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IMPLEMENTING TPR FOR VOCABULARY MASTERY IN SDN 246 BULU-BULU

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Abstract

Vocabulary mastery plays a crucial role in supporting young learners' overall English proficiency, particularly in elementary level contexts where learning typically relies on concrete examples and active engagement. However, many students still experience difficulties in retaining and understanding new vocabulary due to teacher-centered instruction and the limited use of interactive learning methods. To address this gap, this research aims to examine the effectiveness of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in enhancing students' English vocabulary mastery, specifically on the topics of body parts and action commands. Employing a quantitative one group pretest–posttest design, the research involved 21 fifth-grade students at SDN 246 Bulu-Bulu, Tonra District, Bone Regency. Data were obtained through a vocabulary worksheet and a comprehension test designed in accordance with TPR principles, and an 80-minute TPR-based learning session served as the intervention. The results show a notable improvement in students' vocabulary performance, with mean scores increasing from 64.29 on the pretest to 83.10 on the posttest. A paired sample t-test confirmed a significant effect of the TPR method on vocabulary mastery, indicated by a t-value of 7.26 exceeding the critical value of 2.086. These findings suggest that TPR effectively supports students' understanding, memory retention, and participation by integrating physical movement with verbal instruction. Therefore, TPR can be considered an engaging and suitable method for teaching vocabulary to elementary school students, particularly in rural learning environments with limited access to instructional media.

Keywords: *Total Physical Response, English learning, Body parts, Action commands, Elementary students*

INTRODUCTION

English language learning at the elementary school (SD) level plays an important role in developing students' basic vocabulary competence as a foundation for further language skills. However, in many elementary school contexts, particularly in vocabulary learning, instruction is still dominated by conventional methods such as memorization and teacher centered lecturing, which limit students' active involvement and reduce learning motivation Amalia et al., (2024). This condition often results in students experiencing difficulties in understanding and retaining basic English vocabulary, including concrete topics such as body parts and action commands. Such approaches are not in line with the cognitive and affective characteristics of elementary school learners, who tend to learn more effectively through physical activity and direct

experience Hafidah & Dewi, (2020). Therefore, English vocabulary instruction at the elementary level requires more interactive and movement based strategies to address students' limited vocabulary mastery and low classroom engagement Estika, (2025).

The Total Physical Response (TPR) method, introduced by James Asher, is an approach that integrates language with physical movement. This method enables students to understand the meaning of words and phrases through physical actions rather than mere memorization (Ekawati, 2017). Ideally, language learning methods should help students acquire skills and communication abilities to face future challenges (Putri & Sya, 2024). TPR achieves this by coordinating speech and action, aiming to teach language through physical activity (Safira, 2022). The approach is grounded in the theory that the connection between language and motor activity can strengthen memory and second-language comprehension, particularly for children who naturally learn through multisensory experiences (Nasution & Tarigan, 2024).

Several studies have demonstrated that the use of TPR in English learning at the elementary level significantly improves vocabulary mastery. TPR allows students to "learn while moving," making it easier for them to understand and remember vocabulary related to actions or body parts through direct physical involvement in learning activities. By engaging students in physical responses to verbal instructions, TPR helps strengthen the association between words and actions, which supports long-term memory development Ulya & Ichsan., (2021). The application of TPR has a significant influence on students' vocabulary capability, as the method encourages learners to respond to simple commands, perform meaningful movements, and express vocabulary that is visualized through physical actions Maulidia & Hasibuan, (2021).

Beyond its effectiveness in improving vocabulary mastery, the implementation of TPR has also been shown to reduce students' anxiety toward foreign language learning. Interactive and enjoyable learning activities help create a positive classroom environment and increase students' active participation. One of the main advantages of TPR is that it makes language learning fun for both teachers and students, freeing students from stress and pressure while strengthening long-term memory potential (Ashila et al. 2024). Thus, TPR not only enhances learning outcomes but also provides a meaningful and enjoyable learning experience (Ulya & Ichsan, 2021).

The urgency of applying TPR in elementary schools, particularly at SDN 246 Bulu-Bulu, Tonra Subdistrict, Bone Regency, is driven by the need to improve English instruction, which is still predominantly focused on memorization-based practices. Classroom observations conducted prior to this study indicated that students showed higher engagement when learning activities involved physical movement rather than passive listening. This tendency is consistent with findings reported by Az Zahra & Putri (2024), who emphasize that elementary learners often demonstrate stronger responsiveness in movement-based learning situations. Therefore, an instructional approach that integrates language input with physical actions is considered more relevant to address the identified classroom challenges. TPR is regarded as suitable for elementary contexts because it provides opportunities for students to understand language naturally through action before being required to produce verbal responses actively

TPR is especially suitable for teaching the topics of parts of the body and action commands, as both themes are directly related to physical activities and body movements.

Children can easily understand words such as touch your nose, raise your hand, or jump through direct practice. This reinforces the concept that second-language comprehension becomes more effective when accompanied by contextual movement and concrete experiences. Estika (2025) adds that verbs and actions are best learned not just through instruction but by demonstrating them together with physical activities, which can be further assisted by media such as songs.

