

# APPLYING “TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE” IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS AT “DANAU INA” PRIMARY SCHOOL, KUPANG, EAST NUSA TENGGARA PROVINCE

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Total Physical Response, Teaching English, Young Learners	This study aims to investigate the implementation of “Total Physical Response” (TPR) method in teaching English to young learners at “Danau Ina” Primary School in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara Province. The research focuses on exploring students’ responses, the perceived benefits, and the challenges they encounter when learning English using TPR. A qualitative research method was employed, involving classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with fifth-grade students and their teacher. Data collection techniques included detailed observations of students’ engagement and participation, as well as interviews to gather their perceptions and experiences with TPR. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The results of the study revealed that students responded positively to the TPR method, demonstrating high levels of active participation, positive verbal and non-verbal responses and a strong understanding of the materials taught. They perceived several benefits, including improved vocabulary comprehension, creative language production, and increased confidence in speaking English. However, some challenges were noted, as students occasionally felt frustrated, bored, and overwhelmed. Yet, despite these challenges, the study concludes that TPR is an effective approach to engage young learners in English language learning, and make the learning process more interactive and enjoyable.

**How to cite:** Fanggidae, I. A., Kian Bera, L., & Kabelen, A. H. (2024). *Applying “Total Physical Response” in Teaching English to Young Learners at “Danau Ina” Primary School, Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara Province*. SPARKLE Journal of Language, Education and Culture, 5 (1) 39-47

## INTRODUCTION

English language plays a very important role in today's world as a tool for communication and global connection. This is understandable because, according to Adelaide (2023), with over two billion speakers worldwide, English has become the most widely understood language across cultures and backgrounds. Since it is used globally, English is considered a key tool for achieving success in the modern era, meaning that English is not only a means of communication but also opens the door to great opportunities in various fields, such as international business, science, and academia. English gives us access to a wealth of information, promotes education, and fosters personal growth because it is the language of technology and the Internet. Ayunda (2023) proposes that there are three benefits of mastering English language; first, English opens the gate to more knowledge. Second, it gives a worldwide connection. Third, it advances professional life. Therefore, it is necessary for Indonesians to master the language to get the opportunity to thrive and contribute on a global scale.

In relation to the importance of English, it is widely studied in Indonesian schools. In Indonesia, learning English as a foreign language is often a problem for students due to several reasons. One of the main reasons is the perception that English is a difficult language to learn because the process of mastering English language in Indonesia mostly occurs only through 'formal learning' (Saville-Troike, 2012). Most Indonesian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners only learn the language when they are in a classroom. When they leave the school environment, their social life both at home and the living environment does not provide opportunities to use English in everyday life. Moreover, many students find the grammar rules and pronunciation challenging, leads them to frustration and lack of motivation.

Additionally, the traditional teaching methods used in English classrooms, which heavily focus on textbooks and grammar drills, may not always engage students effectively. In elementary and high schools, English is taught as an integrated subject, unlike in universities where English is divided into sections such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, the traditional teaching methods often lead teachers to prioritize written texts for learners to read and vocabulary exercises using a dictionary. Students are given these tasks and expected to memorize as many vocabulary words as possible, without truly understanding what they are learning. This learning process can be boring, and the teacher's teaching methods are not creative. Many teachers use the same approach, which results in learners feeling bored and lacking enthusiasm in learning English.

To address these challenges, this study proposes the use of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method, a teaching approach that integrates physical movements with language learning to make lessons more engaging and effective. TPR emphasizes student interaction, reduces language learning anxiety, and promotes vocabulary retention by associating language with actions. This innovative approach aligns with contemporary pedagogical strategies that prioritize active and enjoyable learning environments for young learners.

Theoretical studies supporting this research highlight the importance of kinesthetic learning and student-centered approaches in language acquisition. Scholars like Asher (2009) and Larsen-Freeman (2000) advocate for TPR as an effective method for building comprehension and confidence in learners. Previous studies have demonstrated TPR's success in enhancing vocabulary acquisition, motivation, and participation among young learners.

