

## Research Paper

# An Examination of Video Materials to Endure the Hurdles of Phrasal Verbs: A Mixed-Methods Study

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## Abstract

English Phrasal Verbs (PVs), despite their frequency and indispensability, are notoriously known to be daunting for both EFL learners and teachers. Numerous researchers have tried to resolve this conundrum; however, a definite solution to the dilemma of input type in teaching them is yet to emerge. To address the issue, this mixed-methods study investigated the instructional potential of video input in two forms of monologues and sitcoms in teaching PVs. A test of PVs with two parallel versions was custom-made, validated, and employed as the pre-test and post-test. In the quantitative phase, 82 teenage English learners in one control group and two experimental groups were exposed to textual and video input for eight weeks after taking a proficiency test and the pre-test. Upon the post-test, the results of ANCOVA revealed that the monologue group enjoyed a significantly higher gain during the treatment period, regardless of their proficiency level. For the qualitative phase, an attitude study was conducted via focus group interviews and teacher's diary. The thematic analysis of the qualitative data indicated a more welcoming attitude towards sitcoms due to a reportedly higher motivational effect. In general, the results confirm the practicality, applicability, and efficiency of video materials in teaching PVs. It was also concluded that although the entertaining aspects of tasks can lubricate their integration into classroom activities, other contributing factors including instructional value and active attention to the form must not be underestimated in the instruction of PVs.

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## 1 Introduction

Phrasal Verbs (PVs) occur in English rather frequently and prolifically. Gardner and Davies (2007) claimed that “learners will encounter, on average, one [PV] in every 150 words of English they are exposed to” (p. 347). However, teaching idiomatic or even non-idiomatic combinations of multiple words making up phrases and expressions, have always presented serious challenges in English language teaching (ELT). Acquiring PVs has been a “traditional and recurring nightmare for all learners of English” (Littlemore & Low, 2006, p. 158). In fact, it has been indicated that even advanced learners of English demonstrate difficulty in mastering the accurate use of PVs and, by avoiding them, resort to single-word verbs in many cases where native speakers would more commonly use phrasal equivalences (Neagu, 2007; Rudzka-Ostyn, 2003). Therefore, proper employment of PVs has been repeatedly taken as a measure of language mastery since the confusion caused by PVs has been demonstrated to block learners’ path towards proficiency (Barekat & Baniasad, 2014; Boers, 2000; Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Cornell, 1985; Kurtyka, 2001; Littlemore & Low, 2006; Yasuda, 2010).

This quandary does not limit itself to learners. Abdul Rahman and Zeher Abid (2014) reported that the use of PVs was “rare or non-existent” in the written discourse of EFL student-teachers, as compared to native speakers. Alangari, Jaworska, and Laws (2020) have shown that PVs appear less frequently and efficiently in academic writings of non-native scholars in linguistics, as compared to a broader corpus. Proficiency level, learning context, task type, PV type, frequency, semantic opacity, degree of

idiomaticity, and learners’ exposure to such constructions have been listed as variables contributing to the arduousness of PVs in instruction (Becker, 2014; Liao & Fukuya, 2004; Sonbul, El-Dakhs, & Al-Otaibi, 2020). Reluctance and stumbles over PVs can make a non-native speaker’s language sound unnatural and non-idiomatic (Garnier & Schmitt, 2015; Zhang & Wen, 2019).

Given the significance of PVs in learning English, numerous studies have been conducted to study their nature as well as instructional potential and possibilities. However, despite the investigations made of the acquisition and instruction of these vocabulary sequences, the controversy persists regarding the efficacy, applicability, and practicality of the input modalities best serving the purpose of instruction. The need for up-to-date studies has been more emphatically felt since the introduction of technological advancements in educational contexts. Therefore, nowadays, it is unprecedentedly urgent to offer L2 instructors more progressive yet practical suggestions for teaching PVs and equip learners with more autonomous and self-sufficient ways of learning, leading both groups to a more independence-oriented interpretation of education. Moreover, the literature that currently exists on the role of input type in teaching PVs is not unequivocally unanimous in its findings as some have favoured more traditional approaches such as extensive reading of texts (e.g. Bishop, 2004; Wyss, 2002) while others have encouraged the integration of technology such as videos (e.g. Bal-Gezegin, 2014; Washang, 2014). Furthermore, as these divergent findings might also imply, it is quite probable that learners with varying levels of language proficiency (e.g. Liao & Fukuya, 2004;

Zhang & Wen, 2019), learning styles, or age ranges (e.g. Arnon & Christiansen, 2017) may unevenly benefit from varying modes of instruction. Finally, it has been indicated that the existing research results have not been operationally transferred to classroom instruction and have not been efficiently utilized to inform textbook and materials development (Jahedi & Mukundan, 2015). This highlights the necessity of more studies on a variety of learners including various age groups in different contexts.

A review of the literature on the instruction of PVs, as the one following this brief introduction, explains why it is still important to study the potential of videos for this purpose despite the frequency of published research on PVs in general. It is also argued that, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no previous study has examined the possible role of proficiency level as a mediator in the efficiency of video materials for teaching PVs to teenage learners. Therefore, the present mixed-methods study adopted a quasi-experimental approach in its quantitative phase to juxtapose texts and videos in the form of monologues and sitcoms in their efficiency to teach PVs. However, to probe the issue more deeply, an explanatory qualitative phase was integrated to grasp an idea of micro-processes of learning that affect teachers and learners. For this purpose, the following research questions were posed:

- (1) Do text, monologue, and sitcom input modalities have significantly different effects on teenage EFL learners' acquisition of PVs?
- (2) Does level of language proficiency significantly interact with the effect of input modalities on teenage EFL learners' acquisition of PVs?

