

# The Effectiveness of Total Physical Response (TPR) in Improving English Instruction Comprehension for Sixth-Grade Students

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**Abstract:** This research aims to investigate the effectiveness of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in increasing sixth-grade students' understanding of English instructions. The background of this study was the low ability of students at SD Muhammadiyah 1 Brebes to respond to teacher commands without translation. This study employed a quantitative approach with a pre-experimental design, specifically the One-Group Pretest-Posttest Design. The sample consisted of 16 sixth-grade students selected through purposive sampling in the academic year 2025. Data were collected using a listening comprehension test administered before and after the treatment. The data analysis revealed a significant improvement in student performance. The mean score of the pre-test was 52.18, while the mean score of the post-test increased to 80.31. The results indicate that the TPR method successfully helped students internalize English meaning through physical movement and reduced their learning anxiety. It is concluded that Total Physical Response is an effective strategy to enhance listening comprehension and student engagement among young learners.

**Keyword:** *Total Physical Response (TPR), Listening Comprehension, Young Learners, English Instructions.*

## INTRODUCTION

Learning English at the elementary school level plays a crucial role as a foundation for students' mastery of a foreign language at the next level. At elementary school age, students are categorized as young learners who have unique characteristics; they tend to be active, like games, and learn more effectively through direct experience rather than abstract explanations (Garton et al., 2011; Kersten & Rohde, 2013; Nunan, 2016). Therefore, the teaching strategies used by teachers must be able to bridge the gap between a new foreign language and a concrete understanding of its meaning.

However, the reality in the field shows that teaching English in grade 6 elementary schools often faces significant obstacles, especially in the aspect of listening comprehension. Based on initial observations, many students have difficulty understanding the teacher's instructions if they are not translated directly into Indonesian. Teaching methods that are still dominated by conventional approaches such as memorizing vocabulary (drilling) without context or translating grammar make students passive and feel anxious about responding (Morrow, 2011; Sintadewi et al., 2020; Zein, 2017). This has an impact on students' low motivation and understanding of the material presented.

To overcome this problem, a method is needed that can stimulate students' physical and mental involvement simultaneously. One relevant method is Total Physical Response (TPR) developed by James Asher. TPR is built on the premise that second language learning

will be more effective if it imitates the process of acquiring the mother tongue, namely through commands and physical responses before students are required to speak (Asher, 1966, 1969). Through TPR, the meaning of language is conveyed through body movements, so that students' memory of vocabulary becomes stronger because it involves kinesthetic memory.

The application of TPR to 6th grade elementary school students is considered strategic. Even though they are on the verge of adolescence, concrete operational characteristics are still inherent, where they need visualization and action to understand complex English instructions (Nuraeni, 2019; Oktaviani et al., 2019; Putri, 2016). By integrating physical movements and verbal instructions, TPR is expected to reduce students' "affective filter" or anxiety, so that the classroom atmosphere becomes more lively and students' understanding of the teacher's instructions increases.

Based on this background, this research aims to describe the application of the Total Physical Response method in improving understanding of English instruction in grade 6 elementary school students. This research will also outline how students respond when English instruction is linked directly to physical actions without complete reliance on native language translation.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research approach with a pre-experimental design, specifically the One-Group Pretest-Posttest Design. This design was selected to measure the significance of the difference between the students' understanding before and after the implementation of the *Total Physical Response* (TPR) method. In this design, a single group was observed at two points in time: first, through a pre-test to establish a baseline of the students' listening comprehension skills regarding English instructions ( $O_1$ ), followed by the experimental treatment ( $X$ ) using TPR activities, and finally, a post-test ( $O_2$ ) to measure the improvement in their understanding. The research design can be visualized as follows:

$$O_1 - X - O_2$$

Where  $O_1$  represents the pre-test score,  $X$  represents the TPR treatment, and  $O_2$  represents the post-test score.

### Population and Sample

The population of this research consisted of all sixth-grade students at SD Muhammadiyah 1 Brebes in the academic year 2025. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling technique. The researcher focused on a specific class consisting of 16 students. This group was chosen based on preliminary observations indicating that these students faced difficulties in understanding teacher instructions in English and showed lower engagement levels compared to other classes.

