

The Implementation of Total Physical Response in teaching vocabulary to Primary School Students

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Abstract: Learning vocabulary is essential for English language learners and it is often best taught in early age, such as in primary school students. One of the methods that can be used in teaching vocabulary is Total Physical Response (TPR). The purpose of this study is to investigate the implementation of TPR in teaching vocabulary among primary school students and to explore the students' responses after learning. The participants were an English teacher who also served as the researcher and twenty-three second-grade students of SD Aisyiyah Multilingual Darussalam Kudus. This study used a descriptive qualitative method, with data obtained from observation and interviews. The findings revealed that there are three teaching stages in the teaching vocabulary, such as pre-teaching, whilst-teaching, and post-teaching. Furthermore, the teacher has several roles in these stages, such as planner, director, model, and assessor. Various fun activities such as singing a song together, listening and doing, and playing games were used to boost the students' enthusiasm and motivation. In the last stage, the teacher assesses the students to ensure their comprehension. In addition, interview data shows that TPR method has effectively helped students remember new vocabulary, create fun and enjoyable learning atmosphere.

Key words: TPR method, teaching vocabulary, primary school students

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary acquisition is a significant factor for young learners in learning new language. It is not merely knowing the meanings of words, but also understanding how to use them effectively in communication. It equips them with the tools needed to express themselves clearly and engage with more complex ideas. Furthermore, it serves as a foundation for academic success in various subjects. The relationship between vocabulary and academic achievement highlights its critical role both in language learning and broader educational contexts (Suhendra, 2023). In addition, vocabulary significantly contributes to reading comprehension. Rich vocabulary allows learners to understand the meaning more effectively, making it essential for interpreting and analyzing written material. It not only supports success in academic disciplines but also fosters deeper engagement with the texts (Masrai, 2019).

However, it is still challenging to teach vocabulary to primary school students as they have limited attention spans and diverse motivation levels, which affect their engagement and capability to retain new words (Selvarajoo & Hashim, 2022). Traditional methods, such as rote memorization or drilling often fail to capture their interest and motivation, making them more difficult to focus in learning. These methods do not encourage both learners' creativity and critical thinking. Consequently, the learning process becomes less engaging and ineffective. To address these challenges, teachers are constantly looking for more effective methods to

overcome these challenges and create an interactive and engaging learning atmosphere tailored to the learners' needs (Sotlikova, 2023).

One such method is Total Physical Response (TPR), created by James Asher, a psychology professor. He has notably succeeded in developing techniques for teaching foreign languages, especially to young children. This method combines commands, speech, and physical movements to help students learn English more easily. By involving both mind and body, TPR mirrors the way children naturally acquire the first language. Making the learning process becomes more effective and engaging (Putri & Suhendi, 2023). One of the advantages of TPR lies in its capability in enhancing memory retention. When learners physically act out commands, such as "run", "jump", or "clap", they form a strong connection between the words and their meaning. It helps solidify vocabulary in their minds, so that it is easier for them to recall and use the words. A study conducted by Zur & Selfieni (2022) found that students can learn language more effectively when they physically respond to verbal instructions. This approach makes English learning more enjoyable and accommodates kinesthetic learners who benefit from physical activity. They thrive when they are involved in tasks that require hands-on activities or physical actions, because they process information effectively through doing something rather than observing or listening. By integrating movements into language instruction when teaching vocabulary, this approach creates a dynamic and engaging classroom atmosphere that can encourage students to communicate and interact with others (Karlina, 2024). In other words, this method offers an effective learning approach to language acquisition, especially for young learners. Combining physical actions with language instruction fosters a dynamic and engaging learning environment, leading to improved language proficiency and a positive learning experience. This method helps break down the problems of traditional learning techniques, making the learning process more interactive and rewarding for both teachers and students.

One of the schools that has implemented this method is SD Aisyiyah Multilingual Darussalam Kudus. This school has used this method for two years in the second graders. The researchers noticed that students are more interested and engaged when they learn English through this method. At SD Aisyiyah Multilingual Darussalam, teachers guide students through both speaking and physical movement, helping them learn vocabulary in their daily routines.

