

Exploring the Use and Challenges of Phrasal Verbs among EFL Arabic Medical Students

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Abstract

This quantitative study investigates the factors that affect medical students from Saudi Arabia in their study of English as a foreign language. The study also explores the understanding and usage of frequent medical phrasal verbs among Arabic-speaking medical students. Through an online survey, data were gathered from 289 Saudi medical students studying English as a foreign language at various universities across Saudi Arabia. For data collection, the researcher developed a survey that measured the cognition of phrasal verbs and the students' perceptions of the challenges they faced, the support their institutions provided, and the perception of their ability to use phrasal verbs. Findings revealed a strong positive correlation between *support* and *proficiency* ($r = 0.578$), whereas a negative correlation was found between *challenges* and *proficiency* ($r = 0.193$). This means that as support for learning English increased, perceived hurdles decreased. Findings also suggested that increased levels of support contributed to increased proficiency. Results indicated that *years of studying English* functioned as a moderator, improving spoken English. This study highlighted the significance of different strategies, including targeted and contextually relevant strategies, which improve the teaching of phrasal verbs to Arabic-speaking medical students. The study's results focused on the need to utilize immersive, practical, and interactive methods in course syllabi to motivate students to use English in authentic contexts, such as reading medical documents, listening to medical discussions, and engaging in social networking platforms. These activities can significantly enhance the understanding and usage of phrasal verbs.

Keywords: phrasal verbs, medical English proficiency, immersive language learning, social networking, practical English application

1. Introduction

Speaking English accurately is a basic requirement for medical professionals to communicate effectively with coworkers and patients. In Saudi Arabia, professionals use English as a second language (ESL) to communicate or interact with each other for patient care and in academic life. The Oxford University Press (2020) states that a phrasal verb is a verb that is a combination of an adverb and a preposition. Phrasal verbs are an essential part of informal and formal English that make communication easier and clearer. However, they often create hurdles for ESL professionals because of their idiomatic and contextual variations. Therefore, Arabic-speaking medical students find it difficult to comprehend and use these idiomatic expressions. Conversely, they are important for understanding the complicated jargon used in the medical profession to ensure that the communication between patients and colleagues is clear and easy. Baylor, Burns McDonough, Mach, and Yorkston (2019) found that a communication gap exists between healthcare professionals and patients. Therefore, the current study investigates comprehension, usage, and hurdles related to English phrasal verbs among Arabic-speaking medical students. The purpose of this research is to improve the linguistic expertise and the professional success of Arab ESL medical students.

Mastering English as a foreign language (EFL) requires good comprehension and use of phrasal verbs. Proficiency in using phrasal verbs is the most challenging task for those learning ESL in educational and professional settings. According to Othman, Fathia, Omar, and Rima, (2025), it is difficult for EFL university students to use and comprehend phrasal verbs, though due to their idiomatic and polysemous characteristics, phrasal verbs are essential in developing English mastery and comprehension. Despite their significance, these phrasal verbs are still viewed as one of the most challenging components of English grammar for non-native speakers, especially EFL medical students (Albaqami, 2021).

Linguistic and environmental factors further complicate the process of learning English. Because of the differences in formalization between Arabic and English, phrasal verbs lack direct equivalents, which leads to confusion, avoidance, and frequent mistakes in their utilization. According to Alwreikat and Yunus (2022), Arab students may also avoid the use of phrasal verbs because of syntactic and semantic difficulties. The use of phrasal verbs is affected mainly by the learners' expertise and prior vocabulary (El-Dakhs, Sonbul, & Alwazzan, 2022). Furthermore, insufficient exposure to English in real-world conditions and in educational programs that do not prioritize phrasal verbs increases the difficulties (Hamza, 2018). Therefore, learners encounter considerable challenges in understanding and effectively applying phrasal verbs. This affects their comprehension and ability to discuss medical concepts and interact formally with colleagues in English (Assassi & Rouaghe, 2024).

Several factors affect how Saudi medical students, especially EFL students, comprehend and use phrasal verbs. These factors encompass language problems such as semantic vagueness, the persistence of usage, and the questionable characteristics of phrasal verbs. These factors cause EFL students to avoid the use of verbal phrases in their daily informal and professional communication (Alwreikat & Yunus, 2022). Other factors include extrinsic variables such as the use of English outside of the classroom, cultural influences, and access to suitable teaching resources (Sonbul, El-Dakhs, & Al-Otaibi, 2020). Omidian, Akbary, and Shahriari (2019) identified five key factors to success in learning English: years of studying English, months spent in an English-speaking country, hours spent reading English, hours spent watching and listening to English movies and TV, and social networking. Among these factors, hours spent reading in English and watching English movies and TV shows were found to strongly affect the cognition of phrasal verbs by EFL students.

Therefore, this study explores the factors influencing the comprehension and use of phrasal verbs among Saudi EFL students in medical education. Barriers and challenges were identified, providing a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties faced by these learners and leading to practical recommendations to enhance their acquisition of phrasal verbs. The following research questions guided this empirical study:

- How do educational resources and exposure affect EFL medical students' familiarity and proficiency with medical phrasal verbs?
- What challenges do EFL medical students face in comprehending, retaining, and applying phrasal verbs in medical English?
- What general factors, including linguistic, cultural, and experiential variables, influence the comprehension and use of phrasal verbs among EFL medical students in Saudi Arabia?

English is used worldwide to communicate with individuals of all origins, nationalities, and cultures (Dewi, 2015). According to Al Hosni (2014), the biggest obstacles to obtaining practical English-speaking abilities are fear and a reluctance to engage in speaking lessons. University English teachers should emphasize speaking abilities like correctness and fluency because students should be able to learn accurately and easily.