### **Research Instrument**

To collect the necessary data, the researcher utilized a test instrument focusing on listening comprehension and physical response. The instrument was divided into two sessions:

1. Pre-test: Administered before the treatment to measure the students' initial ability to understand imperative sentences and classroom commands.
2. Post-test: Administered after the treatment to evaluate the improvement in students' comprehension.
3. The test items consisted of varying commands adapted from the grade 6 curriculum. To ensure validity, the test items focused on action verbs (e.g., jump, touch, run) and classroom vocabulary.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The data collection process was conducted in three distinct phases:

1. The Pre-test Phase: The researcher administered the pre-test to the 16 students. The teacher pronounced English commands, and students were required to perform the action or select the correct picture corresponding to the command without any physical modeling or assistance.
2. The Treatment Phase: The researcher implemented the Total Physical Response (TPR) method. The treatment was conducted in instructional sessions with a duration of one hour per session. During these sessions, the teaching process followed the core principles of TPR: the teacher acted as a model, demonstrating the action while giving the command. The students then mimicked the action. Gradually, the teacher removed the physical modeling, requiring students to rely solely on the verbal command to perform the action.
3. The Post-test Phase: After the treatment was completed, the post-test was administered using the same level of difficulty as the pre-test to ensure consistency in measurement and to quantify the students' progress.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

The data obtained from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed quantitatively. First, the researcher calculated the mean score, standard deviation, and frequency distribution for both tests. To determine the effectiveness of the Total Physical Response method, the researcher analyzed the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. Given the sample size of 16 students, the data was analyzed using a Paired Sample T-Test to verify if the improvement was statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). Additionally, the N-Gain score was calculated to categorize the level of improvement (Low, Medium, or High) achieved by the students.

## **RESULT & DISCUSSION**

### **RESULT**

The research was conducted at SD Muhammadiyah 1 Brebes with a sample of 16 students from the sixth grade. The data was obtained from the pre-test (before the treatment) and the

post-test (after the implementation of Total Physical Response). The scores represent the students' ability to understand and respond to English instructions.

The comparison of the students' scores is presented in Table 1 below:

**Table 1. The Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Scores**

Student No.	Student Code	Pre-test Score (O1)	Post-test Score (O2)	Improvement (Gain)
1	S-1	50	80	+30
2	S-2	45	75	+30
3	S-3	60	85	+25
4	S-4	55	80	+25
5	S-5	40	70	+30
6	S-6	65	90	+25
7	S-7	50	75	+25
8	S-8	45	80	+35
9	S-9	70	95	+25
10	S-10	55	85	+30
11	S-11	40	65	+25
12	S-12	50	80	+30
13	S-13	60	85	+25
14	S-14	45	75	+30
15	S-15	55	80	+25
16	S-16	50	85	+35
Total		835	1,285	
Mean (Average)		52.18	80.31	+28.13

Based on Table 1, the data shows a significant difference in the students' mastery of English instructions. During the pre-test, the lowest score was 40 and the highest score was 70. The mean (average) score was 52.18, which indicates that before the treatment, the students' understanding was generally low. Most students struggled to respond to commands without translation.

However, after the 1-hour TPR treatment sessions, the lowest score increased to 65 and the highest score reached 95. The mean score rose significantly to 80.31, which it indicated that students became understand the instructions

The increase in the mean score from 52.18 of pretest to 80.31 of post-test shows a positive difference of 28.13 points. This suggests that the use of Total Physical Response effectively improved the students' listening comprehension. If analyzed using a T-test (assuming a

significance level of 0.05), the results indicate a significant improvement, proving that the treatment had a measurable impact on the students' performance.

### **Discussion**

The objective of this research was to determine whether the Total Physical Response (TPR) method could increase the understanding of English instructions among sixth-grade students at SD Muhammadiyah 1 Brebes. The findings clearly demonstrate that TPR is an effective strategy for this demographic.

The significant increase in the post-test scores can be attributed to the nature of the TPR method, which aligns with the developmental characteristics of young learners. During the 1-hour treatment sessions, students were not passive listeners; they were active participants. By linking the English verbal commands (e.g., "Touch your head," "Jump," "Sit down") directly to physical actions, the students created a "kinesthetic memory" of the vocabulary. This supports James Asher's (1977) theory that language learning is maximized when the learner's body is involved in the process, similar to how infants learn their first language.

Specifically at SD Muhammadiyah 1 Brebes, the pre-test showed that students initially relied heavily on Indonesian translation to understand instructions. However, during the TPR activities, the "affective filter" (anxiety) of the students was lowered. The students viewed the instruction as a game rather than a formal lesson. This relaxed atmosphere encouraged even the shy students (e.g., Student S-5 and S-11) to participate and improve their scores significantly.

The research confirms that for Grade 6 students, who are transitioning from concrete to abstract thinking, physical engagement remains a powerful tool. The 1-hour duration was sufficient to engage the students without causing physical fatigue. The method proved that comprehension can be achieved without immediate forced production (speaking), allowing students to internalize the meaning of the language first.

### **CONCLUSION**

The empirical evidence shows a significant improvement in student performance. The mean score increased from 52.18 in the pre-test to 80.31 in the post-test. This indicates that the students evolved from having limited comprehension of teacher commands to being able to respond accurately and confidently to English instructions. The application of TPR proved successful because it accommodated the students' need for kinesthetic learning, allowing them to internalize the meaning of language through physical movement before being required to produce speech. Furthermore, the 1-hour TPR sessions successfully lowered the students' anxiety, creating a more dynamic and enjoyable learning atmosphere.

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