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## TEACHERS' STRATEGIES USING SONGS AND MOVEMENT TO TEACH VOCABULARY IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the strategies used by an English teacher in using songs and movement to teach vocabulary to third-grade students at SDN Cibogo 4. This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. The participant in this study was an English teacher at SDN Cibogo 4. The data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation using an observation checklist and an interview guide as the main instruments. The findings revealed that the teacher applied several strategies, including introducing the topic and vocabulary before playing the song, encouraging students to sing and move along, and conducting vocabulary reinforcement activities after the song. The teacher stated that songs help students remember new vocabulary more easily and create an enjoyable learning atmosphere. However, challenges were also found, such as limited instructional time and difficulties in selecting appropriate songs for young learners. Overall, the use of songs and movement was effective in improving students' vocabulary mastery and classroom engagement.

**Keywords:** *teachers' strategies, songs, movement, vocabulary, SDN Cibogo 4*

### INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary plays a crucial role in English language learning, particularly for young learners, as it forms the foundation for communication and comprehension. Young learners tend to learn language more effectively when the learning process is enjoyable, interactive, and involves physical engagement. Traditional vocabulary teaching methods often fail to maintain students' attention, resulting in low motivation and limited retention of new words. Therefore, alternative teaching approaches that align with children's natural learning characteristics are needed.

Previous studies have shown that songs and movement are effective tools in teaching vocabulary to young learners. Songs provide repetition, rhythm, and meaningful context that help learners remember new words more easily. Additionally, physical movement supports cognitive processing and enhances memory through bodily engagement (Helmi, Sayidah, and Taufik 2024). A study on teaching English

vocabulary through songs and interactive games revealed significant improvement in students' vocabulary mastery and participation (Meisuri *et al.*, 2025) Similarly, music-based activities combined with bodily interaction help children develop representational strategies and strengthen language learning through embodied cognition (Fortuna and Nijs, 2020).

The use of movement in education is closely related to Total Physical Response (TPR), which emphasizes learning language through physical actions. Music and movement pedagogy has been proven to support children's cognitive, emotional, and linguistic development, making learning more meaningful and engaging (del Barrio and Arús, 2024). Furthermore, local studies also show that familiar children's songs combined with movements can improve students' motivation and vocabulary acquisition in early education contexts (Lestari *et al.*, 2023).

Based on these considerations, this study aims to explore how songs and movement are implemented in teaching English vocabulary to young learners and how students respond to this teaching approach. The research focuses on classroom observation to identify students' engagement and learning behavior during the use of songs and Total Physical Response (TPR) activities.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore students' learning behaviors, participation, and responses during the teaching and learning process. The qualitative approach was selected because it allows the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of how young learners interact with learning activities involving songs and Total Physical Response (TPR). Qualitative methodology is characterized as being descriptive and dealing with phenomena in a deeper and more individualized way (Merriam, 2009; Stanley and Robertson, 2024). In addition, a qualitative research approach is more concerned with processes rather than products, as it focuses on how understanding is formed, how meanings are conveyed, and how roles are shaped within a learning context (Zireva, 2013, as cited in Muzari, Nevers Shava and Shonhiwa., 2022). Through direct observation, the researchers were able to capture natural classroom situations, students' engagement, and their reactions toward vocabulary learning activities without manipulating the learning environment.

The research design used in this study was classroom observation. This design was chosen because it enables the researchers to directly observe the implementation of songs and Total Physical Response (TPR) in teaching vocabulary to young learners. By observing the teaching and learning process, the researchers were able to identify how the instructional activities were conducted and how students responded physically, emotionally, and behaviorally during the lesson. Furthermore, feedback obtained from classroom observations is considered an effective way to provide valuable information

about classroom practices, as it can support reflection and contribute to continuous professional development (Shanjida et al., 2018; Fayo and Hilario, 2023).

The participants of this study were elementary school students categorized as young learners. These students were selected because they were in the early stage of learning English, particularly basic vocabulary. Primary education generally covers six years and is mandatory for children aged 7 to 12 years; therefore, this study focuses on learners within the context of Teaching Young Learners (Zgaga, 2006; Labaika and Purwanto, 2023). Young learners tend to respond well to interactive teaching methods such as songs and physical movement; therefore, they were considered appropriate participants for this study. The students' characteristics allowed the researchers to observe how songs and Total Physical Response (TPR) supported vocabulary learning in an engaging classroom environment.