Over the years, many studies have looked at using Total Physical Response (TPR) in different educational settings, showing its effectiveness in improving vocabulary skills. For example, TPR has greatly improved students' English vocabularies (Baiq Sumarni et al., 2022; Putri & Suhendi, 2023; Paramita, 2022; Khakim & Anwar, 2020; Mariyam & Musfiroh, 2019; Gayanti & Satriani, 2020; Supriyatin & Argawati, 2021). In addition, it creates a fun, enjoyable, and engaging learning atmosphere, which helps students retain new words better (Cahyawati & Antara, 2021; Dongsanniwas & Sukying, 2024) and develop their speaking skills and fluency (Husanović, 2022). By encouraging students to respond the verbal commands with movements, the method enhances comprehension and builds confidence in using the language.

This confidence will improve fluency, as students become more comfortable in expressing themselves in a supportive environment.

While many studies have explored the effectiveness and application of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method, research on its implementation remains limited. Therefore, there is a need to delve into how TPR is implemented in primary school settings, with a focus on the second graders. This study aims to investigate the implementation of TPR in second graders and explore the students' responses after learning. Understanding its implementation and students' responses to TPR is significant as it provides the description of teaching stages of

TPR and gain students' responses for optimizing teaching strategies as well as adapting the method to suit students' needs. Understanding how TPR is implemented and how second-grade students respond to it is crucial. It helps describe the teaching stages of TPR and gathers students' feedback for optimizing teaching strategies. It also allows teachers to adapt the method to better suit students' needs.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a descriptive qualitative research design. It is aimed at understanding the phenomena from the participants' perceptions and providing deeper insights into the learning processes (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Yulfi & Aalayina, 2021). This approach is crucial in educational settings where the dynamic interaction between teachers and students are significant in learning experience and outcome (Sugiyono, 2010). By focusing on these dynamics, researcher can gain a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the effectiveness of the method. It also helps reveal the contextual factors that influence teaching and learning process. Furthermore, this design allows the researcher to explore the outcomes and to understand what makes TPR effective as well as why it works in the teaching and learning context.

The research was carried out at SD Aisiyiah Multilingual Darussalam in Kudus, a school in Central Java that emphasizes the multilingual education. It lasted for three meetings. During this period, the researchers thoroughly observed and gathered data to analyze the implementation of TPR in the classroom. The data sources included an English teacher and twenty-three second-grade students, aged between 7 and 8 years old, all of whom had similar levels of English proficiency.

Data collection methods included observation and semi-structured interviews. To collect the data, the researcher used participant observation as a key approach. It means that the researcher actively engages in the activities being studied. Instead of just watching from the outside, the researcher becomes a part of the group or setting being investigated. This immersive approach allows the researcher to gain richer, real-time insights and deeper understanding by experiencing the activities from insider's perspective (Busetto et al., 2020; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). In addition, this active involvement enables the researcher to gain a more detailed understanding of the processes, interactions, behaviors or responses, and challenges found in the classroom that capture subtle details, such as non-verbal cues and spontaneous reactions from the students.

During these meetings, the researcher observed her own teaching process using Total Physical Response (TPR) methods in grade two and closely monitored the participation and engagement of the students in the classroom setting. This hands-on involvement is significant to refine and evaluate the teaching method used based on real-time feedback and interactions with the students. In addition, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with three students to gain their feedback or responses on their learning experiences with TPR method. The interview questions were adapted and modified from Putri & Suhendi (2023) and consisted of three questions.

For data analysis, the researcher utilized the process suggested by Miles et al. (2014), which consists of three components: data condensation, data display, and drawing conclusions. Data condensation is summarizing and organizing the collected data to gain important themes and patterns. Data display involves visually representing the data to find relationships. Finally,

drawing and verifying conclusions. It involves interpreting the data to understand how TPR is implemented and to gauge the students' responses after learning (Setiawan et al., 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results from observation and interviews are described as follows.

Teaching Stages

After observing how teacher implemented the TPR method, it was noted that teaching vocabulary using this approach occurred in three stages. It includes pre-teaching, whilst-teaching, and post-teaching.

Pre-Teaching Stage

In Pre-Teaching phase, the teacher arranged the seating positions, welcomed the students, and greeted the students by saying "Assalamualaikum, good morning students!, how are you today?". After the students responded. Then she greeted them again using greeting song to help them easily remember the sentences or phrases for greeting and asking about someone's condition.

Greeting song:

Good morning, everybody how are you?

Just fine

Good morning, everybody how are you?

