



An Exploration into Challenges of Teaching English Phrasal Verbs in Colleges of Education in North Eastern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper explored into the challenges of teaching English phrasal verbs in colleges of education in north eastern Nigeria. The paper examined definitions of phrasal verbs, types of phrasal verbs and importance of phrasal verbs. The research design used in the study is survey research design. Stratified random sampling was used to sample fifty lecturers and five hundred students from the study population, and Likert's five element rating scale questionnaire was used to collect data from the sampled population. The data collected was analyzed by using the statistical tools of pie chart, mean and standard deviation. Based on the data analyzed, it was found that lecturers of English under this study understand phrasal verb but they don't teach it because there is no provision for teaching it in the NCCE minimum standard. The study also found that the students do not understand phrasal verbs because they are not taught the concept and they do not learn it personally. It was also discovered that both the lecturers and the students want phrasal verbs to be taught in colleges of education. The study concluded that phrasal verbs are not taught in colleges of education and the students of colleges of education do not understand the concept well. Finally, the study recommended that provision for teaching phrasal verbs in our colleges of education should be made in the NCCE minimum standard, and that lecturers in our colleges of education should be encouraging their students to be learning phrasal verbs personally.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received: July, 2022

Received in revised form: July, 2022

Accepted: September, 2022

Published online: December, 2022

KEYWORDS

Phrasal Verbs, Idiomatic Phrasal Verbs, Transitive, Phrasal Verbs, Intransitive Phrasal Verbs

INTRODUCTION

English phrasal verbs have been considered as a very important component of English language vocabulary which needs to be studied by learners of English as a second or foreign language. A phrasal verb is a verb that consists of two or three words. Most phrasal verbs consist of two words - the first word is a verb, and the second word is a particle. The particle is either an adverb or a preposition. "Phrasal verbs are made up of two components: a verb and a particle which is typically homonymous with an adverb or a preposition." This definition looks at any combination of verb and particle as a phrasal verb whether the particle is an adverb or a preposition. According to Rodriguez-Puente (2012), scholars have shown keen interest in studying phrasal verbs

because of their importance in marking the fluency and the level of competence of the speakers of the English language especially those who speak it as a second or foreign language. This research therefore seeks to investigate whether phrasal verbs are taught in colleges of education in north eastern Nigeria or not. The study is aimed at finding out how lecturers understand and teach phrasal verbs in colleges of education in that part of the country. The study is motivated by the fact that phrasal verbs are highly productive and very significant in determining the communicative competence of an individual in English language, but there is no specific attention given to them in the NCCE minimum standards for teaching English language and for teaching General English and communication skills. This lack of specific



capturing of phrasal verbs in the minimum standards as a topic to be taught may lead the lecturers to teach phrasal verbs just as idioms thereby leaving the students devoid of knowledge of that very important category of vocabulary which they will be required to teach when they are employed as teachers later in their lives. A review of related literature is carried out to survey definitions and types of phrasal verbs as well as stress the importance of this category of vocabulary in English language. The study is very significant as it seeks to explore challenges that have been hampering the effective teaching and understanding of a very important grammatical category in English Language. The study employs the use of questionnaire as a method of collecting data for the study. The data collected are analyzed by the use of statistical tools. The findings of the study will bring to light the challenges faced in teaching and understanding phrasal verbs in our colleges of education. These findings will be beneficial to both lecturers and students and will help curriculum planners and material developers to give phrasal verbs the necessary attention in the NCCE minimum standards and to develop appropriate pedagogical materials for teaching the concept.