There are numerous reasons why learning EFL is crucial. EFL assists businesses in selling their goods and services around the world. EFL assists immigrants in obtaining employment, settling in, and pursuing further education. People who previously had restricted access to the internet benefit from EFL. EFL aids in the global marketing of skilled professionals' abilities. EFL aids students in honing their communication abilities for both professional and everyday contexts, understanding grammar rules, and increasing their vocabulary. EFL teaches students how to pronounce and intonate words correctly so they may speak English confidently. According to Chin, Said, Pudín, and Din (2022), educators and learners believe that fun is crucial for instruction in learning English, because it increases motivation, overcomes gaps in involvement, and increases the language's utility.

This study is based on theories applied in English as a second language (ESL) courses, particularly for academic and professional learners. The usage-based language theory (Tomasello, 2003), which is applied in ESL research, emphasizes that learners acquire language structures like phrasal verbs through repeated exposure and use in meaningful contexts. This aligns with the need for practical, discipline-specific usage in medical settings. The noticing hypothesis, proposed by Richard Schmidt, suggests that conscious attention to and awareness of the linguistic features of an input is a crucial factor for second language acquisition (Schmidt, 1990). This theory indicates that conscious awareness of language input is essential for acquisition, which supports structured teaching of phrasal verbs. Lastly, dynamic systems theory (De Bot et al., 2007), which is increasingly used in ESL and EFL studies, views language development as a complex, evolving process influenced by internal factors (e.g., motivation, prior exposure) and external factors (e.g., institutional support). These theories collectively provide a foundation for understanding how Arabic-speaking medical students acquire and use English phrasal verbs in EFL environments.

2. Problem and Methods

A country's English language education system largely determines the type of English spoken there (Kachru, 1985). For example, if you teach only in English and the majority of your students have spoken the language since birth, you can be confident that you are working in a nation that supports English as a native language (ENL; Crystal, 2003). Fernandez argued that in the domains of education and government, English is only considered a medium of instruction in ESL or ENL circumstances, not EFL (2015). Although EFL and ESL are commonly used interchangeably, they are not identical. ESL countries are those where English is the primary language of government and education, even though it may not be the native tongue (Kachru, 1992).

Conversely, EFL nations teach English in schools but do not use it as a medium of instruction. For instance, Malaysia, formerly regarded as an ESL nation, now swings more toward EFL. There are significant differences between teaching English as a second language and teaching it as a foreign language (Fernandez, 2015).

As the importance of English increases, more attention must be paid to improving educational and economic possibilities in Arab nations, ultimately leading to the use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI). Most universities have started implementing EMI programs, especially in the more advanced disciplines, such as engineering, business, and medicine (Kirkpatrick, 2011). It is increasingly necessary for teachers to improve their English language skills, and they should have proper and appropriate teaching materials. EMI in Arab nations has taken steps to address obstacles to the understanding and comprehension of language, including cultural hostility (Phillipson, 1992). Despite these hurdles, the proficiency of English is increasing in Arab nations (Graddol, 2006). Additionally, researchers have

shown that EMI can enhance students' academic execution and language competency, especially when used correctly and with support (Macaro, Curle, Pun, An, & Dearden, 2018).

2.1 Phrasal Verbs

It conveys a new meaning, for example, "go in for" or "see to." Phrasal verbs are a standard part of English, used mainly in the past in informal contexts such as breaking news, movie headings, and musical lyrics (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2005). Recently, their use has increased in formal contexts (Biber, 1999).

Phrasal verbs have different explanations. In some cases, the explanations are clearly related; some are specific and accurate, whereas others are figurative (Lakoff & Johnson, 2020). For instance, the phrasal word "get on" can signify "to have a good relationship with someone" or "to board a vehicle" (Sinclair, 1990). Effective communication in English requires understanding the subtleties of phrasal verb meanings. "He spends hours glued to the TV every evening" and "People are flooding into the stadium two hours before the concert" are examples of phrasal verbs with figurative meanings. Another thing to note is that the particle frequently significantly impacts the phrasal verb's meaning. Exercises that include structured words can aid learners in developing their language proficiency, according to Hlaing (2020). Gaining proficiency with phrasal verbs can help increase vocabulary and enhance language abilities because they are essential to teaching or learning English as a foreign language and affect both spoken and written forms. In addition to being commonly used in daily English, phrasal terms are used in more specialized contexts, such as hospitals.

In this case, doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals employ phrasal verbs to replace more formal terminology or expressions. When communicating with patients, healthcare providers should use language that the patient can understand; hence, they should refrain from employing technical words. That is why they approve the phrasal verb "come on" when asking, "When did your pain start?" But when talking about reducing fast food intake, patients may understand "onset" better or follow advice more easily. Students learning EFL encounter many hurdles in learning English language fluency. Learning phrasal verbs needs extra attention, because they increase the student's communication power. Gaining proficiency and mastery in these difficult verbs is necessary for effective English language proficiency (Polackova, 2008).

2.2 Challenges in Learning Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal verbs are among the most important language proficiencies for students to learn when studying EFL (Lewis, 1997). They are a combination of a verb and an adverb or preposition. This combination generates a separate meaning, which is idiomatic in nature and lacks transparency. It is difficult for non-native speakers to understand and comprehend these grammatical structures (Bolinger, 1971). Also, EFL students find it challenging to understand the meaning of phrasal verbs, specifically their sensible implications and patterns of expression (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2005). Good EFL instruction should include teaching phrasal verbs; students should be given much time to practice and understand difficult parts of speech (Gatbonton, 2008). EFL teachers should assist students in obtaining a deeper understanding and comprehension of phrasal verbs and increase their ability to understand general language skills by combining clear and detailed instructions, practice concepts, and authentic materials (Tomlinson, 2011).