This study aims to explore the application of TPR in teaching English to fifth-grade students at 'Danau Ina' Primary School in Kupang. It seeks to investigate students' responses to TPR, identify its perceived advantages, and examine the challenges faced during its implementation. The findings are expected to contribute valuable insights into effective teaching strategies for young learners in Indonesian contexts. By addressing the identified issues with innovative teaching methods like TPR, this research offers a potential solution to improve students' motivation, comprehension, and overall learning outcomes in English as a foreign language.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a qualitative research design to explore the implementation of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in teaching English to young learners. Conducted at 'Danau Ina' Primary School in Kupang during July 2024, the research focused on fifth-grade students, aged 11–12 years, who were selected due to their developmental readiness for interactive and kinesthetic learning. This approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of students' responses, the benefits of TPR, and the challenges encountered during its use.

Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Observations were used to assess students' engagement, participation, and responses during TPR activities, with detailed field notes and an observation checklist ensuring consistency. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with students in their native language to explore their perceptions, benefits experienced, and challenges faced. Audio recordings of interviews ensured accuracy, and responses were translated into English for analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved coding data segments and grouping them into broader themes, such as students' responses, perceived advantages, and challenges. Triangulation of data from observations and interviews enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings. Ethical considerations were upheld throughout the study, with informed consent obtained from participants and privacy maintained during interviews. This methodology provided rich insights into the effectiveness of TPR in fostering an engaging and interactive language-learning environment for young learners.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Students Responses**

Students' responses to the implementation of TPR method were observed during classroom activities. The observations focused on the levels of active participation, verbal responses, non-verbal responses, and

understanding demonstrated by students during TPR-based lessons. The students' responses from the observations are presented in table 4.1 a below:

Table 4.1 a  
 Students' Responses from Observations

Key Element	Rating Scale					Total Students
	1 VL	2 L	3 E	4 G	5 VG	
Active participation	0	0	0	5	18	23
Verbal Responses	0	0	0	9	14	23
Non-verbal Responses	0	0	0	7	16	23
Understanding	0	0	0	5	18	23

Rating scale: (1)VL= Very Low, (2)L= Low, (3)E= Enough, (4)G= Good, (5)VG= Very Good

The writer interviewed the students and used their answers as supporting evidence to increase the data's validity and robustness. Table 4.1b following provides specifics of the students' interview responses:

Table 4.1 b  
 Students' Responses from Interviews

Questions	Responses
Do you like doing actions and movements when learning English? Why or why not?	<p><u>Student 1:</u>  <i>Iya, suka miss! Karena dengan pake gerakan gerakan buat belajar jadi menyenangkan. Yes, I like doing actions. It makes learning so fun.</i></p> <p><u>Student 2:</u>  <i>Yes miss, saya sangat suka! Sangat menyenangkan. Yes. I enjoy it so much. So fun.</i></p> <p><u>Student 3:</u>  <i>yess miss. Saya sangat suka. Sangat menyenangkan belajar bahasa inggris seperti itu. Yes, I really like it! It's fun to learn English this way.</i></p> <p><u>Student 4:</u>  <i>Iya suka. Menurut saya menyenangkan. Um, yes, I think it is fun.</i></p>
Do you find it easy or hard to learn new English words when you use actions?	<p><u>Student 1</u>  <i>iya gampang miss! Saya ingat banyak kata-kata baru dengan lebih gampang It's easier. I remember so many new words easily.</i></p> <p><u>Student 2:</u>  <i>Gampang miss! dengan melakukan gerakan, itu membuat saya jadi ingat banyak kata bahasa Inggris dan artinya. Misalnya dancing artinya menari, going to school artinya kesekolah, dan eating artinya makan. Yes. I do the actions and it makes me remember the words and their meaning. For example, dancing means menari, going to school means pergi ke sekolah, and eating means makan.</i></p> <p><u>Student 3:</u>  <i>Menurut saya gampang miss. Saya ingat kata baru dengan baik ketika ucap smabil lakukan aksi dan gerakan. It's easy for me. I remember the words better when I do actions with them.</i></p> <p><u>Student 4:</u>  <i>Gampang. Lakukan gerakan gerakan buat saya ingat kata bahasa inggris. It's easy. Doing action helps me remember the words better.</i></p>
Do you feel more confident speaking English when you use actions?	<p><u>Student 1:</u>  <i>Iya miss. Saya tidak merasa takut salah ucap kata-kata bahasa inggris sambil pakai gerakan. Yes. I'm not afraid to say English words when doing actions and say them.</i></p> <p><u>Student 2:</u>  <i>iya miss! Saya merasa sangat baik, dan saya mengucapkan banyak kata baru. Yess miss. I feel good in class and I say so many English words.</i></p> <p><u>Student 3:</u>  <i>iya. Kadang saya masih ragu, tapi lihat teman saya ucap dan lakukan, saya juga ikut lakukan. Yes. Sometimes I still hesitate, but seeing my friends say and do, I also try to do the same.</i></p> <p><u>Student 4:</u>  <i>iya miss saya ingat kata baru dan tidak malu untuk ucap dan peragakan gerakan. Um, yes. Doing actions in class make me remember words and I'm not shy to say them.</i></p>