- (3) What are teenage learners' attitudes towards the use of texts, monologues, and sitcoms to teach PVs in an EFL class?

The results of the present study were expected to appeal to all L2 instructors and learners who have experienced similar confusions and provide prognostic recommendations to syllabus designers, curriculum developers, and administrators by addressing these questions.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Phrasal Verbs (PVs)

Traditionally described as “a verb + particle combination that functions as a single verb, both parts giving up meaning to form a new lexical item” (Darwin & Gray, 1999, p. 65), PVs are difficult to be acquired, yet, crucially significant in language learning process. “Phrasal verbs are made up of two components: a verb and a particle which is typically homonymous with an adverb or a preposition” (Thim, 2012, p. 10). Such a definition does not imply any hurdle per se. However, the complicacy often emerges with the incongruency between the individual meaning of each component and their combined connotation since “the union of two elements of the compound often gives rise to new non-compositional forms outwardly similar to idioms, in which the meaning of the individual elements a priori does not relate to the sense of the compound” (Rodríguez-Puente, 2019, p. 1). Additionally, proper employment of PVs in accordance with contextual factors, and the decision between PVs and their one-word alternatives has been shown to be

challenging for non-native speakers (Chan & Liou, 2005; Neagu, 2007).

Therefore, teachers and learners, as well as researchers have paid particular attention to PVs trying to overcome this difficulty. If treated as items of vocabulary, PVs become increasingly important in the light of the fact that learners' overall lexical repertoire directly contributes to their language comprehension and production. For example, McCarthy (1990) claims that regardless of learners' grammatical and phonological competence, limited vocabulary knowledge can impede meaningful communication. Uchihaara and Saitob (2016) found a positive correlation between learners' knowledge of productive vocabulary and their fluency in spontaneous oral tasks. Similarly, Dabbagh and Janebi Enayat (2019) noted the relationship between vocabulary breadth and depth and learners' writing performance.

## 2.2 Teaching Phrasal Verbs (PVs)

Regarding the instruction of PVs, sources as early as Coles and Lord (1976) as well as O'Connell (1987) focused on the complexities of teaching PVs, mainly through texts, the main medium of the day. Thereafter, several researchers have focused on the instruction of vocabulary sequences such as PVs through printed materials. For instance, Nagy, Herman, and Anderson (1985) introduced the incidental acquisition hypothesis proposing that vocabulary learning in general, and by comparison, acquisition of PVs, often occurs in meaningful contexts. Moreover, Pitts, White, and Krashen (1989) as well as Bishop (2004) focused on the instruction of such lexical items through reading. The body of literature in this

regard, including the abovementioned pioneering studies, found positive effects for reading printed textual materials on the acquisition of vocabulary items in general and PVs in particular. Other studies showed that learners' extended exposure to vocabulary can lead to internalization of those items (e.g. Ozturk, 2016; Pauwels, 2018).

However, as the new century approached, traditional methods of instruction began to lose favour and, with the highlighted role of meaningful communication and authentic interaction, the move towards modern contextualized language instruction seemed inevitable for teaching PVs. For instance, Wyss (2002) suggested prolonged exposure to a variety of authentic texts embedding overflowing amounts of PVs. Therefore, the next section is going to deal with the role of input modalities in the instruction of PVs.

## 2.3 Input Modalities in Teaching Vocabulary and PVs

Studies exclusively focusing on the role of input in instruction of PVs are limited; yet, several have tried out a variety of input modalities in teaching vocabulary items in general. As the examples in the previous section well indicated, traditionally, textual input has been the most popular modality in instructed language learning, including teaching vocabulary. This was especially the case back in the time when technological advancements had not yet introduced the current variety to the domain of education. This popularity, however, does not seem to have completely fallen out of fashion even after recent technological revolutions. For example, Nation (2015) argues for the application of extensive reading in teaching vocabulary and offers



suggestions to optimally integrate this strategy in vocabulary instruction. Other studies have also confirmed the role of reading and extensive reading in building learners' vocabulary (e.g. Nation, 2014; Nation & Wang, 1999; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006; Pulido, 2004; Webb, 2005).

Specifically, regarding the PVs, Hare (2010) concluded that the acquisition of PVs can be facilitated through an average of eight incidental exposures while reading. Pellicer-Sánchez (2016), employing an eye-tracking methodology to scrutinize the incidental acquisition of new words while reading, confirmed that eight encounters with a new word can lead to the correct recognition of that word in 86% of cases. Bridging these single-modality methodologies and multi-modal instruction, Brown, Waring, and Donkaewbua (2008) focused on the role of reading, reading while listening, and listening to stories in incidental acquisition of lexical sequences. They concluded that although words can be incidentally learned in all these three contexts, mere exposure without proper recurrence did not prove to be a very successful method especially in case of listening and in the long run.