2.3 EFL and ESL

EFL and ESL are different. Classifying regions as EFL or ESL can be tricky, as seen in Indonesia (Barber, 2000). Indonesia is relevant to Arabic ESL and EFL instruction because it has a large number of Arabic language learners, owing to religious and cultural factors. As the country with the biggest Muslim population, Indonesia includes many Islamic schools and colleges where Arabic is frequently taught, notably for Quranic and religious studies. This makes Indonesia a relevant context for studying Arabic ESL and EFL because students frequently study both Arabic and English as foreign languages. Furthermore, research on bilingual and multilingual education in Indonesia sheds light on how students navigate between Arabic, English, and their local languages. For Arabic-speaking medical students, EFL helps them communicate and understand the medical literature. EFL differs from ESL primarily in the setting. EFL is taught where English is not the local language, making it challenging for teachers to provide authentic English models. In contrast, ESL is learned in environments where English is commonly spoken, allowing students to access English language models in their communities and schools. According to Gunderson (2019), a shift toward EFL classroom methods is increasingly common.

2.4 EFL and Saudis

People who speak Arabic find it challenging to use phrasal verbs in English because grammatical structures and semantic meanings differ between Arabic and English. Arabic verbs are usually formed by adding prefixes and suffixes to their roots, whereas English phrasal verbs depend on prepositions and particles to convey different meanings (Aldahesh, 2009). Most Arabic speakers find it difficult to understand idiomatic expressions because of their collocation patterns, which are innate in English phrasal verbs; this confusion may cause discrepancies, and the students misuse phrasal verbs (Benson & Chik, 2014).

Moreover, it is often difficult for Arabic speakers to use phrasal verbs to convey their message effectively because most English phrasal verbs have no exact parallel in Arabic (Kachru, 1985). It is difficult for students in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to understand English instructions. To excel in their academic and professional aspirations, Saudi students must become proficient in English because it is widely used for international communication. Therefore, teaching EFL is essential to giving Saudi students the language proficiency they need to access information, engage in the global economy, and support the nation's goal of becoming a more diverse and knowledge-based economy.

Enhancing students' overall proficiency, particularly in oral communication, and providing EFL students with sufficient opportunities to speak the language effectively should be the goals of English language instruction (Al-Tamimi & Attamimi, 2014). Currently, English is introduced to Saudi EFL students late in their education. Speaking English is regarded as one of the most challenging tasks for EFL students in the Arab world. Fluency in English has been a challenge for many Saudi EFL students. Instead of using a teacher-centered method, Saudi EFL learners can practice speaking English in the classroom by adopting a learner-centered approach, where they are free to converse and correct one another (Bin-Hady, 2023; Gathumbi & Masembe, 2005; Larasati, 2018).

Saudi EFL students want the instructor's input while improving their English proficiency. Saudi Vision 2030 and EFL learning are interdependent (Al-Mwza'iji & Muhammad, 2023). Vision 2030 drives the need for Saudi students to increase their EFL proficiency to meet the goals of the vision (Al-Hassaani & Al-Saalmi, 2022). According to the study's findings, Saudi EFL students should be encouraged to communicate in English with people within and outside the classroom and be given ample opportunities to practice speaking the language. The curriculum and instructional resources for English-speaking skills courses must be updated to reflect learners' everyday requirements and the demands of the job market.

2.5 English for the Arabic Medical Students

The primary language for international medical communication is English, because most medical journals, conferences, and research publications are in this language. To ensure safe and effective health care, proficiency in medical English, including phrasal verbs, is essential for Arabic-speaking medical students in various academic and professional settings, including clinical documentation and patient interaction (Schkinder, 2024). Because medical professionals need to stay updated with complex terminology and advancements, fluency in English is crucial for academic and professional success in the medical field. Medical students often excel in English because they engage with relevant educational materials for better oral communication (Kadagidze, 2025).

2.6 EFL Programs for Medical Students

Limited EFL programs for teaching medical English are provided in several Arabic-speaking countries (Alrashed & Latif, 2025). These programs focus on specialized vocabulary and phrases, including structure, framework, interventions, and processes. Even so, less attention is often given to the meanings of specialized terms in medical discussions, like the usage of phrasal verbs. Consequently, medical language may be learned, but gaining expertise in using phrasal verbs may be difficult. To increase students' English-speaking skills, these projects should include directions about how to use medical phrasal verbs. For students to flourish in medical settings where English is the mother language, they must understand the meanings related to the context of phrasal verbs and know how to use them correctly (Faraj, 2015).

Language specialists and educators have long been mesmerized by the complicated and varied processes of acquiring a language. Arabic EFL learners must handle the variations of a new language while often having minimal experience or opportunity to practice. EFL instructors must have an in-depth understanding of the concepts and processes of acquiring language to maintain effective curricula and teaching techniques that highlight their students' uncommon requirements and hurdles (Alhamami & Almelhi, 2021).

2.7 Language Acquisition and EFL Learners

Theories of second language acquisition offer notable insights into the way EFL learners acquire medical English, especially phrasal verbs. For instance, Krashen's input hypothesis states that students learn a language most successfully when given understandable input that is a little beyond their current competency level (Krashen, 1985). This process should include several real-world medical examples of phrasal verbs. Swain's output hypothesis also suggests the importance of achievement, or energetically producing language, in language acquisition (Swain, 2005). Role-playing, clinical communication, and written case reports encourage medical students to use phrasal verbs in meaningful contexts; these activities can increase their competency in using these phrases effectively.

2.8 Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory proposed that acquiring language is a socially arbitrated procedure by which students energetically develop meaning through collaboration with more knowledgeable individuals. Vygotsky (1978) stated that language learning occurs within the zone of proximal development. Students involved in collective discussions with teachers, peers, or native speakers learn to construct the meanings of words commonly used within the group. Feedback and instruction play a crucial role in how learners acquire new vocabulary, grammatical structures, and language rules, which gradually enhance their overall linguistic abilities. This sociocultural perspective highlights the important roles of social relationships, surroundings, and culture in framing language acquisition results. This theory emphasizes the importance of social relationships in learning a language. This approach can be applied to Arabic-speaking medical students to support their learning and effective use of medical phrasal verbs in hospital settings.