The writer discovered that the fifth-graders at "Danau Ina" Primary School in Kupang had a favorable reaction to the use of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in the classroom. Four essential components of the students' comments were noted by the writer:

1. Students Participate More Actively

The writer found that the students were more active during TPR lessons. Based on observational data, out of 23 students in the class, 18 exhibited very good active participation, while 5 demonstrated good active participation when learning English through the use of Total Physical Response method in the classroom. The writer observed that students were able to focus and pay attention to the teacher during the lesson, showing positive body language by performing actions and moving around the classroom. These results are consistent with Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), which holds that understandable input is the basis for language acquisition. Total Physical Response, with its emphasis on physical engagement and contextualized learning, provides a rich source of comprehensible input, fostering active participation and engagement.

Additionally, interview data indicated that students found learning English through TPR highly effective in promoting active participation. The students expressed that TPR was very fun and enjoyable, making them more eager to learn English. Student 1 mentioned, "It is like playing a game. We sing, act out different things like buying stuff, going to school, and even dancing." Similarly, student 3 echoed this sentiment, stating, "It makes me enjoy learning English because it is fun". From both of these statements, the writer found that Total Physical Response's playful and interactive nature effectively motivates students and encourages active participation. This aligns with Asher's theory (1977) that emphasizes the importance of movement and physical response in language learning, making the process more engaging and memorable.

2. Students Show Positive Verbal Responses

The writer found that the students' verbal responses were getting better. Observational data revealed that out of 23 students in the class, 14 exhibited very good verbal responses, while 9 demonstrated good verbal responses during the use of Total Physical Responses in the classroom. Students demonstrated proficiency in pronouncing English words and phrases, indicating a high level of language use within the classroom. Notably, the writer found most students pronounced words correctly and clearly.

Interview data supported the positive impact of TPR on students' verbal abilities. Students reported feeling confident in using English language during class, attributing this to Total Physical Response method. Student 2 mentioned, "last week, we learned to say Cici is writing in the classroom while do the action of writing and I still remember it." This response highlights Total Physical Response's effectiveness in promoting vocabulary acquisition and retention through kinesthetic learning. Asher (2003), notes that TPR facilitates long-term retention of vocabulary and structures by connecting physical actions with verbal cues, thus reinforcing language through multiple modalities.

3. Students Show Positive Non-Verbal Responses

The writer found that the students showed strong positive non-verbal responses. Observational data indicated that out of 23 students in the class, 16 demonstrated very good non-verbal responses, while 7 exhibited good non-verbal responses during Total Physical Response-based lessons. The writer found that the students displayed positive gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact with the teacher, indicating their active engagement and understanding of the learning process.

