



**The Impact of Total Physical Response (TPR) on the Acquisition and Retention of Action
Verbs in Young Learners.**

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Abstract.

This study examines the effectiveness of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in facilitating the acquisition and retention of action verbs among preschool students from a public educational institution in Chone, Manabí, Ecuador. The research aimed to improve English language teaching through dynamic and meaningful learning experiences adapted to young learners.

The study employed a qualitative approach with an action research design and participant observation as the primary data collection methods. Different verbal commands related to body movement were implemented, supported by visual resources such as flashcards and demonstrations. The intervention focused on helping children associate language with physical actions to facilitate comprehension and vocabulary retention.

The results demonstrated that the TPR method reduces anxiety during English learning and strengthens listening comprehension through the association between words and body movements. Furthermore, the method stimulated memory retention by connecting language with motor responses, allowing students to retain vocabulary for longer periods. The findings also revealed that TPR increased students' motivation, active participation, and confidence within the classroom environment.

Overall, the study concludes that the Total Physical Response method contributes significantly to vocabulary acquisition and long-term retention in preschool learners by promoting meaningful, dynamic, and low-anxiety language learning experiences.

Keywords: Total Physical Response (TPR), action verbs, preschool education, vocabulary retention, qualitative approach, classroom anxiety.

Introduction.

Teaching English in a public institution, particularly at the preschool level, presents several structural challenges that directly affect the quality of language learning from an early age. One of the most significant difficulties observed in these contexts is the limited acquisition and retention of vocabulary among young learners. As students progress to higher educational levels, many demonstrate difficulties remembering previously learned vocabulary and linguistic structures, revealing a lack of meaningful and sustained learning.

In many cases, English instruction is still based on traditional methodologies that emphasize repetition and memorization rather than interaction and active participation. Consequently, students frequently perceive English learning as an abstract and difficult process, which may reduce their motivation and participation in the classroom. Since English differs from the students' native language, many preschool children experience insecurity and anxiety when exposed to a foreign language environment.

In response to the educational problem, there is a growing need to implement active and student-centered methodologies that promote meaningful learning experiences. One of the most effective approaches for young learners is the Total Physical Response (TPR) method developed by James Asher (1977). According to Asher, language acquisition becomes more effective when learners physically respond to oral commands, establishing a direct connection between auditory input and motor activity.

The relevance of the TPR methodology lies in its capacity to transform the classroom into a dynamic learning environment where movement functions as a cognitive bridge for language comprehension.

Several studies have demonstrated that associating vocabulary with physical actions facilitates long-term retention and strengthens memory processes (Mariyan & Musfiroh, 2019). Likewise, Liu, Chen, and Chen (2024) found that vocabulary acquisition significantly improves when students combine movement with immediate language comprehension while simultaneously reducing anxiety during the learning process. Furthermore, preschool children naturally learn through movement, imitation, and interaction with their environment. Therefore, methodologies that integrate kinesthetic activities are particularly appropriate for this developmental stage. The TPR method allows children to interact with language naturally and engagingly, encouraging participation without forcing immediate oral production.

This research emerged from the educational reality observed in public institutions, where English learning often lacks continuity and long-term effectiveness. In this context, the study seeks to analyze the impact of the Total Physical Response method on the acquisition and retention of action verbs among preschool learners. Specifically, the research focuses on understanding how body movement supports vocabulary comprehension, memory consolidation, and linguistic development in early childhood education.

Unlike other studies, this research emphasizes that body movement is a cognitive tool that facilitates language retention through meaningful physical interaction. Additionally, the study contributes to the improvement of English teaching practices by demonstrating that TPR is an accessible, practical, and effective methodology for preschool classrooms with limited educational resources.

General Objective.

To analyze The Impact of the Total Physical Response (TPR) methodology on the Acquisition and Retention of action verbs in Young Learners, considering the particularities of their cognitive, motor, and linguistic development. This research seeks to understand how the integration of body movements with verbal language influences the formation and consolidation of cognitive connections related to vocabulary learning, promoting a stronger and more effective linguistic development during this crucial stage.

1. To evaluate how the use of the Total Physical Response (TPR) methodology influences the initial acquisition of action verbs in preschool children during English as a Foreign Language (ELF) classes.
2. To measure the level of retention of action verbs learned through the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in preschool students.
3. To compare the results obtained through group activities to determine the effectiveness of the TPR methodology in learning action verbs.

The use of the Total Physical Response (TPR) methodology as the main strategy in English language teaching enhances the acquisition and retention of action verbs in young learners.

In addition, learning through body movement and physical activities increases students' motivation and participation, facilitating vocabulary comprehension and memorization over a longer period of time (Fayzullayeva,2025).

