



Transformation of english listening learning in second grade elementary school through the Total Physical Response (TPR) method

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Article info	Abstract
Keywords: elementary students, embodied learning, listening comprehension, total physical response, TPR.	Listening comprehension is a fundamental skill in early foreign language learning; however, it is often underdeveloped in elementary classrooms due to low student engagement and conventional instructional practices. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in improving English listening comprehension among second-grade elementary school students. A quasi-experimental nonequivalent control group pretest–posttest design was employed involving 60 students from an elementary school in East Jakarta, Indonesia. The participants were divided into an experimental group (n = 30) that received TPR-based instruction and a control group (n = 30) that received conventional instruction over four weeks. Quantitative data were collected via listening comprehension tests and analyzed using independent-samples t-tests. The results indicated that the experimental group achieved significantly higher posttest scores (M = 80.17) than the control group (M = 68.50), $t(58) = 3.25$, $p = .003$, with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.84$). These findings suggest that TPR is an effective and developmentally appropriate approach for enhancing English listening comprehension in early elementary education.

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1. Introduction

English, as an international lingua franca, plays a crucial role in education, technology, and global communication. Consequently, introducing English from an early age is widely regarded as essential for establishing a strong linguistic foundation. In elementary education, English is

typically introduced as a foreign language with an emphasis on familiarising learners with basic vocabulary, phonological patterns, and simple classroom expressions (Duan, 2021; Hà et al., 2020; Reflianto et al., 2021; Tai & Chen, 2021).

Listening comprehension is a fundamental component of second language acquisition. Before learners develop productive skills such as speaking, reading, and writing, they first process linguistic input through listening. For young learners, listening serves as the primary gateway to understanding meaning in a new language (Dongsanniwas & Sukying, 2024; Octaberlina, 2023; Simbolon et al., 2020). From a developmental perspective, second-grade elementary students are generally situated in Piaget's concrete operational stage, during which learning is most effective when concrete experiences and sensorimotor engagement support abstract input. Instructional approaches that integrate physical activity are therefore considered compatible with the cognitive and developmental characteristics of learners at this age (Liu & Chen, 2021; Rmelah & Pornwiryakit, 2023).

Despite this theoretical alignment, English instruction in many elementary school classrooms continues to rely heavily on teacher-centred practices such as repetition drills and translation-based explanations. These approaches often limit students' active involvement and reduce opportunities to construct meaning through experience, thereby hindering the development of listening comprehension and learner engagement (Obitube et al., 2020; Pacheco et al., 2022; Xie, 2021). This condition indicates a pedagogical need for instructional strategies that address not only linguistic input but also learners' developmental readiness and learning modalities.

One instructional approach that responds to this need is the Total Physical Response (TPR) method, initially proposed by Asher. TPR emphasizes the coordination of verbal input and physical action, allowing learners to demonstrate comprehension through bodily responses before being required to produce spoken language. Through simple commands such as "stand up" or "touch your head," learners associate auditory input with concrete actions, thereby facilitating the construction of meaning through embodied experience (Rintaningrum, 2023). Previous studies have reported that TPR can enhance learner engagement, attention, and language comprehension in early language learning contexts (Kaharuddin et al., 2023).

However, existing empirical research on TPR has primarily focused on vocabulary acquisition or speaking skills. At the same time, studies specifically examining listening comprehension outcomes among second-grade students using controlled quasi-experimental designs remain limited, particularly in the Indonesian context. In addition, few studies integrate quantitative listening test results with qualitative classroom evidence to explain how and why TPR supports listening development at this stage.

Based on this research gap, the present study aims to examine the effectiveness of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in improving English listening comprehension among second-grade elementary school students. This study aims to provide empirical evidence for early English language pedagogy and to offer practical insights for teachers in designing developmentally appropriate listening instruction.