Furthermore, interview data confirmed the positive influence of Total Physical Response on students' non-verbal communication. Students reported feeling comfortable expressing themselves non-verbally during Total Physical Response-based lessons. Student 1 mentioned, "Because the use of actions makes the learning process enjoyable". According to this response, Total Physical Response's focus on physical expression creates a more laid-back and stimulating learning atmosphere that encourages students to freely express themselves and communicate. This is corroborated by research by Lazaraton (2004), which emphasizes the value of nonverbal communication in improving classroom engagement and language understanding.

#### 4. Students Show Strong levels of Understanding

Based on the data from observations, out of 23 students in the class, 18 demonstrated very good understanding, while 5 exhibited good understanding during the use of Total Physical Response in the classroom. The writer discovered that throughout the class, students showed a high capacity to follow directions from the teacher and comprehend the instructions for Total Physical Response. The effectiveness of Total Physical Response in improving students' comprehension was further confirmed by interview data. Students reported finding Total Physical Response instructions are easy to understand and comprehend. As it is mentioned by student 1, "I like to do the actions so I always listen to the instructions given by my teacher". This response suggests that Total Physical Response reliance on physical actions aids in comprehension, as students actively engage with the instructions and connect them to physical movements. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social learning, which highlights the significance of interaction and physical activity in cognitive growth, lends credence to this.

#### Perceived Advantages

Students' perceptions of the advantages of using TPR in the classroom were also gathered through classroom observations and student interviews. The observations focused on the levels of vocabulary comprehension, language production, and interest and confidence of the students during TPR-based lessons. The following Table 4.2 a present the perceived advantages gathered through classroom observations:

Table 4.2 a  
 Perceived Advantages from Observations

Key Element	Rating Scale					Total Students
	1 VL	2 L	3 E	4 G	5 VG	
Vocabulary Comprehension	0	0	2	8	13	23
Language Production	0	0	2	9	12	23
Interest and confidence	0	0	0	3	20	23

Rating scale: (1)VL= Very Low, (2)L= Low, (3)E= Enough, (4)G= Good, (5)VG= Very Good

In order to make the data stronger and valid, the writer did interviews with the students and used the students' responses from the interviews as supporting data. The interview responses are presented in the table 4.2 b below:

Table 4.2 b  
 Perceived Advantages from Interviews

Questions	Responses
What are some good things about using actions to learn English?	<p><u>Student 1:</u>                      Menurut saya, hal baiknya adalah saya jadi mau belajar lebih banyak lagi.                      I think, the good thing is I want to learn English more.</p> <p><u>Student 2:</u>                      Saya tidak bosan belajar Bahasa Inggris miss.                      It makes learning English not boring.</p> <p><u>Student 3:</u>                      Saya menikmati pembelajaran bahasa Inggris karena menyenangkan.                      It makes me enjoy learning English because it is fun.</p> <p><u>Student 4:</u>                      Kelas jadi menyenangkan dan saya tidak bosan.                      It makes the class more interesting and I don't get bored.</p>
Does using actions help you remember new words better?	<p><u>Student 1:</u>                      Iya miss! Minggu lalu kami belajar kata buying dan mekakukan gerakan membeli jadi saya masih ingat.                      Yes miss. Last week we learn the word buying and do the action of buying something and I still remember it.</p> <p><u>Student 2:</u>                      Iya. Minggu lalu, kami belajar ucap 'Cici is writing in the classroom' dan saya masih ingat dengan jelas.                      Yes. Last week we learn to say cici is writing in the classroom and do the action of writing, and I</p>

