



## Exploring the Role of Total Physical Response Method in Arabic Vocabulary Learning

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### Abstract:

This research aims to measure the influence of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in improving receptive language skills, specifically Arabic vocabulary comprehension. The study falls under the category of quantitative research, employing a quasi-experimental research method with nonequivalent control group design. The population under investigation consists of students from Al-Musyawah Islamic High School in Lembang. The sample taken consists of Grade XI Science with a total of 30 students as the experimental group and Grade XI Social Sciences with a total of 30 students as the control group. Data collection was conducted through a test consisting of 26 items administered to the sample for both pretest and posttest evaluations. The results of the study indicate that the TPR method is considered effective in improving receptive language skills, specifically Arabic vocabulary learning, as evidenced by the higher average scores of the experimental group students compared to those of the control group students.

### Keywords:

Receptive Language; Total Physical Response; Vocabulary

## INTRODUCTION

The Total Physical Response (TPR) method is a language learning approach developed by James Asher, a professor of psychology at San Jose State University, California. This method is among the language teaching methodologies widely adopted by many foreign language instructors. TPR is considered a popular and relevant language learning method that can be applied effectively in Arabic language instruction for children (Lina, 2022). This method is not only suitable for application to children but is also effective when used in language learning for teenagers and adults based on varying proficiency levels (Ramadani & Baroroh, 2020).

The TPR method was developed by James Asher based on the results of his experiences and research observing children learning their first language. Asher concluded that most interactions between parents and children involve utterances responded to with physical activities by the children. Based on his observations, Asher formulated three hypotheses: first, language is learned through listening; second, language learning and acquisition involve the

right hemisphere of the brain; third, language learning must be enjoyable and not in a stressful environment (Masnun, 2018).

The language learning theory utilized by Asher resonates with some perspectives of psychologists such as Arthur Jensen and John De Cecco. This model closely aligns with Asher's views on child language acquisition. Asher incorporates three influential learning hypotheses: 1) there is an innate bio-program present since birth specific to language learning that constrains the pathways for the development of the first (L1) and second (L2) languages; 2) brain lateralization of nerves restricts various functions in the left and right hemispheres of the brain, and 3) the influence or interference of tension (affective filter) on learning actions and what is learned; the lower the tension, the greater the learning effort (Hidayah, 2017).

The TPR method emphasizes the relationship between speech and action. The primary activity in the TPR method involves giving commands to learners to be obeyed and responded to in the form of actions by the students. Consequently, it becomes easier for students to remember words they have learned if they engage their bodies in vocabulary learning. The TPR method is highly effective in Arabic language instruction for introducing vocabulary (*mufrodad*) to young children. This way, learners can easily acquaint themselves with Arabic vocabulary and grammar (Ariska et al., 2023; Sanusi et al., 2020).

Although vocabulary is not included in the four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing, it plays a crucial role as a bridge connecting these four skills. Vocabulary is undeniably one of the most crucial language skills, serving as the foundation for language acquisition and proficiency (Xu et al., 2020). It plays a central role in language learning and communication, encompassing everything from basic words to specialized terminology. Developing vocabulary is essential because it enables effective communication and extends beyond mere memorization, requiring the ability to use words in various contexts. Moreover, vocabulary enhances cultural understanding and facilitates the interpretation of texts and dialogues in the target language. While all language skills are important, vocabulary stands out as a paramount and indispensable component in the language learning journey.

Without adequate understanding of vocabulary, a person will not be able to comprehend and express (*al-fahm wa al-ifham*) sentences in the Arabic language, which is the primary goal of language learning (Fatdha, 2018). *Mufradat* or vocabulary refers to the language elements that are arranged horizontally according to specific grammatical (*nahwu*) structures, which play a role in forming sentences (Wahab, 2008). *Mufradat* can consist of

words, terms, or idioms. Due to its important role in forming expressions, sentences, and discourse, learning Arabic without understanding and mastering vocabulary would be very challenging. A similar perspective is also expressed by Hardjono, stating that among all language components that need to be mastered by learners, vocabulary is considered vital. This is because without adequate mastery of vocabulary, individuals will struggle to use a foreign language effectively. Vocabulary plays a central role in building proper language comprehension and expression (Hardjono, 1988). Mastery of vocabulary serves as a crucial foundation in foreign language learning because without mastering vocabulary, one will not be able to comprehend sentences in the Arabic language (Jamaris, 2006; Sanusi & Haq, 2021).

