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ENHACING VOCABULARY ACQUISITION THROUGH TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE AND DIGITAL MEDIA: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY ON YOUNG LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the extent to which the integration of physical movement and interactive digital media enhances young learners' vocabulary acquisition, retention, and comprehension. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, the study was carried out at an Islamic kindergarten, RA Mina Jadid, involving fifteen students aged 5–6 years from Class B. Data were collected through systematic classroom observations, in-depth teacher interviews, and analysis of students' vocabulary assessment outcomes. The findings indicate that the implementation of Total Physical Response (TPR), when supported by stimulating digital resources such as educational videos, interactive games, and visual materials, substantially improved learners' motivation, active engagement, and vocabulary mastery. The study concludes that the synergistic combination of TPR and digital media constitutes an effective, engaging, and developmentally appropriate strategy for vocabulary instruction among early childhood learners.

Keywords: Vocabulary Acquisition, Total Physical Response, Digital Media, Young learners.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the teaching of English to young learners has received growing attention, particularly in countries where English is taught as a foreign language. Children are considered to be in a critical or optimal period for language acquisition, as they demonstrate greater receptiveness to new sounds, linguistic patterns, and vocabulary when learning takes place in immersive, meaningful, and playful environments. Young learners are generally defined as children at the pre-school level, starting from approximately three years of age, through elementary education, up to around twelve years old (Uljayeva, 2024; Ratri et al., 2025; Nurzama et al., 2019). A similar definition is proposed by Nunan (2023), who describe young learners as those in pre-primary and primary education, roughly ranging from the ages of three to twelve.

In the era of globalization, the growing importance of English has encouraged the establishment of language centers and formal educational institutions offering English programs specifically designed for children. Although scholars may differ slightly in their interpretations of the term *young learners*, there is a shared understanding that it primarily refers to children at the pre-school and primary school levels (Celik et al., 2021; Jaya et al., 2025; Putri et al., 2023). Despite the widespread presence of English in modern society, young learners generally have limited exposure to the language in their home and social environments. Consequently, teaching English to children presents considerable challenges, requiring careful preparation, appropriate instructional methods, and strategies

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that can effectively engage learners and sustain their interest.

Vocabulary instruction, in particular, demands approaches that allow children to actively experience and practice new language items. One recommended method is Total Physical Response (TPR), as it enables learners to directly associate vocabulary with physical actions, thereby supporting comprehension and retention (Celik et al., 2021). This approach can be further enhanced through the integration of digital media, such as interactive videos, which are visually appealing and engaging for young learners. In this regard, teachers are expected to possess adequate pedagogical skills to effectively engage young learners, employ suitable teaching strategies, capture their attention, and maintain active participation throughout the learning process (Jazila & Megawati, 2024).

Vocabulary acquisition is widely recognized as a fundamental component of language learning. It serves as the foundation for effective communication, interaction, and both spoken and written expression. The breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge significantly influence language use, as vocabulary is closely linked to linguistic competence, emotional development, academic achievement, and social interaction. Both the quantity and quality of a learner's vocabulary determine their ability to communicate effectively, particularly in early childhood language education. Among the various instructional methods applied in teaching English to children, Total Physical Response has emerged as one of the most effective approaches, especially for vocabulary learning.

Learning vocabulary represents a crucial stage in the process of language acquisition (Askhatova A, 2020; Olsson & Tbena, 2023; Nasution et al., 2024). The more words learners possess, the better they are able to understand spoken and written input, as well as express ideas accurately in speech and writing. Nevertheless, young learners often encounter difficulties in memorizing and internalizing new vocabulary quickly and efficiently. Early mastery of English vocabulary is therefore essential, as it provides a strong foundation for future academic and professional success. Given young learners' cognitive and developmental characteristics, early English instruction offers practical advantages, as increased vocabulary knowledge contributes directly to higher levels of language proficiency.

Effective vocabulary acquisition in English as a second language requires innovative, interactive, and play-based instructional methods that align with young learners' developmental needs (Zheng, 2024; Almusharraf, 2021; Rouhani & Modarresi, 2023). One effective technique is the Total Physical Response approach, which integrates verbal instruction with physical movement to facilitate language comprehension and memory retention (Al-Farisi et al., 2025).

TPR, developed by James Asher, is a language teaching method that combines linguistic input with physical activity to enhance comprehension and long-term retention. This kinesthetic approach is particularly suitable for young learners, who tend to learn more effectively through movement, play, and multisensory

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engagement. Previous studies have demonstrated that TPR supports vocabulary internalization by associating lexical items with physical actions, thereby strengthening memory and understanding (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Liu & Chen, 2014).