	<p><i>remember it until now.</i></p> <p><u>Student 3:</u>  <i>Terakhir kali, saya belajar ucap playing marble dan saya masih ingat sampai sekarang.</i>  <i>Last time, I learned the word playing marble and acting it out, and I still remember it.</i></p> <p><u>Student 4:</u>  <i>Saya masih ingat kata swimming artinya berenang karena saya lakukan gerakan itu minggu lalu dan saya masih ingat.</i>  <i>Yes. I still remember the word swimming means 'berenang' because I did the action and I like it.</i></p>
<p>Do you think it's more fun to learn English when you use actions?</p>	<p><u>Student 1:</u>  <i>Iya miss! Belajar terasa seperti bermain karena kami bernyanyi dan membuat gerakan, ada juga bermain peran seperti membeli, pergi ke sekolah, dan menari.</i>  <i>Yes miss. Learning feels like playing because I sing and do actions, I act roles like buying something, going to school, and dancing.</i></p> <p><u>Student 2:</u>  <i>Iya Miss. Saya mau belajar lebih banyak lagi.</i>  <i>Yes. I like to learn English words with doing actions more.</i></p> <p><u>Student 3:</u>  <i>Iya miss. Terasa lebih menyenangkan. Definitely. It is more fun.</i></p> <p><u>Student 4:</u>  <i>Iya Miss. Saya sangat suka. Sangat menyenangkan belajar Bahasa Inggris dengan cara seperti itu.</i>  <i>Yes miss. I really enjoy the class. It's so fun to learn English like that.</i></p>

### 1. Vocabulary Comprehension Gets Better

Observations during TPR lessons revealed a positive impact on vocabulary comprehension among 23 students in the class. Thirteen students exhibited very good vocabulary comprehension, eight demonstrated good comprehension, and two displayed enough comprehension when learning English through Total Physical Response method in the classroom. This suggests that TPR effectively facilitated vocabulary acquisition for a majority of the students.

Furthermore, interview data revealed that TPR significantly enhanced students' vocabulary comprehension. They described the physical actions as a helpful tool for remembering new words. Student 4 remarked, "It's easy. Doing action helps me remember the words better." Additionally, student 2 shared, "I do the actions and it makes me remember the words and their meaning. For example, dancing means menari, going to school means pergi ke sekolah, and eating means makan." These responses underscore the effectiveness of TPR in creating a multi-sensory learning experience, contributing to deeper vocabulary acquisition. This is supported by Asher's theory (2003), which emphasizes the role of physical movement in reinforcing language learning.

### 2. Good and Creative Language Production

Observations indicated a positive impact on students' language production. Out of 23 students in the class, 12 exhibited very good language production, 9 demonstrated good language production and 2 displayed enough language production while learning English with TPR. Students showed increased confidence in using English. For instance, during a role-playing activity of buying snack, students were able to use phrases like "I'd like a roti please" and "can I have a bakwan?" while performing and receiving their food. This suggests that TPR provided a safe and supported environment for students to practice and experiment with language production.

Moreover, interview data revealed that TPR helped students feel more comfortable and confident in speaking English. They described that performing physical actions in class enabled them to express themselves verbally. Student 1 stated "I remember so many new words easily." This response highlights the potential of TPR to reduce language anxiety and empower the students to take risks with language production. These findings align with Swain's Output Hypothesis (1985), which posits that language production is crucial for language acquisition.

### 3. Students' Interest and Confidence Gets Higher

Observations indicated a significant increase in students' interest and confidence during TPR-based lessons. Out of 23 students, 20 exhibited very good interest and confidence, while 3 demonstrated good interest and confidence. Students participated actively and showed enthusiasm for classroom

activities. The playful and interactive nature of TPR created a positive learning environment, fostering a sense of enjoyment and accomplishment. Students' facial expressions, body language, and overall demeanor indicated a more positive and motivated method to learning English.

Additionally, interview data revealed that TPR increased students' interest and confidence in learning English. They described the activities as fun and engaging, making them more motivated to learn English. Student 2 stated "Doing actions in class make me remember words and I'm not shy to say them." Furthermore, student 1 shared "I'm not afraid to say English words when doing actions and say them." These responses highlight the potential of TPR to create a more positive learning experience leading to increased motivation and confidence in language learning. This is consistent with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), which suggests that a lower affective filter enhances acquisition by reducing anxiety and increasing motivation.

