

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

Vocabulary is an essential element of language learning. When learners learn, understand and master vocabulary, it can easily develop language proficiency. Nation calculated that a learner would be required to know about 4,000 of the most frequent word families plus proper nouns to reach 95% lexical coverage, and around 8,000–9,000 families plus proper nouns to reach 98% coverage (Schmitt, 2008). Therefore, implementing teaching vocabulary with effective method is crucial for Primary School students as the foundational step in language learning.

Some previous studies have found that students often face difficulties in learning vocabulary, particularly in retaining new words and showing low engagement in vocabulary learning activities (Feng Shan-shan, 2017; Nuraeningsih & Rusiana, 2016; Setiawan et al., 2022) In line with these studies, similar problems were also found among fourth grade students at SDN Pasirlayung 03. Based on preliminary classroom observation, the students had difficulties memorizing vocabulary and showed low engagement during the learning process, resulting in a passive classroom atmosphere.

In vocabulary learning, selecting the right teaching method is very important to ensure an effective and engaging learning process. Therefore, many teachers seek innovative and suitable methods to improve young learners' participation and create a more interactive classroom atmosphere. Some previous research has shown that the Total Physical Response (TPR) method is considered suitable and effective for teaching vocabulary (Dewi & Fatmawati, 2022; Ibrohim et al., 2019; Xie, 2021).

Total Physical Response (TPR) is an approach that recognizes the importance of physical activity in the process of language acquisition. The TPR

method facilitates vocabulary learning (Pitaloka et al., n.d.). Earlier research also suggested that the Total Physical Response (TPR) presents a suitable language teaching method, as it draws inspiration from how children learn their mother tongue (Putri, 2024).

This method aligns closely with the theory of embodied cognition, which posits that cognitive processes and memory retention are deeply rooted in the body's interactions with the world (Barsalou, 2008). For young learners, whose cognitive development relies heavily on physical experiences, learning is most effective when it transcends abstract text. By integrating physical movement, visual aids and auditory commands, TPR creates a robust multi-sensory learning environment. Similarly, TPR is absolutely essential for success in acquiring languages for students (Asher, 2000).

While several previous study shown that the TPR method is effective for teaching vocabulary, most of these study mainly focused on statistical results and were conducted at the secondary school level (Gayanti & Satriani, 2020; Pitaloka et al., n.d.) A critical evaluation of these previous findings reveals a significant gap : while quantitative data prove that TPR improves test scores, they fail to explain how and why young learners experience this cognitive shift. Quantitative metrics often overlook unpredictable classroom dynamics, individual learning preferences, and varying levels of student engagement. Therefore, this study aims to analyze in depth the implementation of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in vocabulary learning among fourth-grade students at SDN Pasirlayung 03.

Based on the issues discussed above, this study explores how the TPR method is implemented for fourth grade students at SDN Pasirlayung 03, as well as its role in engaging students and enhancing their word retention. The novelty of this study lies in its in-depth focus on this primary school context which has received limited attention in previous studies. Conceptually, This study operates on a framework where the multi-sensory nature of the TPR method serves as the primary catalyst to stimulate student engagement; this heightened immersion and

physicalization of words, in turn, structurally solidifies mental mapping to maximize long-term English vocabulary retention in young learners.

The urgency of mastering English as a foreign language has become something that can no longer be debated, especially now that we live in an era of globalization where English is one of the means of communication. The great urgency of mastering English requires the increasingly sophisticated and applicable way of teaching English. The goal is for students or learners to be able to understand and apply English in an applicable way.

In the context of young learners, various innovations in the English learning process are very important. This is intended so that teaching this foreign language without reducing the essence as a communication tool that can be accepted quickly and pleasantly without eliminating or disturbing the developmental psychology of students who at this stage are still in the concrete thinking stage and want a pleasant learning atmosphere.

As a teacher, the researcher wants to explore appropriate and enjoyable teaching methods to improve students' English comprehension. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) constructed a picture of what narrative researchers do (Creswell, 2014). Narrative research is a design of inquiry from the humanities in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives (Riessman, 2008). This information is then often retold or restoried by the researcher into a narrative chronology. Often, in the end, the narrative combines views from the participant's life with those of the researcher's life in a collaborative narrative (Creswell, 2014)

Various methods are used by educators so that students can understand English easily and efficiently. The right method is very necessary in delivering English learning because English is still a foreign language in Indonesia. (Ikhwati & Megawati, 2018). Mastering vocabulary is a crucial aspect of language learning. When learners learn, understand, and master vocabulary, they can easily develop important competencies like reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce English vocabulary to young learners as they begin

their journey to learn and understand the English language. (Putri, 2024) To address this issue, a more engaging approach to vocabulary acquisition is suggested. Total Physical Response (TPR) presents a suitable language teaching method, as it draws inspiration from how children learn their mother tongue.(Putri, 2024)

Various research has examined the phenomenon of English vocabulary size. Yashima (2021) determined that elementary school students as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners should possess a vocabulary of 1,000 to 3,000 words. This indicates a significant gap in the acquisition of English vocabulary among these students, emphasizing the necessity for efficient language learning strategies and treatments (Dwi azizah, 2024).

