


Improving the Eighth Grade Students' Mastery of Verbs Using the Total Physical Response (TPR) Method

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A B S T R A C T

Mastering vocabulary, particularly action verbs, is fundamental for junior high school students to develop the effective communication skills in English. Although English teacher taught students with various strategies at SMP Swasta Kristen Agios Nikolaos to improve the mastery of vocabulary but almost of them still have not mastered the action verbs. This study aimed to improve the eighth graders' mastery of verbs by using the Total Physical Response (TPR) method. It was conducted in classroom action research, which included planning, action, observation, and reflection process. It was done in two cycles. The participants were 10 males and 14 females. The instruments used were observation, test, and field notes. The data were analyzed through both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The results shown that in cycle I there were 14 students (58,33%) categorized as poor, 10 Students (41,67) were categorized at good, and there were no students categorized at very good and excellent level but in cycle 2, there were no students categorized at the poor, fair, or good levels. There were 5 students (21%) categorized at very good, and 19 students (79.17%) categorized at excellent level. In addition, the classroom activities carried out by the researcher were done 94% and the students' responses done 92%. Furthermore, the field notes showed a positive learning atmosphere. The students became more active, happy, and enjoying the learning process. In conclusion, the use of the TPR method was effective in improving the eighth graders' verbs at SMP Swasta Kristen Agios Nikolaos.

Keywords: *Vocabulary Mastery, Verbs, Total Physical Response, Classroom Action Research.*

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INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is important to be mastered, because it's the foundation for the learners to learn any languages. (Rashid et al., 2022), vocabulary is widely recognized as a foundational component of language learning, critical for effective communication, fluency, academic achievement, and personal motivation. Modern teaching methods increasingly prioritize vocabulary development, integrating it with grammar and communicative practice to support learners' overall language proficiency. Vocabulary also serves as the foundation for learners to understand and express ideas accurately. Research studies have shown that vocabulary knowledge has a considerable impact on language ability. For example, (Tan and Abdullah, 2025) proved that vocabulary learning is closely related to reading comprehension and oral communication, whereas (Putri and Refnaldi 2020) discovered a substantial positive relationship between vocabulary mastery and students' speaking abilities. Furthermore, vocabulary competency is associated with translation skills (Pratama et al., 2024), emphasizing its importance in facilitating meaning between languages.

However, despite its importance many learners face various challenges in acquiring vocabulary effectively. According to (Krisnayanti and Winarta, 2021), students' limited knowledge about the meanings and appropriate usage of words often causes confusion, hindering their ability to apply vocabulary accurately in different contexts. (Ellizza, 2018) also

highlighted several non-linguistic barriers such as lack of exposure to English, insufficient practice, limited access to supporting facilities, and negative peer influence that further complicate vocabulary acquisition. These challenges underline the necessity for innovative and engaging vocabulary teaching strategies that help learners internalize word meanings more effectively.

Vocabulary is a collection of words that need to be mastered and used as a foundation in learning a language. One type of word is the verb, which is a very important part of speech. It refers to actions and activities that we perform. Verbs are one of the essential components in language learning because of their crucial role in forming sentences and conveying meaning. In addition, verbs can also indicate the condition or state of something (Madanun et al., 2025). They are important elements in a sentence because they function as predicates that explain what the subject does or what happens to the subject (Sögüt & Keçik, 2023). By understanding verbs, we can easily recognize and remember new vocabulary related to actions, states, or processes. It describes what the subject does or what happens to the subject, making vocabulary related to verbs often the core of everyday communication. For example, action verbs like "eat," "run," or "sleep" immediately provide a clear and concrete image of an activity, which makes them easier to remember. Therefore, mastering verbs greatly facilitates expanding vocabulary and understanding sentence structure in the language being learned.

One of the most effective types of verbs to teach, especially to beginners and children, is the action verb. In English grammar, an action verb is a verb that indicates an action performed by a person (Simamora, 2021). By mastering action verbs, the students can tell what they are doing in English easily. Action verbs describe physical actions that can be seen and performed, such as "run," "jump," or "write." Teaching action verbs is easy and enjoyable because it can involve direct physical movement, allowing students to learn not only theoretically but also practically. For instance, a teacher can give simple commands like "raise your hand," "walk in place," or "clap your hands," and then students perform these actions. This method helps students understand the meaning of verbs more clearly and improves their memory through concrete physical experience. Thus, teaching action verbs becomes an effective bridge in vocabulary and verb learning overall, making the language learning process more interactive and fun.

