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Difficulties Face EFL Learners in Comprehending and Using English Phrasal Verbs at Secondary Level

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Abstract

Phrasal verbs are essential to comprehend and communicate with native speakers, it is clear that phrasal verbs is one of the problematic areas for EFL learners therefore, this study aims to investigate the difficulties that face EFL learners in comprehending and using them. The study adopted the descriptive analytical method. The data of the study were collected by means of a questionnaire. The sample of the study consisted of (50) EFL learners at secondary level – Hasahisa locality – Gezira state. The statistical packages for social science program (SPSS) was used for analyzing the data. The study reached many important results: most of EFL learners find difficulties in comprehending and using phrasal verbs at secondary level. Also internet is full with various materials related to phrasal verbs. Based on those findings the study recommended: EFL teachers should help and encourage their students to comprehend and use phrasal verbs. Besides both EFL teachers and students should search using internet to comp with and follow the least and most recent and up-to date concerning English grammar and phrasal verbs.

Key words

Phrasal verbs – difficulties – comprehend – recent – cope-with.

المستخلص

تعتبر أشباه الجمل الفعلية ضرورية لفهم والتواصل مع متحدثي اللغة الإنجليزية المحليين: من الواضح أن أشباه الجمل الفعلية تعتبر إشكالية لدارسي اللغة الانجليزية لذلك يتجنبون استخدامها. لذلك تهدف هذه الدراسة لبحث الصعوبات التي تواجه دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية في فهم واستخدام أشباه الجمل الفعلية. اتبعت الدراسة لمنهج التحليلي الوصفي. جمعت البيانات بواسطة الاستبانة. تتكون عينة الدراسة من (50) معلم لغة إنجليزية في المرحلة الثانوية – محلية الحصاصيصا – ولاية الجزيرة. استخدم الباحث برنامج الحزم

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الاحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية لتحليل البيانات (SPSS). توصلت الدراسة للعديد من النتائج الهامة: يواجه معظم دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية السودانيين صعوبات في فهم واستخدام أشباه الجمل الفعلية الانجليزية في المرحلة الثانوية. كما إن الانترنت مليء بالعديد من المواضيع ذات العلاقة بأشباه الجمل الفعلية. بناء على هذه النتائج أوصت الدراسة بالآتي: يجب أن يساعد ويشجع أساتذة اللغة الانجليزية طلابهم في فهم واستخدام أشباه الجمل الفعلية. كما يجب على كل من الأساتذة وطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية البحث في الانترنت لكي يواكبوا آخر وأحدث المواضيع المتعلقة بقواعد اللغة الانجليزية وأشباه الجمل الفعلية الانجليزية.

كلمات مفتاحية:

أشباه الجمل الفعلية – صعوبات – يستوعب – حديث - يواكب

Introduction

Phrasal verbs are very common in English especially in more informal contexts. They are made up of a verb and a particle. Sometimes, two particles, the particle often changes the meaning of the verb. In term of word order, there are two main types of phrasal verbs: separable and inseparable. Separable phrasal verbs such as: take off, putt off, payback, bring up, Inспенble, such as, fall off, splash out, scrap by, and dip into phrasal verbs ordinarily cannot be understood based up on the meaning of the individual parts a lone but must be considered as a whole the meaning is non-compositional and thus unpredictable phrasal verbs are differentiated from other classification of multi-word verbs and free combinations by based on idiomaticity, replacement by a single word verb, wh questions formation and particle movement. Many EFL learners find difficulty in comprehending and using phrasal verbs in English language therefore, the main objective of this study is to investigate the difficulties that face EFL students in using English phrasal verbs within written or spoken English.

1.1 Statement of the Problem:

Phrasal verbs are considered as a problematic area for a wide sector of both EFL leaners and teachers at secondary schools. The meaning of the phrasal verbs is often very different from the meanings of the two words taken separately. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the difficulties face EFL learners in using and understanding phrasal verbs at secondary level.

1.2 Objective of the Study:

The study aims to:

- 1) Investigate the difficulties face EFL learners in phrasal verbs.

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- 2) To find out to what extent that EFL teachers are trained to teach English phrasal verbs.
- 3) To differentiate between types of phrasal verbs .
- 4) To raise EFL students awareness in inferring the meaning of phrasal verbs.