Another study indicated that TPR significantly improves vocabulary acquisition and listening comprehension skills. Moreover, Husanović (2020) found that pre-adolescent students develop vocabulary more naturally and effectively through TPR than traditional methods. Therefore, implementing the TPR approach can be suitable for enhancing students' English vocabulary size. (Dwi azizah, 2024)

From here this article is here to provide a little enlightenment especially for English teachers for early age about how English should be taught. Is the Total Physical Response method effective in improving English vocabulary mastery for young learners or not.

1.2 Problem Statement

- a.) How is the Total Physical Response (TPR) method implemented in teaching English vocabulary to fourth-grade students at SDN Pasirlayung 03?
- b.) How does the implementation of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method influence students' engagement and vocabulary retention in English learning?

Vocabulary mastery is one of the fundamental aspects in learning English as a foreign language. For young learners, vocabulary serves as the foundation for

developing other language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, students may experience difficulties in understanding English expressions and communicating their ideas effectively. Therefore, introducing and developing vocabulary at the elementary school level is considered essential because students at this stage are still developing their language awareness and building basic knowledge that will support their future English learning.

However, vocabulary learning among elementary school students is often associated with several challenges. Many young learners perceive English as a difficult subject because they are required to remember unfamiliar words, understand their meanings, and use them appropriately in context. In many classrooms, vocabulary teaching still focuses primarily on memorization activities, translation exercises, and teacher explanations. This condition may limit students' opportunities to actively engage with the language. As a result, students may recognize vocabulary when they see it but experience difficulties when they need to recall and use the words in communication.

In the context of Indonesian elementary schools, English learning is influenced by various factors, including students' limited exposure to English, different levels of language ability, and teaching approaches applied by teachers. Based on classroom observations, some students tend to become passive learners when vocabulary is introduced through conventional teaching methods. The use of teacher-centered approaches, such as Grammar Translation Method (GTM), often emphasizes translating words from English into Indonesian and completing written exercises. Although this method can help students understand word meanings, it provides limited opportunities for students to experience vocabulary through meaningful activities and physical involvement.

Young learners generally require learning experiences that are interesting, interactive, and appropriate to their cognitive development. Children at the elementary level tend to learn effectively through activities involving movement,

interaction, and direct experiences. Therefore, teaching strategies that involve students physically and emotionally may provide a more meaningful learning process. One approach that is considered suitable for young learners is Total Physical Response (TPR), a method developed by James J. Asher that connects language learning with physical movement. Through TPR activities, students respond to verbal instructions through actions, allowing them to associate new vocabulary with physical experiences rather than only memorizing word meanings.

Although previous studies have reported the effectiveness of TPR in improving vocabulary learning, many studies have primarily focused on quantitative measurements, such as vocabulary test scores before and after treatment. These studies provide valuable evidence regarding learning outcomes; however, they may not fully explain how students experience the learning process, how they respond to physical activities, and how teachers perceive the implementation of TPR in the classroom. Understanding students' and teachers' experiences is important because successful learning is not only determined by achievement scores but also by students' engagement, motivation, participation, and classroom interaction.

Furthermore, research exploring the implementation of TPR in Indonesian elementary school contexts, particularly through a qualitative perspective, remains limited. Each classroom has different characteristics, including students' learning abilities, classroom atmosphere, and teacher strategies. Therefore, investigating how TPR is implemented and experienced in an actual classroom setting can provide deeper insights into its contribution to vocabulary learning among young learners.

In the observed classroom context, students initially experienced difficulties in learning and retaining English vocabulary when conventional teaching approaches were applied. Students tended to rely on translation and repetition without fully engaging with the meaning of words. This situation indicated the need for a teaching approach that could create a more active, enjoyable, and meaningful vocabulary learning environment. The implementation of Total Physical Response

was considered a potential alternative because it allows students to learn vocabulary through movement, interaction, and contextual activities.

Based on these considerations, this study focuses on exploring the use of Total Physical Response in vocabulary learning among fourth-grade students. Rather than only measuring students' vocabulary improvement through numerical results, this qualitative study aims to describe the learning process, students' responses, and classroom experiences during the implementation of TPR. The findings are expected to provide a deeper understanding of how TPR can support vocabulary learning and contribute to the development of effective English teaching strategies for young learners at the elementary school level.

1.3 Objectives of the Research

a) General Objective

To describe the implementation of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method and how it enhances the vocabulary knowledge of fourth grade students in an English language classroom.

The general objective of this study is to describe the implementation of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method and to explore how this method supports the development of vocabulary knowledge among fourth-grade students in an English language classroom. This study aims to provide a comprehensive description of how TPR is applied during vocabulary learning activities, including the teaching procedures, classroom interactions, students' participation, and learning experiences throughout the process.

Furthermore, this study seeks to understand how the use of physical movement, teacher instructions, and interactive activities in TPR contributes to students' vocabulary learning. Through the implementation of TPR, students are encouraged to associate English words with meaningful actions and classroom experiences, which may help them understand, remember, and use

new vocabulary more effectively. Therefore, this research does not only focus on vocabulary outcomes but also examines the learning process and students' engagement during the implementation of the method.