Multimedia and audio-visual materials, with or without edutainment intentions, have never relinquished their contributory role to language teaching since their introduction to this field. Auditory input has long been a popular medium in language learning, including vocabulary instruction. For instance, similar to Brown et al.'s (2008) findings reported earlier, it has been found that listening to stories alone can lead to successful acquisition of foreign language vocabulary items (e.g. Elley, 1989; Mason, 2004; Mason et al., 2009) at noticeable rates as high as .17 words per minute (Mason & Krashen,

2018). Teng (2018) also found advantages for reading-while-listening modality over reading-only approaches in incidental vocabulary acquisition. Interestingly, recent propositions also include teaching vocabulary through drama and drama techniques (e.g. Kalogirou, Beauchamp, & Whyte, 2019).

A third popular modality in vocabulary instruction is the use of videos. Some studies in this regard have investigated the impact of videos on word retention and the vocabulary building process (Washang, 2014) while others have compared multiple modalities, including videos and audios (e.g. Bal-Gezegin, 2014). As the present study, some have focused on the efficiency of sitcoms on vocabulary acquisition (e.g. Kohútová, 2011). These findings have collectively suggested positive outcomes for integrating videos in the instruction of vocabulary items. Furthermore, Kohútová (2011) introduced sitcom series as very appropriate tools for classroom use since the duration of most episodes are optimally short for the limited class time and this type of series boosts learners' confidence and their ability in recognizing vocabulary items. In another study, Peters and Webb (2018) investigated the role of viewing television on incidental vocabulary learning. They concluded that watching TV can enhance vocabulary learning at both levels of meaning recognition and meaning recall depending on the frequency of occurrence, cognateness, and learners' prior knowledge. Puimège and Peters (2019) also found similar results on the role of viewing TV in incidental vocabulary acquisition.

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) also attracted the attention of vocabulary researchers as early as the 2000s. Laufer and Hill (2000) as well as Peters (2007) examined the merits of using

online dictionaries in vocabulary learning. In another study, Solak and Cakir (2015) found out that designing materials with Augmented Reality (AR) technology can boost EFL learners' motivation to acquire English vocabulary. Katwibun (2014) also found a positive effect for the use of interactive whiteboards on students' vocabulary knowledge, participation and attitude. Comparing the effects of computer-mediated multimedia and blackboard instruction, Rusanganwa (2013) demonstrated the superiority of CALL-driven methods over traditional approaches in teaching vocabulary to ESP learners. Also, Milton, Jonsen, Hirst, & Lindenburn (2012) explored the potentiality of 3D online environments for vocabulary uptake. In a closely related vein, video games have also been auspiciously tested in vocabulary development (e.g. Janebi Enayat & Haghghatpasand, 2019).

A number of studies have also compared the effects of different input modalities on vocabulary learning and retention. Among these, Alhamami (2016) drew a comparison between audio, images, and videos without sound and found that input accompanied by images was the most useful in the retention of L1 equivalents for English vocabulary items.

Aside from these general studies on vocabulary instruction, a number of other studies have exclusively directed their attention to teaching and learning PVs. For instance, Ghabanchi and Goudarzi (2012) focused on learners' avoidance strategy in using PVs. Sadri (2012) investigated traditional methods of instruction by mainly listing PVs in alphabetical order with all possible particles, or a particle with all possible verbs. Mohammadi and Mirdehghan (2014) attempted to teach PVs through blended learning, while Badri

Ahmadi and Panahandeh (2016) studied the influence of input-based and output-based teaching methods on the PVs acquisition. Nassaji and Tian (2010) compared individual and collaborative output tasks in terms of PV development and found both equally effective. In a more recent study, Teng (2020) compared the effects of individual, pair, and group work with cloze, editing, and writing tasks on the improvement of PV knowledge and concluded that collaboratively accomplishing tasks with maximum productivity, i.e. writing tasks, yielded the best results. In another recent attempt to teach PVs through entertainment, Akbary, Shahriari and Hosseini Fatemi (2018) successfully utilised song lyrics as instruction materials. Chou (2019) also indicated the efficacy of task-supported language teaching in developing learners' knowledge of PVs, even though memorisation techniques proved to be the best in enhancing students' test performance.

Most specifically, a number of studies have focused on the role of videos in teaching PVs. For example, Shahriari, Akbary, and Omidian (2019) found both reading and watching movies/TV efficient in the development of receptive and productive knowledge of PVs. Daly Eoin (2015) employed a popular sitcom series, *The Simpsons*, to teach PVs and it was concluded that learners exposed to animated videos were better capable of memorizing the meaning of PVs when compared to traditional paper-based instruction. However, Daly Eoin exclusively focused on adult learners at the upper-intermediate level of proficiency. Similarly, Spring (2019) tried out the potential of short animated movies in teaching PVs and found positive effects for integrating videos in educational tasks.

SoHee (2019) also realized that although a combination of images with texts showed superior outcomes on an immediate post-test, videos led to more significant improvements in learners' retention of PVs in the long run. The findings from SoHee emphasized the value of contextualization and the role of media in fostering learners' autonomy when it comes to teaching PVs.

As this brief literature review unravels, despite the abundance of studies on the nature and instruction of PVs, very few have focused on the role of teaching materials in the instruction of PVs and yet fewer have compared input modalities for an optimized instruction of these word sequences to different proficiency levels. Jahedi and Mukundan (2015) also made similar observations and asserted that the majority of literature on PVs falls within only four categories: analysis of syntactic and semantic properties of PVs, comparative analysis of non-native learners on avoidance of PVs, analysis of ESL learner corpora and its comparison with native speaker corpora, and corpus-based analysis of PVs in language teaching materials. Therefore, this study aimed at filling this gap by examining the efficiency of video materials in the form of monologues and sitcoms in teaching PVs to different proficiency levels of teenage learners.

