

# Improving English Vocabulary Mastery Using the TPR Method at Jerisa Mandiri Middle School, Medan

**Author Name:** Junita Siahaan<sup>1</sup>, Aditya Esrika<sup>2</sup>, Cindy Ambarita<sup>3</sup>, Elisabeth Simamora<sup>4</sup>, Fori Pandiangan<sup>5</sup>, Rialince Gultom<sup>6</sup>, Sofiya Barus<sup>7</sup>, Yannece Sihombing<sup>8</sup>

**Affiliation:** Universitas Katolik Santo Thomas<sup>1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8</sup>

**Contact Information:** [siahaanjunita@ust.ac.id](mailto:siahaanjunita@ust.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>, [adityaesrika8@gmail.com](mailto:adityaesrika8@gmail.com)<sup>2</sup>, [cindysep trianaa@gmail.com](mailto:cindysep trianaa@gmail.com)<sup>3</sup>, [elisabethsimamora19@gmail.com](mailto:elisabethsimamora19@gmail.com)<sup>4</sup>, [forinaulipandiangan@gmail.com](mailto:forinaulipandiangan@gmail.com)<sup>5</sup>, [Benedictakssy@gmail.com](mailto:Benedictakssy@gmail.com)<sup>6</sup>, [sofiyaagustina114@gmail.com](mailto:sofiyaagustina114@gmail.com)<sup>7</sup>, [Yannecesihombing@gmail.com](mailto:Yannecesihombing@gmail.com)<sup>8</sup>,

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## Abstract

Vocabulary mastery is a fundamental aspect of learning English, yet many middle school students struggle with recalling and using it correctly. This issue is caused by monotonous teaching approaches, lack of enjoyment, and limited physical activities that actively engage students. This study aims to determine the effectiveness of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in improving vocabulary and imperative sentence structure skills in seventh-grade students at Jerisa Mandiri Middle School, Medan. The method used is qualitative descriptive with techniques such as observation, documentation, and reflection. The learning process is carried out through interactive activities that involve verbal instructions in English, which are responded to with physical movements by the students. The core activities include vocabulary introduction, imperative sentence practice, and the application of the educational game "Domino Games." The results show that students were able to recall and use more than 20 new vocabulary words, as well as construct and read 11 imperative sentences independently. The physical activities in the learning process proved to enhance memory retention and made the learning environment more enjoyable. Students also showed increased participation and confidence. The main challenge in the implementation was the time constraints and varying skill levels among students. Nevertheless, the activities were carried out successfully and received positive feedback from both teachers and students. In conclusion, the TPR method is effective in improving vocabulary mastery and understanding English sentence structures contextually for beginner students.

**Keywords:** *Vocabulary, TPR, imperative sentences, interactive learning, middle school students.*

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## Introduction

In the context of globalization and the advancement of information technology, English is one of the most important subjects in the school curriculum in Indonesia. In learning English,

vocabulary mastery is a fundamental skill that students must possess. Whether it is listening, reading, writing, or speaking, vocabulary plays a crucial role. However, many students in Junior High School (SMP) continue to struggle with recalling and using English vocabulary contextually and correctly.

One of the causes of low vocabulary mastery among students is a teaching approach that lacks variation and does not involve enjoyable and meaningful activities for students. Additionally, an approach that focuses solely on memorization tends to make students forget quickly and leads to a lack of motivation to continue learning. Therefore, a teaching approach is needed that can help students understand and remember vocabulary more effectively. It is essential that students enjoy learning. This aligns with the humanistic perspective on language teaching, as stated by Harmer, which emphasizes that students' emotions are just as important as their mental or cognitive abilities. If a method is not used in the learning process, the process can be considered unsuccessful. This is because a series of learning components—goals, methods, materials, media, and evaluation—occupy the second most important position after the goals. A method is considered good and appropriate if it can achieve the desired goals.

For learning English, the Total Physical Response (TPR) method is the best because it makes students feel happy and stress-free, makes the material easier to remember, and they do not need to think hard to understand or retain anything. Combining physical movements with intellectual activities and using all the senses can have a significant impact on learning outcomes (Rahmawati et al., 2019).