2. Method

This study employed a quasi-experimental nonequivalent control-group pretest–posttest design with a mixed-methods approach. The design involved two intact second-grade classes from SD Pematang Raya, East Jakarta, Indonesia. One class was assigned as the experimental group and received instruction using the Total Physical Response (TPR) method. In contrast, the other class functioned as the control group and received conventional listening instruction (Abduh et al.,

2022). Quantitative data were used to measure changes in students' English listening comprehension, whereas qualitative data were collected to provide contextual explanations of classroom processes and student engagement during the intervention. The design can be illustrated as follows:

$$O_1 - - - - X - - - - O_2$$

O1: Pretest (Measurement of listening ability before treatment)

X: Treatment (Learning using the TPR method)

O2: Posttest (Measurement of listening ability after treatment)

The participants consisted of 60 second-grade students enrolled in the 2023/2024 academic year. The experimental group consisted of 30 students, and the control group consisted of 30 students, both drawn from two existing classes at the same grade level. Purposive sampling was applied to select the classes based on administrative accessibility and comparable academic characteristics. Both groups followed the same English curriculum, received equal instructional time, and were taught by teachers with similar professional backgrounds to minimize instructional bias and ensure baseline comparability.

Students' listening comprehension was assessed using a performance-based listening test designed to measure understanding of classroom commands. The test consisted of 20 oral English commands, such as 'stand up,' 'touch your head,' and 'point to the door,' which required students to demonstrate comprehension through physical responses. Each correct response was awarded 1 point, yielding a maximum score of 20, which was then converted to a percentage for analysis (Pranata, 2023). Content validity was established through expert judgment by two English education specialists. To ensure scoring reliability, the classroom teacher and the researcher independently assessed students' responses, and inter-rater agreement was confirmed prior to data analysis.

Qualitative data were collected through structured classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with the English teacher. The observation focused on students' engagement, attentional focus, accuracy of physical responses, and emotional involvement during listening activities. Teacher interviews explored perceptions of student participation, comprehension development, and classroom dynamics throughout the implementation of the TPR method. These qualitative data were used to complement and explain the quantitative findings.

The research was conducted over a four-week intervention period. Both groups completed a pretest prior to the commencement of the instructional treatment. The experimental group then received TPR-based instruction twice a week, emphasizing listening activities through teacher-issued commands accompanied by coordinated physical responses (Pranata, 2025). Each instructional session included a brief warm-up, core command-based listening activities, and reinforcement tasks. In contrast, the control group received conventional listening instruction that emphasized verbal explanation, repetition, and translation without systematic physical movement. At the end of the intervention, both groups completed a posttest to measure changes in listening comprehension.

3. Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of students' English listening comprehension scores for both the experimental and control groups, based on pretest and posttest results. The table

summarises the performance of 30 students in each group, including minimum and maximum scores, mean values, and standard deviations.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of listening comprehension scores

Group	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest Experimental Group	30	40	65	52.67	7.00
Posttest Experimental Group	30	70	95	80.17	6.00
Pretest Control Group	30	38	63	51.33	6.23
Posttest Control Group	30	55	85	68.50	7.89

The descriptive data indicate that both groups demonstrated improvement in listening comprehension from the pretest to the posttest. However, the magnitude of improvement differed between the two groups. The experimental group demonstrated a substantial increase in mean scores, rising from 52.67 on the pretest to 80.17 on the posttest, representing a gain of 27.50 points. In contrast, the control group's mean score increased from 51.33 to 68.50, resulting in a gain of 17.17 points.

In addition to higher mean gains, the experimental group exhibited a lower standard deviation in posttest scores (SD = 6.00) compared to the control group (SD = 7.89). This indicates that students in the experimental group achieved more homogeneous listening comprehension outcomes following the intervention (Khulel, 2021; Xing, 2023). These descriptive findings provide initial evidence that students who received instruction through the Total Physical Response (TPR) method achieved greater and more consistent improvements in listening comprehension than those who received conventional instruction, thereby justifying further inferential statistical analysis.

