instructional practices. As a conceptual and document-based study, the discussion does not claim empirical learning outcomes but rather synthesizes patterns and implications reported in the literature.

5.1 Implications of GTM-Dominated Vocabulary Instruction

The analysis highlights how vocabulary instruction in Bangladeshi EFL contexts remains strongly influenced by the Grammar Translation Method (GTM). As discussed in Section 5.2, GTM-oriented practices emphasize memorization, translation, and isolated word meanings, leaving limited space for multiword lexical items such as phrasal verbs. This instructional orientation aligns with findings reported in earlier studies that document the marginalization of formulaic language in GTM-based classrooms.

Corpus-informed research reviewed in Section 2.7 suggests that this instructional imbalance creates a mismatch between classroom vocabulary content and authentic language use. The present analysis therefore supports

existing critiques of GTM by illustrating how its structural features constrain the integration of high-frequency lexical items such as phrasal verbs.

5.2 Phrasal Verbs within Contemporary Vocabulary Theory

From a theoretical perspective, the analytical themes discussed in Section 5.3 are consistent with contemporary approaches to vocabulary instruction, particularly the Lexical Approach and theories of multiword expressions. These frameworks conceptualize vocabulary knowledge as encompassing prefabricated lexical units rather than isolated words.

The literature reviewed in Section 2.7 indicates that phrasal verbs function as core lexical items in natural discourse and therefore warrant systematic inclusion in vocabulary instruction. The present study extends this theoretical position by contextualizing it within Bangladeshi EFL classrooms, where vocabulary teaching has traditionally prioritized single-word items.

5.3 Learner Avoidance as an Instructional Issue

Avoidance of phrasal verbs is widely reported in EFL research and is consistently linked to instructional practices rather than inherent linguistic difficulty. As synthesized in Section 5.1, the literature suggests that when phrasal verbs are presented as irregular or idiomatic exceptions, learners tend to favor single-word alternatives.

Rather than framing avoidance as a learner deficit, the present discussion interprets it as a consequence of instructional design. This interpretation is supported by prior studies reviewed in Section 2.7, which argue for systematic, meaning-based approaches to phrasal verb instruction. Within this framework, avoidance emerges as an instructional issue that can be addressed through curricular reorientation rather than remedial practice.

5.4 Pedagogical Feasibility in the Bangladeshi Context

A key concern addressed in the literature is whether phrasal verb instruction is feasible within exam-oriented, GTM-dominated classrooms. The analytical themes summarized in Section 5.4 suggest that integrating phrasal verbs into vocabulary teaching does not require abandoning existing instructional structures. Instead, phrasal verbs can be incorporated incrementally through lexical grouping, contextual examples, and contrastive explanation.

This observation aligns with applied linguistics research emphasizing adaptation rather than wholesale methodological change. The present discussion

therefore positions phrasal verbs as a core vocabulary component that can be embedded within existing instructional practices in Bangladesh.

5.5 Toward a Structured Vocabulary Framework

Based on the convergence of linguistic theory, corpus evidence, and pedagogical research, the study proposes a structured approach to integrating phrasal verbs into vocabulary instruction. As outlined in Section 5.5, this approach prioritizes high-frequency items, semantic transparency, and contextualized use.

Rather than replacing conventional vocabulary instruction, phrasal verbs are conceptualized here as a lexical anchor that complements traditional word lists and enhances lexical depth. This framework responds directly to the instructional gaps identified in earlier sections and offers a theoretically grounded direction for curriculum development and future empirical research.

6. FINDINGS

This section presents the analytical themes that emerged from the systematic review and synthesis of linguistic theory, applied linguistics research, and instructional documents related to phrasal verbs and vocabulary instruction. Consistent with the conceptual and document-based design of the study (see Section 4), the themes reported here do not represent empirical findings from primary data but rather recurring patterns, tendencies, and insights identified across the reviewed sources. These themes provide the analytical foundation for the pedagogical discussion in Section 6.

6.1 Persistent Learner Difficulty with Phrasal Verbs

A dominant theme across the reviewed literature is the persistent difficulty EFL learners experience in understanding and using phrasal verbs. Numerous studies report that learners perceive phrasal verbs as unpredictable, semantically opaque, and structurally confusing. This difficulty is particularly pronounced when phrasal verbs are introduced without systematic explanation of particle meanings or semantic motivation.

The literature also consistently highlights learner avoidance of phrasal verbs, with learners favoring single-word Latinate verbs instead. This tendency is widely attributed to instructional practices that marginalize phrasal verbs or present them as idiomatic exceptions rather than as regular lexical items. Within the Bangladeshi context, this pattern is reinforced by vocabulary instruction

practices that emphasize memorization and translation over contextualized use, thereby limiting learners' exposure to phrasal verbs as functional vocabulary.