At the same time, advancements in digital media have significantly transformed educational practices, including early childhood language instruction. Today's children grow up in digital environments surrounded by interactive applications, educational games, animated videos, and multimedia storytelling platforms. These technologies provide rich linguistic input and engaging learning experiences that support vocabulary development and broader language skills (He et al., 2024; Thi & Que, 2025). When digital media are integrated into TPR-based instruction, learners' motivation, participation, and vocabulary acquisition can be further enhanced (Pérez-Sabater, 2019; Widiastuti et al., 2022; Na et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital technologies in early childhood education, encouraging educators to explore innovative instructional approaches that balance physical, movement-based learning with screen-based interaction (Bond et al., 2021). In this context, the integration of TPR and digital media emerges as a promising pedagogical strategy, combining the active physical engagement characteristic of traditional TPR with the flexibility, visual stimulation, and multimodal input offered by digital platforms.

Despite the growing recognition of both TPR and digital media in English language teaching, empirical research examining their integrated application in early childhood contexts remains limited, particularly within Indonesian educational settings. Therefore, this study aims to explore how the integration of Total Physical Response and digital media can enhance English vocabulary acquisition among young learners through a descriptive qualitative approach. By investigating the synergy between physical response and digital engagement, this research seeks to contribute to the development of more interactive, child-centered, and contextually relevant approaches to early English language instruction.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary acquisition constitutes a fundamental pillar in young learners' language development. Cameron (2021) emphasizes that vocabulary learning in early childhood should be meaningful, contextualized, and closely connected to real-life experiences. Children between the ages of four and seven are considered to be in a critical phase of language development, during which exposure to rich lexical input and active engagement plays a decisive role in shaping long-term language proficiency (Nation, 2022). Furthermore, effective vocabulary instruction should incorporate repetition, multisensory input, and strong contextual support to ensure optimal learning outcomes (Nation & Waring, 2019).

Vocabulary development is particularly essential in early English language learning contexts (Nation, 2022). Young learners acquire

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language most effectively when new lexical items are presented through meaningful and contextualized input embedded in engaging experiences. Cameron (2021) further argues that vocabulary acquisition among young learners is influenced by the quality and frequency of exposure, as well as by instructional methods. Consequently, appropriate pedagogical strategies are required to ensure that vocabulary learning is not only memorized but also comprehended and applied meaningfully.

One instructional approach that has demonstrated effectiveness in vocabulary learning is Total Physical Response (TPR), developed by James Asher. TPR connects language input with physical movement, making it particularly suitable for young learners who are still developing both cognitive and motor skills (Priyadi et al., 2024). Empirical evidence suggests that TPR enhances learners' memory retention and engagement in vocabulary learning activities (Rahmat & Marlina, 2021). Additionally, TPR supports natural language acquisition by lowering learners' affective filters, reducing anxiety, and creating a more enjoyable learning atmosphere (Setiawan & Kuswandono, 2020). Several studies have confirmed that the application of TPR significantly improves vocabulary acquisition among kindergarten and early primary school learners (Fitriani, 2022).

Alongside movement-based approaches, digital media has profoundly transformed early childhood education, particularly in language learning contexts. Interactive resources such as educational videos, animated stories, and digital games offer multisensory experiences that align well with young learners' learning preferences (Zucker & Light, 2020). Recent studies indicate that digital tools support vocabulary development by enabling repeated exposure, visual reinforcement, and interactive engagement (Alqahtani, 2019; Azhar & Iqbal, 2021). When digital media is integrated with TPR-based instruction, learners demonstrate increased motivation to participate actively and to practice language beyond classroom settings, thereby reinforcing vocabulary learning within meaningful contexts.

The integration of TPR and digital media creates a dynamic and stimulating language learning environment. Through this combination, learners are able to associate physical movements with visual and auditory digital stimuli, resulting in deeper cognitive processing and stronger vocabulary encoding (Yuliani & Hartono, 2022). Research has shown that the use of animated TPR-based digital videos significantly enhances vocabulary mastery among young learners (Hapsari, 2020). Moreover, teachers report that combining TPR with digital platforms promotes higher levels of classroom participation, particularly among learners who tend to be passive in traditional instructional settings (Munir & Auliya, 2023).

Descriptive qualitative studies have further examined learners' behaviors, responses, and learning outcomes associated with the use of TPR and digital media in early childhood education.

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These studies highlight the effectiveness of movement-based and technology-supported instructional strategies in fostering vocabulary development (Putri & Safitri, 2021). Through a descriptive qualitative approach, researchers gain in-depth insights into how young learners interact with language when learning is facilitated through play, physical movement, and digital engagement, providing a comprehensive understanding of the learning process (Rohmah & Prasetyo, 2020).