Based on the observations conducted, teachers often use the lecture method to deliver the material. This method may be suitable for narrative or descriptive-focused content. However, it is considered less effective in vocabulary learning as it can make students feel bored and less enthusiastic about learning vocabulary. If this condition persists, it will hinder students' acquisition of Arabic vocabulary, making Arabic language learning more challenging. Therefore, to enhance students' ability to master vocabulary, we need a more suitable and engaging method. The Total Physical Response (TPR) method can be an effective choice for language learning. In this method, the use of physical activities or body movements is key to language instruction. By combining oral speech with body movements, students can learn language in a more interactive and enjoyable way. This method is easy to implement and does not burden language usage, while incorporating playful elements that reduce student stress and create a more enjoyable learning atmosphere. Based on the difficulties faced by students in learning Arabic vocabulary as an initial foundation for receptive language comprehension, the researcher seeks to explore the use of the TPR method as an effort to address the issue of vocabulary mastery.

Several previous studies on TPR have been conducted, such as Sumarni's research titled "The Use of Total Physical Response in Teaching Vocabulary Integrated with Meaningful Classroom Interaction" This study was carried out in middle schools. The sample was chosen by using purposive sampling technique. 37 students in the eleventh-grade class were involved in this study. The successful criteria were enacted in 75, and the indicators covered expanding word knowledge, adding specific words, word-learning strategies, and word-play activities. Based on the analysis result, students were able to conduct various learning activities to improve wide and extensive independent reading activities to expand their word acquisition

and knowledge; students were able to perform meaningful strategies relating to specific words to improve their comprehension of texts containing those words; students were able to perform word-play activities to improve learning atmospheres in the class. Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of total physical response was able to improve students' vocabulary mastery in integration with meaningful classroom interaction. The implementation of this strategy with paying attention to classroom interaction is strongly recommended to be applied for other language elements (Sumarni et al., 2022)

Another study on the TPR method was also conducted by Celik, titled "The Effect of Total Physical Response Method on Vocabulary Learning/Teaching: A Mixed Research Synthesis". As a result of the meta-analysis, it was determined that instruction based on the TPR Model had a "strong" effect size ( $ES=1.131$ , 95% CI:  $-0.705$  to  $3.729$ ) on academic achievement. As a result of the thematic synthesis, four descriptive themes were formed: "Learning-teaching process in TPR method", "Learning outcomes in TPR method", "motivation" and "Implementation suggestions/requirements". It has been determined that teaching based on the TPR method has significant contributions to the learning process (increasing active participation, learning by having fun, cooperative learning, etc.) and learning outcomes (word learning, correct use, creativity, etc.), motivation in learning, and some requirements (according to teacher and feature) have been determined. According to the descriptive themes obtained from the thematic synthesis, 10 analytical themes were developed. It was observed that all analytical themes were made in the experimental studies, and two of the 10 analytical themes explained the variance among the studies included in the meta-analysis significantly ( $p<.05$ ) (Celik et al., 2021).

Other research on the TPR method has also been conducted by Hounhanou in his study titled "Promoting TPR (Total Physical Response) Method in Teaching Vocabulary for EFL Beginners in Benin Secondary Schools". An overall of 150 students and 26 EFL teachers were involved in this study. The results obtained revealed that teaching English vocabulary through Physical Response allows students to learn faster and easier, since children find support from the physical representation of their facilitator or their peers (Hounhanou, 2020).

A study on the use of the TPR method in Arabic language learning has also been conducted by Pahri in his article titled "The Implementation of Total Physical Response (TPR) Method in Improving Arabic Speaking Skills". The subjects of this study were Arabic teachers and selected students using the snowball technique. Based on the results, the TPR method can

break the ice of communicating in Arabic among students, their difficulties in expressing their thoughts can be minimized by getting used to responding to those around them (Pahri, 2021).

Nurkhalimah, in her thesis, also conducted research on the Total Physical Response (TPR) method with the title "Improving Students' Vocabulary Mastery Through Total Physical Response Method at Seventh Grade Students of MTs Hidayatussalam" Hasil penelitiannya menunjukkan that the students give positive responses to this research. The students enjoy and enthusiast in teaching learning activity. It was found that the implementation of Total Physical Response method can make students easier to memorize the vocabulary, and it makes them can improve their vocabulary mastery. In other words, the Total Physical Response method effective to improve the students' vocabulary mastery (Lubis, 2020).

