

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Vocabulary is a fundamental component of early foreign-language learning because it provides the linguistic resources students need to understand classroom instructions and participate in simple interactions. For young learners, vocabulary is more accessible when new words are connected with familiar objects, actions, images, and experiences. This principle is particularly relevant in elementary classrooms where students are still developing their ability to sustain attention and interpret abstract verbal explanations. Recent research on movement-supported vocabulary instruction indicates that combining spoken input with actions can create multiple cues for meaning and recall (İnciman Çelik et al., 2021; Magnussen & Sukying, 2021; Dongsanniwas & Sukying, 2024; Liu et al., 2024).

The need for concrete instruction was evident in the second-grade classroom at MI Sindangraja, Tasikmalaya. English exposure in the school was limited, and classroom vocabulary activities had commonly relied on explanation, translation, and oral repetition. During the preliminary classroom observation, several students waited for the teacher's model or followed their classmates before responding to English words. Others appeared reluctant to participate when they were uncertain about the meaning of a word. These conditions suggested that the class required an instructional procedure that made meaning visible, invited physical involvement, and allowed comprehension to develop before students were expected to produce spoken responses.

The theme *Animals Around Us* was selected because it was familiar to the students' everyday environment. The students regularly encountered animals such as cats, birds, chickens, rabbits, goats, and cows. The topic also offered action verbs that could be demonstrated physically, including run, fly, hop, crawl, and roar. Connecting animal nouns and action verbs with bodily movement made it possible to present the target language through observable actions rather than through translation alone.

Total Physical Response (TPR) provides a relevant procedure for this context. TPR was originally developed by Asher (1977) as a language-teaching approach that coordinates spoken commands with physical responses. In classroom practice, the teacher first models an action while giving a command, students respond physically, and teacher support is gradually reduced as comprehension becomes more established. Recent research continues to describe TPR as suitable for vocabulary that can be represented through actions and gestures (İnciman Çelik et al., 2021; Setiawan et al., 2022; Rosiana et al., 2025).

Several studies conducted within the last five years have investigated TPR in young-learner and vocabulary-learning contexts. Magnussen and Sukying (2021) examined the use of songs and TPR with Thai preschool learners and reported that movement-based activities provided meaningful support for vocabulary learning and learner reactions. Their study demonstrates the relevance of physical response for young learners but was conducted in a preschool context and combined TPR with songs.

Paramita (2022) investigated TPR with second-grade students at an Indonesian elementary school through a descriptive qualitative approach. The study emphasized students' participation in vocabulary activities and found that movement encouraged classroom involvement. Although the participants were similar in age to those in the present study, the study concentrated primarily on participation and motivation rather than providing a detailed account of how teacher modelling, command sequencing, and the gradual withdrawal of support occurred.

Setiawan et al. (2022) described the materials, teacher roles, and instructional stages used when TPR was implemented with elementary students. Their findings identified the teacher as planner, director, model, and assessor and organized the lesson into pre-teaching, whilst-teaching, and post-teaching stages. This study offers a useful procedural reference; however, its participants came from a different setting and grade range, and the reported vocabulary themes differed from the immediate madrasah context examined in the present research.

Afianti and Rustipa (2023) used observation, interviews, and documentation to examine TPR-based vocabulary teaching in an elementary school. The study showed that gestures, visual support, and repeated classroom

commands helped organize vocabulary instruction. The research is relevant to the use of qualitative data sources, yet it did not specifically examine the implementation of animal vocabulary with second-grade learners in a madrasah where English exposure was limited.

Liu et al. (2024) compared traditional and personalized TPR strategies for young EFL learners. Their study underlined the importance of connecting vocabulary with meaningful movement and also noted that rigid imitation may limit learners' opportunities to use movement creatively. The study provides contemporary evidence about the value and limitations of TPR, but its personalized video-production context was considerably different from a resource-limited elementary classroom.

Most recently, Rosiana et al. (2025) conducted a descriptive qualitative study involving an English teacher and second-grade primary-school students. They described TPR through pre-teaching, whilst-teaching, and post-teaching stages and highlighted teacher roles, songs, listening-and-doing activities, and games. While this study is closely related to the current topic, the present research provides a more context-specific account of implementation at MI Sindangraja, including the use of the Animals Around Us theme, the movement from collective imitation to more independent response, the role of a collaborating observer, and the practical challenges encountered in the classroom.

