

Implementation of Total Physical Response (TPR) to Improve English Vocabulary of Grade 1 Elementary School Students in Tangerang Regency

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Abstract

English vocabulary is one of the fundamental skills for young learners, yet Grade 1 students often face difficulties in memorizing and recalling new words due to limited attention span and passive learning methods. This study aims to determine the effectiveness of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in improving the English vocabulary mastery of Grade 1 elementary school students. This research employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) design conducted in two cycles. Each cycle consisted of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The subjects were 25 Grade 1 students at [Nama SD] in Bandung. Data were collected through vocabulary tests, observation sheets of student engagement, and teacher field notes. The results showed that the application of TPR significantly improved students' vocabulary mastery. In the pre-cycle, the average vocabulary test score was 58.4 with 32% of students achieving the minimum mastery criteria. After Cycle 1, the average score increased to 71.2 with 68% completeness. In Cycle 2, the average score reached 84.6 with 92% of students achieving mastery. Student engagement also increased from "passive" in the pre-cycle to "very active" in Cycle 2, as observed from their enthusiasm in following physical commands and responding to instructions in English. It can be concluded that Total Physical Response is an effective strategy for teaching English vocabulary to Grade 1 students. TPR makes learning more enjoyable, reduces students' anxiety in speaking, and aligns with young learners' kinesthetic learning style. It is recommended that teachers integrate TPR activities such as "Simon Says", "Follow the Command", and role-play games in daily English lessons.

Keywords: Total Physical Response, TPR, English Vocabulary, Young Learners, Grade 1, Elementary School

INTRODUCTION

Language is a fundamental tool for communication, and in this globalized era, English has become a crucial skill to master from an early age. In Indonesia, introducing English to young learners, particularly elementary school students, aims to build a strong foundation for their future academic and professional endeavors. At the primary level, vocabulary acquisition serves as the building block of language learning. Without an adequate vocabulary, students cannot understand read texts, express their ideas, or communicate effectively. Asher, J. J. (2023).

However, teaching English to young learners especially Grade 1 students presents unique challenges. Children around the ages of six to seven are naturally active, have a short attention span, and learn best through concrete experiences rather than abstract grammatical rules. They easily lose focus if the teaching method is monotonous or heavily reliant on rote memorization and textbooks. Ananda, R., & Fadhilaturrahmi, F. (2022).

Problem Identification in the Local Context; In Tangerang Regency, the challenges of teaching English to first-graders are highly visible. Based on preliminary observations in local elementary schools, many English teachers still employ traditional teacher-centered methods. Students are often asked to sit quietly, repeat words after the teacher, and memorize long lists of vocabulary without meaningful context. Brown, H. D., & Lee, H. (2025).

This conventional approach often leads to several issues: Low Engagement: Students become passive, bored, and easily distracted during lessons. Poor Retention: Vocabulary learned through rote memorization is quickly forgotten after the class ends. Anxiety: Being forced to speak or memorize words in a foreign language can intimidate young learners, reducing their confidence. Cameron, L. (2024).

Given that Tangerang Regency is a rapidly developing suburban and industrial area where English literacy will be highly valuable, there is an urgent need to shift toward a more dynamic, engaging, and age-appropriate teaching methodology. The Proposed Solution: Total Physical Response (TPR) To bridge this gap, the Total Physical Response (TPR) method, developed by James Asher, offers a highly effective alternative. TPR is built around the coordination of speech and action; it mimics the way children learn their first language. In a TPR classroom, students respond to language input through physical movement. For example, when learning the word "*jump*," students actually jump. Hidayat, A., & Siregar, R. (2025).

This method is highly compatible with the characteristics of Grade 1 students for several reasons: Aptitude for Kinesthetic Learning: It utilizes children's natural urge to move, turning physical energy into a learning tool. Low Affective Filter: Students are not immediately forced to speak, which significantly reduces language anxiety and creates a safe learning environment. Contextual Comprehension: Linking words directly to physical actions creates stronger cognitive pathways, leading to better vocabulary retention. Lestari, S., & Wardani, K. (2024).