6.2 Limitations of Traditional Vocabulary Instruction

Another prominent theme concerns the limitations of traditional vocabulary instruction methods, particularly those associated with the Grammar Translation Method (GTM). The reviewed literature indicates that GTM-oriented instruction prioritizes isolated word meanings, bilingual equivalence, and decontextualized learning, leaving little pedagogical space for multiword lexical units such as phrasal verbs.

Document analysis of instructional materials and curriculum guidelines further suggests that vocabulary syllabuses often privilege single-word items while neglecting high-frequency phrasal verbs commonly used in authentic English. This instructional imbalance contributes to a form of vocabulary knowledge that is broad but shallow, as learners may recognize individual word meanings without developing the ability to process or produce formulaic sequences. The literature therefore suggests that traditional vocabulary instruction inadequately addresses the lexical demands of real-world communication.

6.3 Pedagogical Value of Teaching Phrasal Verbs as Lexical Units

A third theme emerging from the literature is the pedagogical value of treating phrasal verbs as lexical units rather than as marginal grammatical constructions. Research grounded in the Lexical Approach and theories of multiword expressions emphasizes that phrasal verbs function as prefabricated chunks that are cognitively processed holistically.

Studies reviewed in this analysis suggest that instructional approaches emphasizing semantic grouping, particle meanings, and contextualized practice facilitate deeper lexical understanding. By presenting phrasal verbs alongside their single-word equivalents, instruction can highlight functional differences and usage preferences rather than positioning phrasal verbs as optional alternatives. The literature consistently indicates that such approaches align more closely with natural language use and promote richer lexical representations.

6.4 Relevance to Bangladeshi EFL Classroom Contexts

The applicability of phrasal verb instruction within Bangladeshi EFL classrooms emerges as a distinct analytical theme. The reviewed studies and

instructional documents point to structural constraints such as large class sizes, exam-oriented curricula, and limited teacher training in lexical pedagogy. These constraints often discourage communicative or usage-based instruction.

Nevertheless, the literature suggests that integrating phrasal verbs into existing vocabulary teaching practices does not necessarily require radical methodological change. Instead, phrasal verbs can be incorporated incrementally through contextualized examples, lexical grouping, and contrastive explanation. This observation is particularly relevant to GTM-dominated contexts, where complete pedagogical reform may be impractical.

6.5 Need for a Structured and Context-Sensitive Instructional Model

The final analytical theme concerns the need for a structured and context-sensitive instructional model for teaching phrasal verbs. Across the reviewed literature, there is broad agreement that unsystematic exposure to phrasal verbs – often limited to incidental textbook examples – is insufficient to address learner difficulty.

The literature points toward the effectiveness of instructional sequencing that progresses from semantically transparent to more opaque phrasal verbs, supported by corpus-informed frequency prioritization. Such a model aligns with cognitive linguistic principles and accommodates classroom constraints commonly reported in Bangladeshi EFL contexts. This thematic insight directly informs the instructional framework proposed and discussed in Section 6.

6.6 Summary of Analytical Themes

In summary, the document-based analysis yields five interrelated analytical themes: persistent learner difficulty with phrasal verbs, limitations of traditional vocabulary instruction, pedagogical advantages of treating phrasal verbs as lexical units, contextual constraints within Bangladeshi classrooms, and the need for a structured instructional model. These themes do not constitute empirical findings but rather represent synthesized insights derived from the convergence of linguistic theory, pedagogical research, and contextual documentation. Together, they provide a coherent analytical basis for the pedagogical implications and recommendations discussed in the following section.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The findings of this study carry important implications for both EFL classroom practice and future research on vocabulary instruction in Bangladesh

and similar contexts. Because phrasal verbs are highly frequent, pragmatically rich, and cognitively complex lexical units, their systematic integration into vocabulary teaching has the potential to reshape the linguistic competence of Bangladeshi learners. These implications are presented below.

7.1 Implications for EFL Teaching Practice

7.1.1 Transition toward Lexical and Meaning-Based Instruction

The study reinforces the need for Bangladeshi educators to move beyond traditional Grammar Translation Method (GTM) practices and incorporate lexical, meaning-based instruction. Teaching phrasal verbs as chunks offers a practical way to introduce modern pedagogy without completely discarding familiar GTM structures.

7.1.2. Curriculum Designers Should Prioritize Multiword Expressions

Because multiword expressions (MWEs) such as phrasal verbs contribute significantly to real-world fluency, curriculum designers should embed them directly into vocabulary syllabuses. This includes revising textbooks, adding semantic clusters, and providing contextual examples.