The review of previous studies therefore reveals a contextual and procedural gap. Recent studies generally support the use of TPR for young learners, but many emphasize achievement, motivation, or broad student responses. Fewer studies offer a focused description of how TPR is implemented step by step in a lower-grade madrasah classroom with limited English exposure and simple learning facilities. In addition, the specific process of selecting familiar animal vocabulary, modelling actions, repeating and varying commands, organizing collective and individual responses, and managing classroom movement needs further classroom-based description.

Accordingly, the present study does not seek to measure the effectiveness of TPR or to claim a causal change in students' vocabulary achievement. It focuses on describing how TPR was implemented in teaching English vocabulary to

second-grade students at MI Sindangraja. The description covers lesson preparation, teacher modelling, students' physical responses, classroom interaction, the gradual reduction of teacher support, and challenges during implementation. This focus is expected to provide a transparent and contextually grounded account that teachers can consider when planning similar movement-based vocabulary lessons.

1.1.1 Vocabulary Instruction in the Early Stages of English Learning

At the beginning level, knowing vocabulary is not limited to remembering an Indonesian equivalent for an English word. Learners need to notice the spoken form, connect it with a referent or action, and recognize when the word is used in a classroom message. This relationship among form, meaning, and use is particularly important for children because an isolated translation may be repeated correctly without being understood independently. Movement-supported instruction provides an alternative route: the word is heard while the learner observes or performs a semantically related action. Recent syntheses of TPR and embodied language learning indicate that the coordination of auditory, visual, and motor information can strengthen the meaningfulness of classroom input, although the quality of the result remains dependent on instructional design (İnciman Çelik et al., 2021; Jusslin et al., 2022; Oppici et al., 2023).

The distinction between hearing a word and understanding it shaped the problem addressed in this study. During early observation, students sometimes repeated language after the teacher but waited for a visual model before acting. This classroom behavior could not be interpreted simply as a lack of intelligence or effort. It indicated that spoken English had not yet become sufficiently connected to concrete meaning. A method selected for this context therefore needed to offer comprehensible cues, repeated encounters, and opportunities to demonstrate understanding without requiring extended speech. TPR was relevant because the teacher could make the target language observable through actions and then reduce those supports gradually.

Vocabulary selection also required pedagogical restraint. A lower-grade lesson can become confusing when too many new nouns, verbs, modifiers, and sentence patterns are introduced at once. The present study therefore used a small

lexical set under one coherent theme. Animal names provided concrete referents, while movement verbs created a direct relationship between language and action. The restricted set was not intended to represent the full range of students' vocabulary knowledge. Instead, it created a bounded context in which the sequence of TPR implementation could be observed clearly.

1.1.2 Young-Learner Classroom Context at MI Sindangraja

The institutional context is important because the same teaching method may operate differently across schools. At MI Sindangraja, English exposure was limited and the students were still developing basic classroom routines for responding to a foreign language. The lesson was conducted with simple resources and within an ordinary classroom rather than a specially designed language laboratory. Consequently, the implementation had to rely on the teacher's voice, gestures, pictures, student movement, and careful organization of the available space. This setting makes the study relevant to schools that require practical and low-cost instructional procedures.

The participants were also at an age at which physical energy, imitation, curiosity, and short attention spans strongly influence classroom interaction. These characteristics should not be treated as obstacles that must be suppressed. When movement is purposefully connected to language, students' physical activity can become part of the learning process. At the same time, movement does not automatically produce learning. Commands must be clear, the action must represent the intended meaning, and the teacher must observe whether students are listening or merely copying one another. Recent studies of TPR with elementary learners similarly emphasize both the engagement created by action and the need for strong teacher direction (Paramita, 2022; Setiawan et al., 2022; Rosiana et al., 2025).

The madrasah context further requires sensitivity to the established classroom culture. Activities must remain respectful, safe, and compatible with school routines. Expressive actions such as roaring or hopping can attract students' attention, but they can also increase noise and reduce focus when boundaries are unclear. For this reason, the current research treats classroom management as part of implementation rather than as a separate issue. How the teacher arranges

students, controls movement, repeats instructions, and closes an activity is as important as the initial selection of a method.