## 3 Method

### 3.1 Participants

The present mixed-methods study targeted 82 Iranian teenage EFL learners in six intact classes of three pre-intermediate and three intermediate levels. These learners were assigned to one control group and two experimental groups covering the three input modalities of text, sitcom, and monologue in a balanced manner based on their

proficiency levels. The counterbalance was also ensured by administrating the Energy Placement Test prior to the study. Finally, the three groups were formed as the following: Text and Monologue groups with a total of 27 students in each and Sitcom group with 28 participants.

### 3.2 Instrumentation

Two quantitative and two qualitative instruments were employed in the present study for the purpose of data collection along with the materials used for instructional purposes in each class. These instruments are briefly introduced here, while, to avoid redundancy, more details are provided in the Procedure Section below, where the development and validation procedure of the PV tests is described.

Energy Placement Test (Parsons, 2004) was used at the very beginning of the study for a two-fold purpose: first, to ensure the counterbalance of the groups in a way that despite their two different levels, the three research groups did not display significant difference in the overall proficiency balance; second, to record each individual's entry proficiency to take the mediating effect of this variable into account for addressing the second research question. The test, published by Longman publication, covered all the proficiency levels (elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, and advance). It included 60 multiple-choice questions which tested a number of major grammatical points of English. As recommended by the developer, a 30-minute time limit was set for the students to do the tests.

As for the second quantitative instrument, a test of PVs, custom-made to cover the targeted PVs during the treatment, was developed, piloted, and

checked for reliability and validity by the researchers. While the format of the test was inspired by a number of commercially available tests of vocabulary, it tried to target both receptive and productive knowledge of PVs by integrating several subsections of *pictorial matching*, *fill in the blanks*, *cloze test*, etc. in a total of 50 items. The test was developed in two parallel versions reserved as the pre-test and post-test.

In the qualitative phase of this study, two instruments were utilised to record the learners' attitudes towards experimental conditions. First, the teacher kept a journal with a focus on the feedback offered by the students after the treatment in each session. Second, a semi-structured interview comprising six simple questions was developed to be used for eliciting students' attitudes and comments in the form of a focus group on the last session of the class. The semi-structured format was selected to ensure the freedom of the discussion to grow and evolve during the course of the interview.

Finally, the teaching materials for the three research conditions were selected from reading passages in Interchange Series, episodes from the popular American sitcom series, Friends, and lectures from well-known TED Talks accordingly. A total of eight passages, and eight episodes from each of these series were finally chosen to be covered during two months of instruction. The criteria for selection here included the level of language difficulty, appropriacy and appeal of the content for teenagers, time manageability, and abundance of the most frequent PVs in English according to Gardner and Davies's (2007) list.

### 3.3 Data Collection Procedure

At the first stage of the study, the instructional materials for the text, sitcom, and monologue groups were selected as described above. The transcriptions of the primarily selected episodes of the sitcom and TED Talk, available in the form of subtitle files, were analysed for the frequency of the most common English PVs according to Gardner and Davies's (2007)'s list. Episodes with less satisfying frequency of desired PVs were replaced with new ones and the same procedure was reiterated. Finally, a list of the PVs appearing in all the selected videos, classified according to each episode, was created to be used both in supplementary activities as well as the pre- and post-tests. The list, made up of a total of 50 PVs was cross-checked with the content of the reading passages. As needed, some passages were replaced with new ones or underwent modifications to accommodate all the 50 PVs targeted for this study. Three random students from all six classes were exposed to randomly selected materials from this repertoire to check the comprehensibility, readability, and appeal of their content. Students' positive feedback during this piloting phase confirmed the selections.

The finalized list of 50 frequent PVs was then used to develop the test of PV retention in two parallel forms as described in the previous section. To ensure the reliability, validity, and feasibility of the tests, along with the functionality of its items, both versions were piloted with 19 students of similar proficiency levels twice. After the first pilot run, reliability indices and item statistics, including item facility (IF) and item discrimination (ID) were computed. Accordingly, deviant items with item IFs



above .8 and below .3 as well as the items with IDs lower than .2 were either discarded or revised. The analysis of the second pilot administration confirmed the internal consistency of both versions with alpha values of .67 and .77 which were of a rather moderate magnitude and in an acceptable range given the length of the tests and the rather small sample size. Also, IFs and IDs of all items were once more checked and all items were found to demonstrate reasonable statistics. Finally, a correlational analysis was run to ensure whether the two forms were indeed parallel, which resulted in an acceptable Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient of .6, which was a rather desirable value due to the small sample size. The two versions were then randomly assigned to the pre-test and post-test. Oral comprehension and discussion class activities, with a focus on the targeted PVs, were also designed for both pre- and post-task stages to ensure the students' engagement during the implementation of the materials.