2.9 Education and Needs of Arab Medical Students

Education plays an important role in preparing medical professionals for the future, specifically in the Arab world (Abu-Jeyyab & Alrosan, 2023). Arabic medical students have uncommon educational requirements that must be catered to, because they will soon form the spine of their countries' medical or healthcare systems. These requirements involve more than acquiring expertise in clinical and medical knowledge; they also include evaluating professional skills, cultural realization, and smart communicative abilities. Rasenberg, Brand, and van Weel-Baumgarten (2023) conducted a study on communication training for medical students. One finding was that effective patient-centered communication optimizes the results. These trainings are important components of high-quality patient care in healthcare settings in the Arab world. According to Ta traingyem, AlShammari, Albalawi, and Shareef (2020), most Arab medical students prefer

English-based medical instructions.

Arabic-speaking medical students have particular educational requirements. Because of the increasing demand for high-quality medical services in the Arab world, medical education must prioritize the growth of qualified, culturally sensitive, and successful healthcare professionals (Awosogba et al., 2013). To achieve these requirements, Arabic-speaking medical students need training sessions that incorporate modern medical practices and help them become sensitive to the culture. In addition, most medical textbooks, research papers, and international medical conferences are deliberately based on English. Thus, a strong command of the English language is required. To provide compassionate, patient-centered care across diverse medical settings in the Arab world, Arab medical students must be taught to pay attention to the emotional, social, and psychological facts of medical practice through productive education (Wahyuni, 2021).

Medical education is crucial in forming any country's medical and public health future. It is also a complicated and challenging process that requires continuous development and modification to address the evolving requirements and expectations of communities and medical systems (Perez-Gomez, & Ramos-Zuniga, 2012). Furthermore, several hurdles and limitations inhibit the development and quality of medical education in the Arab world, stopping it from reaching its full potential (Abu-Jeyyab & Alrosan, 2023).

In Arab countries, there is a tension between the medical curricula and the needs of regional and community medical care. Many medical schools in the region face this issue because of their dependency on outdated or new curricula that often do not reflect the area's social, cultural, and biological realities (Alamri et al., 2021). Consequently, medical education becomes less adequate and effective, because there is no connection between what is taught and the practical requirements of the medical care systems.

2.10 Specific Challenges in Medical English for Arabic-Speaking Learners

For Arabic-speaking students continuing medical education, learning medical English is an important hurdle. The difficulty of medical terms and the variation of the English language framework can inhibit understanding and comprehension. Arabic-speaking learners may encounter unique sounds, like the pronunciation of English letters such as "p" and "b," which do not exist in Arabic (Altakhaineh, AL-Junaid, & Younes, 2024). Moreover, it might be difficult to deliver medical concepts effectively because of variations in the grammatical structure between Arabic and medical English. English presents unique challenges for Arabic-speaking medical students because of differences in syntax, grammar, pronunciation, and the use of unknown Latin and Greek roots in medical phrases (Attia, 2024). For example, although English specifically follows a subject-verb-object structure, Arabic employs a verb-subject-object order. This difference in sentence structure can make it difficult for Arabic speakers to grasp the correct sequence and usage of phrasal verbs in English (Adam, 2024).

Despite these hurdles, the Arabic world has seen remarkable accomplishments and growth in medical education. These include the development of leading universities contributing to medical programs with modern, innovative curricula, the promotion of international partnerships to increase the exchange of expertise and material, and the assumption of continuing medical education as a guiding principle (Gosselin et al., 2016).

One of the significant hurdles in medical education in the Arab world is the limited number of skilled instructors who can deliver quality education and training (El-Dwairi, Mustafeh, Khatatbeh, Malki, & Mustafa, 2022). The English language is both broad and full of zest. Phenomena like idioms and phrasal verbs make it even more unique, particularly for non-native speakers. Phrasal verbs and idioms function in diverse types of communication because native speakers usually employ them instead of more formal phrases or terminology. ESL learners ought to be able to identify these occurrences (Mäntylä 2004). They should focus primarily on verbs utilized as synonyms for particular expressions (phrases) in a given field. They should include these vocabularies in their active vocabulary and utilize them as equivalent expressions for more formal phrases in specific communication domains.

Notwithstanding these obstacles, several opportunities and assets could be leveraged to enhance medical education in the Arab world. One of these is the accessibility of digital platforms and technology, which can facilitate communication, collaboration, creativity, and access to information (Senbekov et al., 2020). The COVID-19 epidemic accelerated the use of online education, which enhanced the effectiveness and caliber of medical practice and education. However, ensuring that these technologies are applied properly, morally, and appropriately is crucial (Eltaiba, Hosseini, & Okoye, 2025).

2.11 Factors Influencing Comprehension and Usage of Medical Phrasal Verbs

In English language acquisition, verbs are more important than other speech components in forming sentences from early childhood to the present (Albaqami, 2021). They are also complex and difficult to understand. On the one hand, their meanings, tenses, structures, usages, and exceptions may frustrate students, but on the other hand, they stimulate curiosity and interest. Phrasal verbs unconsciously attract attention (El-Dakhs, Sonbul, & Alwazzan, 2022). Using basic medical terms in everyday speech has become increasingly challenging for Arabic-speaking medical students. Most Arab students can only understand the meaning of a single-word verb. Conversely, they struggle to learn and rarely deduce the meaning of phrasal verbs (Haugh & Takeuchi, 2022).