Prior to conducting inferential statistical analyses, a normality test was performed to examine whether the pretest and posttest scores of both the experimental and control groups were normally distributed. Normality testing was conducted to determine whether parametric statistical procedures were appropriate. The Shapiro–Wilk test was used as the primary indicator of normality, given the sample size of each group ($n = 30$), while the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test served as a supporting reference. The results of the normality tests are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Normality test results

Group	Kolmogorov–Smirnov Statistic	df	Sig.	Shapiro–Wilk Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest Experimental Group	0.132	30	0.178	0.961	30	0.328
Posttest Experimental Group	0.121	30	0.200*	0.972	30	0.589
Pretest Control Group	0.118	30	0.200*	0.958	30	0.287
Posttest Control Group	0.126	30	0.200*	0.953	30	0.217

Based on the Shapiro–Wilk test results, all significance values were greater than 0.05 for both pretest and posttest scores in the experimental and control groups. These findings indicate that the listening comprehension data in both groups were normally distributed. Therefore, the assumption of normality was satisfied, and parametric statistical analyses were deemed appropriate for subsequent hypothesis testing.

A homogeneity-of-variance test, Levene's Test, was conducted to examine whether the variances of posttest listening comprehension scores were equal between the experimental and control groups. Testing the assumption of homogeneity is necessary before conducting independent-samples t-tests to ensure the appropriateness of parametric analysis. The results of the homogeneity test are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Homogeneity of variance test (Levene's test)

Variable	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Posttest Listening Scores	3.572	1	58	0.155

The Levene's Test showed that the p-value was greater than 0.05 ($p = 0.155$), indicating no statistically significant difference in variance between the experimental and control groups. This result confirms that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met (Suciati & Zarkasih, 2021; Triwardani, 2022). Therefore, the use of an independent samples t-test to compare posttest listening comprehension scores between the two groups was considered statistically appropriate.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine whether there was a statistically significant difference in posttest listening comprehension scores between the experimental and control groups. This analysis was performed after the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance were confirmed. The results of the independent samples t-test are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Independent samples t-test results (posttest scores)

Test Condition	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Cohen's d
Equal variances assumed	3.25	58	0.003	11.67	0.84

The results indicated a statistically significant difference in posttest listening comprehension scores between the experimental and control groups, $t(58) = 3.25$, $p = 0.003$. The experimental group achieved higher mean scores than the control group, with a mean difference of 11.67 points. The calculated effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.84$) indicates a significant effect, suggesting that the Total Physical Response (TPR) intervention had a substantial impact on students' listening comprehension performance.

In addition to the quantitative findings, qualitative data from classroom observations and teacher interviews provided supportive evidence. Observational records indicated that students in the experimental group exhibited higher levels of attentional focus and accuracy in responding to oral English commands during posttest sessions. Teacher interview data further indicated increased student participation, particularly among students who were previously less active during listening activities.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Total Physical Response (TPR) method is more effective than conventional instruction in improving English listening comprehension among second-grade elementary school students. Students who received TPR-based instruction achieved significantly higher posttest scores with a large effect size, indicating that the observed differences were not only statistically significant but also educationally meaningful ("A Study On English Teachers' Perceptions Towards The Use Of Augmented Reality (AR) In Secondary School ESL Classroom," 2022; Judijanto et al., 2024; Rosa et al., 2020). These results directly address the

research gap identified earlier, namely the limited empirical evidence on the impact of TPR on listening comprehension outcomes—rather than vocabulary or speaking—at the lower elementary level, particularly within the Indonesian educational context.

The effectiveness of TPR observed in this study can be explained through principles of cognitive development and embodied learning. Learners at the second-grade level are generally in the concrete operational stage, where learning is facilitated by direct interaction with physical actions and observable experiences (Hasram et al., 2021; Marhamah & Mulyadi, 2020; Suprayogi & Budi Eko, 2020; Tilwani et al., 2022). By pairing verbal input with coordinated physical responses, TPR provides concrete referents for abstract linguistic forms, enabling learners to construct meaning through action. This alignment between instructional method and developmental characteristics allows comprehension to develop before verbal production is required, which is especially beneficial for young learners with limited linguistic resources (Kuswanti et al., 2023; Nariyati et al., 2020; Sulistyo et al., 2020).

