



*Respuesta física total para mejorar el vocabulario de los estudiantes de jardín de infantes*

*Total Physical Response to enhance vocabulary for kindergarten students*

*Resposta Física Total para Melhorar o Vocabulário dos Alunos do Jardim de Infância*

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Ciencias de la Educación  
Artículo de Investigación

\* **Recibido:** 12 de abril de 2025 \* **Aceptado:** 05 de mayo de 2025 \* **Publicado:** 30 de junio de 2025

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## Resumen

Los estudiantes aprenden según el contexto que viven en clases, adquirir un nuevo idioma requiere dedicación esfuerzo y adaptación de un ambiente adecuado a sus necesidades, el uso de técnicas que estimule sus sentidos y pueda aprender el vocabulario, la metodología TPR es una estrategia eficaz debido a que emplea comandos físicos que ayudan a que los niños aprendan de una forma dinámica y entretenida. Este estudio se desarrolló acorde a un enfoque cualitativo y descriptivo centrado en la recolección y análisis de las experiencias de los docentes de inglés mediante entrevistas con preguntas abiertas acerca de los beneficios de la metodología TPR. Los resultados de investigación indican que la mayoría de educadores de la materia de inglés prefiere utilizar el Total Physical response para implementar un vocabulario nuevo de una forma significativa y didáctica, desarrollando también un entorno adecuado, una ambientación sensorial adecuada y el uso de recursos tecnológicos que fomente el aprendizaje significativo en el aula de clases. Según las respuestas de los docentes entrevistados, el TPR ayuda a mejorar la concentración de los estudiantes al integrar un adecuado ambiente sensorial lo que facilita la retención y entendimiento de nuevas palabras

**Palabras clave:** Respuesta física total; estudiantes jóvenes; inglés para jóvenes; vocabulario; aprendizaje significativo.

## Abstract

Students learn according to the context they experience in the classroom. Acquiring a new language requires dedicated effort and adapting to an environment appropriate to their needs, using techniques that stimulate their senses and foster vocabulary acquisition. The TPR methodology is an effective strategy because it uses physical commands that help children learn in a dynamic and entertaining way. This study was conducted according to a qualitative and descriptive approach focused on the collection and analysis of English teachers' experiences through interviews with open-ended questions about the benefits of the TPR methodology. The research results indicate that the majority of English teachers prefer to use Total Physical Response (TPR) to implement new vocabulary in a meaningful and didactic way, also developing an appropriate environment, adequate sensory settings, and the use of technological resources that foster meaningful learning in the classroom. According to the responses of the interviewed teachers, TPR helps improve students'

concentration by integrating an appropriate sensory environment, which facilitates the retention and understanding of new words.

**Keywords:** Total Physical Response; young students; English for young people; vocabulary; meaningful learning.

## Resumo

Os alunos aprendem de acordo com o contexto que vivenciam em sala de aula. A aquisição de um novo idioma exige esforço dedicado e adaptação a um ambiente adequado às suas necessidades, utilizando técnicas que estimulem seus sentidos e promovam a aquisição de vocabulário. A metodologia TPR é uma estratégia eficaz, pois utiliza comandos físicos que auxiliam as crianças a aprender de forma dinâmica e divertida. Este estudo foi conduzido segundo uma abordagem qualitativa e descritiva, com foco na coleta e análise de experiências de professores de inglês por meio de entrevistas com perguntas abertas sobre os benefícios da metodologia TPR. Os resultados da pesquisa indicam que a maioria dos professores de inglês prefere usar a Resposta Física Total (TPR) para implementar o novo vocabulário de forma significativa e didática, desenvolvendo também um ambiente apropriado, cenários sensoriais adequados e o uso de recursos tecnológicos que promovam a aprendizagem significativa em sala de aula. De acordo com as respostas dos professores entrevistados, a TPR ajuda a melhorar a concentração dos alunos ao integrar um ambiente sensorial apropriado, o que facilita a retenção e a compreensão de novas palavras.

**Palavras-chave:** Resposta Física Total; jovens estudantes; Inglês para jovens; vocabulário; aprendizagem significativa.