Specialized disciplines like medicine depend on a different linguistic structure, even though phrasal verbs are essential in common English communication because they combine verbs with prepositions or adverbs to produce new meanings. Most of the medical vocabulary has Greek and Latin origins, creating exact and consistent phrases that guarantee understanding in a variety of global contexts. Medical terms follow rigid morphological patterns, which makes them less intuitive for learners but more predictable than phrasal verbs, which are fluid and idiomatic (Tadayonifar, 2024). This distinction draws attention to the differences between discipline-specific

vocabulary and general language use, highlighting the significance of comprehending word construction in various situations. Although phrasal verbs and idioms demand more time and effort, medical and nursing students can learn to translate or apply medical language with practice. For instance, compare “The patient is becoming cognizant again” with “The patient is coming around” or “Did you have any expectorations?” with “Have you coughed up anything?” (Sonbul et al., 2020).

Medical education in the Arab world is going through a crucial developmental period that will require cooperation from all parties. Numerous parties have proposed and implemented ways to address the inadequate medical education infrastructure and resources in the Arab world (Abu-Jeyyab & Alrosan, 2023; Cura, 2023). These include increased government and private investment in medical schools, hospitals, clinics, laboratories, libraries, and research facilities. Another strategy is to improve cooperation and coordination between medical schools, health authorities, professional associations, and international organizations to share curricula, standards, best practices, instructors, and students (Abu-Jeyyab & Alrosan, 2023).

2.12 Teaching and Learning Strategies for Medical Phrasal Verbs

Focusing on contextual understanding, grouping verbs according to meaning and body systems, employing visual aids, integrating real-life medical scenarios, conducting interactive exercises like games and quizzes, and practicing with actual medical texts and dialogues are all important ways to teach and learn medical phrasal verbs (Alhujaylan, 2025; Bin-Hady, 2023). The more often students practice using structured word exercises, the more comfortable they will be using phrasal verbs. Accordingly, the more they know about phrasal verbs, the more likely they will get the correct response. Furthermore, because everyone has a strong propensity to use a word's definition immediately without giving other definitions much thought, using a dictionary is essential and can help students improve. Without this practice, students' language skills may deteriorate, impeding their overall learning. Therefore, to give the base verbs a different meaning, the learners should be constantly exposed to prepositions or adverbs that are coupled with verbs. Furthermore, improving dictionary skills aids all students in improving their language proficiency as well as their understanding of phrasal verbs (El-Dakhs et al., 2022).

Handling phrasal verbs can be challenging, and paying close attention to the form is crucial. Working with phrasal verbs is made considerably simpler for teachers and students when they are added to the target language on the subject, placed in the proper context, and treated like any other vocabulary.

2.13 Interrelation Between EFL, Phrasal Verbs, and the Medical Arabic Students

Phrasal verbs, Arabic-speaking medical students, and EFL interact in a complicated way (Kachru, 1985). Learning phrasal verbs presents unique difficulties for EFL students, especially those pursuing careers in medicine (Bolton, 2008). It is widely known that people unfamiliar with speaking English find it very difficult to master phrasal verbs (Lewis, 1997). When learning English as a foreign language, Arabic medical students face numerous challenges, including the meaning of medical terminology, complicated grammatical structures, and particular idioms for specific cultures (Aldahesh, 2009). This presents another layer of complexity in mastering phrasal verbs, particularly in medical contexts (McDonough, Shaw, & Masuhara, 2013). Arabic students in the medical field may face comprehension and utilization errors because of lingual difficulties with phrasal verbs, such as their different meanings and usage depending on context (Hinkel, 2006).

Moreover, cultural variability in medical applications can prevent Arabic medical students from feeling comfortable with new cultural backgrounds, conversational expressions, and medical phrases (Hofstede, 2001). Medical students need to be proficient and have strong competency in speaking English. They must have a command of phrasal verbs to succeed in their studies and future jobs and to interact effectively with patients, colleagues, and other workers (Bachman, 1990). These specific hurdles and needs must be taken into account when teaching EFL to Arabic-speaking medical students. This involves using medical phrases and phrasal verbs specific to medical settings and cases appropriate to the culture. Students should also be given much time to practice speaking English in real-world healthcare settings (Gatbonton, 2008).

The most prevalent medical phrasal verbs are recognized and utilized by Arabic-speaking medical students learning EFL through a complex process affected by several interconnected aspects. The students' lingual and cultural background, level of English language competence, and experience with medical phrases are included as variables in this process (Albaqami, 2021; Haugh & Takeuchi, 2022). Students with a better understanding of the language learn more easily and use phrasal verbs (Sonbul et al., 2020). The understanding of these expressions may be helped or inhibited by other factors, including their awareness of medical phrases and their backgrounds in both Arabic and English, as well as language and cultural differences between Arabic and English, such as the lack of direct Arabic equivalents for many phrasal verbs (Haugh & Takeuchi, 2022). Students' understanding and use of medical phrasal verbs are also greatly affected by the teaching techniques and materials used in EFL classes, where effective interaction and context-related methods outperform rote memorization (Bin-Hady, 2023; Tadayonifar, 2024;). Moreover, students' apprehension and use of medical phrasal verbs might be upgraded by focusing on notes and context-based learning in EFL classes (El-Dakhs et al., 2022). Individual differences in learning styles, motivation, and cognitive capacities have also been found to significantly affect the efficiency of practice and the student's ability to understand and apply medical phrasal verbs correctly in various medical situations (Alhujaylan, 2025). Moreover, the students' understanding and ability to comprehend phrasal verbs are influenced by their past experiences in real medical settings: clinical experience, internships, or social media (Sonbul et al., 2020). Complex interrelations among factors shape how Arabic-speaking EFL medical students learn and gain expertise in using medical phrasal verbs.