1.3 Questions of the Study

The study tries to answer the following questions:

- 1) Do EFL learners at secondary level face any difficulty in using English phrasal verbs in EFL classes?
- 2) To what extent are EFL teachers trained to teach English phrasal verbs?
- 3) To what extent does the nature of phrasal verbs cause difficulty of meaning to EFL learners in grasping the accurate meaning.

1.4 Hypotheses of The Study:

The study hypothesizes the following:

- 1) EFL learners face many difficulties English phrasal verbs.
- 2) Most EFL teachers are not well trained to teach phrasal verbs.
- 3) The nature of phrasal verbs causes difficulty to grasp the accurate meaning.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The researcher believes that this study is not only useful for teachers, but also for students and all those who are interested in English language learning. It is also valuable for syllabus designers.

1.6 Methodology:

The study will adopt the descriptive analytical method. A questionnaire will be used as a tool for collecting the data and it will be distributed to (50) EFL learners at secondary school level – Rufaa – secondary school East Gezira locality during the academic year 2023. The statistical packages for Social Science program (SPSS) will be used for analyzing the data.

1.7 Limits of the Study

The current study is limited to investigating the difficulties that face EFL learners in using and comprehending English phrasal verbs – Rufaa secondary schools – East Gezira Locality 2023.



Literature Review

2.0 Definition of Phrasal Verbs:

Definition of term "Phrasal verbs" is debatable among grammarians and researches. The verb plus particle combination functioning as a single unit is commonly termed as "a phrasal verb". Some linguistics call such combination "a multi word verbs" (Sci, 2001) and "a verb particle combination" (Fraser, 1976). In the literature, various definitions of a phrasal verbs are also found. According to a definition provided by Fraser (1976), a verb – Particle combination is used to describe "a single constituent or series of constituents, whose semantic interpretation is in dependent of the formatives which compose it (P.V)". that is the meaning of a verb particle combination cannot be decoded by combining the meaning of its verb and particle, Bolinger (1971) suggests that the phrasal verbs should be considered as "new stereo types" rather than "new word". He proposes the phrasal verbs a "lexical unit in the strict sense of a non – additive compound are derivation, one that has a set meaning which is not the sum of the meanings of its parts". Phrasal verbs also can be defined as all verbs and particle combinations that function as a unit both lexically and syntactically such as "bring about", "take on", and "give up".

While a variety of definitions of the term "phrasal verbs" have been suggested, it is obviously noticed that the phrasal verbs defined in two parts which are syntactic and lexical. Thus, this article will use the definition proposed by Bolinger (1971) who saw the (P.V) as a combination of verb and a particle, which can be either a verb or preposition, functioning together as a new lexical unit. Without explicit focus on linguistic forms. Multi-word verbs are therefore quite problematic for learners. However, simply by anticipating and being prepared for problems students can do much to erase part of the fear and confusion that surrounds multi-words. Crystal (2008:48).

2.1 Important information about phrasal verbs

A phrasal verb is the combination of a standard verb such as wake or put with one or two particles. In some cases the particle is an adverb such as a way, together, in others it is a preposition such as through, in. here are a few examples

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of the many hundreds of English phrasal verbs: pass away, pull together, fall through, make do with, put down to, Heaton (1985).

2.2 The difficulty of phrasal verbs

Phrasal verbs are one of the most difficult aspects for learners of the English language. There are three main reasons for this:

- 1) In many cases the meaning of the phrasal verb cannot be deduced from its elements, i.e., it is being used idiomatically. For example: a learner who knows that to tick it to make a checkmark may have difficulty in understanding the sentence the teacher ticked off the student for being late, in which the phrasal verb to tick off means to reprimand or to express disapproval, Palmer (2012).
- 2) Many phrasal verbs are polysemous, i.e., they have more than the meaning. The phrasal verb to put down has the literal meaning of putting something down on the table or floor. But it also has the idiomatic meanings:
 - To make someone feel small, to criticize and humiliate them.
 - To kill as in the sentence, I had to have my cat put down.
 - To stop, quash, put an end to as in the sentence, the police put down the riots with unnecessary brutality.
- 3) There are difficulties with the grammar of phrasal verbs, particularly with the position of the particles. Look at the following examples:

She put down the baby. ✓

She put the baby down. ✓

The teacher put the student

The teacher put down the

Down. ✓

student?

