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The Implementation of The Total Physical Response (TPR) Technique to Develop Young Learners Vocabulary of Recognizing Colours

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ABSTRACT

Introducing English from an early age is a crucial step toward foreign language acquisition. However, young learners often encounter challenges when learning a language that is unfamiliar to them. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in improving English color vocabulary among early childhood learners. This study employed a qualitative approach using classroom action research conducted at Al Asthoriyah Early Childhood Education Center and Mekar Arum Kindergarten in Bandung Regency. Data were collected through classroom observations, field notes, and semi-structured interviews with teachers. The findings indicate that the implementation of the TPR method through engaging and movement-based activities enhanced students' comprehension and responsiveness to instructions. Students demonstrated high levels of enthusiasm and motivation, which contributed to noticeable improvement in vocabulary acquisition and faster response in answering questions. Based on these findings, the TPR method can be considered an effective and engaging instructional approach that offers a practical solution to challenges in early English language learning.

1. Introduction

English is an international language that is widely used in foreign countries. English is a language used in business, Internet, education and more. English can be taught from an early age. It can start with the introduction of numbers, alphabets or vocabulary. "English is a foreign language in Indonesia but it is very important to be taught to children from an early age perhaps because English is an international

language that is used throughout the world can facilitate communication when outside Indonesia as the main communication.” (Oktaria & Putra, 2020).

English is often used as a transitional language in educational contexts, particularly in early stages of language learning. Early childhood education therefore plays a crucial role as a foundational level of education, as children’s subsequent learning development is highly dependent on their acceptance of various stimuli. Stimulus exposure is considered essential in early childhood, as it supports children’s responsiveness and readiness to acquire new languages (Sari, I. P., Sormin, R. K., Purba, A., Rahayu, A. P., & Khairas, E. E., 2023).

This shows that language stimulation is an important element in early childhood education, because children's language development is greatly influenced by the stimuli they receive during the learning process. In learning English as a foreign language, one of the most basic forms of language input is vocabulary. “A teacher needs to see how students perceive their learning activities, especially in vocabulary improvement. Then, by knowing students' perceptions, teachers can find out how students view the teaching and learning process and know how to solve the problem.” (Vasya, I. D. A. M. S., Puspitaloka, N., & Kartini, D., 2025) In teaching English vocabulary to young children, the effectiveness of a learning method is closely related to how students interpret and respond to learning activities in the classroom. Therefore, understanding students' perceptions is an important aspect in evaluating the success of the learning strategies applied, including the Total Physical Response (TPR) method..

Vocabulary is a collection of words of a language, and vocabulary learning is an important part of learning English. As stated by Richards and Rodgers (1986), “vocabulary is one of the most important aspects of foreign language learning.” By learning vocabulary, children can develop their language skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Learning vocabulary can be taught from an early age or during kindergarten. By introducing English early on, it will make it easier for them to learn more widely in English learning Not only because English is an international language for communication, the factor of introducing English from an early age also helps them to gain insight or world information that is published using English.“ The quality of education in Indonesia must continue to be improved so that the Indonesian nation is able to compete (nation competitiveness) with other countries.” (Gaffar,et al.,2021.)

Early childhood education in Indonesia has implemented the independent curriculum. In the curriculum, there are several theories based on 4 categories; (1) developmental aspects, (2) learning characteristics, (3) formulation of competencies, and (4) achievement of child development. Early childhood education in the independent curriculum is included in the foundation stage, the foundation stage is the first stage of children's entry into the world of education, which aims to support children's growth and development in learning. From this, there are learning outcomes that have 3 stimulus elements including; (1) religious values, (2) ethical values, (3) literacy and steam. Judging from this, the introduction

of English in early childhood is included in the third part of the three stimulus elements, which must be grown since children already know letters and numbers.

Teaching English at an early age is different from teaching English among teenagers and adults. "early childhood has unique strengths, which are different from those of higher-level learners, or adults." (Cameron, 2001). Patience and creativity of the teacher are the main points to teach English at an early age. Therefore, strategies or techniques are needed that can facilitate children in learning English. Metode TPR (Total Physical Response) is a suitable method to facilitate children in learning English.