The instruments used in this research were observation checklists, field notes, and documentation in the form of photos and videos. The observation checklist was used to systematically record students' participation, attention, and responses during the learning activities. Field notes were written to capture detailed descriptions of students' behaviors, reactions, and interactions that could not be fully represented in the checklist. Documentation served as supporting evidence to strengthen the observational data and to provide visual records of the teaching and learning process. Instruments play a very important role in determining the quality of an investigation, as the validity of data collection depends on the appropriateness of the instruments used; therefore, both existing and researcher-developed instruments may be employed in a study (Purba, 2021; Sukmawati et al., 2023).

Data were collected through several stages of classroom activities, including classroom observation and documentation. The researchers observed the teaching and learning process to identify students' engagement and responses toward the use of songs and Total Physical Response (TPR) in learning English vocabulary. In addition, documentation in the form of photographs and videos was used as supporting data to strengthen and validate the results of the classroom observations.

The data were analyzed descriptively by organizing and categorizing the data obtained from observations, field notes, and documentation. The researchers grouped students' activities and responses into several categories such as engagement, participation, enthusiasm, and vocabulary comprehension. This descriptive analysis helped the researchers interpret how songs and Total Physical Response (TPR) influenced young learners' involvement and understanding during vocabulary learning activities. The characteristics of descriptive qualitative research emphasize the attempt to create a systematic, accurate, and factual description of the facts, characteristics, and relationships among the phenomena being investigated (Furidha, 2023).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are based on classroom observations conducted at SDN Cibogo 4, involving fourth-grade students aged 10–11 years who participated in English learning activities through songs and movement. Prior to the implementation of this teaching method, students had limited exposure to English vocabulary instruction that actively incorporated physical movement and musical elements. Classroom instruction was predominantly focused on verbal explanation and repetition, which resulted in varying levels of student engagement and participation. Therefore, the integration of songs and movement was introduced as an alternative instructional approach to enhance students' motivation, participation, and vocabulary comprehension.

### Body Parts

In this study, the first topic, Body Parts, was conducted within a total duration of approximately 35 minutes. The session started with the pre-activity stage, during which the teacher prepared students for the lesson by introducing the importance of learning English vocabulary as a fundamental aspect of language acquisition. The teacher emphasized that vocabulary mastery is essential for understanding and using English effectively in daily communication. In addition, the teacher briefly explained the general functions of human body parts using simple and age-appropriate language. Classroom observations showed that students demonstrated attentiveness and interest during this initial stage, indicating their readiness to proceed to the subsequent learning activities.

During the main activity stage, the teacher introduced vocabulary related to body parts by pronouncing each word clearly and asking students to repeat the pronunciation collectively. This activity aimed to familiarize students with correct pronunciation while reducing anxiety in speaking English. To deepen students' understanding and support vocabulary retention, a song related to body parts was played. While the song was playing, the teacher guided students to point to the corresponding body parts mentioned in the lyrics. This activity enabled students to associate spoken words with physical movement and visual representation. After several guided repetitions, the song was played again without teacher assistance, and students were asked to sing along and perform the movements independently. Observations indicated that most students were able to follow the song and movements enthusiastically, reflecting a high level of participation and engagement.

The post-activity stage was conducted to explore students' understanding of the vocabulary through an interactive game known as *Simon Says*. In this activity, the teacher gave commands related to body parts using the phrase "Simon says...", and students were required to respond by pointing to or touching the corresponding body parts. The game encouraged students to listen carefully and respond accurately to

instructions. During the activity, many students were able to follow the commands correctly and demonstrated vocabulary comprehension through appropriate physical responses. However, some students showed hesitation or delayed reactions, indicating partial unfamiliarity with certain English words or instructions. Nevertheless, overall observations revealed that most students were able to identify and recognize body parts accurately, suggesting that they not only memorized the vocabulary but also understood its meaning in context.