Just fine

Good morning to you, good morning to me

Good morning everybody how are you? Just fine

The second-grade students then prayed together before beginning the lesson, led by the teacher. Following that, the teacher warmed up the students by singing songs related to the upcoming topic through YouTube video, combined with physical movement to boost their enthusiasm and participation in learning. It was done in each three meetings. The song is written below.

Follow me, follow me, hands up, hands up

Follow me, follow me, hands down, hands down

Follow me, follow me, hands up, hands down

Follow me, follow me, turn around, turn around

(teacher and students were singing and acting out this song)

Then, The English teacher asked to the students to be silent and pay attention to the using this chant.

Teacher :Are you ready for the class?

Students :Yes, I am. Yes, I am

Teacher :Are you ready for the class?

Students :Yes, I am. Yes, I am

Teacher :Let's be quiet

Students :ssssttttt....

Based on the observation in pre-teaching activities, the teacher sang a song while demonstrating the physical movements associated with the words, and the students imitated her actions. It can be inferred that both students and teacher have their own roles in this activity. Students acted as imitators and teacher acted as a model. It aligns with the study conducted by Putri & Suhendi (2023), which found that teacher often acted as an active director and model in the classroom activities. It suggests that teachers are not only facilitators but also active participants who shape the learning environment by giving clear examples and structured guidance. Meanwhile, students were positioned as executors of movement or imitators, responding to the teacher's instructions. By acting as executors, students do not merely absorb knowledge. Instead, they are involved directly, they translate what they see into actions. This active participation helps them better in understanding the content being taught. It creates more interactive and engaging learning environment, where the teacher and students work together to make the teaching and learning process effective and meaningful. As imitators, students' actively respond to the teacher's guidance and instruction, which makes the learning process more dynamic and engaging. This method underscores the importance of practice and repetition, that plays a key role in helping students strengthen their understanding and retain what they have learned.

Whilst-Teaching Stage

In whilst-teaching stage, the teacher begins introducing body parts vocabularies by pointing to her own body parts and showing pictures to students. In the first meeting, the teacher introduced these words: head, shoulders, knees, toes, eyes, ears, mouth, nose, and hands. The students repeated the pronunciation of the words while pointing to specific body parts after the teacher. By using this technique, it could strengthen their understanding through repetition and action. To make the class more engaging, the teacher incorporated songs like "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes" through a YouTube video that includes these body parts and movements. The students sang along and mimicked the physical movements. The song and movements were repeated many times to help them memorize the words more easily. In each of the two other meetings, the teacher reviewed the previously taught words and added a few new body parts based on the students' needs. This approach ensures the students building the new vocabulary without being overwhelmed.

In this meeting, the teacher also played "Simon Says" to reinforced the vocabularies in a fun and enjoyable way, allowing students to take turns being the "Simon," calling out body parts and others demonstrated the actions. Through singing songs and using various games, students will actively engage in teaching and learning process.

Similarly, in other two meetings, the teacher used the same strategy by incorporating the different body parts song through YouTube and using flash cards. In flashcard activity, students were divided into three groups. One group was given some cards that had a variety of different body parts. Then, one member of the group held the cards and showed a flashcard to the other groups. The other groups would then guess the name of body part and point it to their bodies. They took turns showing the flash cards so that every group had the same opportunity in playing the game. Peer collaboration not only enhanced vocabulary but also built teamwork, making the learning experience more effective. This set of activities made the students enjoy the learning process and helped them memorize the vocabulary more easily

Post-Teaching Stage

In post teaching stage, the students were first given a worksheet. Once they had already done this assignment, they submitted it to the teacher. Thereafter, the teacher and students discussed the answers and reviewed the lesson as a whole. The teacher asked questions related the lesson had been taught. By doing this activity, the teaching and learning process would be more dynamic and engaging.

After that, the children sang the body parts song “Head Shoulders Knees and Toes” with movements. This engaging song would further enhance their learning and made the class much more interesting. Finally, to ensure the students’ understanding, the teacher assessed them by giving the worksheet. After the students had already finished their work. Then, they discussed the answers and the teacher guided them to review the topic they had learnt. The teacher then motivated them to be diligent to learn and used English more often; this, in essence, will help them to study hard outside the classroom. Before the class ended, they all prayed and sang a farewell song. Finally, the teacher closed the lesson.