## Introduction

### State of the art

Learning a new language represents a significant challenge for anyone, regardless of age, location, or social background. In today's world, English has established itself as a global language, making it an essential tool for international communication. In the initial stages of learning, especially in early childhood education, the process focuses on acquiring basic vocabulary, which in most cases is taught through repetition and memorization of simple words. However, this traditional approach can be insufficient to achieve lasting understanding in young students.

In the Ecuadorian context, one of the main obstacles to effective English learning at the initial levels is the limited use of teaching methodologies that integrate the senses and encourage active learning. For preschool-aged children, being in constant movement is very important, as cognitive and physical development are closely related at this stage. Therefore, it is essential to implement strategies that consider this natural need for activity. In this sense, the Total Physical Response (TPR) method emerges as an effective pedagogical alternative, as it allows vocabulary to be introduced in a dynamic and interactive environment that adapts to the students' pace.

The TPR method is based on the coordination between language and action, facilitating comprehension through the execution of physical commands. By involving the body in the learning process, children not only memorize words but also associate them with specific movements, reinforcing their meaning. This technique, in addition to capturing students' attention, allows them to channel their energy productively, improving their concentration and participation during classroom activities. Thus, learning becomes a fun and meaningful experience.

Implementing the TPR method requires creative teachers capable of adapting the content to the needs of the group. For children in their initial stages of development, it is essential to provide a stimulating learning environment that supports their adaptation to new educational routines. The combination of play, movement, and language not only promotes vocabulary acquisition but also strengthens social, emotional, and communication skills.

According to Nigora (2018), children, through play and other activities, considered enjoyable for them, have an amazing ability to absorb language through vocabulary, thus facilitating communication.

In this sense, the research focuses on the effectiveness of using the Total Physical Response methodology to improve vocabulary acquisition in early childhood education students. Learning a second language in the early years of life represents a very important role in the development of communication skills and in achieving improved academic performance. This process is not limited to simple language acquisition; it requires commitment, adequate linguistic stimulation, and a pedagogical environment that favors active learning. Through a bibliographic review and several interviews with open-ended questions for teachers, the study analyses how the implementation of TPR in the classroom aids in the comprehension and retention of new vocabulary. Therefore, the use of this methodology is encouraged as an effective teaching strategy that allows for the creation of a real, motivating learning environment adapted to the needs of students in their early stages.

## **Teaching English & Vocabulary acquisition**

Learning a second language like English in early childhood presents many challenges, including the need to use methodologies that adapt to the students' cognitive and behavioral characteristics. One of the main obstacles when teaching young students is their tendency toward distraction, caused by their desire to be constantly moving. As Iswandhary (2021b) points out, children are easily distracted because they do not stay still and simply asking them to be quiet is not enough. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers use physical movement and be active during class to attract their attention and facilitate comprehension.

One of the important elements in teaching a foreign language is the acquisition of vocabulary, since this is the basis for the development of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Tugba Inciman, Kesen and Bayram (2021) affirm that mastery of vocabulary is essential for students to understand texts, participate in conversations and acquire effective linguistic skills. In this sense, active and contextualized learning helps us to better expose the language and better understand its structure and application.

### **Total Physical Response (TPR)**

The Total Physical Response (TPR) methodology is presented as an effective tool, since it allows combining language with physical actions, generating a multisensory environment that actively involves students. According to Setiwan, Hartono, and Lestari (2022), teaching English at the earliest stage should use methods that are adapted to the individual characteristics of children, who learn most effectively through what they see, hear, and do. TPR is associated with this vision by involving a learning experience where the body, sight, and hearing are used, creating more meaningful connections between vocabulary and its practical application.

One of the most recognized theories about TPR methodology is based on the way in which students acquire their native language. According to Asher (1977), children at their earliest stages respond to instructions from their parents before beginning their verbal language. This learning pattern can be transformed into the process of teaching a second language, where children can internalize a linguistic code by reacting with physical actions to verbal commands. The TPR approach focuses on listening comprehension, helping students hear and respond to teachers' instructions through movements or by promoting the retention of new words and the comprehension of class content without causing anxiety or pressure.