7.1.3. Teacher Training Must Include Cognitive and Lexical Approaches

The findings suggest that teachers require training on how to teach phrasal verbs effectively – especially using semantic transparency, metaphorical extensions of particles, and contextualized practice. Professional development programs should integrate these approaches to reduce teacher uncertainty.

7.1.4. Assessment Practices Should Reflect Communicative Vocabulary

Examinations in Bangladesh generally test isolated vocabulary knowledge. Including phrasal verbs in communicative tasks (dialogues, usage-based items, contextual gap-fills) will encourage both teachers and students to treat them as central to vocabulary learning.

7.1.5. Classroom Materials Should Promote Contextualized Use

Phrasal verbs should be presented with authentic examples, not merely dictionary definitions. Teachers may add short dialogues, real-life scenarios, and semantic mapping tasks to facilitate usage-level competence.

7.2 Implications for Research

7.2.1. Need for Empirical Validation

This study is conceptual; therefore, future empirical investigations are required to test the effectiveness of teaching phrasal verbs as a vocabulary substitute in actual Bangladeshi classrooms.

7.2.2. Exploration of Learner Perceptions and Attitudes

Research should examine how learners perceive phrasal verb instruction, particularly in comparison to traditional vocabulary teaching.

7.2.3. Teacher Beliefs and Challenges

Studies on teacher readiness, beliefs, and barriers to implementing phrasal verb instruction would provide insights for policy and training design.

7.2.4. Comparative Studies Across Educational Systems

Bangla Medium, English Medium, and Madrasa systems may respond differently to phrasal verb instruction; comparative analyses could reveal specific curricular needs.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and discussion of this study, several pedagogical and institutional recommendations are proposed to support the effective integration of phrasal verbs as a core component of vocabulary instruction in Bangladeshi EFL classrooms. These recommendations aim to address learners' persistent difficulties with phrasal verbs, reduce dependence on traditional dictionary-based vocabulary teaching, and enhance communicative competence.

8.1 Integrate Phrasal Verbs Systematically into Vocabulary Curricula

English curricula at the secondary and tertiary levels should treat phrasal verbs as essential lexical items rather than optional or advanced structures. This requires:

- a. including phrasal verbs in vocabulary lists
- b. presenting them through thematic or semantic groupings
- c. introducing them from early stages of language learning
- d. aligning classroom instruction with real-world usage frequency

Curriculum developers should prioritize high-frequency phrasal verbs to ensure practical communicative gains.

8.2 Train Teachers in the Lexical and Cognitive Approaches to Teaching Phrasal Verbs

Teacher education and professional development programs should include training on:

- a. semantic transparency and particle meanings
- b. the Lexical Approach and multiword expressions
- c. methods for teaching opaque and semi-idiomatic phrasal verbs
- d. integrating phrasal verbs into translation-based classrooms

This will help teachers overcome their own uncertainty about phrasal verbs and confidently incorporate them into lessons.

8.3 Use Contextualized and Meaning-Based Teaching Methods

Teachers should adopt instructional strategies that support deep processing and contextual learning, such as:

- a. Teaching phrasal verbs through short dialogues or scenarios
- b. Comparing phrasal verbs with single-word synonyms to illustrate differences
- c. Using stories, role-plays, and authentic examples
- d. Emphasizing conceptual metaphors to explain particle meanings

These methods help learners infer meaning and improve retention.

8.4 Provide Learners with Structured, Step-by-Step Instruction

Given learners' difficulty with phrasal verbs, instruction should follow a clear sequence:

- a. Start with transparent phrasal verbs
- b. Group verbs by particles or meanings
- c. Explain particle metaphors (e.g., up, down, out)
- d. Introduce semi-transparent and opaque phrasal verbs
- e. Practice through controlled and communicative tasks
- f. Reinforce learning through revision and spaced repetition

This structured approach reduces cognitive overload and builds learner confidence.

8.5 Incorporate Phrasal Verbs into Class Tests and Assessments

To reinforce the importance of phrasal verbs, assessments should include:

- a. contextualized gap-fill tasks
- b. sentence transformation exercises
- c. short communicative tasks requiring phrasal verb usage

- d. matching and categorization activities

Assessment-driven learning will motivate both teachers and students to focus on phrasal verbs.

8.6 Adapt Textbooks and Teaching Materials to Include Multiword Expressions

Publishers and material developers should update English textbooks to include:

- a. phrasal verb clusters based on meaning or function
- b. visual aids illustrating particle metaphors
- c. example-rich explanations rather than only dictionary definitions
- d. tasks that encourage usage, not mere memorization

This ensures alignment between teaching goals and learning resources.