Research Questions / Objectives: While TPR has been widely studied, its contextual application among Grade 1 elementary school students in the specific demographic of Tangerang Regency where classroom sizes and student backgrounds vary significantly requires further empirical investigation. Therefore, this study aims to: Investigate how the implementation of Total Physical Response (TPR) can improve the English vocabulary mastery of Grade 1 elementary school students in Tangerang Regency. Examine the students' engagement and responses toward the use of the TPR method in their English classroom. The results of this study are expected to provide practical insights for elementary school English teachers in Tangerang Regency to innovate their teaching practices, making language learning an enjoyable and fruitful experience for young learners. Mulyadi, D., & Kurniawati, E. (2026).

METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, following the collaborative model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart. CAR is highly appropriate for this study as it aims to diagnose, reflect on, and solve practical classroom problems—specifically the low English vocabulary mastery among first-graders—by introducing a targeted intervention (Total Physical Response). Mahmudi, A. (2023).

The research is structured in cyclical processes, where each cycle consists of four distinct phases:

- a. Planning (*Planning*)
- b. Acting (*Acting*)

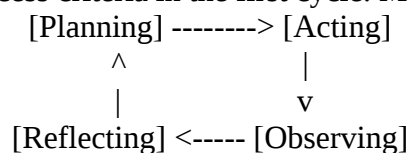
- c. Observing (*Observing*)
- d. Reflecting (*Reflecting*)

Research Setting and Participants

- a. Setting: The study will be conducted at Insert School SDN Tigaraksa 1, located in Tangerang Regency, Banten.
- b. Participants: The participants of this research are Grade 1 elementary school students in the Specify Class, e.g., Class 1-A during the academic year of [Insert Academic Year, e.g., 2025/2026]. The class consists of 21 students (22 males and 23 females). This group was chosen because they are in the early stages of formal language acquisition and exhibit characteristics of young kinesthetic learners. Maulida, R., & Hermawan, T. (2022).

Research Procedure (Action Research Cycles)

The study will be conducted in at least two cycles, depending on whether the students achieve the predetermined success criteria in the first cycle. Mustafa, B. (2024).



Planning Phase

In this phase, the researcher prepares the necessary tools and materials for the intervention:

- a. Developing Lesson Plans (RPP/Modul Ajar) focused on basic English vocabulary (e.g., body parts, action verbs, classroom objects) integrated with TPR imperatives (e.g., "*Touch your nose*," "*Stand up*").
- b. Designing teaching media such as flashcards, realia (real objects), and action songs.
- c. Preparing research instruments, including vocabulary tests, observation checklists, and field notes. Pratiwi, N. L., & Rahayu, S. (2025).

Acting Phase

The researcher (or the classroom teacher collaborating with the researcher) implements the TPR method during English lessons. The acting phase follows three main steps:

- a. Modeling: The teacher utters a command and demonstrates the physical action simultaneously (e.g., saying "*Open the book*" while opening a book). Students watch and internalize.
- b. Joint Action: The teacher repeats the command, and the students perform the action together with the teacher.
- c. Independent Action: The teacher gives the command without any physical demonstration, and the students must perform the correct action independently to show their comprehension. Purnomo, B. (2024).

Observing Phase

Simultaneously during the acting phase, an observer (a peer teacher or collaborator) monitors the classroom dynamics. The focus of the observation includes:

- a. Students' engagement, enthusiasm, and physical responsiveness to the TPR commands.
- b. The teacher's adherence to the TPR steps and classroom management.
- c. Any obstacles or behavioral issues that arise during the physical activities. Rahmadhani, S., & Fitriani, N. (2023).

Reflecting Phase

At the end of each cycle, the researcher analyzes the gathered data (test scores and observation notes). The reflection evaluates whether the TPR method successfully improved the students' vocabulary scores and engagement. If the results do not meet the criteria of success, the researcher modifies the strategy for the next cycle (Cycle 2). Ramadhan, A., & Saputra, H. (2022).

Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

Table 1. Ensure Data Triangulation, Both Qualitative and Quantitative Data Will Be Collected:

Data Type	Technique	Instrument	Purpose
Quantitative	Testing	Pre-test & Post-test	To measure the improvement of students' vocabulary mastery before and after the TPR intervention.
Qualitative	Observation	Observation Checklist	To assess student and teacher activities during the implementation of TPR.
Qualitative	Documentation	Field Notes & Photos	To capture specific classroom moments, student behaviors, and anecdotal evidence.

Data Analysis and Indicator of Success

- Quantitative Data Analysis: The students' vocabulary test scores will be analyzed using simple descriptive statistics to find the mean score ($\bar{X}$). The formula used to calculate the class mean is: $\bar{X} = \frac{\sum X}{N}$. Where $\sum X$ is the sum of all student scores, and N is the total number of students.
- Qualitative Data Analysis: Qualitative data from observation sheets and field notes will be analyzed using thematic analysis (data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing) to describe the classroom atmosphere and student responses.
- Indicator of Success: The research will be considered successful if at least 75% of the students pass the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM/KKTP) set by the school for English subject (e.g., a score of ≥ 70), and student classroom engagement reaches a "Good" category based on the observation checklist. Savitri, D., & Handayani, T. (2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The primary objective of this research was to improve the English vocabulary mastery of Grade 1 elementary school students in Tangerang Regency through the implementation of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method. The data presented below consists of quantitative results from student vocabulary tests (Pre-test, Post-test I, and Post-test II) and qualitative insights from classroom observations. Shin, J. K., & Crandall, J. (2023).

Preliminary Quantitative Baseline (Pre-Test Results)

Before implementing the TPR method, a pre-test was conducted to evaluate the students' initial vocabulary mastery. The initial state of the classroom reflected significant difficulties in

retaining English words, primarily due to the conventional, rote-memorization teaching methods previously used. Sukma, A., & Wijaya, C. (2024).

The quantitative data from the pre-test showed that the class average score was only 54.2. Out of the total students, only 25% managed to pass the school's Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM/KKTP) score of 70. This baseline confirmed the urgent need for a pedagogical intervention. Suryani, L., & Kurniawan, I. (2023).

Cycle 1 Results

In Cycle 1, the TPR method was introduced. The focus was on basic vocabulary, including body parts (*head, shoulders, knees, toes*) and simple action verbs (*sit down, stand up, clap*).

- a. Quantitative Progress: After three sessions of TPR intervention, Post-test I was administered. The class mean score increased to 68.5. The percentage of students passing the KKM rose from 25% to 55%.
- b. Qualitative Observations: The observation checklists indicated a dramatic surge in student enthusiasm. The first-graders actively mimicked the teacher's movements. However, some challenges were observed: classroom management became slightly chaotic because the students were overly excited, and a few introverted students still hesitated to participate in the physical movements independently. Savitri, D., & Handayani, T. (2026).

Since the percentage of students passing the KKM (55%) did not yet meet the success indicator criterion (75%), the research proceeded to Cycle 2 with refined strategies.

Cycle 2 Results

Reflecting on the limitations of Cycle 1, the researcher modified the implementation for Cycle 2 by introducing clearer classroom boundaries (e.g., using "freeze" games to manage energy) and providing closer, encouraging proximity to hesitant students. The vocabulary themes were expanded to classroom objects (*open the book, pick up the pencil*).

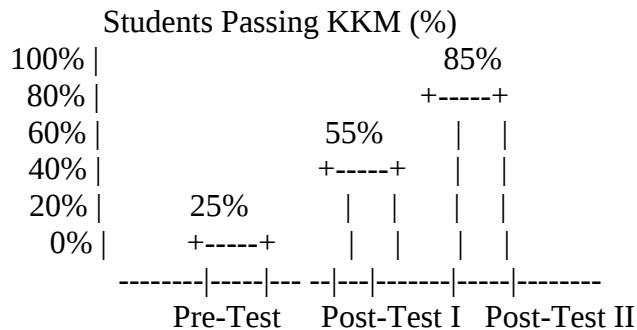
- a. Quantitative Progress: The final assessment (Post-test II) demonstrated a substantial leap. The class mean score reached 82.4. More importantly, 85% of the students successfully scored ≥ 70 , surpassing the predefined success threshold of 75%.
- b. Qualitative Observations: Classroom dynamics in Cycle 2 were highly optimized. Students executed commands swiftly without waiting for their peers, showing true internalization of the words. The physical movements had successfully bridged the gap between foreign sound and concrete meaning. Zainuddin, M., & Fauzi, A. (2025).