The Total Physical Response (TPR) method, developed by James Asher, offers a pedagogical approach that aligns with the cognitive characteristics of early childhood. Its core principle—synchronizing verbal instructions with simultaneous physical responses—enables children to internalize new vocabulary without excessive cognitive load. As emphasized by Shan (2017), TPR significantly enhances learning interest by fostering intrinsic motivation. This is further supported by Mulyanah et al. (2018), who define TPR as a method designed to allow students to acquire new expressions, particularly verbs, through direct listening and acting activities.

The urgency of vocabulary mastery at an early stage is highlighted by Richard and Rodger (1986) and Julian Edge (1993), who argue that an extensive vocabulary is fundamental to a child's ability to understand and be understood in foreign language communication. Furthermore, Ramadhani (2015) notes that this process mirrors first-language acquisition, where physical response precedes verbal production. By adopting this approach, learning becomes more active and harmonizes with the dynamic psychological nature of young learners.

Several previous studies have attempted to map the implementation of TPR in kindergarten settings. For instance, a study by Astutik and Aulina (2017) at Aisyiyah 5 Tanggulangin Kindergarten found that teacher creativity in employing TPR created a more effective and responsive learning environment. However, this effectiveness is not without field-level challenges. Research by Bella, Rahmawati, and Hafidah (2021) revealed that while multi-method approaches (including TPR) can mitigate student boredom, issues such as maintaining focus—where children become preoccupied with their own activities—and pronunciation difficulties remain critical concerns that require further evaluation.

While the aforementioned studies provide a strong foundation, most have focused on general effectiveness or teacher creativity. There remains a research gap regarding a comparative analysis of TPR implementation across different sites with varying English curriculum availability. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the application of the TPR technique in enhancing vocabulary mastery among 4-year-old children, while critically analyzing the contextual obstacles that emerge during the implementation process.

2. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to describe the application of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in teaching English vocabulary to young children. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the learning process, student responses, and teachers' views on the use of the TPR method in the classroom. In addition to teaching methods and technology, assessment has become an equally important dimension in shaping the quality of English language education (Islami, A. P., Putri, S. A., & Hasibuan, H. N. H. D., 2025). Therefore, this study adopted a qualitative assessment approach rather than formal testing to capture authentic learning processes in early childhood English classrooms.

The research was conducted in two early childhood education units, namely PAUD Al-Asthoriyah and TK Mekar Arum in Bandung Regency. The research subjects consisted of classroom teachers and students in group A in each school. The selection of research locations was based on differences in the background of English language learning implementation, where one school did not yet have a regular English learning schedule, while the other school already had a weekly English learning schedule.

Data collection was conducted through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation of learning activities. Observations focused on the process of applying the TPR method, student engagement, and student responses during English vocabulary learning. Interviews were conducted with teachers to explore information related to their experience of teaching using the TPR method, the obstacles they faced, and the supporting factors in English language learning. Documentation in the form of photographs of learning activities was used as supporting data to reinforce the observation results.

Research instruments include observation sheets, interview guidelines, and field notes. Observation sheets are used to record learning activities and student responses, while interview guidelines serve as a guide in obtaining systematic data from teachers. Field notes are used to record findings during the research process. The data obtained was analyzed qualitatively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The analysis was carried out by grouping the data based on emerging themes, such as the application of the TPR method, student responses, and factors supporting and inhibiting learning. The validity of the data was strengthened through triangulation techniques by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation.

3. Results and Discussion

Student Engagement

Observations at two research sites showed that student engagement was significantly stimulated by physical activity. The use of body movements and kinetic instructions successfully transformed the classroom atmosphere to be more

participatory. This is consistent with the findings of Hafidah and Dewi (2019), who state that movement-based learning can develop children's linguistic abilities. The difference in the results of applying the TPR method in both schools indicates that contextual factors affecting learning, such as the existence of a special schedule and supportive learning environment, influence the method's effectiveness.

However, a divergence in the patterns of engagement between the two schools is evident :

- **PAUD Al-Asthoriyah**, Early Childhood Education Centre, high levels of enthusiasm are known to fluctuate due to the novelty effect, with students tending to lose focus quickly after the physical session ends.
- **TK Mekar Arum**, the level of student engagement is more stable and measurable because it is supported by a weekly routine schedule.