At the onset of the treatment, one of the three pre-intermediate and one of the three intermediate classes were randomly assigned to each of the research conditions: one control group (text) and two experimental groups (sitcom and monologue). Energy Placement test was given to all participants and the results of ANOVA indicated no significant difference between the three groups in terms of proficiency and, hence, confirmed the counter-balance of the cohort. Upon the administration of the proficiency test and the pre-test, the treatment period began lasting eight weeks. The classes met twice a week and during the treatment, the students in the three groups were exposed to their designated materials within a controlled and balanced time interval

every other session. The planned class activities, with a focus on the PVs appearing in the materials every session, were carried out to boost students' engagement. Moreover, the instructor of the classes, as one of the researchers of the present study, was required to keep a diary of class events recording the feedback received from each class, emphasising moments of joy, enthusiasm, boredom, and frustration.

Finally, after two months of instruction, the post-test was administered. Simultaneously, the semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted with all three groups. The focus group format was opted for its potential to create a more liberal opportunity for willing students to express their opinions; however, the instructor tried to engage all students and elicit responses from more reclusive ones as well. The content of all questions focused on the merits and demerits of the three instructional approaches and tried to delve into the experiences of individuals in these classes by eliciting their feedback towards the respective approaches. All focus group sessions were audio-recorded and later transcribed for thematic analysis.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

In the quantitative phase of the study, one-way ANOVA was used to establish the counter-balance of the three groups on their proficiency level and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to compare their achievement on the post-test while taking the results of the pre-test into account as the covariate. Students' scores on the proficiency test were also taken into account as the mediating variable. As for the qualitative phase of the study, inductive thematic analysis was used in order to probe the data from interviews and the instructor's diary. The

results will be presented and discussed in the following sections.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Quantitative Results

The ANOVA based on the results of the Energy test indicated no significant difference between the three groups ( $p > .05$ ). Therefore, it was concluded that the three groups of students recruited in this study were similar and balanced in terms of proficiency prior to the study. After the post-test, the descriptive statistics of the three groups in the cohort for both pre-test and post-test were computed in SPSS. The results indicated an improvement in all groups in terms of their PV mean scores on the post-test compared to the pre-test. To run inferential statistics, after checking the assumptions of parametric tests and ensuring their applicability by means of computing kurtosis and skewness ratios,

ANCOVA was run by taking the results of the pre-test as the covariance and introducing proficiency as a mediating variable at a later stage.

Results of ANCOVA indicated a significant difference between the three groups in terms of their achievement on the post-test [ $F(1,78) = 74.73, p = .000$ ] while adjusting for the pre-test, with a partial eta squared value of .48, suggesting a rather large effect size according to Cohen's (1988) guidelines. This implies that the null hypothesis to the first research question was rejected and there was indeed a difference between the performances of the three groups on the post-test even after adjusting for their differential performances on the pre-test. To locate this difference, a post hoc analysis, in this case Bonferroni test, was run. Table 1 below summarizes the results of this pair-wise comparison.

**Table 1** Pairwise comparisons between three conditions

(I) Groups	(J) Groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.b	95% Confidence Interval for Difference <sup>b</sup>	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Monologue	Sitcom	3.23*	.97	.004	.86	5.61
Sitcom	Text	-.36	.97	1.00	-2.73	2.01
Text	Monologue	-2.87*	.98	.013	-5.27	-.47

Based on estimated marginal means

\*. The mean difference is significant at the level of .05.

b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni.

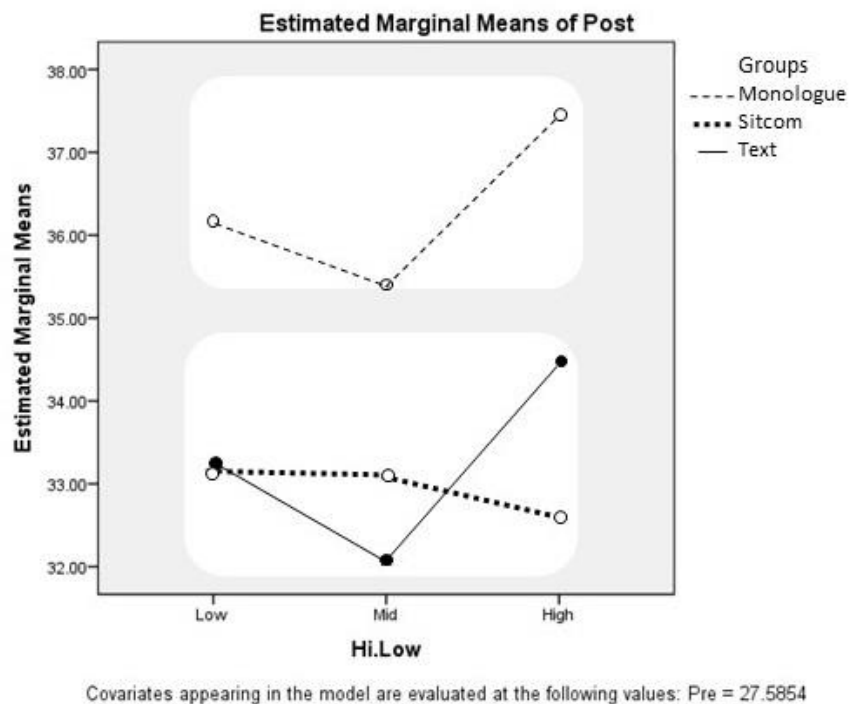
As evident in Table 1, the difference between monologue and sitcom groups ( $p = .004$ ) as well as monologue and text groups ( $p = .013$ ) proved to be significant while a similar difference was not found between the sitcom and text groups ( $p = 1.00$ ). In other words, learners in the monologue group outperformed their

peers in both other groups. It was also shown that the learners in sitcom and text groups did not make significantly different improvements from the pre-test to the post-test and both had fallen behind in mastering the presented PVs when compared to the monologue group. Therefore, the monologue approach was

found to be the most efficient way of instruction for teaching PVs when compared to texts and sitcoms.