The student put her bad grade the student put down her bad

Down to tiredness. ✓

grade to tiredness. ✗

2.3 The importance of phrasal verbs

Phrasal verbs are very important for learners because they are so prevalent in every day spoken and informal written language. Not only do learners need to understand the more common phrasal verbs, but they will also need to use them themselves. If they don't, and use a more formal synonym, they run the risk of sounding pompous or ridiculous to native speakers. Imagine, for example, your



friend telling you Oh, do desist from talking! Instead of Oh, do shut up! Or Oh, do belt up! Or Oh, do pipe down! Graham (1995).

2.4 Selection Principle

When you find phrasal verbs listed on a website the criterion is that in the opinion of the webmaster, those are among the most useful for English learners to learn first. Only idiomatic phrasal verbs that are likely to cause difficulties to language learners have been included. The definition listed for each phrasal verb is generally very short and should be regarded as the first step in the learning process. The example sentences are the second, more useful step in the process of understanding the verb and the contexts in which is used. The third step is to look at the additional information that is listed for some verbs.

2.5 Problems Related with Phrasal Verbs

Vivin, (2003). It is well known that phrasal verbs are a challenge area of English language learning and teaching. In this section, we will identify – and offer some solutions for – the main problems that learners experience when they try to use phrasal verbs in their own speech and writing. We will focus on combination of high frequency verbs, with which learners ought to be familiar such as (**go, take, and give**), with:

- ❖ Adverbial particles such as **up, in, out, off, down, and through**.
- ❖ Preposition particles such as, **at, for, to, and with**.

There are two types of evidence that help with understanding the kinds of problem that learners have when they use phrasal verbs, these are:

- ✓ Experiential data, such as translation tests or multiple-choice tests in which learners have to select the most appropriate verb (phrasal verb or single-word verb) to fill in a gap in a sentence.
- ✓ Computer learners corpora, which are electronic collections of spoken or written texts produced by learners (such as essays or translated conversation). On the basis of this evidence, we can identify a number of issues that seem to cause problems for many learners. Vivian (2003).



The following main problems have been highlighted in relation to phrasal verbs formed of adverbial articles:

- 1) Avoidance.
- 2) Style deficiency.
- 3) Semantic confusion.
- 4) Lack of collocational awareness.
- 5) Using "idiosyncratic" phrasal verbs.
- 6) Syntactic errors.
- 7) Avoidance.

The evidence suggests that learners who lack phrasal verbs in their mother tongue (such as French-speaking or Spanish-speaking students) tend to avoid using phrasal verbs in English. This does not mean that they do not use phrasal verbs at all, but rather that they use fewer phrasal verbs and more single-word verbs than native-speakers of English performing similar tasks. Learners who do have phrasal verbs in their mother tongue, on the other hand, do not avoid using these in English. In fact, Dutch-speaking and German-speaking EFL learners tend to use more phrasal verbs than native speakers in written discourse. Vivian et al (2003).

Methodology

3.0 Sample

The sample of this study consisted of (50) EFL teachers. They were chosen from different. Secondary schools at – Hasaheisa Locality – Gezira state – Sudan.

3.1 Procedure

The data of the study were collected by using a questionnaire which was distributed to (50) EFL teachers at secondary level. Then was analyzed by using the statistical packages for social Science program (SPSS).

3.2 Validity and Reliability of the questionnaire

To test the reliability of the questionnaire Pearson's correlation is used the statistical treatment.