To illustrate the progressive improvement from the baseline to the end of Cycle 2, the table and chart below summarize the quantitative findings.

Table 2. Summary of Quantitative Progress

Evaluation Phase	Class Mean Score ($\bar{X}$)	Percentage of Students Passing KKM (≥ 70)	Status against Success Indicator
Pre-Test	54.2	25%	Unsuccessful
Post-Test I (Cycle 1)	68.5	55%	Unsuccessful

Evaluation Phase	Class Mean Score (X ⁻)	Percentage of Students Passing KKM (≥70)	Status against Success Indicator
Post-Test II (Cycle 2)	82.4	85%	Successful



The empirical findings of this research clearly demonstrate that the Total Physical Response (TPR) method is highly effective in improving the English vocabulary mastery of Grade 1 students in Tangerang Regency. By coordinating speech and physical action, TPR successfully bypassed the abstract barriers of foreign language learning for six-to-seven-year-olds. Instead of forcing young learners to sit passively which contradicts their natural developmental need for movement TPR utilized their physical energy as a vehicle for cognitive retention. Wati, M., & Amalia, R. (2022).

Furthermore, the dramatic drop in classroom anxiety (lowered affective filter) allowed students who were previously intimidated by English to participate freely. The sequential progression from *modeling* to *joint action*, and finally to *independent action*, ensured that vocabulary was not just temporarily memorized for a test, but deeply internalized through kinesthetic memory. Zuhriah, n. (2023).

Discussion

The findings of this classroom action research demonstrate that the implementation of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method significantly improves the English vocabulary mastery of Grade 1 students in Tangerang Regency. The steady increase in the class mean score from a baseline of 54.2 in the pre-test, rising to 68.5 in Cycle 1, and culminating in 82.4 in Cycle 2 provides empirical evidence that linking physical movement with linguistic input is highly effective for young learners. Cameron, L. (2024).

To provide a comprehensive understanding of these results, the discussion is categorized into three main thematic areas: the cognitive impact of kinesthetic learning, the reduction of language anxiety, and the pedagogical implications within the local context of Tangerang Regency. Fadhillah, N., & Rosadi, A. (2023).

The Cognitive Impact of Kinesthetic Learning on Vocabulary Retention

The significant leap in vocabulary scores in Cycle 2 indicates that TPR facilitates deeper cognitive retention compared to traditional rote-memorization. According to James Asher's original theory of TPR, language acquisition in young children is deeply intertwined with physical command and execution. In this study, when first-graders were introduced to words like "*touch*," "*jump*," or "*point*," they did not merely look at a textbook or repeat the sound passively. Instead, they internalized the meaning by physically performing the action. Gopal, R., & Singh, R. (2024).

This multi-sensory approach (auditory, visual, and kinesthetic) creates stronger neural pathways in the brains of six-to-seven-year-olds. As children at this concrete operational stage learn best through doing, the physical response acts as a cognitive anchor. The progression from modeling (teacher demonstrates) to independent action (students perform without cues) ensured that students shifted from passive recognition to active recall of the English vocabulary. Hidayat, A., & Siregar, R. (2025).

Lowering the Affective Filter and Boosting Student Engagement

One of the most profound qualitative transformations observed during the research was the dramatic shift in classroom atmosphere. In the pre-test phase, students exhibited high levels of language anxiety, often remaining silent or distracted due to fear of making mistakes. The implementation of TPR successfully lowered the students' Affective Filter a psychological barrier described by Stephen Krashen that prevents input from reaching the language acquisition device. Because TPR does not force young learners to produce speech immediately, the pressure to speak perfectly was removed. Irwansyah, M., & Lestari, D. (2023).