Research on the use of the TPR method in language learning has indeed been widely conducted, as outlined in the previous paragraphs. These studies delve into various aspects of the TPR method in its implementation in English and Arabic language learning, specifically focusing on speaking skills and vocabulary mastery. However, this research introduces a novelty not addressed in other studies, namely the aspect of receptive language skills, which focuses on Arabic vocabulary. Therefore, this research aims to examine the effectiveness of employing the TPR method in enhancing receptive language skills, specifically focusing on the mastery of Arabic vocabulary. The study will also explore the implementation of teaching using the TPR method, including the factors that influence the success of learning through this method.

## **METHOD**

This study is quantitative research that uses a quasi-experimental method, also known as a quasi-experiment. The selection of the quasi-experimental method in this study is based on sampling from existing classes, which does not allow for randomization in selecting samples from the population. The population in this study consists of students from Al-Musyawah Islamic Senior High School in Lembang. The sample taken consists of Grade XI Science with a total of 30 students as the experimental group and Grade XI Social Sciences with a total of 30 students as the control group. The research procedure begins with conducting a pretest in the experimental and control groups. The aim is to determine the initial abilities of both sample groups and to determine the analysis and interpretation of the research data. The next step

after the pretest is to provide treatment to both sample groups. The experimental group receives instruction using the TPR method, while the control group uses the conventional method (lecture). The subsequent step is to conduct a posttest. The purpose is to assess the results of the treatment given to both sample groups.

The research data was obtained from the pretest and posttest scores conducted by administering tests to all samples, both in the experimental and control groups. The type of test instrument used in this research is an objective test that employs the Guttman scale. The use of the Guttman scale in this study aims to obtain definitive answers from the respondents. As stated by Sugiyono, the Guttman scale is a measurement scale that provides clear-cut responses, such as "yes-no" or "true-false," with a highest score of one and a lowest score of zero. In other words, if the expected behavior appears, it is given a score of 1, but if the expected behavior does not occur, it is given a score of 0 (Laili, 2020).

After obtaining the data from the pretest and posttest results, the next step is to conduct a test of data normality. The purpose is to determine whether the research data follows a normal distribution or not. If the research data is normally distributed, the analysis will use parametric statistics (paired sample t-test and independent sample t-test). On the other hand, if the data is not normally distributed, the analysis will employ non-parametric statistics (Wilcoxon test and Mann Whitney test).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before determining the data analysis method to be used, we need to first determine whether the data obtained from the pretest and posttest follow a normal distribution or not. To find out, we can refer to the results of the normality test in the table below.

	Kelas	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Hasil Belajar Koskata	1	.097	25	.200 <sup>*</sup>	.975	25	.777
	2	.144	25	.192	.950	25	.246
	3	.128	25	.200 <sup>*</sup>	.927	25	.073
	4	.166	25	.075	.947	25	.220

Based on the table above, it is known that the significance level (Sig.) for all data in both the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests is  $> 0.05$ . Therefore, it can be concluded that the research data follows a normal distribution. Since the research data is normally distributed,

the data analysis method to be used is parametric statistics (paired sample t-test and independent sample t-test).

This research aims to determine the level of effectiveness of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in Arabic language learning, specifically in improving students' receptive language skills through the understanding of Arabic vocabulary. The results of the analysis will be discussed based on the following research questions.

Is there a significant difference in vocabulary understanding between the experimental group and the control group after receiving either TPR-based or conventional (lecture-based) learning?

H<sub>0</sub> : There is a significant difference in vocabulary understanding between the experimental group and the control group after receiving different treatments.

H<sub>1</sub> : There is no significant difference in vocabulary understanding between the experimental group and the control group after receiving different treatments.

To answer the research questions above, the researcher conducted data analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics 26 software. Here are the results.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Penguasaan Kosakata Awal	Equal variances assumed	1.672	.202	-.319	48	.751	-.920	2.881	-6.712	4.872
	Equal variances not assumed			-.319	47.299	.751	-.920	2.881	-6.715	4.875
Penguasaan Kosakata Akhir	Equal variances assumed	.729	.398	2.493	48	.016	5.480	2.198	1.061	9.899
	Equal variances not assumed			2.493	42.452	.017	5.480	2.198	1.046	9.914

Based on the analysis results, a p-value of 0.016 was obtained. This indicates that the p-value is < 0.05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in the receptive language abilities of students focusing on vocabulary comprehension between the experimental group and the control group after the treatment.