3. METHODS

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative research design to investigate the implementation of Total Physical Response (TPR) integrated with digital media in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among young learners. A descriptive qualitative approach was selected to obtain in-depth and contextualized insights into classroom instructional practices, learners' responses, and teachers' pedagogical strategies within early childhood English language education (Neuman, 2019).

The research was conducted at RA Mina Jadid, a private Islamic early childhood education institution located in Mojokerto, East Java, Indonesia. The participants comprised one English teacher and fifteen students aged 5–6 years enrolled in Class B. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, as they were directly involved in the implementation of TPR supported by digital media.

Data were collected using three primary instruments. Classroom observations were conducted to examine the teaching–learning process involving TPR and the use of digital media. Semi-structured interviews with the teacher were carried out to obtain detailed information regarding instructional strategies, classroom implementation, and the integration of digital tools. In addition, documentation was collected in the form of lesson plans, students' worksheets, and screenshots of digital media utilized during instruction.

The study was conducted over a four-week period, with two classroom observation sessions per week. Each session lasted approximately 30–40 minutes. Observational data were recorded through detailed field notes and supported by photographs and video recordings, obtained with parental consent. Teacher interviews were conducted following the observation sessions, with each interview lasting between 15 and 20 minutes.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (2019), which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying relevant information from observation notes and interview transcripts. Data display was carried out by organizing the reduced data into tables and visual formats to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified by identifying recurring patterns, comparing findings across data sources, and interpreting the influence of TPR integrated with

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digital media on young learners' vocabulary acquisition.

Table 1. The Collected Data

Component	Description
Research Design	Descriptive Qualitative
Setting	RA Mina Jadid Mojokerto
Participants	one English teacher and fifteen young learners (aged 5–6 years, B Class)
Sampling Technique	Purposive Sampling
Data Collection Methods	Observation, Interview, Documentation
Instruments	Observation checklist, interview guide, document analysis
Analysis Method	Miles and Huberman's interactive model (Data reduction, display, conclusion)

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study were derived from systematic classroom observations, in-depth interviews with the English teacher, and documentation of instructional materials implemented at RA Mina Jadid Mojokerto. The analysis focused on examining how the integration of Total Physical Response (TPR) and digital media contributed to English vocabulary acquisition among young learners aged 5–6 years. The results revealed three prominent patterns, as outlined below.

a. Improved Vocabulary Retention through Movement-Based Instruction

The findings indicate that students demonstrated stronger vocabulary retention when new lexical items were introduced through TPR-based activities. When the teacher delivered commands such as *"jump"* or *"clap"*, learners responded with corresponding physical actions, enabling the vocabulary to be more deeply encoded in memory. This movement-oriented response facilitated stronger associations between meaning and form, thereby enhancing recall. These findings are consistent with prior studies suggesting that bodily movement supports cognitive processing and memory retention in early childhood language learning (Fitriani, 2022; Asher, 2009).

b. Increased Learner Engagement through Digital Media Integration

The incorporation of digital media, including animated videos, interactive songs, and visual flashcards, significantly heightened learners' engagement and attention during instructional activities. Students displayed greater enthusiasm and focus when observing animated demonstrations of TPR commands or participating in movement-based songs. This finding supports previous research indicating that digital tools provide multisensory learning experiences that enhance engagement and comprehension in early language acquisition (Zucker & Light, 2020).

c. Contextual Use of Vocabulary in Classroom Interaction

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In addition to improved retention and engagement, students began to actively apply the vocabulary acquired through TPR and digital media within daily classroom routines. Learners were able to respond appropriately to simple English instructions and accurately name familiar objects introduced through animated materials. Insights from teacher interviews further revealed that students exhibited faster comprehension and higher levels of participation compared to lessons delivered through more traditional instructional approaches. This suggests that the integration of TPR and digital media not only supports vocabulary learning but also facilitates meaningful and functional language use in early classroom contexts.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the pedagogical effectiveness of integrating Total Physical Response (TPR) with digital media in facilitating vocabulary acquisition among young learners. This instructional combination capitalizes on kinesthetic learning alongside visual and auditory stimulation, both of which are widely recognized as highly effective for children in the early stages of language development (Nation, 2022). The discussion of these findings is presented as follows.

a) TPR as a Medium for Meaningful Language Input

Total Physical Response enables learners to establish direct associations between linguistic input and physical actions, thereby making vocabulary learning more meaningful and accessible. Setiawan and Kuswandono (2020) argue that TPR creates a psychologically supportive learning environment by reducing learners' anxiety and promoting a playful, natural approach to language acquisition. The findings from RA Mina Jadid align with this perspective, as learners exhibited high levels of enthusiasm and confidence when performing physical actions corresponding to newly introduced vocabulary items. This indicates that TPR effectively facilitates comprehension while fostering positive emotional engagement.