### **TPR and learning styles**

In a classroom, each student has their own way of interpreting knowledge in class. Dunn and Dunn (1993) emphasize the importance of adapting learning to these styles in order to achieve effective learning. In this sense, the TPR methodology helps us maintain inclusion since it combines gestures, which helps visual students learn, oral instructions, which are related to auditory learning, and body movement, which is related to kinesthetic students. This helps students adapt immediately to the class.

Ausubel's (2000) theory of meaningful learning is based on the premise that students assimilate knowledge better by repeating ideas multiple times in a single context. With this in mind, TPR is essential because it is an active learning process in which students learn and repeat physical commands. Students actively participate in their learning environment and connect with vocabulary through actions, thus better understanding and retaining the content of the lesson.

### **TPR and motivation in class**

The implementation of the TPR methodology in classes not only improves vocabulary acquisition but also increases student motivation and commitment by providing a dynamic and participatory environment that responds to the needs of children at their earliest stages of development (Xie, 2021).

### **Vocabulary and TPR**

The use of methodologies such as TPR in language teaching to young children allows for a multisensory learning experience, combining listening comprehension with physical responses, which facilitates the internalization of new vocabulary and improves long-term retention (Jayanti & Rachmawati, 2025).

Within the framework of this research, the focus on vocabulary development through TPR is based on the fact that the methodology promotes a direct association between words and actions, facilitating memorization and long-term retention. According to Pallo Ayala and Rosero Herrera (2023), vocabulary is key for students to communicate clearly in English, and its teaching improves when active methodologies such as TPR are used, which produce meaningful learning by integrating body and mind into the educational process. Furthermore, recent studies suggest that TPR not only improves vocabulary acquisition but also promotes concentration and focus in class. It responds to the needs of students at early stages of development and promotes active participation in the classroom.



## Material and methods

This research paper adopts a qualitative, descriptive approach, analyzing teachers' perceptions, experiences, and behaviors in teaching contexts. According to Noviandari and Rustipa (2023), qualitative research focuses on understanding phenomena through the analysis of real environments, considering the motivations and actions of participants. This is especially important for exploring the impact of educational strategies such as the Total Physical Response (TPR) method. This approach allows us to interpret how this methodology influences vocabulary teaching to students in their initial learning stages, from the direct perspective of teachers.

For data collection, a structured interview with ten open-ended questions was conducted with English teachers who work with young students. The questions were based on describing the teachers' experiences using the TPR methodology, as well as the benefits observed, the difficulties encountered in its implementation, and the resources used in the classroom. Participants were intentionally selected, prioritizing teachers with direct experience using this strategy. The data obtained were analyzed using an interpretive approach, which revealed patterns, common themes, and meaningful relationships among the responses. This technique allowed for a deeper understanding of the impact of applying TPR on children's vocabulary teaching.

The use of interviews as the main data collection technique was justified in depth to explore the individual perceptions and experiences of teachers. Unlike qualitative instruments, open interviews allow for the collection of nuances in responses, as well as emotional and contextual aspects that help enrich the analysis. This tool helps us understand how the educational methodology is applied in real classroom situations. It also gives us direct information on how teachers adapt this strategy to the specific needs of children, how they perceive its effectiveness in vocabulary learning, and what aspects they consider key to its successful implementation.

## Analysis and results

According to the responses obtained and the qualitative analysis of the interviews conducted with English teachers, it was evident that the Total Physical Response (TPR) methodology is effective for teaching vocabulary to preschool students. Teachers agree that this strategy promotes dynamic, motivating, and meaningful learning. Below are the relevant parameters they highlighted in their responses:

1. Creating an Active and Motivating Environment

According to the interview responses, teachers agreed that the Total Physical Response (TPR) methodology keeps students active, motivated, and focused on the vocabulary they are learning. One teacher mentioned: "Children really enjoy it when they can move, imitate animals, or perform actions, and it helps them remember words better." This confirms Iswandhary (2021), who states that young students tend to be easily distracted if required to remain seated and silent, so it is best for teachers to use active physical movements to capture and maintain their attention.