Here the researcher followed and applied the "product-moment" correlation (Pearson's) by means of the split plot and the formula is.

$$R = \frac{40(61356) - (2250168)}{\sqrt{40((59880 - 2143296)(63615 - 2362369))}} = 0.95$$

$$R = \frac{N(\sum Xy - \sum X \sum Y)}{\sqrt{N(\sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2)(\sum y^2 - (\sum Y)^2)}}$$

Where:

R: Reliability of the test

N: Number of all items in the test

X: Odd marks

Y: Even marks

Σ : Sum

$$Relia = 2 * r / I + r$$

$$Val = \sqrt{reliability}$$

N: 40

$$\sum Xy = 61356$$

$$\sum X \sum y = 2250168$$

$$\sum X^2 = 59880$$

$$\sum X^2 = 63615$$

$$(\sum X)^2 = 2143296$$

$$(\sum X)^2 = 2362369$$

$$R = 40(61356) - 2250168$$



$$R = \frac{N(\sum Xy) - (\sum X \sum y)}{\sqrt{N((\sum X^2) - (\sum X)^2)(\sum Y^2) - (\sum XY)^2}}$$

$$R_{lia} = 2*r/1+r = (2*0.95)/(1+0.95) = 0.98$$

$$Val = \sqrt{reliability}$$

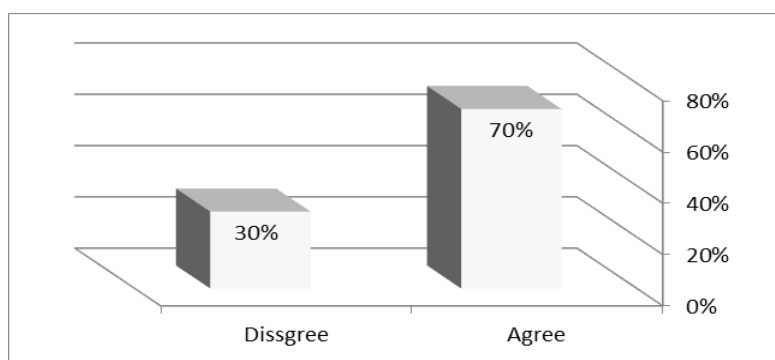
$$= \sqrt{0.98} = 0.99$$

The calculated coefficient of correlation reached 0.95 which indicates agreement in results for reliability. This shows that this instrument of the test as a whole is reliable and stable.

4.0 Data Analysis and Discussion

Table (4.1) EFL students at secondary level find difficulties in comprehending and using phrasal in EFL classes.

	Frequency	Percent
Agree	35	70.0
Disagree	15	30.0
Total	50	100.0



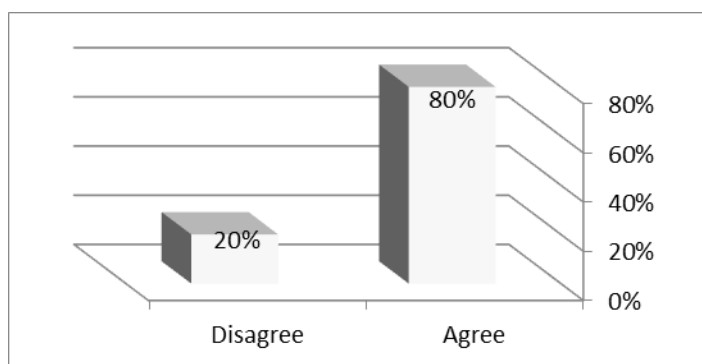
From the above table it is clear that the majority of the respondents (70%) of the respondents agree that EFL students find difficulties in comprehending and



using phrasal verbs in EFL class whereas, (30%) disagree with the statement. Therefore, this statement is accepted.

Table (4.2) There is less representation of phrasal verbs in EFL students Courses.

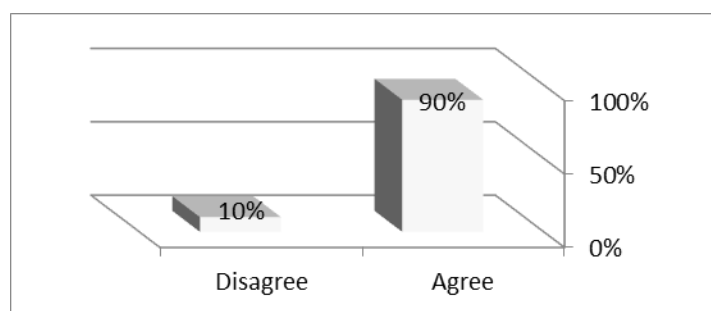
	Frequency	Percent
Agree	40	80.0
Disagree	10	20.0
Total	50	100.0



It is noticed from the above table that (20%) of the answers disagree, which, the highest number of the answers agree that emphasizes that there is less representation of phrasal verbs in EFL students' courses. Thus, this statement is accepted.