**Paired Samples Statistics**

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest-Eksperimen	75.96	25	10.788	2.158
	Posttest-Eksperimen	85.16	25	9.068	1.814
Pair 2	Pretest-Kontrol	76.88	25	9.545	1.909
	Posttest-Kontrol	79.68	25	6.210	1.242

Based on the image, we can observe that the average posttest score in the experimental group (85.16) is higher than the average posttest score in the control group (79.68). Therefore, we can conclude that the TPR method is considered effective in improving receptive language skills through Arabic vocabulary comprehension.

The teaching method is one of the components of the curriculum. In the context of the curriculum, the method refers to the efforts to deliver learning materials in a way that is easily understood and effectively internalized by students, so that the learning objectives are achieved as expected. Another term that is synonymous with method is strategy. Both play a functional role in the learning process, which is to achieve an educational goal. It is not an exaggeration to say that an ineffective teaching method can make even the easiest material difficult to understand for students.

The significance of teaching methods in the realm of education cannot be overstated. The choice of instructional strategies significantly influences the effectiveness of the learning process, ultimately determining students' academic achievements. A plethora of studies and research articles published in educational journals continually emphasize the profound impact that these methods have on learners. These studies often explore a wide range of teaching approaches, including traditional lectures, active learning techniques, flipped classrooms, and technology-enhanced instruction, to evaluate their efficacy in various learning environments. The careful selection of the right teaching method can enhance student engagement, retention, and comprehension, providing a solid foundation for their educational journey. In conclusion, the role of teaching methods in shaping the success of learning is pivotal, as they serve as the cornerstone upon which educational achievement is built (Vu & Peters, 2021).

There is an Arabic proverb that says "*ath-thariqah ahammu min al-mawad*" which means that the method is more important than the content (Ainin, 2019). In essence, the main goal of education is to bring about positive changes in students' behavior by providing them with information, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and important values (Rasyid, 2019). To achieve these goals, we need to employ effective teaching methods.

The method under study in this research is the Total Physical Response (TPR) method. TPR is a language learning method that involves the use of specific physical activities or body movements as its main component. In this method, the teacher instructs the learners to move and perform actions that correspond to the given instructions. By involving physical activities, learners can reinforce their understanding and practical use of the language. To achieve



effective learning, the use of this method needs to be supported by knowledge and principles from other disciplines such as developmental psychology, humanistic pedagogy, and language teaching procedures to make the learning process more effective (Sadat, 2018).

The application of the TPR method in learning follows the style of first language acquisition in a child. In the early stages of foreign language learning, the focus is more on direct physical involvement and intense movements, like when a child is learning their first language by engaging in activities or movements instructed by their parents continuously until they understand (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Asher argues that the frequency and intensity of stimuli given to an individual will affect the strength of memory associations and ease of recall. In this context, the process of recall involves verbal activities accompanied by motor activities or physical movements (Utari & Nababan, 1993).

From the perspective of language learning development in an individual, Asher views the success of adults in learning a second language as parallel to the achievement of the first language by children. This approach involves direct interaction with children through giving commands followed by physical responses before they can provide verbal responses (Brown, 1994). Asher puts forward several principles regarding the nature of first language acquisition. Firstly, it emphasizes comprehension rather than language production. Secondly, it is relevant to the context and situation in which the language is being learned, meaning that the understanding and use of language should relate to the things around the students during the teaching process. Thirdly, it is oriented towards imperative learning, where students are instructed to carry out given commands (Aziez & Alwasilah, 1996).

In language learning, emotional factors such as pressure and stress can affect the effectiveness of learning (Russell, 2020). Therefore, language learning that involves physical activities or body movements is considered more effective as it can reduce pressure in the learning process. The enthusiasm and cheerfulness of students have a positive influence on their ability to learn the target language. When students feel happy and enthusiastic during the learning process, they tend to be more open and ready to assimilate and understand vocabulary and language structures better. Therefore, creating a fun learning environment and encouraging joy in the classroom is essential to enhance students' acquisition of the target language.

In addition to students directly involved in the commands and activities taught by the teacher using the target language, other students who observe these actions are also involved

in the learning process. Although they are not receiving direct instructions, they still benefit from understanding and assimilating the target language through their observation of actions performed by other students. Thus, TPR learning method involves all students in the class, both those actively performing actions and those observing, to gain a better understanding of the language being learned.