There are many teaching methods can be used by teachers to improve students' mastery of vocabulary, such as discussions, games, spinning tops, and others. However, the implementation of these various methods does not guarantee students' success in mastering vocabulary, as happened at the eighth grade of SMP Swasta Kristen Agios Nikolaos. The English teacher has taught them with various strategies in order to master the vocabulary but observation showed that almost of students still do not master vocabulary especially action verbs. It is proved that when the researcher asked students, "apa bahasa inggrisnya terbang, melompat, menangis, membawa dan sebagainya." They were unable to answer them well. Meanwhile, the learning achievement expected that students are able to master various language skills. This problem needs to be solved, so the researcher conducted the research with the title, *Improving the Eighth Graders' Mastery of Verbs by Using the Total Physical Response (TPR) method.*"

Total Physical Response (TPR) is widely regarded as an excellent tool for teaching action verbs, particularly at the basic and junior levels. The TPR method is a method that can be used to support more inclusive learning. Students who have difficulty in conventional language learning, such as through reading and writing methods, can more easily follow learning with a movement-based approach (Indik Syahrabanu, 2023). TPR promotes learners to physically respond to orders, resulting in links between actions and language. (Mamma and Sirjon, 2024) observed that TPR improves learners' speaking and understanding abilities through movement-based learning, which is especially helpful for teaching verbs. (Strong, 2023) also said that retrieval, repetition, and retention—the key processes of language acquisition—are naturally incorporated in TPR activities. While several researchers have investigated the impact of TPR on vocabulary acquisition, most studies have focused on general vocabulary knowledge without highlighting its specific effect on action verb mastery

in junior high school settings. Moreover, few studies have explored the contextual challenges of implementing TPR in private junior secondary schools where students' exposure to English may be limited. So it can be assumed that the use of the TPR method can improve students' vocabulary mastery.

This study aimed to know whether the use of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method can improve the eighth graders' mastery of verbs especially action verbs. This study is expected to contribute pedagogical insights into effective vocabulary teaching strategies and support teachers in implementing movement-based learning to enhance students' communicative competence.

METHOD

Research design

This research started from the problem found in the classroom based on the observations as preliminary data. It is absolutely used classroom action research (CAR) method because this research aimed to improve the learning achievements with the appropriate method used in teaching and learning process. Here the learning achievement expected was mastery of verbs by using total physical response method. There were two cycles applied in this research. Each cycle consisted of two meetings. Each cycle implemented the stages orderly such as planning, acting, observing and reflecting.

In planning the researcher identified a problem of area for improvement in the classroom. Finding the some references for appropriate method in teaching vocabulary. Then prepare the teaching modul. In preparing this modul it considering the core competence has been decided based on curriculum. The researcher arrange the teaching activities in each meeting. The activities were started from opening, core activities and closing. In first meeting the researcher introduced himself and the aim of coming in the classroom. The researcher gave apperception to wrap the students' motivation in learning. in core competence the researcher arrange the procedure in teaching action verbs by using total physical response. Then in closing the researcher concluded the material, gave the homework, gave suggestions and motivated students in learning.

In planning, the researcher also prepare the material, such as verbs will be taught and description of total physical response will be applied. The researcher also prepare the instruments such as observation sheets, test, answer sheets, field notes and handphone to record the activities in the classroom. The observation sheet contained the teaching activities done by researcher and students activities. So the both researcher and students' activities has been observed in the classroom.

Acting and observing were done in same time in the classroom to collect the data. The researcher teach the students by implementing the procedures of teaching mastery of verbs through total physical response method. while asking the co-researcher to help him as observers of the activities done in the classroom. One observer for researcher' activities checked the list of activities done preped in observation sheet. One observer for the students' activities and one person who took role to take pictures, video and notes. Acting and observing were done in two meetings. After that the researcher test the students.

After planning, acting and observing has been done, the researcher did reflection. Here the researcher analyse the data has been collected such as activities of teachers and students in first and second meeting. The researcher analysed the quantitative data got from observations sheets and test by using theory of Brown 2024. Here the researcher account the presentage of the activities has been done by researcher and the students in the classroom. The formula used was score total time one hundred divided by maximum score. After that the researcher check the students' answer sheets. Scorred them and list their scores in the table. Then making presentage of students based on the range mark they have to know the category such as poor, fair, good, very good and excellent. After that the researcher analyse the qualitative data such as fiel notes, video and photos by applying the process of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing or verification of find the factors of undone activities and poor or fair level of students or students did not meet the minimum completion criteria has

been decided, 70. After analysing the data got from cycle I the researcher continue to conducted research in cycle II, consisted in two meetings. Because there were not any students got mark 70. The planning in cycle II has been done by considering the results of analysis. Then the acting, observing and reflecting have been done such as the process done in cycle I.