From a psycholinguistic perspective, TPR may reduce cognitive load during early foreign language learning. Instead of simultaneously processing auditory input and producing verbal output, learners demonstrate understanding through physical movement (Ahmad et al., 2024; Kaharuddin, 2022; Laksmi et al., 2021). This separation enables attentional resources to focus on decoding meaning, which may explain both the higher mean scores and the more consistent performance observed in the experimental group. Physical movement thus serves as a mediating mechanism, strengthening semantic associations and supporting memory retention by linking language input to embodied experience.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research, which highlights the benefits of movement-based instruction in early language learning contexts. Delgado (2022) reported that physical involvement in English instruction increased learners' attention and comprehension accuracy, while Huhtiniemi (2020) found that integrating movement into classroom activities supported sustained engagement among young learners. Although many earlier studies emphasized motivational or affective outcomes, the present findings extend this body of research by demonstrating that TPR leads to measurable gains in listening comprehension performance. This suggests that the value of TPR lies not only in increasing engagement but also in supporting deeper cognitive processing of auditory input.

Despite these positive outcomes, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study employed a quasi-experimental design without random assignment at the individual level, which limits the strength of causal inference. Additionally, the research was conducted in a single school over a relatively short intervention period, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or longer instructional durations. Furthermore, listening comprehension was assessed through command-based tasks, which may not fully capture more complex listening skills such as narrative or conversational comprehension.

5. Conclusion and implications

This study concludes that the Total Physical Response (TPR) method is efficacious in improving English listening comprehension among second-grade elementary school students within the context of a four-week instructional intervention conducted in a single elementary school. Students who received TPR-based instruction demonstrated higher and more consistent listening comprehension outcomes than those who received conventional instruction. These findings indicate that integrating physical movement with auditory input can support listening development in early foreign language learning when implemented in a structured and

developmentally appropriate manner. However, the conclusions of this study should be interpreted within the limitations of its quasi-experimental design, small sample size, and localized research setting.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that TPR should not be viewed merely as an alternative teaching technique, but as a systematic instructional strategy for early listening development. For classroom practice, teachers are encouraged to implement short, command-based listening activities two to three times per week, using clear and consistent verbal instructions accompanied by physical responses. TPR lessons should follow a structured sequence: a brief warm-up, core listening activities focused on comprehension through action, and reinforcement activities to consolidate understanding. Assessment of listening comprehension should prioritize performance-based evaluation, allowing students to demonstrate understanding through action rather than solely through verbal production.

At the school and curriculum levels, the findings suggest the need for institutional support to ensure the effective implementation of TPR. Schools should provide professional development opportunities that familiarise teachers with TPR principles, classroom management strategies for movement-based instruction, and appropriate assessment techniques for listening skills. Curriculum planners may consider allocating dedicated time for listening-focused activities in early English programs and providing instructional materials that support kinesthetic learning, such as visual prompts and classroom space conducive to movement.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations that point to directions for future research. Further studies are recommended to examine the long-term retention effects of TPR, replicate the intervention across multiple schools and grade levels, and employ stronger experimental designs with randomized group assignment where feasible. Future research may also explore integrating TPR with communicative or digital learning approaches to investigate whether combined instructional models yield broader listening outcomes across different types of listening tasks.

6. Limitation

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. The use of a quasi-experimental design without individual randomization may limit the strength of causal inference, even when groups are statistically equivalent at baseline. Additionally, the study was conducted at a single elementary school with a relatively small sample, limiting the generalizability of the results to other educational contexts. The intervention period was limited to four weeks, allowing only the examination of short-term effects on listening comprehension. Furthermore, listening skills were assessed using command-based tasks aligned with the TPR method, which may not fully represent more complex listening abilities. Finally, potential teacher-related and classroom dynamics effects cannot be entirely ruled out. These limitations indicate the need for further research using broader samples, longer interventions, and more varied listening assessment formats.

Statement of Transfer of Responsibility

The preparer/editor did not receive the necessary data or information required to complete and verify the following sections: CRediT authorship contribution statement, declaration of competing interest, data availability statement, ethical approval/ethical declaration, acknowledgements, and AI disclosure statement. Accordingly, full academic and legal responsibility for the content and accuracy of these statements is hereby transferred to the authors, including any consequences arising from non-compliance with the target journal's policies and applicable ethical standards.

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