b) Digital Media as a Catalyst for Learner Engagement

Digital media played a pivotal role in sustaining learners' attention and reinforcing vocabulary through repeated exposure. This finding corroborates the work of Saraswati et al. (2021), who highlight the effectiveness of multimedia and mobile-assisted tools in enhancing vocabulary learning. In the context of RA Mina Jadid, repeated interaction with digital TPR-based materials enabled learners to revisit vocabulary in varied formats, thereby strengthening retention and comprehension through consistent reinforcement.

c) Synergistic Effects of TPR and Digital Media Integration

The integration of TPR and digital media creates a dynamic and interactive learning environment that supports deeper cognitive

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processing. When physical movement is combined with visual and auditory stimuli, learners benefit from dual coding of information verbal and nonverbal which significantly enhances memory retention (Yuliani & Hartono, 2022). Furthermore, this instructional synergy accommodates diverse learning styles, including kinesthetic, visual, and auditory preferences, making the learning process more inclusive and holistic (Munir & Auliya, 2023). Such multimodal engagement ensures that learners remain actively involved in the learning process.

d) Implications for Teaching Practice

The findings of this study suggest important implications for early childhood English language instruction. Educators are encouraged to integrate TPR techniques with digital tools to enhance vocabulary learning while simultaneously promoting active participation and digital literacy, which are essential competencies in 21st-century education. Teachers should be equipped with adequate training to design developmentally appropriate TPR commands and to select or curate digital content that aligns with thematic units commonly employed in early childhood curricula (Azhar & Iqbal, 2021). Through thoughtful integration, this approach can support effective, engaging, and sustainable vocabulary instruction for young learners.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that integrating Total Physical Response (TPR) with digital media constitutes an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing vocabulary acquisition among young learners. The combination of physical movement and engaging digital content not only improved learners' retention of new vocabulary but also fostered higher levels of enthusiasm and active participation throughout the learning process. Through TPR, learners were able to internalize word meanings by associating linguistic input with physical actions, while digital media such as educational videos, animations, and interactive games provided visual and auditory reinforcement that aligned with young children's preferred learning modalities.

The findings further indicate that this blended approach creates a dynamic, supportive, and learner-centered environment in which vocabulary development occurs in a more natural and enjoyable manner. The integration of kinesthetic and multimedia-based instruction supports meaningful learning by accommodating diverse learning styles and maintaining learners' motivation. Consequently, early childhood educators are encouraged to incorporate TPR techniques in conjunction with appropriate digital tools to optimize vocabulary learning outcomes. Future research is recommended to examine the application of this integrated approach across different educational settings, learner age groups, or language skills in order to extend and validate the present findings.

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, several recommendations are proposed to inform teaching practice, curriculum development, and future research.

a. Implications for Early Childhood

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Educators

Early childhood educators are encouraged to incorporate Total Physical Response (TPR) techniques in conjunction with digital learning tools when teaching English vocabulary to young learners. To support effective implementation, professional development programs such as training sessions and workshops should be provided. These initiatives can equip teachers with practical strategies for integrating physical movement and digital resources in a developmentally appropriate and pedagogically sound manner.

b. Implications for School Administrators and Curriculum Developers

Educational institutions are advised to enhance digital learning infrastructure by providing adequate technological resources, including projectors, tablets, and smart televisions. Such facilities can support the effective integration of multimedia content in classroom instruction. Additionally, curriculum designers should embed multimodal instructional approaches combining TPR strategies with digital and multimedia resources into early childhood English language curricula to promote holistic and engaging language learning experiences.

c. Directions for Future Research

Future studies are encouraged to further investigate the long-term effects of integrating TPR and digital media on learners' vocabulary retention, fluency, and overall language development. Comparative research examining the effectiveness of TPR-based digital instruction alongside other vocabulary teaching methods across diverse age groups, educational contexts, or cultural settings would also provide valuable insights and contribute to the broader field of early language education.

d. Implications for Parents and Caregivers

Parents and caregivers are encouraged to actively support children's language learning at home by employing simple TPR-based commands and providing supervised access to age-appropriate digital media. Such involvement can reinforce vocabulary exposure beyond the classroom and strengthen the continuity between home and school learning environments.

Overall, this study affirms that the creative integration of physical movement and digital media not only enhances vocabulary acquisition but also fosters joyful, meaningful, and sustainable learning experiences for young learners.

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