The Phrasal Verb Academic Calendar (PVAC): A 14-Week Vocabulary Tool for English Language Learners

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ABSTRACT

Phrasal verbs, distinguished by their idiomatic meanings and context-dependent usage, provide a significant challenge for students learning English as a second language. Classroom observations indicate that many students tend to memorise phrasal verbs without demonstrating a clear understanding of their practical application. This project outlines a fourteen-week academic calendar structured around a weekly root word theme, featuring one phrasal verb for each day of the calendar. The objective of this initiative is to enhance consistency, practicality, and engagement in learning. Students can enhance their retention and use of phrasal verbs in practical contexts through frequent exposure and practice. The Phrasal Verb Academic Calendar (PVAC) is a simple yet effective resource suitable for both classroom teaching and self-directed learning. It aids students in cultivating their confidence and fluency progressively.

Keywords: phrasal verbs, academic calendar, vocabulary learning, education innovation

INTRODUCTION

Phrasal verbs are notoriously challenging for ESL learners due to their idiomatic meanings, multi-word construction, and context-sensitive usage. In classroom settings, students often rely on rote memorization rather than understanding the contextual meaning of phrasal verbs. This limits their ability to apply them in real-life communication. To address this issue, this project innovates the fourteen-week academic calendar by featuring a phrasal verb each day to promote consistent and structured vocabulary acquisition. The repetition, weekly focus, and visual reinforcement aim to improve long-term retention of phrasal verbs among learners.
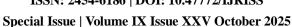
Problem Statement

Despite years of English instruction, students consistently demonstrate poor comprehension and usage of phrasal verbs due to several factors. This is due in part to their unpredictability, as a single phrasal verb can have multiple meanings, while several can share the same or similar meanings (Zhi & Juan, 2015). Phrasal verbs also often have figurative senses that are confusing to learners, making them difficult to understand and use correctly (Crawford Camiciottoli, 2024; Huwari, Erkir, Alwreikat, Alqaryouti, & Alshewiter, 2025; Strong, 2025). In previous research, it was discovered that a significant number of students avoid using phrasal verbs like "run into" or "turned down," opting instead for more straightforward alternatives such as "meet" or "refused" (Algethami & Almalki, 2016). Another factor contributing to the difficulty in acquiring phrasal verbs is the absence of equivalent grammatical or lexical structures in learners' native languages (Wang & Chen, 2020; Tao, 2021). This situation is similar for Arabic learners, where the concept of phrasal verbs does not exist in their mother tongue, creating significant challenges in recognising, understanding, and correctly using them in English (Saeed, 2025).

These challenges are also evident among Malaysian university students, who often demonstrate comparable patterns of avoidance (Strong, 2025), restricted comprehension (Haugh & Takeuchi, 2024), and overall

erroneous application of phrasal verbs, despite extensive exposure to English through formal schooling. This gap hinders their fluency and confidence, especially in informal or spoken contexts. Traditional methods, such as memorising lists or completing isolated exercises, often fail to sustain engagement or promote long-term retention.

Ahmad, A., Fatima, M.-A., Ali, A., Apandi, N., & Kamarudin, M. (2019). Sustaining Baba-Nyonya

Calendar (PVAC), that offers repeated, thematic exposure and meaningful practice over time, thereby enhancing both retention and practical usage.

Objectives

1. To innovate the existing university academic calendar by incorporating common phrasal verbs on a weekly basis over a fourteen-week period.
2. To improve students' recognition, understanding, and usage of common phrasal verbs through daily exposure provided by the integrated academic calendar.

Product Description

Weekly Phrasal Verbs

The Phrasal Verb Academic Calendar (PVAC) is a printed academic calendar designed exclusively for university students, which integrates time management with the learning of common phrasal verbs. It is structured around a fourteen-week academic semester, featuring one root verb each week (e.g.: take) and seven of its most common phrasal combinations (e.g.: take off, take in, take up, take over, take back, take apart, take away) – one for each day – with definitions and sample sentences. This design ensures repeated exposure through both visual cues and contextual examples, enabling students to encounter, recall, and apply phrasal verbs in real-life academic and social communication.

Figure 1: A sample of weekly phrasal verb structure

Week	Root verb	Phrasal Verb
1	Put	put on, put off, put up with, put out, put through, put away, put down
2	Get	get up, get over, get by, get ahead, get along, get through, get into
3	Run	run into, run over, run out of, run through, run after, run away, run across

Short Quizzes

In addition, PVAC also includes a weekly QR code that links to a short, fill-in-the-blank quiz that tests students' knowledge of the seven phrasal verbs introduced that week. This format encourages systematic review and helps students retain what they have learned through daily exposure. Immediate, automated feedback gives students the correct answers, helping them verify their responses and strengthen accurate usage. Students will receive a score from the short quiz, which is linked to a motivational sticker system that celebrates their achievements.