By using a qualitative approach, this study aims to gain deeper insights into the perspectives of both the teacher and students regarding the use of TPR in vocabulary learning. The findings are expected to provide an understanding of the potential of TPR as an alternative teaching method for creating an active, enjoyable, and meaningful English learning environment for young learners at the elementary school level.

b) Specific Objectives

The results of this study are expected to have several benefits. First, for English teachers, namely sharing information about the effectiveness of the TPR method in the learning process. Second, this study is expected to improve students' understanding in learning English vocabulary.

The specific objectives of this study are designed to provide a deeper understanding of the implementation of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in vocabulary learning among fourth-grade students. Specifically, this study aims to describe how the TPR method is applied during English vocabulary learning activities, including the teaching procedures, classroom interactions, and students' participation throughout the learning process.

Furthermore, this study aims to explore how the implementation of TPR contributes to students' understanding of English vocabulary. Through physical movements, meaningful actions, and interactive classroom activities, TPR provides students with opportunities to connect vocabulary with real experiences, which may support their vocabulary comprehension and retention. This study also seeks to identify students' responses, engagement, and experiences while learning vocabulary through the TPR method.

In addition, this study aims to provide valuable information for English teachers regarding the use of TPR as an alternative approach for teaching vocabulary to young learners. The findings may help teachers understand the advantages, challenges, and classroom practices related to implementing TPR in elementary English classrooms. By gaining insights from the learning process, teachers can consider more interactive and student-centered strategies to create an enjoyable and meaningful vocabulary learning environment.

For students, this study is expected to contribute to a better understanding of English vocabulary learning through an active and enjoyable learning approach. The use of TPR may encourage students to participate more actively, increase their motivation, and develop positive learning experiences when learning English vocabulary.

1.4 Benefits of the Research

a) Theoretical

Adding scientific references regarding the TPR method in learning English vocabulary. Theoretically, this study is expected to provide additional scientific references regarding the implementation of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in English vocabulary learning, particularly in the context of elementary school education. The findings of this study may contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the field of English language teaching, especially related to teaching strategies for young learners. By describing the implementation process, classroom activities, and learning experiences of students and teachers, this research provides a deeper understanding of how TPR can be applied as an approach to support vocabulary learning.

Vocabulary learning is an essential component of English language acquisition because vocabulary knowledge becomes the foundation for developing other language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, learning vocabulary among young learners requires

appropriate teaching approaches that consider students' cognitive, emotional, and physical characteristics. This study theoretically contributes by providing insights into how a movement-based learning approach, such as TPR, can facilitate vocabulary learning through meaningful experiences. The findings may enrich theoretical discussions about the relationship between physical activity, student engagement, and language learning.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the theoretical understanding of Total Physical Response as a teaching method based on the connection between language input and physical responses. TPR emphasizes that learners can acquire language through listening, comprehension, and physical actions before being required to produce verbal responses. Through this research, the application of these theoretical principles can be examined in an actual elementary classroom context. Therefore, the findings may provide empirical descriptions of how TPR principles are reflected in classroom practices and how they influence the learning process.

In addition, this study may support theories related to young learners' language learning characteristics. Elementary students generally learn more effectively when they are actively involved in learning activities that are meaningful, enjoyable, and appropriate to their developmental stage. The use of movement, repetition, and interaction in TPR reflects the characteristics of child-centered learning, where students are not only passive receivers of information but active participants in constructing their understanding. Therefore, this research may contribute to theoretical discussions about appropriate approaches for teaching English to young learners.

This study also provides theoretical contributions by emphasizing the importance of investigating language learning processes through qualitative perspectives. Previous studies on TPR have frequently focused on measuring learning outcomes using quantitative approaches. While quantitative research provides valuable information about achievement improvement, qualitative

research allows researchers to explore classroom experiences, student participation, teacher strategies, and learning interactions in greater depth. Therefore, this study expands the understanding of TPR by focusing on how the method is experienced and implemented in a real classroom setting.

Moreover, this research may serve as a reference for future researchers who are interested in exploring TPR or other interactive teaching approaches in English language education. The descriptions and findings presented in this study can provide background information, conceptual understanding, and methodological considerations for further studies. Future researchers may use this study as a comparison or foundation for investigating similar topics in different educational contexts, levels, or learning environments.

Another theoretical contribution of this study is related to the understanding of vocabulary retention and meaningful learning. Through physical movement and contextual activities, TPR allows students to associate vocabulary with actions and experiences. This learning process may help students create stronger connections between words and meanings. Therefore, this study may provide theoretical insights into how experiential and embodied learning approaches can support vocabulary development among young learners.

Overall, the theoretical benefit of this study is to enrich academic knowledge regarding the use of Total Physical Response in English vocabulary learning. By providing a qualitative description of TPR implementation among fourth-grade students, this research contributes additional references for educators, researchers, and academics who are interested in language teaching approaches, vocabulary learning, and young learner education. The findings are expected to strengthen the understanding that effective vocabulary instruction requires not only attention to learning outcomes but also consideration of students' experiences, engagement, and interaction during the learning process.