Table (4.3) Most of EFL teachers think that phrasal verbs are very complicated so they avoid using them.

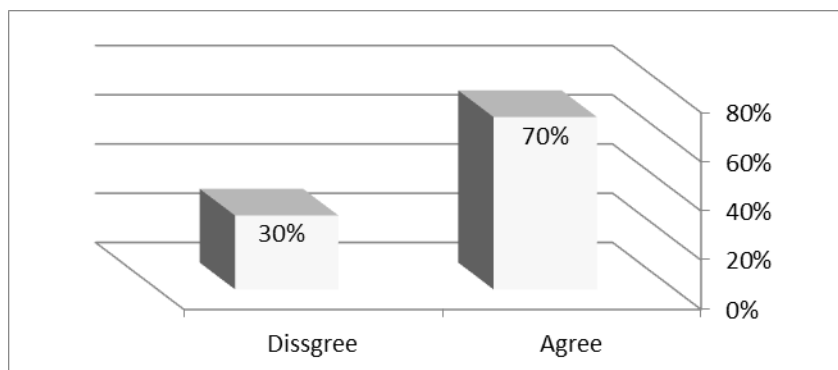
	Frequency	Percent
Agree	45	90.0
Disagree	5	10.0
Total	50	100.0



The above Table shows that (10%) of the respondents disagree with this statement. Whereas, (90%) of the majority of them agree that most of EFL teachers think that, phrasal verbs are very complicated so they avoid using them. There are, this statement is accepted.

Table (4.4) EFL students confuse in understanding of the accurate meaning of phrasal verbs

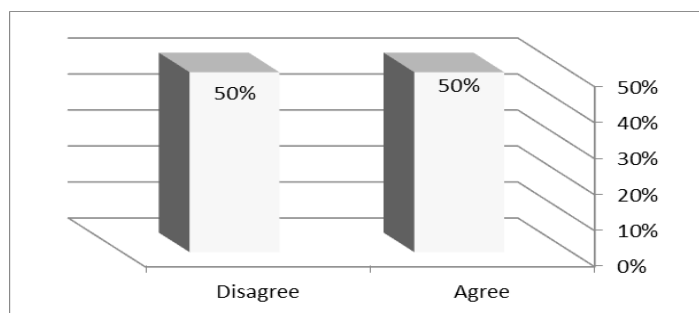
	Frequency	Percent
Agree	35	70
Disagree	15	30
Total	50	100.0



(30%) percent of the respondents disagree with the statement. While, (70%) of them agree that EFL students confuse in understanding the accurate meaning of phrasal verbs. Thus, this statement is accepted.

Table (4.5) Phrasal verbs are very interesting if they find well trained teachers.

	Frequency	Percent
Agree	25	50.0
Disagree	25	50.0
Total	50	100.0



It is noticed from the above table that the answers with agree are, (50%) and the answers with disagree are (50%). This indicates that the answers are equal.

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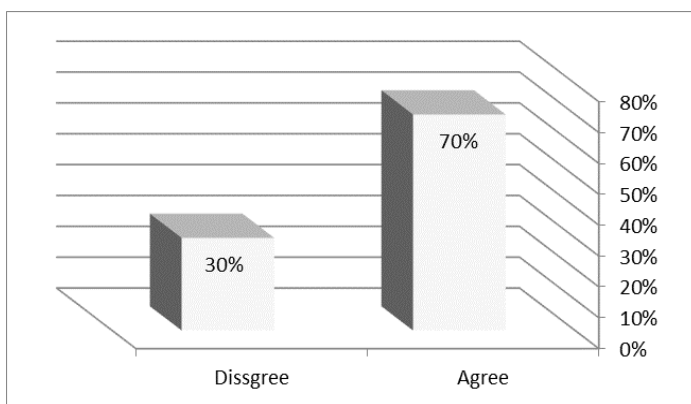
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This shows that some respondents see that phrasal verbs are interesting if they find well trained teachers and some of them do not see them interesting.