8.7 Encourage Learner Autonomy in Vocabulary Development

Learners should be encouraged to:

- a. maintain vocabulary notebooks specifically for phrasal verbs
- b. use digital tools and corpora to explore real-life examples

record phrasal verbs encountered in media, online content, or conversation

- c. create personal dictionaries of phrasal verbs grouped by theme
- d. Autonomous learning promotes long-term retention and practical application.

Implementing these recommendations will enable Bangladeshi EFL learners to move beyond rote memorization and develop meaningful lexical competence. By integrating phrasal verbs systematically, training teachers effectively, and adopting context-based instructional methods, classrooms across Bangladesh can better prepare learners for real-world communication in English. The recommended strategies offer practical pathways for aligning vocabulary instruction with modern linguistic insights and the communicative needs of learners.

9. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the current study provides a strong conceptual foundation, several research opportunities remain that can further develop the field of vocabulary teaching and multiword expression pedagogy in Bangladesh.

9.1 Classroom-Based Experimental Studies

Future research should implement phrasal verb-focused lessons in actual classrooms and measure their effects on:

- a. vocabulary retention
- b. speaking fluency
- c. reading comprehension
- d. writing accuracy
- e. learner confidence

Pre- and post-test designs could empirically validate the pedagogical model proposed in this study.

9.2 Longitudinal Studies on Vocabulary Development

Long-term studies (spanning months or semesters) would reveal how sustained phrasal verb instruction influences learners' lexical depth and communicative competence over time.

9.3 Cross-Linguistic Influence Studies

Since Bangla lacks verb-particle constructions, future research may explore:

- a. how L1 interference affects phrasal verb learning
- b. whether bilingual learners (Bangla + another language) show different patterns
- c. which types of phrasal verbs (transparent, semi-transparent, opaque) are most difficult

9.4 Teacher Training Intervention Studies

Action research projects involving teacher workshops could evaluate:

- a. changes in teacher confidence
- b. instructional improvements
- c. student responses
- d. classroom adoption barriers

9.5 Corpus-Based Studies

Developing a corpus of Bangladeshi learner English could help identify:

- a. which phrasal verbs learners naturally avoid
- b. common errors in production
- c. preferred synonym replacements

Such evidence would help refine pedagogical strategies.

9.6 Technology-Enhanced Vocabulary Learning

Future studies may investigate digital tools for teaching phrasal verbs, such as:

- a. mobile apps
- b. interactive games
- c. spaced repetition software
- d. AI-supported vocabulary platforms

These methods have shown effectiveness in other contexts and could benefit Bangladeshi learners.

10. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the pedagogical value of teaching phrasal verbs as a substitute for traditional vocabulary instruction in Bangladeshi EFL classrooms. The findings reveal that despite the centrality of phrasal verbs in natural English communication, they remain underrepresented in classroom practice due to the prevalence of the Grammar Translation Method, the lack of teacher preparedness, and the structural and semantic complexity associated with verb-particle constructions. As a result, learners develop a limited understanding of multiword expressions and rely heavily on single-word synonyms, restricting their communicative fluency and pragmatic competence. Drawing on the Lexical Approach, Cognitive Linguistics, Multiword Expressions theory, and contemporary vocabulary acquisition research, this study demonstrates that phrasal verbs are not peripheral or optional elements of English vocabulary but essential lexical units that support fluency, semantic depth, and natural usage. Teaching phrasal verbs as holistic lexical items aligns with principles of chunk learning, semantic pattern recognition, and contextualized vocabulary development. The findings further indicate that when phrasal verbs are introduced systematically – starting with transparent items and progressing toward metaphorical and opaque forms – the literature consistently suggests improvements in confidence, retention, and accuracy when phrasal verbs are taught as lexical units. The study also highlights the practical feasibility of integrating phrasal verbs into Bangladeshi classrooms, even within GTM-dominant environments. By adopting structured and context-sensitive instructional methods, teachers can bridge the gap between traditional teaching practices and modern communicative needs. A step-by-step pedagogical model, as suggested in the analysis, provides clear pathways for teachers to incorporate phrasal verbs without requiring major curricular overhauls or extensive training. Ultimately, this study underscores the need for curricular reform, teacher training, and updated teaching materials that emphasize phrasal verbs as core vocabulary items. By shifting from isolated word lists to multiword expressions and chunk-based instruction, Bangladeshi EFL learners can gain access to the

lexical resources required for authentic communication and improved proficiency. Future research may explore empirical classroom testing of the proposed model, learner perceptions of phrasal verb instruction, and longitudinal gains in vocabulary depth resulting from chunk-based teaching. In conclusion, teaching phrasal verbs as vocabulary represents a practical, theoretically grounded, and pedagogically sound approach to strengthening English language education in Bangladesh. It offers a meaningful direction for advancing vocabulary competence, enhancing communicative ability, and aligning classroom practices with the realities of contemporary English usage.

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