Recent research has continued to emphasize the challenges and pedagogical strategies related to phrasal verbs in ESL and EFL contexts. For instance, Tadayonifar's (2024) experimental work with EFL learners revealed that presenting phrasal-verb definitions after reading,

especially alongside typographic enhancement and delayed retrieval practice, significantly improves both immediate and long-term retention compared to pre-reading definitions. Similarly, a study on mobile-assisted language learning demonstrated that a dedicated app for phrasal verbs enhanced learners' acquisition more effectively than traditional methods (Alhujaylan, 2025). It highlighted the growing role of technology in vocabulary development. Corpus-based research has also shown that learner L1 typology influences phrasal-verb usage patterns, suggesting tailored instruction based on the student's first language background (Haugh & Takeuchi, 2022). Moreover, the research identified the most frequent phrasal verbs across spoken and academic registers, offering valuable insights for targeted instruction in medical and academic English (El-Dakhs et al., 2022). These recent studies supported the integration of contextualized input, delayed retrieval, typographic cues, and digital tools into ESL and EFL curricula, affirming the need for immersive and multimodal approaches tailored to specialized fields like medical English.

2.14 Rationale of the Current Study

The study aimed to explore the factors that affect the understanding and usage of frequent medical phrasal verbs by EFL medical students in Saudi Arabia. The purpose of the study was to enhance the abilities of Arabic-speaking medical students to learn and speak English in medical situations. Learning English, especially for medical purposes, is challenging for Arabic-speaking EFL medical students. There are several factors that affect their understanding and use of common medical phrasal verbs (Aldahesh, 2009). The discrepancy between the students' spoken and ethnic experiences and their exposure to medical vocabulary or terminology, as well as their ability to understand, comprehend, and speak the English language are variables that make it hard to comprehend and use medical phrasal verbs (McDonough et al., 2013). Also, the teaching strategies and resources used in EFL classes can strongly affect students' abilities and motivation to learn, comprehend, and use medical phrasal verbs (Gatbonton, 2008). Previous research concluded that when teaching phrasal verbs to EFL learners, both improved interrelations between teachers and students and contextual-based learning can be effective (Hashemi & Gowdasiaei, 2005). It is important to examine the factors that affect Arab EFL medical students' abilities of comprehension, understanding, and implementation of frequent medical phrasal verbs. Despite the amount of literature on English language teaching and learning, especially in medical settings, there is still a gap in the literature on understanding and implementing medical phrasal verbs. Prior research has focused on teaching expanded English pronunciation, vocabulary, and language skills to medical students (Huang, 2004; Chang, 2010). However, researchers have not paid attention to the most challenging part of learning English, phrasal verbs in the medical field for Arab EFL medical students. The current study tried to close this knowledge gap by focusing on those variables that affect the medical students' understanding and use of medical phrasal verbs. However, very little research has been conducted on these linguistic and cultural elements (Kachru, 1992; Canagarajah, 2005) that indicate how well Arab medical students comprehend and use medical phrasal verbs. This study helps identify the gap by focusing on language and cultural factors.

2.15 Methodology

This study employed a correlational predictive research design to explore the factors influencing the comprehension and usage of medical phrasal verbs among Saudi EFL medical students. The study included 289 Saudi EFL medical students from various universities across Saudi Arabia. A self-developed survey was used to assess the cognition of phrasal verbs and the students' perception of the challenges they faced, the support their institutions provided, and their perception of their ability to use these terms. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS, descriptive statistics (e.g., means, standard deviations), and inferential tests such as correlation and regression.

2.16 Tools of the Study

The self-developed tool was reviewed by four experts to ensure its content validity. For further construct validity and reliability, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using AMOS (see Figure 1). The model demonstrated good construct validity, with all observed variables loading significantly on their respective latent constructs. Standardized factor loadings ranged from .52 to 1.00, indicating that the items were strong indicators of their underlying factors. For support, items Q70 to Q74 showed substantial loadings (e.g., Q73 = .96, Q74 = 1.00), suggesting that institutional support was reliably captured. Similarly, Q75 to Q79 represented challenges with strong loadings (e.g., Q78 = .66, Q79 = 1.00), reflecting perceived barriers against using phrasal verbs. Proficiency, measured by Q63, Q64, and Q68, also showed adequate loadings (e.g., Q63 = .57), supporting the internal consistency of the construct. Moreover, the inter-factor correlations were in line with theoretical expectations: support was negatively correlated with challenges ($r = -.47$) and positively associated with proficiency ($r = .40$), whereas challenges had a weak negative correlation with proficiency ($r = -.11$). These results confirm the adequacy of the three-factor measurement model and support the instrument's validity for assessing the constructs in an EFL medical education context.

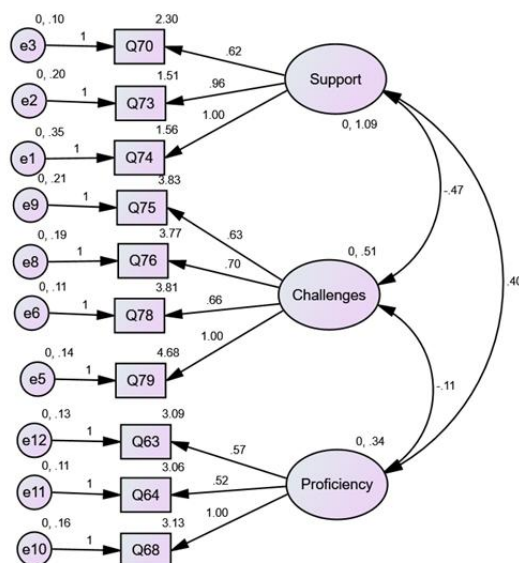


Figure 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Model

2.17 Participants' Demographics

The details of the respondents, including their demographics and behavioral characteristics, can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Description of the Participants (N=289)