This comparison proves that physical enthusiasm alone is not enough; habituation is a key variable that transforms “momentary enjoyment” into confidence in verbal language production. This aligns with Suwarti et al. (2022), who assert that the implementation of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method is an effective strategy to foster motivation in children's foreign language learning, particularly in the context of English. The findings revealed that children who underwent TPR training demonstrated notable improvements in vocabulary recognition, particularly in the school that had previously lacked an English language curriculum. The students' active involvement and physical synchronization during the vocabulary introduction session are documented in Figure 1 below:



Figure 1. Implementation of TPR Method in Vocabulary Learning

The visual evidence in Figure 1 illustrates how the integration of movement and verbal instructions creates a participatory classroom atmosphere. This physical engagement serves as a bridge to overcome the initial barriers of foreign language learning for young children.

Teacher Strategy

The second approach is to implement a strategy of adaptation, integrating visual media (colours, music, and video) in order to address limitations in time. At PAUD Al-Asthoriyah, the teaching strategy employed by educators is known as the

'Translational Kinetics' approach. This pedagogical method involves the utilisation of explicit commands in the Indonesian language, which are subsequently transitioned to English. This strategy has been proven to function effectively as a cognitive framework for individuals who are novices in a foreign language.

According to Lightbown and Spada (2013, as cited in Isnaeni, 2025), young children internalize vocabulary more effectively through instructions delivered within a visual context, such as direct movements. By utilizing these visual cues, the TPR method in both research sites functioned not only as a mnemonic tool but also as a means to stimulate sustained student enthusiasm, effectively bridging the gap between auditory input and conceptual understanding

Classroom Challenges

In contrast to theoretical claims that are frequently idealistic, empirical findings have revealed substantial structural impediments. The researchers conclude that the aforementioned impediments are not merely technical issues, but rather factors which limit the overall effectiveness of TPR :

- **Cognitive Load vs. Literacy Skills:** It is evident that, in the absence of proficiency in reading, the entire burden of information is entrusted to the auditory memory. In the context of reduced teaching hours and frequency of meetings, cognitive fatigue is prevalent. This is the rationale behind the frequent decline in focus observed during the course of a session. The cognitive abilities of early childhood are characterised by a limited capacity to process physical instructions without the intermission of assimilation.
- **Supporting Ecosystem Imbalances:** It was revealed through the course of the interview that the level of support for the English language in educational settings is considered to be inadequate. This is perceived as a "foreign entity" that is not accorded the requisite priority. This phenomenon elucidates the reasons why the success of TPR in the classroom is often transient, failing to transition into long-term memory unless it is supported by adequate home or school environments.
- **Teacher Readiness and Classroom Management:** The constraints imposed by spatial limitations and the absence of ancillary support systems necessitate that educators resort to improvisation, a process that is inherently demanding and often exerts undue strain on their physical and mental resources. In the absence of a high level of creativity on the part of the teacher in terms of the variation of movements and methods, there is a risk that TPR will become a physical activity that is monotonous and devoid of its linguistic function.

Learning Outcomes

Overall, TPR excels in the aspect of vocabulary imitation, aligning with Rahmadhani's (2015) theory that language acquisition in early learners is primarily characterized by the capacity to imitate vocabulary, regardless of pronunciation

accuracy. However, this study critically notes that such achievements remain at the recognition level rather than full mastery. This suggests a cognitive gap where, although students can respond accurately to physical cues, they still struggle with independent language production outside of the controlled context. Consequently, these findings imply that while TPR is an effective initial stimulant, it requires integrated follow-up strategies to transition students from mere recognition to active language proficiency. The difference in results between schools with fixed schedules and schools without specific schedules shows that the effectiveness of TPR is highly dependent on the variable of exposure frequency. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to mean that TPR will always be successful in every early childhood education school without considering the readiness of the curriculum and the duration of learning available.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the Total Physical Response (TPR) method is an effective approach for introducing English vocabulary to early learners. Based on classroom observations conducted in two different schools, the TPR method was successfully implemented through interactive and engaging learning activities that supported students' vocabulary development. The active role of teachers in providing clear instructions and meaningful guidance was identified as an important factor in facilitating students' language acquisition. The results of the study also revealed that students in schools that do not use English as their primary language face significant challenges in understanding and using English. This condition emphasizes the importance of choosing the right learning strategies to support language learning in the early stages. Conversely, educational institutions that have previously integrated English language learning show better results in vocabulary comprehension, vocabulary usage, and basic communication skills in English. Overall, the TPR method contributes positively to vocabulary acquisition in early learners through active engagement, enjoyable learning experiences, and increased student confidence. Despite initial challenges in the learning process, this approach creates a supportive learning environment that improves vocabulary retention and gradually develops English communication skills.

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