1.1.3 Synthesis of Recent Research and the Position of the Present Study

Recent research presents TPR from several complementary perspectives. Experimental and mixed-method studies have examined vocabulary outcomes and learner perceptions (Nguyen et al., 2021; Dongsanniwas & Sukying, 2024; Liu et al., 2024). Descriptive studies have examined classroom stages, teacher roles, student participation, and practical challenges (Xie, 2021; Paramita, 2022; Setiawan et al., 2022; Afrianti & Rustipa, 2023; Rosiana et al., 2025). Research syntheses have considered broader evidence about TPR, gesture, and embodied language learning (İnciman Çelik et al., 2021; Jusslin et al., 2022; Oppici et al., 2023). Together, these studies support the educational relevance of linking language with action, while also showing that context, word type, teacher preparation, repetition, and classroom organization affect how movement-based instruction is experienced.

The three groups of research do not answer exactly the same question. Outcome studies can indicate whether differences appeared under particular conditions, but they do not always provide a detailed description of daily classroom decisions. Descriptive studies can explain how teachers model, sequence, and manage activities, but they are not designed to establish a causal effect. Reviews can identify broad patterns across studies, yet the patterns still need to be interpreted in specific educational settings. The present study is positioned within the second group. It offers a contextual description of implementation and uses recent outcome and review studies to interpret, rather than to overstate, the classroom observations.

This distinction is methodologically important. A study focused on implementation should not use isolated classroom enthusiasm as proof of vocabulary mastery. Nor should it describe an observed sequence as universally effective. Its contribution lies in documenting what was planned, what occurred, how the teacher responded to uncertainty, and what practical conditions influenced the lesson. By maintaining that boundary, the study can provide useful pedagogical knowledge without making claims that the available qualitative data cannot support.

1.1.4 Research Gap and Expected Contribution

The research gap has four dimensions. First, there is a contextual gap because limited research has described TPR implementation in a lower-grade Indonesian madrasah with restricted English exposure. Second, there is a procedural gap because many studies summarize that TPR was used without reporting in detail how modelling was introduced, repeated, reduced, and restored. Third, there is an evidential gap because classroom participation is sometimes discussed without a transparent link to observation instruments and field notes. Fourth, there is a pedagogical gap concerning the management of space, noise, different response speeds, and peer dependence during movement-based lessons.

The present study addresses these gaps by combining a structured observation sheet, chronological field notes, lesson-plan documentation, and visual records. The analysis follows the implementation from vocabulary selection to closure and identifies both planned stages and responsive adjustments. The findings are expected to offer a traceable account that teachers can evaluate against their own classroom circumstances. The contribution is therefore practical and interpretive: it clarifies how TPR was enacted, what forms of support were visible, and why certain classroom decisions were necessary.

The scope remains deliberately limited. The study does not compare TPR with another method, calculate vocabulary gains, or assess long-term retention. It also does not claim that every physical response represented complete lexical knowledge. These boundaries keep the title, research question, data sources, findings, and conclusion consistent. They also respond directly to the methodological direction of the examiners, namely to present the research as a descriptive qualitative account of implementation.

1.1.5 Alignment of the Title, Question, and Evidence

The wording of a research title establishes the type of claim that readers may reasonably expect. The present title emphasizes the implementation of TPR rather than the effectiveness of TPR. Implementation refers to the way an instructional idea is translated into classroom practice: how vocabulary is selected, how commands and movements are modelled, how participation is organized, how support changes, and how constraints are handled. The title therefore directs

attention to process and context. It does not promise a comparison of achievement or a calculation of change.

The formulation of the problem follows the same orientation by asking how TPR was implemented. A how-question requires evidence about sequence, interaction, decision-making, and classroom conditions. Observation and field notes are appropriate because they preserve those dimensions. Lesson plans show intended action, while classroom records show enactment and adjustment. Documentation contributes contextual support. The contribution of each source is different, and their combined use allows the researcher to construct a detailed explanation without treating any single record as complete.