Statement of the Problem

Phrasal verbs have been considered as significantly challenging and puzzling to non-native speakers of English, particularly in terms of idiomaticity and polysemy (Riguel 2016). Gardner and Davies (2007, p. 2) have observed that phrasal verbs are “notoriously difficult for non-native speakers to acquire”. According to them, the problem is made worse by the fact that phrasal verbs appear to be common and very productive in the English language as a whole, and that learners at the beginning and intermediate levels of proficiency avoid using such forms when communicating in English. The polysemous nature of phrasal verbs makes their meanings quite often context-dependent, thus posing some serious challenges to non-native speakers of the language. Riguel (2016) observes that phrasal verbs constitute one third of the English verb vocabulary. Understanding phrasal verbs therefore is very important in

communicating effectively in the English Language. Looking at how important this category of vocabulary is, its teaching and learning should start right from the senior primary level of education in the country. However, teaching and learning of phrasal verbs have been given little attention in Nigerian colleges of education where teachers for primary and upper basic schools are trained. In the NCCE Minimum Standards for Languages and for General Education, it is only in ENG 211 (The Structure of English) and GES 211 (General English iii) that two topics (*Collocation and Idioms* in ENG 211 and *Idiomatic Expressions* in GSE 211) that have something to do with phrasal verbs. Added to the problem of lack of specific course content addressing only phrasal verbs, the lecturers teaching the topics that are related to the phrasal verbs may not have a good understanding of that problematic category of vocabulary and may just teach them as idiomatic expressions only without specifying their subclasses and their semantic and syntactic peculiarities. All the problems raised here call for investigation with the aim of proffering possible solutions to them which also provide justification for the study.

Research Questions

The following research questions were set to guide the study:

1. Do lecturers of English in colleges of education understand and teach phrasal verbs?
2. Do students in colleges of education learn and understand phrasal verbs?

METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study is survey research design. Survey research designs are procedures in quantitative research in which investigators administer a survey to a sample or to the entire population of people to describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviours, or characteristics of the population. The target population for the study is the lecturers and the students of the department of English in all the colleges of education in North Eastern Nigeria. The sampling method used in this research is the stratified Random Sampling method. This method is used to select the respondents from the sampled



colleges of education in the North Eastern Nigeria. Fifty teachers of English (50) and five hundred students (500) are randomly selected from the over 500 lecturers and over 5000 students of the study population. Two private and three public colleges of education were selected from the study area. Both the lecturers and the students selected are of mixed gender. Questionnaire was used for data collection, two different questionnaires are set for lecturers and

students respectively. The questionnaires are framed in such a way that the responses of the respondents will provide answers to the research questions of the study. The data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study were presented in Tables below;

Table 1: Mean and Standard on Whether Lecturers of English in Colleges of Education Understand and Teach Phrasal Verb

S/No.	Items	\bar{X}_1 Mean of Teachers	\bar{X}_2 Mean of Students	Grand Mean \bar{X}_G	Grand SD \bar{X}_{SD}	Remark
1.	Phrasal verbs and idioms are the same.	1.26	2.00	1.37	0.55	Disagreed
2.	Phrasal verbs and verb phrase are the same.	1.91	1.75	1.89	0.42	Disagreed
3.	I teach phrasal verbs as part of idioms to my students.	1.52	1.75	1.56	0.50	Disagreed
4.	I don't teach phrasal verbs to my students because there is no topic for teaching them in the NCCE minimum standard.	1.74	1.50	1.70	0.71	Disagreed
5.	There is an availability of materials for teaching phrasal verbs in this college of education.	1.43	1.50	1.44	0.50	Disagreed
6.	I have never come across any material for teaching phrasal verbs in this college of education.	1.61	2.00	1.67	0.54	Disagreed
7.	I don't think teaching phrasal verbs to NCE students is important.	1.48	1.75	1.52	1.52	Disagreed
8.	There should be provision for teaching phrasal verbs in the NCCE minimum standards.	1.74	1.75	1.74	0.44	Disagreed
9.	Phrasal verbs are very difficult to understand and so very difficult to teach.	1.74	1.50	1.70	0.45	Disagreed
10.	Materials that will facilitate the teaching and learning of phrasal verbs should be developed.	3.58	0.90	3.22	0.80	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 1 revealed that with exception of item 10 all the items were disagreed by the respondents, as their mean responses were



below 2.50. However, item 10 have the mean value of 3.58 and standard deviation of 0.80. Generally, the grand mean on the entire items on teachers' response was 1.80 while that of

students was 1.78. Therefore, lecturers of English in colleges of education understand do not teach effectively phrasal verbs and students were not taught phrasal verbs.