Table (4.6) Phrasal verbs are Metaphorical expressions that are connected with the cultural background of the native speakers

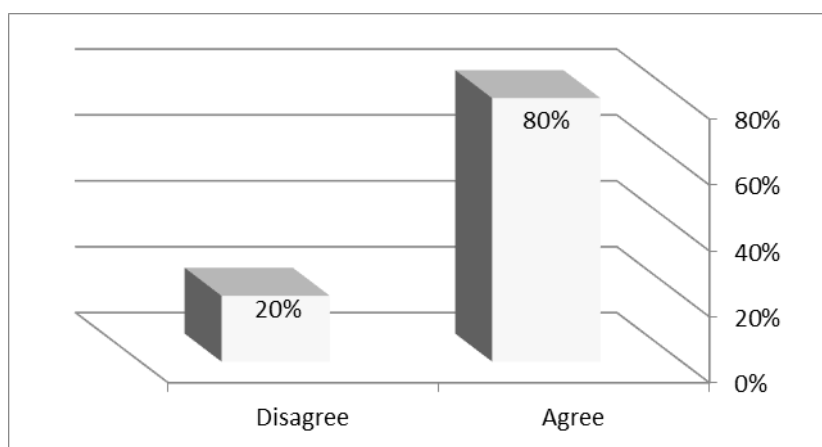
	Frequency	Percent
Agree	35	70.0
Disagree	15	30.0
Total	50	100.0



According to the statistical treatment in the preceding table it is clear that the majority (70%) of the respondents agree that phrasal verbs are metaphorical expressions that are connected with the cultural background of the native speakers, whereas, (30%) disagree with the statement. Thus this is accepted.

Table (4.7) Most EFL learners consider phrasal verbs less important and difficult to be learnt

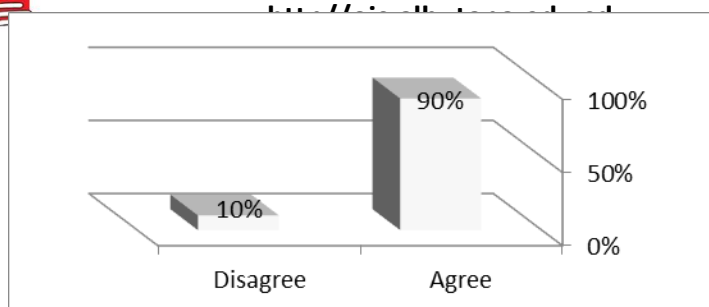
	Frequency	Percent
Agree	40	80.0
Disagree	10	20.0
Total	50	100.0



According to the above table (20%) of the respondents disagree with the statement, whereas, (80%) of them agree some EFL teachers consider phrasal verbs less important and difficult to be learnt. Thus, this statement is accepted.

Table (4.8) The internet is full with various useful learning material related to phrasal Verbs

	Frequency	Percent
Agree	45	90.0
Disagree	5	10.0
Total	50	100.0



The above table shows that (10%) only of the respondents disagree with the statement, while, (90%) the highest number of them agree that the internet is full with various useful learning material related to phrasal verbs. Therefore, this statement is accepted.

5.0 Findings

The study found the following:

- 1) Most EFL students find difficulties in comprehending and using English phrasal verbs at secondary level.
- 2) There is less representations of phrasal verbs in EFL students courses.
- 3) Phrasal verbs are very interesting if they find well trained teachers.
- 4) The internet is full with various materials related to phrasal verbs.
- 5) Most of EFL teachers think that phrasal verbs are very complicated so, they avoid teaching and using them in sentences.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings the study recommended the following:

- 1) EFL teachers should help and encourage their students to comprehend and use phrasal verbs.
- 2) Educators and syllabus designers should involve phrasal verbs in curricula.
- 3) There should be intensive training for EFL teachers in order to be well trained.
- 4) Both EFL teachers and students should search via internet to cope with the most recent information concerning phrasal verbs.
- 5) Teachers should not avoid using phrasal verbs so as to train and help students to use them properly.



5.2 Conclusion

Phrasal verbs are one of the most difficult areas for learners and teachers alike, especially in an ES / EFL context yet, it is very fruitful features to help communicate effectively. Therefore, applying appropriate teaching approach need to be considered to reduce learners' frustration and to promote their understanding and their use of phrasal verbs because they are very important for both written and spoken English particularly for native speakers.

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