Cognitive Linguistics, a well-established field of study that views the use of language as a cognitive process, has important theoretical and methodological implications for the teaching of ESL. Its theoretical approach has the potential to explain connections in language have traditionally been viewed as arbitrary, facilitating learners' vocabulary acquisition. The study presents a mixed-method quasi-experimental case study involving 14 students, detailing the exploration of a cognitive linguistic method in a secondary school setting. The aim of the study was to determine the effectiveness of cognitive linguistic methods, and explore how these cognitive linguistics teaching materials can be designed and administered. The study focused on phrasal verbs, which are notoriously challenging for ESL learners and have recently gained prominence in English language teaching. Phrasal verbs are an important field of study in Cognitive Linguistics, given the potential of Conceptual Metaphor Theory to illuminate the metaphorical properties of its particles. A key strength of this study compared to previous similar experiments was the integration of recent findings in cognitive linguistic methodology. These suggestions, such as the usage of visual aids and the exclusion of technical terms, were thoroughly explored in practice and assessed.

The experiment involved teaching two lessons concerning two sets of phrasal verbs to an upper-intermediate English language group, one taught with 'traditional' and one with 'cognitive' methodology. To ensure the validity of the experiment, the two phrasal verb sets were balanced based on corpus data. A pretest and a delayed posttest were administered to assess the effectiveness of the two methods. The experiment was also triangulated with reflections about the lessons and the analysis of drawings created by students during the experimental lesson. The experiment found the 'cognitive' and the 'traditional' methodology to be equally effective, suggesting that the 'cognitive' method can be used as an alternative to make English lessons more varied. The study also analyzed the errors students made in the test and found traces of metaphorical thinking that can be further exploited on English lessons. The study also shares opportunities and challenges concerning teaching phrasal verbs with cognitive linguistic methods to this age group, providing suggestions for a further longitudinal experiment.