Core Categories of Analysis: TPR Applications.

Application of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method through action commands and visual materials, such as flashcards.

Action Verbs Acquisition/Retention.

Level of acquisition and retention of action verbs in English among young learners.

Theoretical Framework.

The theoretical foundation of this study is based on the Total Physical Response (TPR) theory developed by James Asher in 1977. This methodology proposes that second-language acquisition

becomes more effective when auditory stimuli are combined with physical responses. According to Asher, this interaction creates a direct neural connection between language and the motor system, facilitating comprehension and long-term vocabulary retention.

Asher also argues that second-language learning should imitate the natural process of first-language (L1) acquisition. During early childhood, children initially develop listening comprehension before producing spoken language. In this stage, children respond physically to commands and environmental stimuli before they can verbalize language. Consequently, the TPR method prioritizes comprehension and action over immediate oral production, reducing anxiety and promoting a more natural, stress-free learning environment.

Furthermore, Asher (1977) proposes the existence of an innate biological program for language acquisition. He suggested that the human brain is naturally prepared to decode language through the interaction between auditory input and motor activity. This connection strengthens language retention and facilitates both immediate learning and long-term memory consolidation. (Fayzullayeva, 2025).

The contributions of Jean Piaget (1952) also support the principles of the TPR methodology. Piaget's cognitive development theory, children construct knowledge through active interaction with their physical and social environment. In this sense, kinesthetic learning plays an essential role during early childhood because children learn more effectively through concrete experiences and movement.

Similarly, Stephen Krashen's (1982) theory of the "Silent Period" is highly relevant to this research. Krashen explains that language learners often go through a stage in which comprehension develops before oral production. During this period, learners may understand language without feeling ready to speak. The TPR method respects this natural process by allowing children to respond physically instead of requiring immediate verbal participation.

In the context of teaching English as a Foreign Language EFL in preschool education, the TPR method represents an effective pedagogical strategy because it responds to the cognitive, motor, and emotional needs of young learners. The integration of body movements, games, songs, and oral commands promotes motivation, active participation, and vocabulary comprehension, while creating a positive classroom atmosphere.

Methodology.

This study employed a qualitative approach with an action research design focused on the development of listening comprehension and motor responses among preschool children learning English as a Foreign Language.

The participants consisted of 19 preschool students between four and five years old from a public educational institution located in Chone, Manabi, Ecuador. The sample was selected through convenience sampling because of the accessibility of the participants and the relevance of this developmental stage for language acquisition.

The study was based on the Total Physical Response (TPR) method proposed by James Asher (1977) and the “Silent Period” theory developed by Stephen Krashen (1982). These theoretical perspectives emphasize the importance of listening comprehension, body movement, and gradual language production during early childhood. The intervention was divided into two phases. The first phase lasted approximately 45 minutes and focused on creating a comfortable and participatory learning environment. During this stage, the teacher introduced simple commands such as “sit down” and “stand up” through demonstrations and body movements. The second phase lasted 90 minutes and was divided into two sections. During the first section, students were introduced to more complex action verbs such as “jump,” “dance,” “sing,” “sleep,” and “swim.” Adverbs such as “fast” and “slow” were also incorporated through combined oral and physical instruction.

During the activities, the principles of the “Silent Period” were respected, allowing students to demonstrate comprehension through movement before requiring verbal responses. The second section consisted of a retention assessment in which students responded to oral instructions and visual prompts.

Data collection was conducted through participant observation, field notes, and observation journals. These instruments allowed the researcher to document students’ responses, participation, listening comprehension, motor reactions, and vocabulary retention throughout the intervention.

Ethical Considerations.

Considering that the participants were preschool children between 4 and 5 years old, strict ethical protocols were followed throughout the study. Written informed consent was obtained from the parents or legal guardians of all participants before conducting the intervention. Additionally, verbal assent was requested from the children before each activity. The identity of both educational institutions and participants remained confidential in order to protect their privacy and ensure ethical compliance during the research process.

Results.

The implementation of the Total Physical Response (TPR) methodology generated several observable learning patterns among the 19 preschool participants. Direct observations revealed that the use of visual material and oral commands effectively facilitated the association between image, action, and vocabulary. When flashcards and demonstrations were presented together with oral instructions, all students successfully performed the corresponding physical actions. This finding demonstrated that the children were able to comprehend and retain the action verbs introduced during the intervention. One of the most significant findings of the study was that 14 out of the 19 participants spontaneously verbalized several action verbs after repeated exposure to the activities. This result reflected a natural transition from listening comprehension and physical response to oral language production. However, five students presented difficulties

pronouncing some of the action verbs practiced during the sessions. Despite these pronunciation challenges, these students successfully demonstrated comprehension by correctly performing the requested physical actions. This pattern supports the idea that language comprehension can develop before oral production.