Table 2: Mean and Standard on whether students of colleges of education learn and understand phrasal verbs

S/No.	Items	\bar{X}_1 Mean of Teachers	\bar{X}_2 Mean of Students	Grand Mean \bar{X}_G	Grand SD \bar{X}_{SD}	Remark
1.	Lecturers teach phrasal verbs in Colleges of Education.	1.26	2.00	1.37	0.55	Disagreed
2.	Lecturers teach phrasal verbs as idioms in colleges of education	1.91	1.75	1.89	0.42	Disagreed
3.	Lecturers teach verb phrases as phrasal verbs in colleges of education.	1.52	1.75	1.56	0.50	Disagreed
4.	Lecturers do not teach phrasal verbs, it is not part of the minimum standard.	3.74	2.90	3.32	0.89	Agreed
5.	I thought phrasal verbs should be taught by the lecturers in colleges of education.	1.43	1.50	1.44	0.50	Disagreed
6.	Materials on phrasal verbs should be developed and made available in colleges of education.	1.61	2.00	1.67	0.54	Disagreed
7.	Lecturers do not teach phrasal verbs because they lack proper knowledge on the topic.	1.48	1.75	1.52	1.52	Disagreed
8.	Lecturers should give exercises to students on phrasal verbs.	3.74	3.75	3.75	0.44	Agreed
9.	Lecturers teach verbs and verb phrases well.	1.74	1.50	1.70	0.45	Disagreed
10.	Lecturers do not teach phrasal verbs because it is difficult.	3.26	3.50	3.38	0.55	Agreed
11.	I understand phrasal verbs very well.	1.91	1.75	1.89	0.42	Disagreed
12.	I don't know what phrasal verbs are.	3.52	3.75	3.64	0.50	Agreed
13.	I have been taught phrasal verbs in this college.	1.74	1.50	1.70	0.71	Disagreed
14.	I studied phrasal verbs personally.	1.43	1.50	1.44	0.50	Disagreed
15.	Phrasal verbs and verb phrase are the same.	3.61	3.00	3.31	0.54	Agreed
16.	I have seen materials for teaching	1.48	1.75	1.52	1.52	Disagreed



	phrasal verbs in the college library.					
17.	It is important for me to learn phrasal verbs.	3.74	3.75	3.71	0.44	Agreed
18.	Phrasal verbs should be well taught in our college of education.	3.74	3.50	3.62	0.45	Agreed
19.	Phrasal verb is an aspect of English language.	1.74	1.75	1.74	0.44	Disagreed
20.	I learned phrasal verbs in my secondary school.	1.74	1.50	1.70	0.45	Disagreed

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 2 revealed that with exception of item 4, 8, 10, 12, 15, 17 and 18 all the items were disagreed by the respondents, as their mean responses were below 2.50. Generally, the grand

mean on the entire items was 2.29. Therefore, lecturers students of English in colleges of education do not teach and understand phrasal verbs respectively.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that lecturers in colleges of education don't teach phrasal verbs because there is no provision for teaching it in the NCCE minimum standard; students of colleges of education don't understand phrasal verbs because they are not taught the concept and they don't learn it personally and that both lecturers and students feel that there should be provision for teaching phrasal verbs in the NCCE minimum standard because they believe it is important.

RECOMMENDATION

Having studied the findings of the research and drawn conclusions, the researchers recommends that

1. The NCCE should make provision for teaching phrasal verbs in its minimum standard for teaching English language.
2. Adequate and good materials for teaching phrasal verbs should be developed to facilitate the teaching of the concept.
3. Lecturers in our colleges of education in the country should encourage students to study phrasal verbs personally stressing to them the importance of the combinations in communicating in English Language

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