Theoretically, TPR aligns with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input language input that students can understand before they are expected to produce output (Adnyani, 2018). By providing instructions followed by physical actions, teachers enable students to grasp word meanings without the pressure to speak prematurely, allowing the language acquisition process to occur naturally. Furthermore, studies conducted in various regions of Indonesia show that teachers who apply TPR experience significant improvements in student engagement and learning outcomes (Nugraheni & Kristian, 2021). The implementation of TPR in elementary schools also helps teachers foster collaborative and dynamic learning environments where students participate enthusiastically.

Considering these urgent needs and empirical findings, this research aims to measure the effectiveness of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in improving elementary students' vocabulary mastery. The program aims to enhance teachers' and students' abilities to use TPR in teaching the topics of parts of the body and action commands. The use of quantitative methods in measuring learning outcomes is expected to objectively demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach (Mulyanah et al. 2018). Therefore, this research aims to analyze the effectiveness of the TPR method in enhancing students' English vocabulary mastery on the topics of parts of body and action commands at SDN 246 Bulu-Bulu.

METHOD

This research employs a quantitative approach using a one-group pretest–posttest design. This design aims to measure the effectiveness of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in improving elementary school students' English vocabulary mastery. A quantitative approach was selected because it provides an objective description of changes in students' learning outcomes before and after the treatment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the context of elementary education, quantitative research is effective for empirically assessing learning improvement through numerical data and simple statistical analyses (Rachman et al. 2024)

The research was conducted at SDN 246 Bulu-Bulu, Tonra District, Bone Regency, South Sulawesi. This school was chosen because it has a need for innovative language learning methods and has not widely implemented interactive approaches such as TPR. The research activities were carried out in a single meeting (80 minutes), consisting of four main stages: pretest, TPR-based instruction, posttest, and evaluation of learning outcomes. A single-session intervention was considered sufficient because the study aimed to measure the immediate effect of TPR on students' vocabulary mastery within a controlled instructional setting using a one-group pretest–posttest design. This design focuses on detecting measurable changes in students' performance before and after treatment within the same session, thereby minimizing external instructional variables and maintaining consistency in classroom conditions.

The subjects of this research were 21 fifth-grade students of SDN 246 Bulu-Bulu in the 2025/2026 academic year, comprising 10 male and 11 female students. Fifth graders were selected because they had already learned basic English vocabulary such as parts of the body and action commands. Additionally, they are at the concrete operational stage of cognitive development according to Piaget's theory, in which activity-based learning is considered most effective for strengthening conceptual understanding.

This research involves two main variables: Independent Variable (X) is the implementation of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method, and the Dependent Variable (Y) is English vocabulary mastery (parts of the body and action commands). The relationship between the two variables was analyzed to determine the extent to which TPR influences the improvement of students' learning outcomes. The primary instrument used in this research is a vocabulary test developed based on the instructional material. The test consists of two parts: a Body Parts Diagram Worksheet used to measure word recognition ability, and a Comprehension test of action commands used to assess understanding of vocabulary meaning through contextual instructions. Each item was designed to evaluate vocabulary comprehension through visual and kinesthetic learning in accordance with TPR principles.

The research was carried out through five sequential stages to ensure systematic implementation of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method. The first stage was the preparation phase, during which the researcher designed a lesson plan based on the TPR approach, prepared various teaching media such as flashcards, songs, and movement-based instructions, and developed the Body Parts Diagram Worksheet as the main assessment tool. Prior to its use, the instrument underwent content validation by an English education expert to ensure its alignment with the learning objectives and TPR principles. Revisions were made based on the validator's feedback. To ensure reliability, the instrument was piloted with students of similar characteristics, and the internal consistency was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha, which indicated that the instrument was reliable for measuring students' vocabulary mastery. The second stage involved administering a pretest to measure the students' initial vocabulary mastery before the treatment.

In the treatment phase, the teacher applied the TPR method in one 80-minute session by giving verbal instructions such as "touch your eyes," "raise your hand," "jump," and "sit down," all of which were demonstrated physically to encourage student participation and comprehension. After the treatment, a posttest was conducted using the same format as the pretest to identify improvements in students' vocabulary acquisition. Finally, during the evaluation stage, the pretest and posttest results were analyzed statistically to determine the effectiveness of the TPR method in enhancing students' English vocabulary mastery.

Pretest and posttest data were analyzed using a paired-sample t-test to determine the significance of score differences before and after the treatment. The statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25. The level of significance was set at $\alpha = 0.05$. The obtained p-value was compared with the predetermined significance level to determine whether the difference in mean scores was statistically significant. This research was carried out in accordance with ethical principles of educational research, including obtaining official permission from the school and maintaining the confidentiality of students' identities.