Field notes and observation journals also revealed that the TPR methodology contributed to the creation of a positive, dynamic, and low-anxiety classroom environment. Students demonstrated high levels of motivation, participation, and confidence during the activities.

Furthermore, the results suggested that the silent periods observed in some students did not represent a lack of understanding. Instead, these periods reflected a natural stage of cognitive processing and language consolidation.

Table 1

Qualitative Matrix of Student Responses to TPR Interventions

Core Categories	Observable Pattern/ Behavior	Finding (n=19)	Theoretical Connection
TPR Applications (kinesthetic Connection)	Correct execution of physical actions, jumping, dancing, and sleeping, after listening to oral commands supported by visual flashcards	19/19 students	Asher's TPR Theory (1977)
Action Verb Acquisition	Students progressed naturally from non-verbal comprehension to spontaneous oral production.	14/19 Students	Krashen's Silent Period Theory (1982)
Action Verb Retention	Students with pronunciation difficulties demonstrated comprehension through accurate motor responses.	5/19 Students	Comprehension precedes language production (Fayzullayeva, 2025)

- ❖ The table shows that all 19 students correctly executed motor coordination. While 14 out of 19 achieved spontaneous comprehension in pronouncing the learners' commands.

Additionally, 5 out of 19 students had difficulty speaking, but their movements were coordinated when they showed the flashcards displaying the action verbs learned in class.

Discussion.

The study's findings confirm the positive impact of the Total Physical Response (TPR) methodology on the acquisition and retention of action verbs among preschool learners at a public institution in Chone, Manabi. The demonstration showed that students were able to associate vocabulary with physical movement, facilitating listening comprehension and vocabulary retention.

One of the most important findings was that most participants naturally progressed from physical comprehension to oral production. This process supports Stephen Krashen's (1982) theory of the "Silent Period," which states that language learners develop comprehension before verbal expressions. Similarly, the use of visual materials and kinesthetic activities significantly increased students' motivation and participation during the learning process. These findings are consistent with previous studies conducted by Mariyan and Musfiroh (2019), who argued that physical interaction improves long-term vocabulary retention among young learners. The results also support James Asher's (1977) Theory that language acquisition becomes more effective when learners physically respond to oral language. The successful execution of physical commands demonstrated that students were able to internalize vocabulary through body movement and motor memory.

Another relevant finding was the reduction of anxiety observed during the intervention. The playful and participatory nature of the activities created a safe learning environment in which children felt comfortable interacting with English without fear of making mistakes. Additionally, the evidence collected during the study suggests that body movement functions as a cognitive support mechanism that strengthens language learning during early childhood. This finding aligns with recent studies emphasizing the importance of kinesthetic experiences in second language acquisition. Overall, the study demonstrates that the TPR methodology represents an accessible and effective pedagogical strategy for English teaching in preschool education, particularly in public institutions with limited educational resources.

Conclusion.

The present study concludes that the Total Physical Response (TPR) method has a significantly positive impact on the acquisition and retention of action verbs among preschool learners. The findings demonstrated that integrating body movement into English instruction transforms language learning into a dynamic, meaningful, and participatory experience. Instead of relying exclusively on memorization and repetition, children actively interacted with vocabulary through physical response, facilitating deeper comprehension and stronger retention. One of the most important contributions of the TPR method is its capacity to strengthen listening comprehension while simultaneously reducing anxiety during language learning. By allowing students to demonstrate understanding through movement before requiring oral production, the methodology respects the natural process of language acquisition and promotes confidence among young

learners. Furthermore, the study confirmed that movement and gestures function as cognitive tools that support vocabulary retention through motor memory. The association between language and physical actions enables students to retain vocabulary more effectively and retrieve it more naturally. The results also demonstrated that silent periods observed in some students should not be interpreted as a lack of understanding. Instead, these periods represented a natural stage of language processing and cognitive development.

Finally, the study highlights the importance of implementing active and student-centered methodologies in the preschool English classroom. The Total Physical Response method offers an accessible, flexible, and effective strategy for promoting meaningful learning experiences in young learners. Despite the positive findings, this study was conducted within a specific educational context and with a limited number of participants. Therefore, future research is recommended to explore the long-term effects of the TPR method in different educational settings and with larger populations.

In conclusion, the Total Physical Response methodology contributes significantly to the development of listening comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, motivation, participation, and long-term retention in preschool learners, making it an effective pedagogical approach for early English language education.

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