### **Classroom Objects**

Following the break, the lesson proceeded to the second topic, Classroom Objects. The learning activities were designed to raise students' awareness of how frequently they use objects in the classroom and to introduce relevant English vocabulary in a meaningful and familiar context.

The session started with the pre-activity stage, during which the teacher encouraged students to reflect on their daily use of classroom objects. This discussion aimed to activate students' prior knowledge and highlight the relevance of the topic. Subsequently, the teacher introduced vocabulary related to classroom objects in English and modeled correct pronunciation. Students were asked to repeat the words collectively, allowing them to practice pronunciation and become more familiar with the vocabulary. Classroom observations indicated that students showed interest and active involvement during this stage.

In the main activity stage, a song-based activity was again employed to support vocabulary understanding. The song was adapted to include classroom objects, and while it was playing, the teacher instructed students to point to or hold the objects mentioned in the lyrics. This activity aimed to strengthen the connection between vocabulary, meaning, and physical action. After guided practice, the song was played once more without teacher assistance, and students were asked to sing and perform the actions independently. During this stage, approximately 10 out of 30 students only sang the song without performing the corresponding actions. This observation suggests that some students experienced difficulty performing multiple tasks simultaneously, such as singing while identifying and handling classroom objects.

The post-activity stage was conducted to examine students' understanding through a *stick game*. In this activity, students passed a stick or marker while music was playing. When the music stopped, the student holding the stick was asked to answer a question that had been previously prepared and written on the whiteboard. The results showed that many selected students were able to answer correctly. Although some students responded hesitantly, peer support from classmates was evident, indicating collaborative learning. Overall, these observations suggest that most students demonstrated a good understanding of classroom object vocabulary, despite variations in confidence and fluency.

As a final evaluation, the teacher utilized Kahoot as a digital assessment tool to examine students' vocabulary comprehension. Questions were displayed on a projector, and students were invited to respond voluntarily. This activity enabled the teacher to observe students' confidence, motivation, and accuracy in answering vocabulary-related questions. Observations showed that many students participated enthusiastically, indicating a positive attitude toward technology-assisted learning. Although not all students responded directly, their attentiveness and engagement suggested that Kahoot functioned not only as an assessment tool but also as a motivating learning medium. Overall, this evaluation provided qualitative evidence of students' vocabulary understanding and their willingness to use English in an interactive learning environment.

In addition to observations, interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into students' learning experiences. The interview questions focused on students' feelings, preferences, and perceptions of learning English through songs and movement. All six interviewed students expressed positive responses, stating that they felt happy and excited during the activities. They reported that singing together with classmates was the most enjoyable part of the lesson. However, several students identified the Simon Says game as the most challenging activity, as it required careful listening and quick responses. Furthermore, when asked about the effectiveness of the method, students stated that songs and movement helped them remember and understand English vocabulary more easily. These interview findings support the observational data, indicating that the song and movement method positively influenced students' engagement and vocabulary learning.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed to describe the strategies used by an English teacher in applying songs and movement to teach English vocabulary to third-grade students at SDN Cibogo 4. Using a qualitative descriptive research design, the study explored classroom practices and teacher perceptions through observations, interviews, and documentation.

In response to the first research question, the findings show that the teacher implemented songs and movement through several instructional stages. These strategies included introducing the topic and relevant vocabulary before playing the song, encouraging students to sing and perform movements related to the lyrics, and conducting vocabulary reinforcement activities after the song. These stages allowed students to become familiar with new vocabulary while actively participating in the learning process. The use of songs and movement helped students associate words with actions, making vocabulary learning more meaningful and engaging.

Regarding the second research question, the findings indicate that the use of songs and movement provided several benefits in teaching English vocabulary. The teacher reported that this strategy helped students remember new vocabulary more



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easily and created an enjoyable learning atmosphere. Classroom observations also showed that students were more engaged and motivated during the activities, which contributed positively to classroom interaction and participation.

However, the study also identified challenges in implementing this strategy. Limited instructional time made it difficult for the teacher to fully maximize the activities, and selecting appropriate songs that matched students' age, language level, and learning objectives was also challenging. Despite these limitations, the overall findings suggest that songs and movement are effective strategies for improving students' vocabulary mastery and classroom engagement when applied thoughtfully in elementary school English instruction.

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