Participants of the Study

The participants of this research were 24 person consisting of 14 male and 10 female students. They were not sellected based on particular category but based on the preliminary data got when conducted the firt observation. These students still not master the action verbs even the words used frequently eveyday.

Research Setting

This research was conducted at 8 grade SMP Swasta Kristen Agios Nikolaos Gunungsitoli on April 26th until May 24th 2025. This research was conducted here because a problem of mastering vocabulary especially verbs at SMP Swasta Kristen has been got by the researcher by doing the observation.

Research Instrument

There were three main instruments used in this study. First, observation sheets. The researcher used the observation sheet for researcher' and students' activities. Observation sheet for researcher contained the activities during teaching students by using TPR. Then observation sheet for student contained the response of aged researcher activities during teaching by using TPR in classroom. Second, field notes used by researcher to write the spontanenes occurences unexpected, the weaknesses or the strength found during teaching by using TPR in the classroom. Third, test here the researcher apply written test to measure the students mastery of verbs. The test was accompanied by clear instructions such as students were asked to observe the researcher's demonstration without interruption, think about the corresponding verb, and then write the correct verb clearly on the provided answer sheet.

Data Collection

Data in this research were collected during in the classroom. The researcher teaching the students in the classroom by using total phisical response while the observers checked the list prepared in the observation sheets of researcher's and students' activities. On of observer also taking pictures, videos and notes. Then to get the students' marks, the researcher test them by using the instrument provided in phase planning.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data were gotten from observation sheets and the students tests will be score by using score qualification rubric supportedd by (Brown, 2004) as follows:

$$\text{Score} = \frac{\text{Total score} \times 100}{\text{Maximum Score}}$$

In order to interpret the students' mastery of verbs based on the test results, the score rubric can be seen as follows:

Table 1. Score Qualification Rubric

Score	Indicator	Category
90- 100	A	Excellent
80- 89	B+	Very Good
75- 79	B	Good
70- 74	C	Fair
0-69	D	Poor

A success indicator was achieved if at least 80% of students scored ≥ 70 (minimum completion criteria)

Qualitative Data

After the acting and observing the researcher analyzed the Qualitative data were obtained from field notes and observation sheets by conducted the theory of (Miles and Huberman, 2014), which consists of three interactive components such as data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. In reduction the data got from field notes and observation sheets were simplify then display in graphic. After that taking conclusion by explaining the students' mastery of verbs.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The first cycle followed the steps of the classroom research design, starting from planning, action, observation, and reflection. After the second meeting of the cycle, the researcher analyzed the data that had been collected. In the end of the first cycle, a final test was administered to measure the students' mastery of verbs. The results are presented in the following table:

Table 2. The Eighth Grade Students' Verbs Mastery Results in Cycle I.

No.	Value range	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	90- 100	Excellent	0	0
2	80- 89	Very Good	0	0
3	75- 79	Good	0	0
4	70- 74	Fair	10	41,67%
5	0-69	Poor	14	58,33%
Total				100 %

Table 2 shows that some students' average scores still did not meet the minimum completion criteria. The highest percentage of students, 58.33%, were categorized as Poor, and 41.67% were in the Fair category. No students were categorized as Good, Very Good, or Excellent. This suggests a significant learning gap and indicates that the instructional delivery in Cycle I did not effectively support student mastery of action verbs. The dominance of lower-level scores implies that the Total Physical Response (TPR) method, as initially applied, lacked sufficient scaffolding and reinforcement for students to internalize and retain the targeted vocabulary. These results indicated that the majority of students were still struggling to master the action verbs taught by using the Total Physical Response (TPR) method. This condition might have been caused by several factors. First, the teacher's activity rate (75%–80%) did not fully align with student engagement (70%–75%), as seen in Figure 1, indicating that the researcher's activities not being fully optimized, especially since the first meeting was limited in time and content delivery. This misalignment could point to instructional pacing issues or insufficient interaction, resulting in passive student behavior. Second, the lack of repetition or physical modeling may have hindered comprehension, especially for students unfamiliar with movement-based learning. Third, the limited adaptation time for TPR might have left some students behind, particularly those with lower English proficiency. The results of the observation sheets for both the researcher and the students can be seen in the graphic below:

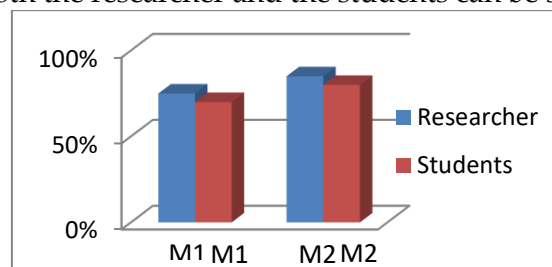


Figure 1. Researcher's and Students' Activities Percentage in Cycle I

Based on the graphic above, the implementation of the learning process in the first cycle was carried out by 75% in the first meeting and 80% in the second meeting of the total planned activities by researcher. The students' activities reached 70% in the first meeting and 75% in the second meeting. The students adequately followed the teaching and learning process. This indicates a generally positive level of engagement. However, approximately 25% of the students showed less optimal responses. This was reflected in passive behavior, lack of self-confidence, and confusion when following instructions. These shortcomings were likely due to differences in students' learning characteristics, limited understanding of the foreign language, and incomplete adaptation to the TPR method, which heavily relies on physical activities as a medium for learning. Thus, these aspects were targeted for improvement in the next cycle to ensure all students could participate more optimally in the learning process.

These insights underline the importance of refining the TPR approach to better suit student learning styles. While field notes confirmed that students responded enthusiastically

and the classroom atmosphere was positive, the disconnect between engagement and mastery highlights that enthusiasm alone does not guarantee learning success. Therefore, instructional strategies required not only better time allocation but also enhanced modeling, increased student interaction, and targeted reinforcement.

However, alongside these strengths, several weaknesses were also observed during the first cycle. Some students still felt shy or hesitant to perform movements, especially when asked to do in front of their peers. Moreover, not all students were able to understand instructions quickly, particularly those with lower English proficiency.

Therefore, improvements in instructional strategies were necessary in the next cycle to enhance overall student learning outcomes. Based on the weaknesses identified in the first cycle, the researcher implemented a number of improvements in the second cycle to enhance both the learning process and student outcomes. These improvements included (1) providing clearer and more frequent demonstrations of the action verbs through physical movements, (2) offering encouragement and motivation to less active students to boost their confidence, and (3) dividing the class into smaller groups to reduce anxiety and create a more supportive learning environment.

The instructional process in the second cycle was carried out in two stages. In the first meeting, the researcher introduced a printed list of 20 targeted action verbs. Students were guided to read, memorize, and physically practice each verb repeatedly. The researcher modeled each verb while saying it aloud, ensuring consistent repetition and immediate feedback to aid comprehension. To reinforce understanding, students were instructed to associate each verb with a specific body movement. After adequate practice, a test was given in which the researcher demonstrated a movement three times, and students had to write the corresponding verb on their worksheet. This activity not only tested vocabulary retention but also assessed students' ability to identify vocabulary through physical cues. The final test conducted at the end of the second cycle revealed a substantial improvement in vocabulary mastery, as shown in the following data:

Table 3. The Eighth Grade Students' Verbs Mastery Results in Cycle II.

No	Value range	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	90- 100	Excellent	19	79,17%
2	80- 89	Very Good	5	21,83%
3	75- 79	Good	0	0
4	70- 74	Fair	0	0
5	0-69	Poor	0	0
Total				100 %

Table. 3 in contrast, shows that all the students have achieved the minimum completion criteria. The results of test in Cycle II showed significant improvement in students' performance if compared to Cycle I. The highest percentage of students, 79.17%, fell into the "Excellent" category with scores ranging from 90 to 100. Additionally, 21.83% of students were categorized in the "Very Good" level with range scores 80-89. Furthermore, no students were categorized as Good, Fair, or Poor. It indicated that all participants demonstrated strong mastery of the action verbs taught using the Total Physical Response (TPR) method.

This improvement can be attributed to several instructional enhancements, including clearer demonstrations, targeted motivation, and the formation of smaller groups, which had a measurable impact on student outcomes. Students were able to connect physical actions with vocabulary more confidently, and they demonstrated stronger retention and understanding of the verbs. The increase in student activity percentages (86% in M1 and 92% in M2) compared to Cycle I further demonstrates improved classroom engagement as shown in figure 2.