To answer the second research question of the study, proficiency was introduced as a mediating variable in the ANCOVA test. It must be reminded that for the purpose of this analysis, students' scores on the proficiency test were taken

into account rather than their predetermined levels of instruction at the institute. The results revealed no significant interaction between the level of language proficiency and input modality on participants' acquisition of PVs [ $F(2,72) = .80, p = .451$ ]. To more clearly demonstrate the nature of these findings, Figure 1 below illustrates the interaction plot between these three conditions.



**Figure 1 Interaction plot, proficiency and experimental conditions**

The interaction plot confirms the output of the ANCOVA test in Table 1 and indicates no significant interaction between the variables. However, as the small sample size of the study might have resulted in an increased type II error, it might be of interest to speculate on possible interactions between proficiency level and research conditions. In all levels of proficiency, monologue method had the highest amount of effect on PV acquisition

of the students; however, it seems that students of high level of language proficiency benefited most and students of mid-level of language proficiency benefited least from this method. In sitcom and text groups, at the low language proficiency, the students benefited almost equally from their methods of treatment; however, at the mid-level of proficiency, the sitcom group students benefited more from the

treatment than those in the text group. Finally, at the high level of language proficiency, students in text groups benefited noticeably more from their treatment than those in sitcom group. Nonetheless, it must be once again reminded that these interaction effects did not prove to be statistically significant; however, they might point towards some possible interaction effects to be further explored in future studies. All in all, these results confirm the null hypothesis to the second research question implying that no matter what proficiency level students came from, the monologue approach was significantly more efficient than the other two approaches and students across a variety of proficiency levels benefitted from this mode of instruction.

## 4.2 Qualitative Results

To delve deeper into the quantitative findings, data from the qualitative phase were analysed for recurring themes to

probe the pros and cons of these approaches as perceived by the learners. For this purpose, inductive thematic analysis was run, first, on the transcribed focus group interviews and, second, on the instructor's diary entries. The semi-structured interview mainly tried to elicit learners' attitudes and their feeling towards their experience. The transcribed interviews were first analysed based on the keywords employed by students in each group to describe their experience in terms of the attributes they assigned to the classroom procedures. For instance, positive adjectives such as *good, enjoyable, interesting, fun*, etc. or their Farsi equivalents were coded as "Efficient" while *boring, dumb, incomprehensible, confusing, difficult*, etc. were categorized as "Inefficient". Other intermediary tokens, including *so-so, not bad, ok, could be better*, etc. were coded as "Neutral". Table 2 below summarizes learners' feedback in each group.

**Table 2 Learners' attitudes**

Conditions	Attitudes	Frequency	Percentage
Texts	Efficient	7	26.92
	Neutral	5	19.23
	Inefficient	14	53.84
Monologue	Efficient	15	55.55
	Neutral	5	18.51
	Inefficient	7	25.92
Sitcom	Efficient	16	61.53
	Neutral	4	15.38
	Inefficient	6	23.07
Total	Efficient	38	48.10
	Neutral	14	17.72
	Inefficient	27	34.17



As evident in Table 2, nearly half of the total comments expressed regarding the experience of students in all three groups were positive (about 48%). On the other hand, about one third (34%) of the attitudes were not very agreeable. Among the three conditions, the sitcom had seemingly attracted the most welcoming reviews (55%) while texts did not end up to be very popular with students and more than half of the comments about them were negative. Therefore, so far, it has

been revealed that sitcoms were the most popular, monologues were also rather popular. However, texts were mostly disdained. In the next step, the reasons expressed by learners for these choices were coded in the transcriptions and while similar comments were clustered together, a pattern of the themes regarding the advantages and disadvantages of each method started to emerge. A gist of these themes is summarized in Table 3 below.

**Table 3 Advantages & disadvantages of the methods from learners' perspective**

Condition	Advantages	Freq.	Disadvantages	Freq.
Texts	Instructive	17	Boring texts	25
	Interesting topics	11	Difficult to follow	22
Monologues	Inspiring	26	Limited in topics	11
	Mentally challenging	23	Boring	7
	Instructive	18		
Sitcoms	Entertaining	26	Long	7
	Instructive	22	Fast in delivery	7
	Informal	8	Outdated	5
			Culturally confusing	3

As indicated in Table 3, texts received more disapproving reviews than positive ones. In fact, some learners found texts partially instructive in improving their different skills, including knowledge of vocabulary and PVs, as well as interesting in terms of the topics, probably because the researchers enjoyed more liberty in choosing the texts from among myriads of possibilities. However, the topics could not seemingly overcome the dullness of the medium and many participants found

reading texts boring. Others suggested that texts were not easy to follow, probably because the medium was not exciting enough for them to evoke their heuristic enthusiasm to overcome the challenges. For instance, one participant commented that:

- *Reading, reading, reading. There were many texts in the course book, it better try other way to learn the PVs [sic].*