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FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This research aimed to determine the effectiveness of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in improving the English vocabulary mastery of fifth-grade students at SDN 246 Bulu-Bulu, Tonra District, Bone Regency. Research data were obtained from the results of the pretest (before treatment) and posttest (after treatment) administered to 21 students. Before the implementation of the TPR method, students took a pretest to measure their initial vocabulary mastery on the topics parts of the body and action commands. After one 80-minute learning session using the TPR method, students completed a posttest with the same test format. The mean score analysis is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Students' vocabulary score

Test Type	High Score	Lowest Score	Mean
a. Pretest	80	50	64.29
b. Posttest	95	65	83.10

The table shows that the students' average score increased from 64.29 on the pretest to 83.10 on the posttest. The increase of 18.81 points indicates a significant difference between learning outcomes before and after the implementation of the TPR method. To confirm whether the increase was statistically significant, a paired sample t-test was conducted. The results showed that the calculated t-value was 7.26, while the t-table value ($\alpha = 0.05$, $df = 20$) was 2.086. Because the calculated t (7.26) is greater than the t-table (2.086), it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest results. Therefore, the implementation of the TPR method significantly affected the improvement of students' English vocabulary mastery.

The results of this research indicate that the Total Physical Response (TPR) method significantly improved the English vocabulary mastery of elementary school students. These findings support Asher's theory, which states that TPR helps learners understand language through the connection between verbal commands and physical movement. When students practice vocabulary through physical activity, memory retention becomes stronger because it involves kinesthetic and sensorimotor aspects.

Discussions

The statistical findings indicate that students' vocabulary scores increased after the implementation of the TPR method. The mean improvement of 18.81 points suggests that integrating verbal commands with physical movement may facilitate vocabulary acquisition among elementary learners. This result is consistent with Safira (2022), who reported that the application of TPR significantly improved students' post-test scores in junior high school settings, with mean scores reaching 83.44. Although conducted at a different educational level, both studies demonstrate that movement-based instruction enhances vocabulary retention.

Similarly, Estika (2025) found that the use of TPR supported by instructional media contributed to a measurable increase in students' vocabulary achievement in elementary classrooms.

Compared to Estika's study, the present research shows a comparable pattern of score improvement within a shorter intervention duration, indicating that even a single-session TPR treatment can produce measurable learning gains. These similarities strengthen the empirical support for TPR as an effective strategy for vocabulary instruction across different contexts and age groups.

Furthermore, the findings align with Asher's theoretical perspective that language comprehension develops effectively when learners respond physically to verbal input. The observed score increase in this study reinforces the assumption that kinesthetic engagement contributes to stronger memory retention through sensorimotor involvement

This aligns with Cameron, who argues that young learners acquire language more effectively through activities involving movement and direct interaction. Additionally, TPR creates an enjoyable and low-pressure learning environment. Students became more active, engaged, and enthusiastic during the lesson. This positive learning experience made them more confident in responding to English instructions. One of the primary goals of TPR is to reduce stress in foreign language learning, which motivates students to continue learning. This stress-free environment allows students to process language more naturally.

TPR enhances elementary students' motivation and vocabulary retention. Moreover, Maulidia & Hasibuan (2021) confirmed that the success of TPR lies in its application where students listen to instructions and immediately practice movements, which was evident in this research as students successfully executed commands like "touch your nose" or "jump."

In the context of SDN 246 Bulu-Bulu, these findings have important implications for English teachers. The TPR method can serve as an effective active learning strategy in schools with limited digital learning media. By relying on verbal instructions and simple physical movements, teachers can still create meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences. TPR helps overcome challenges such as large class sizes or limited time by involving all students in physical motion, although teachers must be creative to address limitations regarding abstract vocabulary.

Overall, the findings strengthen the view that the implementation of TPR contributes to improvements in students' vocabulary mastery. The summary of results shows that the average student score increased from 64.29 to 83.10 after the implementation of the TPR method, with the paired-sample t-test indicating a statistically significant difference ($t = 7.26 > t\text{-table} = 2.086$, $\alpha = 0.05$). These results demonstrate that integrating verbal commands with physical movement supports students' understanding and retention of vocabulary related to body parts and action commands. Therefore, within the scope of this study, TPR can be considered effective in enhancing elementary students' English vocabulary mastery.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This research concludes that the implementation of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method significantly improved students' English vocabulary mastery, particularly in the topics of

parts of the body and action commands. The findings from the pretest and posttest results demonstrate a substantial increase in students' scores, indicating that TPR effectively supports vocabulary comprehension through the integration of verbal input and physical movement. This learning approach allowed students to understand word meanings naturally and contextually, reducing learning anxiety and encouraging more active classroom participation.

The results also suggest that TPR is highly suitable for elementary school children, especially those with kinesthetic learning tendencies. By embedding learning within enjoyable physical activities, TPR not only enhanced vocabulary retention but also fostered a positive and engaging learning environment. This research contributes to the body of knowledge by reaffirming the relevance of movement-based learning in young learner education and highlights the potential of TPR as an effective method in contexts with limited instructional media.

However, this research is limited to a single treatment session with a relatively small sample size. In addition, the study employed a one-group pretest–posttest design without a control group, which limits the ability to attribute the observed improvement solely to the implementation of the TPR method. Future research may extend the duration of treatment, involve larger populations, include a control group for comparison, or compare TPR with other interactive teaching methods to obtain more comprehensive insights. Additionally, classroom-based longitudinal studies could provide a deeper understanding of the long-term impact of TPR on vocabulary acquisition.

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