The Total Physical Response (TPR) method, created by James Asher, combines physical activity with language learning. This method is based on the idea that physical involvement can enhance cognitive processes in language learning. To apply it, the instructor gives commands in English to the students, who then respond with physical movements. This creates a strong connection between words and actions.

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of the Total Physical Response method in improving English vocabulary skills among junior high school students. It is hoped that the learning process will become more enjoyable and interactive, and that students will become more engaged in understanding and remembering vocabulary more effectively..

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## Literature Review

vocabulary mastery is a crucial component in language learning, including English. Having an extensive vocabulary enables students to understand texts, communicate more effectively, and construct sentences accurately. According to Nation (2001), vocabulary is the foundation of language learning, as words are the essential elements of communication. Effective vocabulary teaching not only involves teaching word meanings but also how these words are used correctly in context.

Several studies show that vocabulary mastery can be influenced by various factors, including exposure frequency, context, and the way words are introduced. In this regard, teaching methods that involve direct student experience are vital for enhancing vocabulary comprehension and retention (Snow, 2010).

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## Methodology

### Internal Coordination

Internal coordination begins with a discussion among the team or group members about procedures and each person's responsibilities, ensuring better teamwork and preparation. Next, the team meets with the SMP Jerisa Mandiri school representatives to explain the program plans, build collaboration, and ensure readiness from all parties. This includes a socialization session about the material to be covered and the importance of the program.

### Program Implementation

The program at SMP Jerisa Mandiri is designed as a series of educational activities aimed at improving the quality of learning and motivating students. The program starts with a socialization session for the school about the objectives and benefits of the activities, followed by the introduction of active and innovative learning methods.

The core activities include interactive classroom sessions, demonstrations of digital learning media, and brief training for teachers on integrating technology into teaching. The implementation team does not only deliver the material but also acts as facilitators, guiding students through a meaningful and enjoyable learning process.

Additionally, dialogues and feedback from both students and teachers are conducted to identify the challenges faced in the teaching-learning process. This data serves as the foundation for developing more effective future teaching strategies. Through this program, it is hoped that a more dynamic learning environment will be created, encouraging students to be active and reigniting their enthusiasm to achieve academic success. The program's execution marks a tangible step in supporting the advancement of education at SMP Jerisa Mandiri.

### Research Approach

The approach used in this activity is descriptive qualitative. The aim is to describe how learning takes place, how students respond, and the challenges and solutions encountered during the teaching and learning process. Data is gathered through direct observation, field notes, and reflections from the teacher-student interactions. The assessment is not focused on numerical results but on the process of student engagement, changes in their attitudes towards lessons, and progress in understanding and using vocabulary and English sentence structures taught. This approach aims to provide a comprehensive and in-depth view of the effectiveness of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in enhancing English skills among beginner students. The evaluation focuses on the process rather than the final outcome, allowing for a thorough analysis of all aspects, including interaction, student responses, and technical challenges.

Total Physical Response (TPR) enhances students' ability to speak in imperative sentences, fostering their interest in learning imperative sentences through physical responses. The analysis shows that most students enjoy learning imperative sentences using TPR.

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## Findings

### Results and Discussion

The goal of this teaching is to improve students' understanding of basic English vocabulary and mastery of two key topics: Simple Present Tense and Imperative Sentences, using the Total Physical Response (TPR) approach. From the activities, it was noted that students could recall and use around 20 new vocabulary words, especially those related to body parts, daily activities, and simple commands. Vocabulary such as "head," "shoulders," "knees," "toes," "wash," "eat," "jump," "run," "sit," "open," and similar terms were learned through physical activities and games.

The Total Physical Response method was developed by James J. Asher, a pioneer in teaching foreign languages to children. According to Asher (1969), direct speech accompanied by commands prompts children to respond physically before they begin verbalizing their responses. This method helps students understand the material effectively, supporting a structured learning process that is aligned with the desired goals. Through physical movements ("body posture"), students find it easier to comprehend and retain the material (HERIYADI, 2022).