Another student remarked:

- *There was no CDs to read the texts loud [sic]. It was difficult for pronounce some words [sic].*

On the other hand, monologues were evaluated as inspiring, mentally challenging, and instructive while some did not approve the range of topics and a few found watching lectures boring. As an example, a learner expressed their interest by asserting that:

- *When you watch the speeches of people like Steve Jobs or Bill Gates, you can see that they had many difficulties in life and one day the difficulties end and you see happy life [sic] and it's very helpful to guide us in our life to bear the difficulties.*

Finally, sitcoms attracted many students in terms of their entertaining nature, instructive aspects, as well as the informal and colloquial language they presented. However, a few negative comments included the length of episodes, their fast rate of delivery, and outdated content—which went back to more than 20 years ago. For instance, one of the more eloquent criticisms in this regard asserted that:

- *I think the movie was very old and boring. They were hard for understand [sic] and they spoke very fast.*

Although part of this comment can be attributed to the nature of the specific series selected for the present study, it is illuminating for teachers who wish to integrate this type of materials into their teaching practices, especially when it

comes to specific formal aspects of language such as PVs. It seems that the faster rate of delivery in authentic materials must be accounted for in any similar endeavours. Also, this experience shows that up-to-date shows and materials can better grab students' attention.

Furthermore, a few students raised concerns regarding the cultural mismatches and the confusions they caused for the class. Some students commented that:

- *Why is it ok for these people to live out of their parent house? My mom will kill me if I am late after school! [sic]*
- *Are all young people so free in other countries? They do what they like and no body controls them!*

Such cultural concerns raised by the learners, though intriguing, seem to be baffling to young learners and might even consume a large portion of their resources, constantly thinking about those differences. Therefore, it might be discussed that, in teaching formal aspects of language, including PVs, where promoting cross-cultural competence is not a pedagogical objective, teachers must be cautious in their choices of video materials and the extent to which they distract students' attention away from targeted objectives.

For the next step, the content of the instructor's diary was coded for themes in terms of how the classroom experience was described after each session. As the teacher had recorded all prominent events and feedback during classes, these encounters were classified under three

major categories: *Satisfying*, *Average*, and *Non-satisfying* experiences. The final tally of the frequencies with which these

categories popped up in the teacher's diary is reflected in Table 4 below.

**Table 4** *The experiences recorded by the instructor*

Condition	Experience	Freq.	Percent
Texts	Satisfying	12	18.18
	Average	24	36.36
	Non-satisfying	30	45.45
Monologue	Satisfying	32	45.71
	Average	22	31.42
	Non-satisfying	16	22.85
Sitcom	Satisfying	44	63.76
	Average	15	21.73
	Non-satisfying	10	14.49
Total	Satisfying	88	42.92
	Average	61	29.75
	Non-satisfying	56	27.31

As obvious in Table 4, the instructor had recorded mostly positive experiences for his sitcom and monologue classes while noticeably fewer agreeable encounters were logged for the texts group. These findings confirm the ones obtained from analysing students' feedback and it can be safely concluded that, all in all, the experience with the sitcom modality was the most favourable while texts did not manage to be received as positively. These findings will be more elaborately discussed in the next section.

## 5 Discussion

The answer to the first research question indicated that the monologues had significantly better effects on the acquisition of the PVs as compared to texts

and sitcoms. Furthermore, as the second research question supplemented these findings, proficiency did not play a role here and students from all sorts of proficiency levels seemed to benefit from instruction through monologues similarly. The qualitative findings of the study partially supported these results as the sitcom and monologue groups both articulated mainly positive attitudes towards their instruction conditions with sitcom group surpassing the other two conditions in this regard. This might initially sound rather contradictory as students directed most of their enthusiasm towards sitcoms. This is while the monologue group yielded the best results. Therefore, it might be argued that although learners' approval might lead to

higher levels of engagement and consequently achievement, excessive focus on the fun aspects of an activity can just be misleading and distracting. Hence, an optimal level of entertainment and fun combined with a didactic and instructional purpose seems to be capable of producing the best results in the long run. In purely authentic tasks, such as watching full sitcom episodes, there is a possibility of students' exceedingly attending to the entertaining aspects of the activity and consign the learning intentions to oblivion. Another possibility supported by the findings of the qualitative phase is that, the higher rates of delivery and cultural references along with cross-cultural differences—or even contradictions—might have obscured participants' comprehension of the sitcom materials and consequently blunted their achievement.

Regarding the literature, the results might contradict the findings of some earlier studies, including Alhamami's (2014), who employed audio, images, and video, and gained more favourable results, in terms of uptake, from image-only input than video input. In another study by Ghabanchi and Goudarzi (2012), it was found that proficiency level might affect learners' use and avoidance of PVs. This is not confirmed by the present because similar effects of instruction were found across all proficiency levels among teenagers.

However, these findings seem to update those from some of the earliest studies on instruction of vocabulary items, including Coles and Lord (1976), Nagy et al. (1985), O'Connell (1987), and Pitts et al. (1989) who found impressive results by implementing texts before the widespread access to technological tools in language classes. This is also true about a number of

more recent studies, including Sadri (2012) who recommended traditional methods of teaching PVs such as creating sorted lists accompanied with connotations and applications.