Alignment also governs the findings. A finding is included when it clarifies an element of implementation, such as the function of modelling, the transition from collective to smaller response arrangements, or the restoration of support after hesitation. An event is not included merely because it is interesting. This relevance rule protects the chapter from becoming a general diary of classroom activity. It also ensures that the conclusion answers the research question directly.

The same boundary applies to academic language. Terms such as effective, significant, improvement, gain, and result can imply measured change when they are used without qualification. In this thesis, implementation is described through terms such as observed, indicated, illustrated, supported, constrained, and required adjustment. These expressions are not weaker; they are more accurate for the evidence available. Careful wording is an essential part of methodological consistency.

1.1.6 Rationale for Descriptive, Non-Measurement Reporting

Descriptive qualitative research does not become rigorous by avoiding all structure. Its rigor comes from transparent observation, explicit analytical decisions, contextual detail, and a traceable relationship between evidence and interpretation. For this reason, the present study replaces measurement-oriented displays with descriptive matrices. The matrices organize stages, evidence sources, teacher actions, classroom responses, and interpretations. They help readers follow the analysis without turning observations into scores or frequencies.

Visible physical response must be interpreted with particular caution. When students move after a command, the event may indicate that the language-action relationship was accessible in that moment. It may also involve imitation, peer cues, memory of a sequence, or attention to the teacher's gesture. The study therefore does not convert participation into a numerical indicator of vocabulary mastery. Instead, it examines the circumstances under which the response occurred: whether a model was present, whether the command order was changed, and whether support had to be restored.

This approach permits a more educationally useful account. A score could indicate a level of performance, but it would not by itself explain why the teacher slowed the command, changed the grouping, or returned to modelling. Descriptive evidence makes these pedagogical decisions visible. It shows that implementation was responsive and that classroom meaning emerged through the relationship among spoken input, movement, materials, peers, and teacher guidance.

The non-measurement orientation also limits the conclusion responsibly. The thesis can explain the procedure that was enacted and the conditions that shaped it. It can identify practical strengths and constraints of that procedure in the observed setting. It cannot establish causal effectiveness or long-term vocabulary development. Stating this boundary strengthens the study because the interpretation remains proportionate to the design and evidence.

1.2 Formulation of the Problem

Based on the background of the study, the research was directed by the following question:

1. How was Total Physical Response (TPR) implemented in teaching English vocabulary to second-grade students at MI Sindangraja?

1.3 Operational Definitions

1.3.1 Implementation of Total Physical Response

Implementation of TPR refers to the classroom process through which the researcher introduced spoken English vocabulary by using teacher modelling, verbal commands, physical responses, guided repetition, activity variation, and gradual movement toward more independent student responses.

1.3.2 English Vocabulary

English vocabulary in this study refers to selected animal nouns and simple action verbs under the theme Animals Around Us. The vocabulary was limited to items that were familiar to the students and could be represented through safe physical movements, including cat, bird, rabbit, lion, run, fly, hop, and roar.

1.3.3 Young Learners

Young learners in this study refer to the students in one intact second-grade class at MI Sindangraja during the 2025/2026 academic year. They were beginner learners with limited formal exposure to English and required concrete, short, and physically engaging classroom activities.

1.3.4 Descriptive Qualitative Classroom Study

A descriptive qualitative classroom study refers to an inquiry that produces a contextual account of an instructional process by interpreting classroom observation, field notes, and documentation. The study does not test an intervention statistically; instead, it describes how TPR was planned and enacted in the natural classroom setting.

1.4 Aim of the Study

This study aims to describe how Total Physical Response (TPR) was implemented in teaching English vocabulary to second-grade students at MI Sindangraja.

1.5 Significance of the Study

1.5.1 Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, the study is expected to contribute a contextual description of TPR implementation in English vocabulary instruction for young learners. It extends recent discussion by focusing on the instructional process in a lower-grade madrasah classroom rather than on numerical learning outcomes.

1.5.2 Practical Significance

Practically, the study may provide teachers with a classroom-based example of how to select movement-compatible vocabulary, model spoken commands, organize safe physical responses, vary practice, and manage student participation. For the school, it may serve as a reference for interactive English instruction that

does not depend on expensive facilities. For future researchers, it may offer an instrument framework and field-note structure for studying TPR implementation in comparable settings.