However, in practice, the implementation was not always smooth. Many students lacked a sufficient basic understanding of English, even in terms of pronouncing simple words. This made teaching slightly more challenging. Teachers not only had to deliver the material but also had to find creative ways to help students understand more easily and avoid making them feel pressured while learning.

#### A. Material Taught: Imperative Sentence

The first cycle of learning focused on the topic of Imperative Sentences, which are used to give commands, requests, prohibitions, invitations, or suggestions. The teaching material, based on learning modules and visual presentations, was structured as follows:

##### 1. Definition of Imperative Sentence

An imperative sentence is a command that uses the base form of the verb (verb 1) without requiring a subject. It directly states what the listener must do, for example: "Sit down!" or "Don't be late!"

##### 2. Purpose of Using Imperative Sentences

Students were explained that these sentences are used to:

- Give orders (command)
- Make requests (request)
- Express prohibitions (prohibition)
- Make invitations (invitation)
- Offer suggestions (suggestion)

##### 3. Types of Imperative Sentences and Examples

- **Command:** "Open your book.", "Be quiet!"
- **Request:** "Please help me."
- **Prohibition:** "Don't run!", "Don't touch that!"
- **Invitation:** "Let's sing together."
- **Suggestion:** "Try to study early."

## Learning about Imperative Sentences

The learning of imperative sentences was conducted in the first cycle. The material was delivered gradually, starting with the introduction of basic concepts, the purpose of use, types of sentences, and then practical exercises through games and group discussions. During the process, students were not only given theoretical material through visual presentations but also directed to practice actively. Below are the two main focuses taught to the students:

### 1. How to Use Imperative Sentences in English:

Students learned that imperative sentences are used for:

- Giving direct commands (e.g., *Close the door!*),
- Handling emergency situations (e.g., *Help me!*),
- Making invitations in advertisements or posters (e.g., *Buy now!*).

### 2. Be Careful with How You Speak Imperative Sentences:

Students were also taught that when giving commands, they should:

- Use polite words like “please,”
- Avoid using an angry or harsh tone,
- Speak in a friendly tone.

After the students understood the definition, function, and types of imperative sentences and practiced individually through examples and exercises, the learning was directed toward more applied and collaborative activities. The goal of this phase was to reinforce students' practical understanding while improving teamwork and critical thinking skills in constructing sentences. To achieve this, the teacher implemented the "Domino Game" educational activity. In this game, students, grouped into teams, were asked to arrange shuffled word pieces into complete and grammatically correct imperative sentences. This activity not only served as a language exercise but also helped create a fun, interactive learning environment, motivating students to actively use English in context.

## B. Domino Game Activity (Group Exercise)

After understanding the basic material, students participated in the Domino Game activity designed to:

- Strengthen understanding of imperative sentence structure,
- Train teamwork,
- Encourage students to actively construct and read sentences independently.

### Game Mechanism:

1. Students are divided into 4 groups.
2. Each group receives pieces of paper with shuffled words from parts of a sentence.
3. They must match and arrange the pieces to form 11 complete imperative sentences.
4. The results are then written on an answer sheet and read aloud in front of the class.

### Results from One Group:

Based on the student answer documents, here are the 11 sentences that the group successfully constructed:

1. *Hide behind the tree* = (Sembunyilah di balik pohon)
2. *Listen to your teacher* = (Dengarkan perintah gurumu)
3. *Open the door* = (Buka pintunya)



4. *Touch your hair* = (Sentuh rambutmu)
5. *Look at your friend* = (Lihat temanmu)
6. *Run to your chair* = (Pergi ke bangkumu)
7. *Sit down* = (Duduk)
8. *Stand up* = (Berdiri)
9. *Come here* = (Kemarilah)
10. *Catch the ball* = (Tangkap bolanya)
11. *Stop this game* = (Hentikan game ini)
12. *Eat your biscuit* = (Makanlah biskuitmu)

This activity allowed students to create a better understanding of the material while building confidence, curiosity, teamwork, and critical thinking skills in a collaborative environment. However, some students still faced confusion, had incomplete understanding, and lacked focus during the exercise. The solution we offered was to support students with their group members (instructors), providing guidance and assistance. The outcomes of the students' answers from forming sentences showed progress, even though some required additional clarification.