Five-Star Self-Rating System

The calendar also includes a five-star self-rating system. After completing the weekly quiz, students can rate their own performance by marking from one to five stars. Using this straightforward approach, they are able to evaluate how well they understood the phrasal verbs for the week.

Weekly Reminder

To support academic planning, the calendar also includes a weekly reminder section where students can record upcoming tests, quizzes, presentation dates, submission deadlines, or key university activities. This section offers a big-picture overview of academic priorities for the week, helping students allocate study time strategically and avoid last-minute preparation.

Daily To-Do Lists

There is also a section for daily to-do lists, which is designed to help users keep track of their personal and academic responsibilities on a regular basis. Students are able to engage in tasks such as reading assignments, working on essays, preparing slides, and participating in activities by writing them down. It helps people manage everyday work, reduce large tasks into smaller pieces, stay organised, and prevent forgetting critical duties. Additionally, this practice helps to cultivate self-discipline and contributes to overall academic performance.

By integrating academic scheduling, interactive quizzes, motivational rewards, weekly reminders, and daily to-do lists, PVAC transforms the traditional academic calendar into a dual-purpose, engaging, and measurable learning tool that supports both English language proficiency and time management.

Commercialisation

At the beginning of every semester, the majority of university students already purchase or receive an academic calendar, creating an existing demand that the Phrasal Verb Academic Calendar (PVAC) can directly fulfil. Unlike a standard academic calendar, PVAC functions as both a planner and a targeted language-learning tool, integrating time management with systematic phrasal verb mastery. It is designed for all levels of students (pre-diploma, diploma, and degree) across all Universiti Teknologi MARA campuses, making it suitable for institution-wide adoption.

PVAC can be promoted and commercialised through a variety of platforms, such as campus bookstore sales, bulk faculty orders, and inclusion in student orientation packets in all 34 Universiti Teknologi MARA campuses, reaching approximately 176,000 students nationwide.

The per-unit cost of PVAC will be considerably reduced by bulk production for faculty orders, thereby making it affordable for large-scale distribution across UiTM's 34 campuses. The calendar can be printed on FSC-certified paper sourced from responsibly managed forests or eco-friendly recycled paper to align with environmental responsibility and sustainability objectives. This not only increases the product's appeal but also establishes PVAC as a socially and environmentally conscious initiative.

Revenue generation can also be expanded through the sale of customizable editions featuring faculty branding; or motivational quotes tailored to student cohorts. Additional merchandise, such as stickers and sticky notes, can be offered as optional add-ons, encouraging students to personalize their calendars. These value-added items not only enhance the learning process but also serve as collectible memorabilia, increasing repeat purchases.

NOVELTY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The novelty of the Phrasal Verb Academic Calendar (PVAC) lies in its dual function, as it serves as a practical academic planner and a systematic vocabulary learning tool. This innovation is unique in its thematic and visual approach, moving away from random, disconnected phrasal verb lists. By embedding language learning directly into the calendar, it also guarantees that vocabulary learning becomes a natural part of students' daily routines, rather than an optional, easily overlooked task.

Additional features such as QR codes that lead to online weekly interactive activities, and a motivational sticker system provide a space for students to test their understanding of phrasal verbs and encourage them to

stay motivated. These elements transform PVAC from a simple time management tool into a dynamic learning journey that actively engages students in their vocabulary development.

Besides, PVAC is also positioned as a socially responsible and sustainable product due to the use of FSC-certified, recycled, or eco-friendly paper.

In terms of future direction, PVAC could develop into a variety of academic planners or calendars that are suited to various language learning requirements, including idioms, academic writing expressions, discipline-specific terminology, or even vocabulary related to soft skills. Additionally, the PVAC model could be adapted for use in other Malaysian universities, secondary schools, or professional training programmes.

Most importantly, a systematic evaluation is necessary to determine whether this innovation effectively enhances learning outcomes and delivers meaningful benefits to students. Therefore, future research could investigate the calendar's measurable effects on vocabulary retention, language proficiency, and academic performance, providing data to guide further refinement and product expansion. This process will help ensure that PVAC remains relevant, scalable, and adaptable to diverse learning contexts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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