		Frequency	Percent
Age of the participants	20 to 25	217	75.1
	26 to 30	70	24.2
	30 to 35	2	.7
	Total	289	100.0
Gender	Male	212	73.6
	Female	76	26.4
	Total	288	100.0
Did you attend phrasal verb lessons?	Yes	242	90.3
	No	26	9.7
	Total	268	100.0
I watch English movies or TV shows.	Never	3	1.0
	Rarely (less than once a month)	55	19.0
	Occasionally (1 to 2 times a month)	108	37.4
	Regularly (1 to 2 hours per week)	110	38.1
	Frequently (daily for 1 to 2 hours)	13	4.5
	Total	289	100.0
My English vocabulary is	Very limited. (I struggle with basic words and phrases.)	11	3.8
	Basic. (I can understand and use simple words and phrases.)	58	20.1
	Intermediate. (I can understand and use everyday vocabulary in familiar contexts.)	121	42.0
	Advanced. (I can understand and use a wide range of vocabulary, including academic and professional terms.)	88	30.6
	Extensive. (I have a strong command of vocabulary and can use complex and specialized terms fluently.)	10	3.5
	Total	288	100.0
Years of studying English	1 to 5	214	74.0
	6 to 10	52	18.0
	11 to 15	20	6.9
	16 to 20	3	1.0
	Total	289	100.0
Time spent in English-speaking country	None (I have never been to an English-speaking country.)	122	42.4
	Less than 1 month	26	9.0
	1 to 3 months	78	27.1
	4 to 6 months	42	14.6
	More than 6 months	20	6.9
	Total	288	100.0
Hours spent reading in English	None. (I do not read in English.)	13	4.5
	Less than 1 hour per week	33	11.4
	1 to 2 hours per week	101	34.9
	Total	147	50.8

	3 to 5 hours per week	90	31.1
	More than 5 hours per week	52	18.0
	Total	289	100.0
Hours spent listening to English	None. (I do not listen to English content.)	5	1.7
	Less than 1 hour per week	33	11.5
	1 to 2 hours per week	77	26.8
	3 to 5 hours per week	99	34.5
	More than 5 hours per week	73	25.4
	Total	287	100.0
Time spent on social networking in English	None. (I do not use social media in English.)	10	3.5
	Less than 1 hour per week	26	9.1
	1 to 2 hours per week	56	19.5
	3 to 5 hours per week	86	30.0
	More than 5 hours per week	109	38.0
	Total	287	100.0

Table 2. Alpha Reliability for All the Scores on Scales of the Study Variables ($N = 289$)

S No	Variables and Assessment	No. of Items	Raw Score	Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)
01	Phrasal verb quiz	50	0 to 50	.964
02	Support for phrasal verbs in medical English	4	4 to 20	.857
03	Challenges in learning and using phrasal verbs in medical English	5	5 to 25	.903
04	Phrasal verb proficiency in medical English	3	3 to 15	.729

3. Results

The goal of the present study was to determine the factors affecting medical students from Saudi Arabia in their study of English as a foreign language. The study also explores the understanding and usage of frequent medical phrasal verbs among Arab medical students. The alpha reliability coefficient was computed for each scale. Descriptive statistics was used to determine the frequency and percentage of the demographic variables. In the second table, the results of the descriptive statistics, including raw scores and alpha reliabilities of the studied variables are presented. Bivariate correlation analysis was used to ascertain the relationship between variables. Regression analysis was used to explore the predictive relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variables.

Table 3. Correlations Among the Scores on Scales of the Study Variables ($N = 289$)

		Total Score	Proficiency
Challenges	r	.660**	-.193**
	r^2	43.56%	3.72%
	p	0	0.001
	N	273	274
Support	r	-.391**	.578**
	r^2	15.29%	33.41%
	p	0.0000	0.0000
	N	274	275
Hours spent watching English movies or TV shows	r	-0.015	.128*
	r^2	0.02%	1.64%
	p	0.8	0.033
	N	278	278
Years of studying English	r	-0.04	.196**
	r^2	0.16%	3.84%
	p	0.508	0.001
	N	278	278
Time spent in an English-speaking country	r	.125*	-0.003
	r^2	1.56%	0.00%
	p	0.038	0.955
	N	278	278
Hours spent reading in English	r	.323**	-0.014
	r^2	10.43%	0.02%
	p	0	0.814
	N	278	278
Hours spent listening to English	r	.378**	-0.024
	r^2	14.29%	0.06%
	p	0	0.693
	N	276	276
Time spent on social networking in English	r	.409**	-0.085
	r^2	16.73%	0.72%
	p	0	0.158
	N	277	277

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 illustrates the relationships between various variables (e.g., *challenges*, *support*, *Time spent in an English-speaking country*) and the total score in the phrasal verb quiz and proficiency in using medical phrasal verbs. There was a strong positive correlation between *challenges* and *total score* ($r = 0.660$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that participants who faced more challenges also reported higher scores. This counterintuitive relationship could suggest that greater awareness of challenges correlates with focused learning. A weak negative correlation occurred ($r = -0.193$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that *challenges* slightly hindered *proficiency* in the use of phrasal verbs. *Support* was negatively correlated with *total score* ($r = -0.391$, $p < 0.01$), meaning that higher perceived support was associated with lower total scores. A strong positive correlation ($r = 0.578$, $p < 0.01$) indicated that better support improved proficiency in using phrasal verbs. A weak positive correlation ($r = 0.128$, $p < 0.05$) suggested that watching English media occasionally contributed to improved proficiency. A weak positive correlation ($r = 0.196$, $p < 0.01$) suggested that more years of English study moderately improved proficiency. A weak positive correlation ($r = 0.125$, $p < 0.05$) indicated that more time spent in English-speaking countries slightly improved scores. A moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.323$, $p < 0.01$) indicated that reading in English significantly improved scores.