### Challenges the Students Faced with Total Physical Response

To identify the challenges that the students encountered during their experience of learning English with TPR-based lessons, the writer conducted interview with the English Teacher. The results of this interview are presented in the table 4.3 below:

Table 4.3  
 Challenges the Students faced from Teacher Interview

Questions	Responses
What challenges the students encountered while learning English through TPR in your classroom?	<i>Teacher:</i> Well, the biggest challenge I noticed is language comprehension. Some students, especially those with limited prior exposure to English, struggle to understand the instructions during TPR activities. It can be frustrating for them, and they sometimes get lost in the sequence of actions.
How do you address those comprehension difficulties?	<i>Teacher:</i> I try to use simple language and repeat instructions several times. I also use visual aids, like pictures or flashcards, to help clarify the meaning of words and actions.
Have you noticed any other challenges with TPR?	<i>Teacher:</i> Yes, I noticed that TPR creates frustration for the students during lessons. And, sometimes students have difficulty coordinating the physical actions with the verbal instructions. This is especially true with multi-step activities where they have to remember a sequence of actions. It can be a bit overwhelming for them.
How do you help students with coordination issues?	<i>Teacher:</i> I break down complex activities into smaller, more manageable steps. I also use repetition and practice to help students remember the sequence of actions. And, of course, I encourage them to ask questions if they're unsure about anything.

The writer then analyzed the data based on the result of the interview.

#### 1. Total Physical Response Creates Frustration

One of the major challenges noted by the teacher is that Total Physical Response creates frustration. While the students generally like the method, in some cases, Total Physical Response can be frustrating for students, especially those with limited prior exposure to English, as they may get lost in the sequence of actions. According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, learners acquire language most effectively when they are exposed to comprehensible input that is slightly above their current proficiency level (Krashen, 1982).

#### 2. Total Physical Response Creates Boringness

Besides frustration, another challenge faced by the students during their experience of learning English with Total Physical Response is that the method can also lead to boredom due to its aggressive repetitions. While repetition is a cornerstone of language acquisition (Lightbown & Spada, 2023), excessive repetition may lead to disengagement, especially among students who prefer varied learning activities.

#### 3. Students Feel Overwhelmed During Multi-Step Activities

Another significant challenge identified is multi-step activities are overwhelming for the students. They face difficulty in coordinating physical actions with verbal instructions, especially during multi-step activities. This difficulty can be overwhelming for students and may impede their ability to effectively engage with the

lesson. Asher (2003) suggests that the synchronization of physical and verbal responses is essential for the success of TPR, yet this synchronization can be challenging for some learners.

To mitigate coordination issues, the teacher breaks down complex activities into smaller, more manageable steps and emphasizes repetition and practice. This approach is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasizes the importance of providing learners with tasks that are within their ability to perform with guidance and support.

Another effective strategy mentioned by the teacher is to encourage students to ask questions if they are unsure about any aspect of TPR activities. This aligns with the Communicative Approach to language teaching, which emphasizes interaction and negotiation of meaning as key components of language acquisition (Ellis, 2003). By fostering an open and supportive classroom environment, the teacher can help reduce anxiety and promote active engagement in learning.

## CONCLUSION

The research findings reveal that the implementation of Total Physical Response (TPR) in the 5th-Grade students at 'Danau Ina' primary school Kupang yielded positive outcomes. The key findings can be summarized as follows:

1. Students exhibited strong positive responses to TPR. The majority of students exhibited high levels of active participation during TPR lessons, TPR significantly enhanced students' verbal abilities, with many students demonstrating proficiency in pronouncing English words and phrases and students demonstrated positive non-verbal communication, such as gestures and facial expressions, indicating their understanding and engagement with the learning process.
2. Students perceived several advantages from the implementation of TPR. TPR proved effective in enhancing vocabulary comprehension. Additionally, students exhibited increased confidence in language production. TPR also significantly boosted students' interest and confidence in learning English.
3. The implementation of TPR in the class presents several challenges faced by students. First one, Total Physical Response creates frustration. Second, Total Physical Response creates boringness. Third, Students feel overwhelmed during multi-step activities.

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