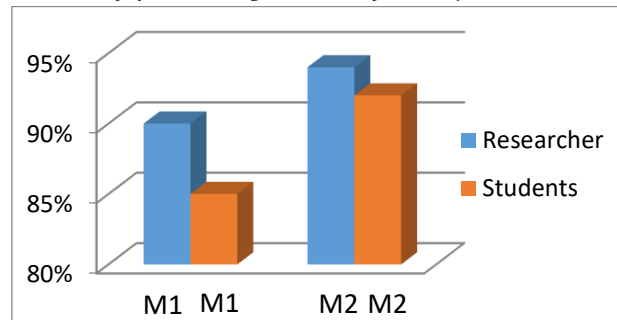


Figure 2. Researcher and Students' Activities Percentage in Cycle II

Based on the graphic above, the implementation of the learning process in cycle II showed a significant improvement compared to the previous cycle. In the first meeting (M1), the researcher managed to carry out approximately 90% of the planned activities, while students demonstrated a response rate of around 86%. In the second meeting (M2), both parties showed further progress, with the researcher reaching 94% implementation and students showing a response rate of 92%. These improvements suggest that TPR can be highly effective when implemented with thoughtful planning and responsive adjustments based on students' needs. Additionally, the decrease in hesitation and the increased willingness to perform movements in front of peers reflect improved self-efficacy and a more inclusive learning environment.

However, although the percentage was relatively high, a small portion of the students still showed occasional hesitation and required more time to adapt to the activities. These challenges may be attributed to individual differences in learning pace and prior language exposure. Nevertheless, the overall trend points toward a positive result in both the researcher's delivery and the students' response, confirming that the applied approach had a meaningful impact on classroom interaction and student motivation.

Field notes indicated a noticeable decline in hesitancy and a boost in students' confidence when using the verbs. Students became more focused, followed directions carefully, and enthusiastically participated in group activities. Overall, the transformation between cycles emphasizes the value of adaptive teaching. Rather than simply following the TPR method, the success of Cycle II came from critically analyzing students' responses and tailoring the method to better support varied learning preferences, thereby transforming a previously underperforming classroom into a learning environment characterized by active engagement and heightened learner motivation.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicated a significant improvement in students' vocabulary mastery through the implementation of the TPR method. The average score increased from (41,67%) fair category and (58,33%) poor category in cycle I to (21, 83%) very good category and (79,17%) excellent category in cycle II. In cycle I there was not any students achieved the minimum completion criteria while in cycle II all the students have achieved it. This result provides prove for the research answer that the use of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method able to improve the students' mastery of verbs.

During the observation done indicated that TPR method were intereting to students because incorporating physical movement so the students more easily understand the meaning and memorize the words. The method of modeling before students imitation has proven helpful in helping students grasp and remember new terminology (Paramita, 2022). It means that the students responded better when supported by physical movement.

The similar research conducted by (Utami et al, 2025) found that TPR improves language acquisition and long-term memory retention by including physical movement into the learning process. However, both studies emphasize the need of regular instructor assistance and repetition, particularly for children with low starting competency. This implies that, while some children may hesitate at first, the TPR approach can gradually increase student involvement and language retention. Some reluctance and lack of confidence in cycle

I indicate that students may require time to adjust the mistakes they take during teaching and learning process.

The implementation of TPR in the classroom needs the good planning. To describe any words by using the total physical response is not an easy one. If the physical movement will be shown to the students does not match with the word we teach, they will give the false response of they will be confused to respond us. To overcome this case, the teacher need to practice this method and make the simulation before teaching in the classroom. The teacher also should prepare the things needed to support the physical movements. This effort make the students easy to learn, memorize or guess the words we teach.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrated that the application of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method significantly improved the eighth-grade students' mastery of action verbs. The findings affirm that combining physical movement with vocabulary instruction promotes greater student engagement, enhances memory retention, and encourages more active participation during learning activities. The use of modeling, repetition, and group-based instruction contributed meaningfully to students' improved performance. From a pedagogical perspective, this research emphasizes the practical benefits of TPR for junior high school learners, especially those who respond well to active and interactive learning strategies. It contributes to the existing body of knowledge by focusing specifically on the mastery of action verbs and by examining challenges encountered in schools with limited English language input. Throughout the process, it became evident that teaching is not merely about delivering material but also about observing how students respond and grow with the method used. The initial failures in Cycle I offered valuable insights that shaped the improvements in Cycle II, highlighting the importance of adaptability and student-centered approaches in language instruction. Personally, this experience deepened my understanding of how crucial it is to connect instruction with students' learning styles, especially in contexts where language exposure is limited. However, this study has limitations, including a small sample size and a short intervention period. Future researchers are encouraged to explore the long-term impact of TPR, its application across various vocabulary domains, or its integration with digital tools to accommodate diverse learners' needs. Ultimately, reflective and responsive teaching remains central to achieving meaningful and lasting language learning outcomes.

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