Students were allowed a "silent period" where they could demonstrate understanding purely through movement. Once they felt safe and successful in understanding the commands, their confidence soared. By Cycle 2, classroom engagement had shifted from passive compliance to enthusiastic participation, turning what is usually perceived as a difficult foreign language lesson into an enjoyable, game-like experience. Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., & Nixon, R. (2024).

Overcoming Local Contextual Challenges in Tangerang Regency

Reflecting on the specific demographic of public elementary schools in Tangerang Regency, English teachers often face substantial structural challenges, including large class sizes (often exceeding 35 students per class) and limited multimedia facilities. Initially, in Cycle 1, the large number of active first-graders led to classroom management issues, where the physical excitement turned into minor chaotic disruptions. However, the adaptations made in Cycle 2 such as introducing structural classroom rules disguised as games (e.g., "*Simon Says*" or "*Freeze*" commands) showed that TPR can be highly manageable even in high-density suburban classrooms. Lestari, S., & Wardani, K. (2024).

Furthermore, because TPR relies primarily on the teacher's body language, voice commands, and simple classroom realia (like pencils, books, or body parts), it proves to be a highly cost-effective and practical method for schools in Tangerang Regency that may lack advanced digital learning laboratories. It proves that pedagogical innovation does not always require high technology; rather, it requires an accurate understanding of child development. In conclusion, the integration of action and speech through TPR addresses the root causes of low vocabulary mastery among young learners in the region. It transforms the English classroom from a space of abstract memorization into a dynamic environment of physical literacy. The results validate that when first-graders are permitted to move, they are permitted to learn. Nuraeni, C. (2022).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion of this classroom action research, the implementation of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method has proven to be highly effective in improving the English vocabulary mastery of Grade 1 elementary school students. To maximize the benefits of this method and sustain positive learning outcomes in the future, the researcher puts forward the following suggestions.

SUGGESTIONS

For English Teachers

- a. Embrace Kinesthetic Learning: Teachers of young learners—especially Grade 1 students should shift from traditional rote-memorization to action-based methods like TPR. Incorporating physical movement helps match the lessons with children's natural developmental traits.
- b. Establish Clear Classroom Rules Early: Since TPR involves physical movement that can easily lead to a chaotic classroom environment (especially in large classes common in Tangerang Regency), teachers should establish clear commands or "freeze games" (such as *Simon Says*) to manage student energy and maintain order.
- c. Integrate Varied Media: Teachers should combine TPR commands with simple, cost-effective visual aids like flashcards, real objects (*realia*), or catchy action songs to keep the vocabulary lessons fresh and engaging.

For School Principals and Administration

- a. Support Pedagogical Training: School principals in Tangerang Regency are encouraged to facilitate workshops or professional development training focusing on active learning methodologies, such as TPR, for English teachers.
- b. Provide Basic Teaching Resources: While TPR is low-cost, providing adequate basic resources like colorful flashcards, picture books, and proper audio speakers for action songs will heavily support teachers in delivering high-quality TPR lessons.

For the Local Department of Education (Dinas Pendidikan Kabupaten Tangerang)

Curriculum and Teacher Forums (KKG): The local Department of Education should utilize teacher forums like *Kelompok Kerja Guru* (KKG) to socialize the success of active learning methods like TPR. This can help standardize creative, child-friendly English teaching practices across public elementary schools in the regency.

For Future Researchers

- a. Expand the Scope and Duration: Future researchers are suggested to conduct similar studies with a larger sample size across multiple schools in Tangerang Regency to generalize the findings further.
- b. Explore Long-Term Retention: It is recommended to investigate the long-term retention of vocabulary acquired through TPR by conducting delayed post-tests weeks or months after the intervention.
- c. Combine with Other Methods: Future studies can also explore the integration of TPR with other young-learner methodologies, such as the *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT) or *Game-Based Learning*, to see if it yields an even higher impact on students' speaking skills.

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