These three stages of teaching align with Larsen-Freeman & Anderson (2011), who stated three TPR teaching stages, such as demonstrating commands, asking students to follow the physical action, recombining the commands and helping the students to learn how to respond the instructions. First, teacher demonstrates commands while performing actions, helping students connect the words to movements. Next, students actively follow these instructions, practicing with their body movement, which solidify their understanding and memory. In the last stage, students begin to use the commands themselves, create their own responses and engage in activities, such as game. This interactive approach makes learning more enjoyable, gradually guiding students from comprehension to language production.

The findings from the observation align with the studies conducted by Pramesti (2021) and Setiawan et al. (2022). There were three steps in TPR implementation, such as pre-teaching stage, whilst-teaching stage, and post-teaching stage. Each teaching step involves different activities that are designed to support language acquisition through physical actions and engagement.

In the pre-teaching stage, the teacher prepares students by introducing the new vocabulary and setting the context for learning. It is crucial in ensuring students understand the commands before they act physically. The observations confirm that this step helps students feel more comfortable in learning. The whilst-teaching stage is the gist of TPR activities. Teachers give commands or instructions, demonstrate actions, and ask the students to follow along. This stage fosters active involvement, comprehension and enhances retention through physical action. The findings showed that students responded positively to this method, their understanding and enthusiasm were increasing in comparison to traditional techniques. Finally, in the post-teaching stage, students review what they have learned, through follow-up activities, such as interactive games. This step ensures they can recall and apply the language in different contexts. The observations indicate that this stage is crucial in reinforcing learning outcomes because students showed better retention in this stage. It can be inferred that the results support the previous researches by demonstrating that structuring TPR lessons into these stages enhances students’ engagement and comprehension. The activities that are implemented create a dynamic learning atmosphere that promotes language acquisition.

Additionally, the researcher also found the teacher’ roles in implementing TPR, such as planner, director, model, and assessor (Setiawan et al., 2022; Putri & Suhendi, 2023). These roles were acted during three stages of teaching. The role of planner was acted when preparing the lesson, such as writing the lesson plan, preparing teaching materials, teaching and learning

media as well as some activities such as flash cards, songs related to the topic and interactive games that enhancing the students' learning. This finding is supported by Setiawan et al. (2022), who stated that teachers as active roles. It can be seen that teacher prepared the materials and modelled the instructions to the students. Besides, the teacher also acted as director who direct the students in three teaching stages. In pre-teaching stage, the teacher asked the students to sing the warm up song, but still related to the topic to boost the students' enthusiasm. In the whilst-teaching stage, the teacher directed the students to pronounce the words taught which followed by physical movement. Furthermore, in the post-teaching stage, the teacher directed the students to sit properly, do the worksheets, and reviewed the vocabularies together in the classroom. Additionally, the role of models was acted in whilst -teaching stage. For instance, the teacher gave example in pronouncing and performing physical movement during the teaching and learning process. In this role, the teacher indirectly exemplified and became model to learn something enthusiastically and stay focused while learning something. Last, teacher acted as assessor. This role was seen in post-teaching stage. The teacher assessed the students to ensure their understanding. She gave the worksheets to students and grade them.

After analyzing the data from observation in TPR class, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews, consisting of three questions to gain deeper understanding of TPR implementation. It was adapted and modified from Putri & Suhendi (2023). The researcher interviewed three students about TPR method they have just learned. The result of interview is described in the following table.

Table 1. The students' responses to the interview

No.	Questions	Responses
1	Do you like learning English using the method we have just done (fun learning with movement)?	The students enjoyed the learning and were enthusiastic through movements because it was fun
2	Do you find it easy or difficult to remember vocabularies with movement?	The students stated that it was easier to remember vocabulary with movement as it greatly helped them remember new vocabularies
3	What was your favorite activity during the English lesson just now?	The students enjoyed fun activities such as singing a song and playing games

Based on the result described above, it is shown that the TPR method effectively impacts on the second-grade students' participation and engagement in learning and vocabulary retention in English class.

In the first question of interview, students were asked, "Do you like learning English using the method we have just done (fun learning with movement)?" The students showed their enthusiasm in learning through the TPR method.