An unexpected finding was the strong positive correlation between *challenges* and *total score* ($r = .660$), which appears counterintuitive given that *challenges* were negatively correlated with *proficiency* ($r = -.193$). One possible explanation is that students who are more engaged and aware of their learning process—especially those with higher academic motivation—may have reported more challenges not because they were less proficient, but because they were more reflective and self-critical of their English language usage in academic contexts.

A moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.378$, $p < 0.01$) suggested that *listening to English* positively affected scores. A moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.409$, $p < 0.01$) highlighted the beneficial impact of engaging in English-based social networking on scores.

Table 4. Regression Analysis of the Study Variables ($N = 289$)

Regression							
Variables		B	SE	β	p	R ²	F
Constant	DV Total Score in Phrasal verb in English	4.992	2.456		.043		
<i>Challenges</i>		1.615	.126	.603	.000	.502	133.832
<i>Time spent on social networking in English</i>		1.429	.330	.204	.000		

The regression analysis explores the predictive relationship between the independent variables (*challenges* and *time spent on social networking in English*) and the dependent variable (*total score* of the phrasal verb quiz). The constant value ($B = 4.992$, $SE = 2.456$) represents the expected total score on the phrasal verb quiz when the independent variables are held at zero. The nonstandardized coefficient (B): 1.615 indicates that for each unit increase in *challenges*, the *total score* increased by 1.615 units, holding other variables constant. The standardized coefficient (β): 0.603 showed a strong positive relationship between *challenges* and *total score*. The relationship is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Although challenges are usually seen as barriers, in this context, they appear to have motivated students to perform better in the phrasal verb quiz, possibly by encouraging focused learning or increased effort. The nonstandardized coefficient (B): 1.429 indicated that for every unit increase in *time spent on social networking in English*, *total score* increased by 1.429 units, holding other variables constant. The standardized coefficient (β): 0.204 reflected a moderate positive relationship between social networking time and quiz scores. The relationship was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Increased engagement with English content on social networking platforms contributed to improved performance in phrasal verb comprehension, likely due to exposure to authentic language usage. $R^2 = 0.502$ indicated that 50.2% of the variance in the total score can be explained by the independent variables (*challenges* and *time spent on social networking in English*).

4. Discussion

The outcomes of the current study align with previous research on the hurdles and techniques related to the acquisition of phrasal verbs by EFL students, especially in specialized professions such as medicine. This discussion presents the results of relevant studies, focusing on the implications for learning and teaching. Omidian et al. (2019) demonstrated a strong positive association between time spent in a social community in English and phrasal verb competency, strengthening the importance of actual exposure. Informal language interaction through platforms like social media allows learners to experience phrasal verbs in actual circumstances, thereby increasing their understanding and utilization. These outcomes align with Krashen's input hypothesis, which focuses on the importance of understandable input for acquiring language (Swain, 1995). This is similar to research that explored reading and listening in English as important factors

that lead toward competency. This study also confirms the findings of Gatbonton (2008), who claimed that experiences with authentic materials, such as medical contexts and podcasts, give students examples of phrasal verbs, allowing them to assign and use them accurately. Moreover, McCarthy and O'Dell (2005) also supported the outcomes of this study, suggesting that practicing continuously enhances learners' acquaintance with phrasal verbs.

Students experienced hurdles, such as problems in understanding the difference between formal and informal phrasal verbs. This was similar to the results of Hinkel (2006), who determined that the idiomatic nature of phrasal verbs makes them difficult to master. Moreover, Hamza (2018) highlighted that the lack of focus on contextualized teaching techniques in medical English curricula created these hurdles. This was a concern that was highlighted in the participants' responses.

Remarkably, a weaker relationship was found between traditional factors such as years of studying English or time spent in an English-speaking country and competency in speaking English. This confirms Lewis's (1997) conclusion. He found that being an expert and possessing experience relevant to the target are less helpful for gaining expertise in critical linguistic features like phrasal verbs than general language exposure. This suggests the need for the application of purposive planned teaching methods tailored to the defined language and professional requirements of medical students. The study's findings also aligned with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which suggested the value of association and support in language learning (1978). Through meaningful engagement and collaborative learning, different activities such as role-playing and clinical discussions can help students learn these expressions or phrasal verbs. The output hypothesis (Swain, 1995) also supported the idea that different tasks, including the active use of phrasal verbs in case presentations or patient consultations, will help students learn and use phrasal verbs.

5. Conclusion

This study highlighted the significance of different strategies, including targeted and contextually relevant strategies that integrate the development of teaching phrasal verbs into programs for Arab medical students. The findings suggest an interactive and practical activity-based curriculum. Moreover, motivating students to use English in authentic contexts, such as looking for medical documents, listening to medical discussions, and engaging in social networking platforms, can significantly increase their understanding and usage of phrasal verbs.

The findings of this study contribute to applied linguistics and teaching EFL by providing data-driven insights into the acquisition, difficulty, and pedagogical practice of phrasal verbs in medical English instruction. The findings have practical applications in curriculum development, instructional strategies, and digital language learning integration. By addressing linguistic, cognitive, and pedagogical barriers, this study lays the groundwork for enhanced teaching methodologies in English for a specific purpose, ultimately improving communication competency in medical English for Arabic-speaking EFL learners.

The study recommends long-term studies to track the progression of medical students' proficiency in phrasal verbs over time and to identify factors contributing to sustained improvement.

With a focus on investigating the impact of different instructional methods (e.g., gamification, flipped classrooms, AI-assisted learning) on medical students' ability to acquire and use medical phrasal verbs, further research may be conducted to explore the benefits of immersive learning approaches, such as virtual simulations, role-playing, and real-world case studies, to enhance EFL medical students' English proficiency.

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Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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