## 2. Adapting to diverse learning styles

The teachers interviewed agreed that TPR caters to different learning styles, especially helping kinaesthetic learners. One teacher explained: "Not everyone learns the same way, and with this methodology, visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic learners have an opportunity to actively participate." This perception is aligned with Setiawan et al. (2022), who indicate that effective methods for teaching English in early childhood must be adapted to the characteristics of students who learn through sight, hearing, and movement.

Another important finding was teachers' perceptions of TPR's ability to adapt to different learning styles. Students with kinaesthetic, visual, and additive tendencies particularly benefit. By integrating verbal commands, gestures, and visual materials, TPR allows each child to access their preferred sensory channel, enhancing comprehension and participation.

## 3. Meaningful repetition to improve retention of vocabulary.

The analysis of the interviews revealed that repeating vocabulary with movement becomes an effective tool for memorization. Constantly practicing physical commands allows students to associate words with concrete experiences, achieving remarkable results even after just a few class sessions. This active repetition, far from being monotonous, is an entertaining dynamic that reinforces the learning of a foreign language.

Another important finding regarding the retention of new vocabulary. One teacher stated: "Before, when I taught only with pictures or repeating words, the children forgot quickly. Now, with gestures and games, they themselves correct me if I pronounce something wrong because they remember it well." This result is consistent with Jayanti and Rachmawati (2025), who emphasize that TPR, by combining listening comprehension and physical responses, generates multisensory learning that facilitates long-term retention.

## 4. Reducing anxiety and improving the classroom environment



Finally, teachers stated that the use of TPR creates an emotionally safe environment that helps reduce anxiety when learning a second language. One teacher stated, "Shy children feel more comfortable with this method because they don't have to speak at first, just move around, and that gives them confidence." This perception is supported by Asher (1977), who directs that TPR is based on the principle that students must first understand language through action, which eradicates the pressure to speak prematurely and promotes a more natural learning atmosphere.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

The results of this research reflect that the TPR methodology is consolidating as a strategy for teaching vocabulary at the initial level, as it responds to the cognitive, sensory, and emotional needs of preschool students. According to the opinions of the interviewed teachers, the use of physical commands and the sensory environment allow for a connection between word and action, which favours memorization.

This is related to the proposals made by authors such as Jayanti and Rachmawati (2025), who assert that the TPR methodology facilitates long-term retention by integrating auditory learning with physical responses. Similarly, Setiawan et al. (2022) assert that the most effective methods are those that involve the body, sight, and hearing, as proposed by TPR.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that this methodology is flexible and adapts to diverse learning styles, helping kinaesthetic, visual, and auditory learners. This versatility is key in inclusive classrooms, where each student presents different ways of understanding and interpreting class content. Furthermore, the multisensory approach is evident, creating a dynamic environment and reducing anxiety levels when learning a foreign language.

It should be noted that the school environment plays a fundamental role in the effectiveness of TPR. When teachers integrate appropriate resources, they structure a series of physical commands that strengthen emotional ties with the language and a love of learning.

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that the use of the Total Physical Response methodology in the classroom is highly effective in improving vocabulary acquisition in kindergarten students. Data obtained from the interviews reveal that TPR allows for multisensory, active, and meaningful learning. By using movements, physical commands, visual materials, and a dynamic environment, teachers are able to capture their students' full attention, helping to promote long-term retention.

Given its positive impact in the classroom, it is recommended that teachers use this methodology in their instructional planning. Future research could also explore the integration of other methodologies with TPR to reinforce aspects other than vocabulary, such as pronunciation, listening comprehension, and oral fluency.

### **Support and gratitude**

I thank God for giving me the intelligence and patience to face every challenge that came my way, and without whom none of this would have been possible. I thank my grandparents who always supported me in everything, my mother who has always wanted to improve herself professionally, my husband Adrian who always had a word of encouragement, and my little daughter Meredith for giving me peace of mind and being a motivation. I thank my younger sister Barbara for always being there for me, supporting me every moment.

My job, my husband, and my family funded and made this research possible. I would also like to thank my best friends Emilio and Dayana who were always there for me. I also extend a special thanks to my group of master's classmates, to Ronald for monitoring the progress of my article, to Sandra for her calls, and to Andrea and Carlos who taught me what excellent teamwork is.

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