"Yes, It's fun to learn English like this, Ms." (student 3)

"Yes, I am happy" (student 1)

"I like it" (student 2)

This result is in line with the findings of Zur & Selfieni (2022) and Putri & Suhendi (2023), which underscores that combining actions into learning not only mitigates the fear but also enhances their engagement in learning activities. TPR method made the learning activities playful environment. The act of moving physically makes students connect more deeply with the subject, making the learning process more memorable. Furthermore, this approach helps

students become active participants and fully engage in learning. Sotlikova (2023) also found that the engagement increases students' motivation and enthusiasm, creating a conducive and supportive environment for learning. When students are enthusiastic, it causes a chain reaction. Learning process transforms into a rich experience and exploration rather than simply absorbing knowledge. This supportive environment fosters a sense of encouragement, laying a strong foundation for sustainable educational achievement. Furthermore, Dongsanniwas & Sukying (2024) found that TPR can improve students' enthusiasm and pleasure in vocabulary learning through peer interaction and interactive learning process. This social aspect adds a sense of joy and connection, making vocabulary learning becomes an enjoyable group activity rather than an isolated task.

In the second question of interview, students were asked *"Do you find it easy or difficult to remember vocabularies with movement?"*, students responded that it was easier to learn new words with movement.

"easy! I can memorize the words better. (student 3)

"It is easy to remember, Ms" (student 1)

"It is easier"(student 2)

This finding aligns with several studies conducted by Baiq Sumarni et al. (2022), Putri & Suhendi (2023), Paramita (2022), Khakim & Anwar (2020), Mariyam & Musfiroh (2019), Gayanti & Satriani (2020), and Supriyatin & Argawati (2021), who found that that TPR helps in enhancing students' vocabulary. By integrating physical movements into learning, this method enhances memory retention and engagement. Associating words with physical movements enables students to better internalize new words and recall it with ease. This method is effective for young learners, as they can learn in more natural way. It mirrors the process of language acquisition in childhood, making learning more intuitive.

When students were asked, *"What was your favorite activity during the English lesson just now?"*, students underscored some activities done in the class such as singing songs and playing games.

"I like the song!" (student 2)

"It's fun to play Simon says" (student 3)

"I like learning like this, playing flashcards" (student 1)

It indicates the effectiveness of TPR in integrating movement with imaginative play, which makes vocabulary learning fun and memorable. This result aligns with the study conducted by Karlina (2024) , who argued that children are naturally drawn to fun and enjoyable activities. This method not only facilitates language learning but also improves interaction and active participation. It not only helps in vocabulary acquisition but also enhances dynamics of the classroom. By encouraging physical activity, students are more energized and motivated in learning. The collaborative activities foster social interaction that enable learners feel more connected with their peers.

From the interviews, it can be inferred that the students enjoyed using the TPR method in their learning process. They argued that the TPR approach made the learning process fun and eased their understanding in English class. It highlights that TPR is an effective method to teach vocabulary, especially for young learners. It can create engaging and enjoyable learning and enhance students' vocabularies at the same time. These findings align with the studies of Cahyawati & Antara (2021), Dongsanniwas & Sukying (2024), Nuraeni (2019), and Celik et al., (2021) who found that learning through TPR method was beneficial for students in retain the new vocabularies. Besides, TPR engages different learning styles by combining physical movements, auditory input, and visual cues, that make the learning process more effective. Its

interactive activities keep students motivated and enthusiastic, reducing the stress or anxiety in learning. TPR encourages active participation and social relationship, creating a lively collaborative classroom environment. These advantages make TPR method an impactful approach for teaching vocabulary to young learners.

CONCLUSION

Based on the result, there are three teaching stages in TPR implementation, such as pre-teaching, whilst-teaching, and post-teaching stage. During these three stages, the teacher interacts with students through some fun activities such as singing a song together, listening and doing, and playing games. In the last stage, the teacher assesses the students by giving worksheets to measure the students' understanding. In doing these activities, the teacher acts out several roles, including planner, director, model, and assessor. The result of this study serves descriptive report of the teaching process through TPR that can be used as a resource for teaching English vocabulary using TPR, especially to young learners. Such classroom activities such as singing a song, playing games, and flashcards make students more motivated and interested in learning the lesson. Furthermore, the interview data shows that the TPR method helps students to improve their vocabulary significantly. It also creates fun and enjoyable learning environment. As a result, students are more motivated and enthusiastic to learn English. However, the study also has limitations. It focused solely on teaching vocabulary through TPR in primary school students. Future studies could explore the TPR implementation at other educational levels along with teaching other language skills beyond teaching vocabulary. By addressing these areas, educators can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the application of TPR in difference educational context and ultimately making teaching more effective.

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