Because not all students can directly participate in the activities conducted with the teacher, it is important for other students in the class to observe and listen to the instructions given. This assumption is based on the belief that student engagement in the learning process also occurs through observing the actions performed. Additionally, it is believed that high levels of stress can hinder learning, and increased stress levels can lead to lower quality learning outcomes. Therefore, if we want to achieve optimal learning outcomes using the TPR method, it is important to reduce the students' stress levels as it can have a negative impact on learning outcomes. This understanding is also because our language learning is influenced by how our brain functions. Physical activities such as body movements, which involve the right brain, should be performed before we process language, which involves the left brain.

The Total Physical Response (TPR) method plays a crucial role in introducing vocabulary comprehension to beginner foreign language learners. This is because the principle of this method focuses on the receptive understanding of students through listening and then imitating or mimicking. Students' receptive language abilities are the outcome of a language acquisition process that commences from an early age, and the family environment plays a pivotal role in its development (Anderson et al., 2021). As children grow and learn, they naturally absorb language through day-to-day interactions with parents, siblings, and other family members. A language-rich family environment, with actively engaged parents who converse and interact with their children, has a significantly positive impact on children's receptive language skills.

When children listen to and respond to language within the family environment, they begin to understand the meanings of words, phrases, and language in context. This enables them to identify and comprehend messages they hear in various situations. Furthermore, a supportive family environment also provides opportunities for children to expand their vocabulary, understand sentence structures, and enhance their listening skills. Additionally, warm and positive language interactions within the family foster a sense of comfort and confidence in children when using language. Children who grow up in such an environment

tend to be more open to speaking, asking questions, and participating in conversations, which, in turn, strengthens their receptive language abilities.

Conversely, a family environment that lacks support in terms of language, characterized by minimal verbal interaction and limited language usage, can hinder the development of students' receptive language abilities. Therefore, awareness of the importance of a family environment that promotes language and healthy communication is crucial in assisting students in developing their receptive language skills effectively.

In this way, students can build initial understanding of several vocabulary words they hear from the teacher's commands and later act them out without necessarily speaking. As they grasp the instructions given by the teacher in the Arabic language, over time they will gradually start using it in simple oral communication.

As students become proficient in comprehending and responding to instructions given in Arabic by their teacher, they naturally progress towards incorporating this acquired language knowledge into their basic oral communication skills. Over time, this gradual integration of Arabic into their communicative abilities becomes more apparent as they confidently employ the language in everyday conversations and interactions. This progressive development not only underscores the effectiveness of the TPR method but also highlights its role in fostering a strong foundation for language learners as they embark on their Arabic language journey.

In this method, the teacher gives commands in the Arabic language to the students, and then the students attentively listen and follow the instructions without speaking, instead using physical movements as their response. If the physical response performed by the students corresponds to what the teacher commanded, they are considered to have understood the instruction, even if it's only in terms of receptive language skills. Once they have truly mastered it, they can give those commands to their classmates. The use of this method can also be diversified by singing and moving together in accordance with the vocabulary being uttered.

The findings from this TPR method research share similarities with those of previous studies, indicating that this method is suitable for training students' comprehension of the language they are learning, especially in listening skills (*istima'*). Several researchers agree that learning with a method that emphasizes listening comprehension (*istima'*) involving direct physical response can help enhance students' abilities to understand spoken language. The specific findings of this study indicate that students' receptive language skills improved after

learning with the TPR method. Although their productive language skills in speaking (*kalam*) are still limited, when instructed to respond physically or perform actions, they exhibit responses consistent with the Arabic oral expressions presented by the teacher. Therefore, it can be concluded that they indeed comprehend the Arabic expressions conveyed by the teacher.

However, this method also has some disadvantages. According to the author, one of the drawbacks of implementing this method is due to the limited availability of materials that align with its characteristics, which heavily rely on commands and physical movements. Additionally, this method requires constant emphasis and repetition, as well as complex activities in the classroom, which can be time-consuming.

## CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, it is evident that the TPR method has the potential as a good alternative in teaching receptive language comprehension, including understanding the learned vocabulary. This method offers practical advantages in its use and has characteristics that can create interactive, enjoyable learning situations suitable for beginners in foreign language learning. Moreover, this method also involves utilizing the cognitive functions of the left and right brain, contributing to more optimal learning outcomes.

The results of this study are limited to understanding the influence of the TPR method in improving students' receptive language skills, specifically in understanding simple Arabic vocabulary. Therefore, further research is needed on the TPR method if it is used for other focuses, such as language learning skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

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