Furthermore, these results appear to confirm a number of previous findings in the literature, including Bishop (2004), whose experiment with formulaic expressions had already assigned a positive role to more interactive methods of instruction in the retention of such sequences, and Katwibun (2014), who demonstrated the efficiency of newer technologies such as interactive whiteboards in enhancing instruction and provoking positively-motivated attitudes. The results also agree with those of Mohammadi and Mirdehghan (2014), who used blended learning as a progressive alternative to traditional approaches in teaching PVs, and Bal-Gezegin (2014) as well as Washang (2014) who found video materials superior to other types of input including audio-only materials in teaching vocabulary. These findings are also comparable with those of Kohútová (2011) who found a positive effect for sitcom series, particularly *Friends*, in developing students' communicative competence. The findings also seem to be in line with Peters and Webb (2018) and Puimège and Peters (2019), both supporting the role of watching television in incidental vocabulary learning, as well as Milton (2008) who found informal tasks significantly beneficial in developing L2 vocabulary. Akbary et al. (2018) also found positive effects for integrating edutainment in instruction of PVs while Shahriari et al. (2019) suggested very positive outcomes for extensive exposure through reading as well as watching movies/TV in developing learners' receptive and productive knowledge of



PVs. The results are also in line with Daly Eoin (2015) and Spring (2019) who found positive effects for the application of animated videos and sitcoms in teaching PVs, as well as SoHee (2019) who found videos more effective in the long-term retention of PVs. Finally, the results support those of Teng (2018), who indicated the superiority of multimedia materials over text-only in incidental vocabulary development and Teng (2020), who corroborated the effect of more interactive activities on the acquisition of PVs.

## 6 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The present study compared the efficacy of video materials to the traditional text-based input in improving learners' mastery over PVs and found a positive effect for videos, especially in the form of monologues as compared to sitcoms, on the acquisition of these tricky sequences in instructional contexts. It was also found that learners demonstrate more enthusiastic engagement and positive attitudes when it comes to video materials, especially when they contain more fun and relatable content. However, although studies such as Shahriari et al. (2019) prioritised extensive and recurrent exposure over explicit instruction, it can probably be concluded that sheer focus on fun cannot always lead to the most desirable outcomes as this might in fact be distracting to learners. As Milton (2008) timely warned us, although informal tasks can lead to noticeable vocabulary growth, learners' conscious attention and integration of form-focused activities are also crucial requirements. Teng (2018) has also emphasised the role of word exposure frequency and elaborate word processing in incidental vocabulary pick-up. Chou

(2019), who found positive results for task-supported teaching of PVs, also concluded that memorisation activities still play a significant role in improving young learners' test results on PVs. Therefore, all in all, this study supports the use of more up-to-date methodologies in teaching PVs and argues for the integration of meaningful, thought-provoking, and engaging, authentic activities in the instruction of PVs to overcome the challenges associated with teaching them.

Teachers, material developers, teacher trainers, and policy makers can benefit from these findings by realizing that with the advent of technological advances, traditional methods—although probably still the easiest choice—are now judged as simply dated, boring, and obsolete by newer generations who are technologically-conscious digital natives. This can obviously pose challenges for a great portion of language teachers, who are mostly digital immigrants and maybe even daunted and intimidated by the compelling forces of educational technology. However, these findings invite them to rethink their methods, most of which have been inherited from their own teachers, and take chances with at least multimedia input modalities in their instruction by giving serious attention to students' needs and attitudes. One such step could be examining video materials in teaching more obscure aspects of language, including PVs, which seem to lend themselves to instruction best via interactive, meaningful, and engaging content. The results also offer hints in selecting and implementing video materials, which, as illustrated through the qualitative phase of this study, can be a rather tricky endeavour. For this purpose, it is very important to target topics most relevant to learners' interests and

immediate needs considering their age, and to resort to an optimal amount of entertainment so that the main goal of instruction is not lost. It is also crucial to take learners' culture and customs into consideration and refrain from overwhelming them with demanding materials with which students cannot establish a relationship. For this purpose, the best option might seem targeting a variety of modalities, especially inspiring and stimulating monologues and lectures along with well-organized exercises and clear instructions accompanied by occasional integration of less-controlled, more entertaining activities such as watching sitcoms. YouTube and VOD (video on demand) platforms can also serve as a rich source of engaging relevant videos. Therefore, curriculum developers, teachers, and independent learners are all invited to take the potential of these materials into serious consideration.

Similar to all other research endeavours, the present study has some limitations and delimitations. These will be discussed here along with some suggestions for further research. First of all, the present study delimited its material sampling to one type of monologues and series. Future studies might want to

examine other forms and genres of videos and delve deeper into the merits each has to offer. Second, the present study focused on video materials which have been around for several decades. Future projects may set out to try other modalities, particularly the ones benefiting from computer technology and online platforms with their virtually endless options to present. This may include wikis, interactive whiteboards, social networks, podcasts, mobile applications, virtual reality, and augmented reality. Finally, this study delimited its focus on the acquisition of PVs and did not examine their effects on the communicative success of learners. The need is still felt to investigate the role of PVs in the comprehension and production of English as a second language and the personal strategies learners employ to overcome their challenges across different proficiency levels and age groups, while this study was limited to teenage learners.

All in all, teaching PVs seems to be an inevitable nuisance teachers have to deal with and video materials as well as more recent technologies appear to be alluring options currently available to teachers.

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