

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Learning vocabulary is one of the most crucial aspects of acquiring a new language. For students learning English as a foreign language, vocabulary mastery plays a central role in supporting the development of speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Recent studies emphasize that students' vocabulary proficiency strongly influences their overall language performance (Rahman & Yusuf, 2021; Putri, 2022). However, research conducted in Indonesia shows that many junior high school learners continue to encounter difficulties in mastering vocabulary due to limited exposure to English, low retention, and challenges in understanding word meanings when taught through conventional techniques (Rahmawati & Kurniawan, 2021; Putri & Hamzah, 2020).

These persistent issues highlight the need for more innovative and engaging teaching approaches that accommodate students' diverse learning styles and support deeper vocabulary acquisition. Recent studies suggest that student-centered and interactive learning such as learning through movement, contextual situations, and multisensory experiences can positive enhance vocabulary learning among young adolescents (Ningsih & Sari, 2022; Hasibuan, 2023).

In the past five years, there has been a noticeable shift in vocabulary teaching research within EFL contexts. Responding to the limitations of traditional memorization-based teaching, scholars increasingly emphasize multisensory and action-based learning as promising alternatives (Nuraeni, 2019). Numerous studies have examined the role of Total Physical Response (TPR) in improving students' vocabulary. Fitriani (2020), for instance, found that TPR substantially boosted Indonesian students' vocabulary mastery. Students became more engaged and less bored during lessons because the learning process involved movement and imitation. This method supports natural language learning similar to how children acquire their first language, enabling students not only to memorize words but to understand them meaningfully within context.

Larasati and Nugroho (2021) further reported that TPR positively affects students' motivation and attitudes toward learning English. Learners became more enthusiastic and confident when lessons were delivered through enjoyable and movement-based activities. Likewise, Siregar and Lestari (2023) concluded that TPR creates a supportive, stress-free learning atmosphere because it emphasizes natural responses rather than formal evaluation. A positive emotional learning environment has been shown to contribute positive to vocabulary retention and oral confidence. Handayani (2024) later added that TPR benefits long-term communication skills, as students can associate vocabulary with real-life contexts through physical actions.

Traditional approaches centered on repetitive memorization have been proven ineffective because students often remember vocabulary only for a short time and do not understand how to use it in context. These methods also tend to reduce motivation because learners quickly become bored and disengaged (Putri & Hamzah, 2020; Rahmawati & Kurniawan, 2021). As a result, scholars recommend adopting more interactive, contextual, and multimodal teaching strategies that incorporate physical, visual, and meaningful learning experiences.

Although research consistently demonstrates the benefits of interactive, movement-based learning strategies (Fitriani, 2020; Larasati & Nugroho, 2021; Ningsih & Sari, 2022), the existing literature still leaves important gaps. Prior studies rarely discuss the real-world challenges teachers face during the application of TPR in the classroom, such as time constraints, differences in students' responses, or classroom management issues. Therefore, there is a need for contextual research that explores the implementation of TPR more comprehensively by documenting not only its ability but also the challenges encountered and strategies used to address them. The lack of practical evidence in junior high school contexts especially in Indonesia makes such research necessary (Putri & Hamzah, 2020).

The researcher chose this topic based on personal observations and teaching experience, which suggest that students learn vocabulary more effectively when they are physically involved in classroom activities. Many adolescents become bored when vocabulary is taught through translation or memorization; with

limited attention spans and high energy levels, they respond better to fun, interactive lessons. SMPK Rosa Mystica Kupang, a private Catholic junior high school in East Nusa Tenggara, serves as the setting for this study. Although the school provides a positive learning environment and is actively improving English instruction, Grade VII students still struggle to master vocabulary due to traditional teaching practices and minimal exposure to English outside the classroom.

Theoretically, this study strengthens the existing literature on English teaching methods, particularly the application of TPR in EFL settings. Practically, it offers insights for English teachers especially those working with early adolescents on how to design and deliver engaging, movement-based vocabulary lessons. It can also be useful for schools and curriculum developers seeking to promote student-centered learning approaches. Based on the issues described above, the researcher is interested in conducting a study entitled: “A Study on Teaching Vocabulary Using Total Physical Response to the Seventh Grade of Junior High School Students.”

1.2. Research Problems

Based on the research background, this research aims at two problems, as formulated in the questions below:

1. How can the application of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method improve junior high school students' English vocabulary mastery through a measurable and gradual learning process?
2. What challenges might arise when applying the Total Physical Response method in teaching vocabulary to junior high school?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

Based on the research problems formulated above, the objectives of this study are:

1. To examine how the Total Physical Response (TPR) method can be implemented to improve students' vocabulary mastery.
2. To identify the challenges encountered during the implementation of the TPR method in teaching vocabulary.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study provides both theoretical and practical significance in the field of English language teaching.

1. Theoretical Significance

The findings contribute to the existing literature on vocabulary instruction using Total Physical Response (TPR), especially in junior high school contexts where

research is still limited. This study strengthens the understanding that physical movement can enhance vocabulary comprehension and retention in young adolescents.

2. Practical Significance

1. For Teachers: This study offers practical guidance on implementing TPR to make vocabulary lessons more interactive, motivating, and effective.
2. For Students: TPR helps increase students' interest, participation, and ability to remember new words through enjoyable movement-based learning.
3. For Schools/Curriculum Developers: The results can serve as a reference to adopt more student-centered, active learning approaches to improve English teaching quality at the junior high school level.