### Analysis and Student Feedback

The students appeared more focused and enthusiastic during the activity as it was conducted in a competitive and collaborative manner. While some students still struggled with reading in English, they were supported through group discussions. The sentences they constructed reflected a good understanding of imperative sentence patterns, though their pronunciation and spelling still require further development.

### 4. Strengthening Strategy

To boost student motivation, the teacher offered rewards such as snacks to the group that successfully constructed sentences and read them confidently. This strategy proved effective in significantly increasing student participation.

The activities carried out at SMP Jerisa Mandiri, specifically for seventh-grade students, highlighted several key points:

1. **Improving English Vocabulary Mastery:**  
According to Dwiastuty et al. (2016), the Total Physical Response (TPR) method is an effective teaching strategy in the English language classroom. This method focuses on student activities, such as passive exercises involving physical and motor movements. Students showed improvement in their understanding and retention of English vocabulary related to imperative sentences after applying the TPR method through physical activities like *Simon Says*. This activity helped students remember words more easily by associating them with real-life movements.
2. **Better Understanding of Simple Sentence Structure:**  
After practicing together, students were able to form and identify simple sentences more effectively after learning the simple present tense material. The practice was conducted both in groups and individually, with a contextual approach that was easy for the students to understand.
3. **More Enjoyable and Interactive Learning:**  
Zahra (2024) stated that using educational games in English learning can enhance students' understanding and increase their social engagement, as all students actively

participate in each game. The use of game media, like the domino game, in teaching imperative sentences encouraged active interaction. Students seemed more engaged and enthusiastic when asked to arrange pieces of domino cards into complete imperative sentences.

4. **Positive Feedback from Teachers and Students:**

Students expressed that the teaching method used was fun and not boring. The accompanying teacher also appreciated the method, noting that it revitalized the classroom atmosphere and encouraged previously passive students to become more active.

5. **Time Management Challenges:**

Time constraints meant that some students did not have the opportunity to engage in all activities individually. However, overall, the activities proceeded smoothly and achieved their objectives.

### **Results and Conclusion**

The activities demonstrated that using the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in English learning helped seventh-grade students at SMP Jerisa Mandiri improve their vocabulary and understanding of simple sentence structures. This aligns with previous research, which shows that TPR helps students remember vocabulary through activities and physical engagement, particularly for younger learners. Positive feedback from both students and teachers suggests that interactive learning methods are a better alternative to conventional lecture-based approaches. Furthermore, increased student involvement in the learning process indicates they felt more motivated and confident.

However, a key challenge in implementing these activities was time limitations. Some students did not have the opportunity to participate fully in all individual activities. In the future, dividing students into smaller groups and adjusting the duration could improve the effectiveness of the implementation.

By connecting the results of this activity with relevant literature, it can be concluded that movement-based and game-oriented learning offers valuable experiences for middle school students. This is especially true for introducing and reinforcing English vocabulary and sentence structures. Games like *Simon Says* and the domino game help students grasp essential vocabulary and simple sentence structures in a fun and engaging way, motivating them to actively participate and speak English with more confidence.



**Figure 1,** Documentation Improving English Vocabulary Mastery Using the TPR Method at Jerisa Mandiri Middle School, Medan.

## Conclusion

The results of the community service activities we conducted at SMP Jerisa Mandiri indicate that the Total Physical Response (TPR) method has successfully enhanced the English vocabulary mastery of students, particularly seventh graders. Students found it easier to understand and remember vocabulary and simple sentence structures, such as imperative phrases, because this method creates a fun, interactive, and meaningful learning environment.



Through activities involving physical movement, educational games like *Simon Says* and *Domino Games*, students became more active, confident, and showed significant progress in understanding and using English contextually. Additionally, positive feedback from both teachers and students reinforces that the TPR method can be an engaging alternative compared to conventional, monotonous teaching methods.

The TPR method proved highly effective in achieving its primary objective, which was to improve vocabulary and speaking skills in imperative sentences. However, some challenges were encountered, such as time constraints and students' varying backgrounds..

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