

## The Impact of Songs and TPR on Thai Preschoolers' Vocabulary Acquisition

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### Abstract

Vocabulary knowledge is essential for successful language learning. However, little is known about young learners' vocabulary learning in a Thai EFL context and the teaching methods that facilitate vocabulary learning. The current study examined whether songs and total physical response (TPR) can facilitate preschoolers' vocabulary acquisition in a Thai EFL context. Seventy-two preschoolers, aged four to five, were taught 12 target words using TPR, songs, and a mix of both methods (TPR&S) in three classrooms for six weeks. A mixed-method research design was used to triangulate data collected from two tests and video recordings. The tests were administered as a pre-test and a post-test. Moreover, video recordings from hidden cameras captured the participants' interactions during the intervention. The findings revealed that singing and TPR and the mix of both methods significantly improved the participants' vocabulary acquisition, with the TPR&S method having a more positive impact on the participants' vocabulary acquisition than either singing or TPR alone. In conclusion, the current findings indicate that singing and TPR, specifically, a combination of the two, are effective methods to teach young learners English vocabulary in EFL contexts.

**Keywords:** TPR, songs, vocabulary, young learners

### Introduction

Words are stepping stones for language learning, and it is widely acknowledged that vocabulary acquisition is vital to all levels of language learning. Therefore, the first steps of vocabulary acquisition for young learners should be carefully established to ensure that young children build a solid foundation in their second language (L2). Understanding how children learn words may help educators successfully implement teaching methods in classrooms with young learners. Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge in English, young learners will not understand what is said in the classroom or be able to express their needs to their foreign teachers. Moreover, they may fall behind their ASEAN peers in English reading and writing at all school levels (Noom-ura, 2013). Ultimately, the economy may suffer

as the next generation will not be competitive in many areas due to a lack of adequate English communication skills (Larsen, 2016). Hence, it is essential that we investigate the early stages of vocabulary acquisition in children and the teaching methods that promote vocabulary acquisition.

It is commonly assumed that beginning to learn a foreign or second language at a young age is advantageous to the long-term language learning process (Joyce, 2011; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). The earlier young learners can acquire the first 1,000 words, the better their prospects for obtaining a higher English level later. Moreover, studies on the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) indicate that learners are better at acquiring some language features in their early years, including accent and grammar (Thornbury, 2006; Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Hees & Nation, 2017). Importantly, teaching methodology significantly impacts young learners' (YLS) vocabulary acquisition (Shin, 2006). Specifically, songs and total physical response (TPR) are two methods known to work well with young learners. Previous research on these two methods in EFL contexts revealed several positive effects of songs and TPR, including higher motivation and enjoyment, improved listening skills, and better pronunciation (Sullivan, 2016; Thao, 2019; Uthaya Kumar & Sandaran, 2018; Bernal Suancha, 2013; Pimwan, 2012). However, to date, the effectiveness of songs and TPR has not been directly compared in the same study, and it is unknown if combining these two methods can further facilitate vocabulary acquisition. Indeed, the impact of these two methodologies on vocabulary acquisition per se remains unclear, especially in young learners in a Thai EFL context.

This study investigated preschoolers' vocabulary acquisition over a six-week period during which songs and TPR were used as the teaching methods. Overall, the current study aimed to provide insight into the roles of pedagogical methodologies in vocabulary acquisition. The research scope included Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories regarding young learners' vocabulary acquisition, teaching methodology, and learning characteristics. The primary purpose of the current study was to examine the effect of songs and TPR on preschoolers' vocabulary acquisition. It also explored how preschoolers' reactions to the teaching methods impacted their vocabulary learning. Two research questions were formulated to guide the study:

Research Question 1: What are the effects of songs and TPR and a mix of songs and TPR on the participants' receptive and productive vocabulary?

Research Question 2: How do the participants' reactions to the teaching methods contribute to their vocabulary acquisition?

## **Literature Review**

### **Vocabulary Knowledge**

Word knowledge, including the various aspects of a word (form, meaning, and use), is necessary for successful vocabulary learning (Nation, 2013). A fundamental understanding of a word is recognising it when heard, spoken or read in a text. Recognising words in spoken or written texts is considered

knowing the word at a basic level. Yet, it may take some learners up to 16 meetings with a word to gain sufficient knowledge of that word. That is, children need to hear or read a word up to 16 times before they can understand it in spoken or written form. However, there is more to knowing a word than to recognise it when heard or read. Specifically, the three aspects of knowing a word are form, meaning, and use. Each aspect is assigned into receptive and productive knowledge, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*What is Involved in Knowing a Word*

<b>Form</b>	Spoken	R	What does the word sound like?
		P	How is the word pronounced?
	Written	R	What does the word look like?
		P	How is the word written and spelt?
	Word parts	R	What parts are recognisable in this word?
		P	What word parts are needed to express the meaning?
<b>Meaning</b>	Form and meaning	R	What meaning does this word form signal?
		P	What word form can be used to express this meaning?
	Concepts and referents	R	What is included in the concept?
		P	What items can the concept refer to?
	Associations	R	What other words does this make us think of?
		P	What other words could we use instead of this one?
<b>Use</b>	Grammatical functions	R	In what patterns does the word occur?
		P	In what patterns must we use this word?
	Collocations	R	What words or types of words occur with this one?
		P	What words or types of words must we use with this one?
	Constraints on use	R	Where, when, and how often would we expect to meet this word?
		P	Where, when, and how often can we use this word?

*Note.* Adopted from Nation (2013, p. 49); R = receptive, P = productive

In addition to knowing a word's form, meaning, and use, it is necessary to distinguish between receptive knowledge and productive knowledge. This distinction is based on the skills involved. Listening and reading skills are considered receptive skills, while speaking and writing are considered productive skills. Typically, receptive knowledge is acquired more easily and develops faster than productive knowledge, as the cognitive load to process input is less compared to that required for productive language output (Sukying, 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2020; Nontasee & Sukying, 2020; Nontasee & Sukying, 2021). Indeed, understanding a word does not necessarily result in the ability to use the word appropriately in speech or writing (Nation, 2013). Productive knowledge, or using a word, either

in speech or in writing, is more challenging as it requires recall of words and knowledge of how to use the word correctly to convey meaningful messages. Consequently, productive knowledge is more complex, as it requires knowledge of a word's pronunciation, spelling, and pragmatics (Nation, 2013).

Although learning words is essential to language learning, vocabulary acquisition is a challenging task for most learners. This is especially true for English as a foreign language (EFL) learners who have minimal English exposure. The few hours of English in school with only some additional practice during homework sessions makes vocabulary acquisition very limited. Indeed, knowing a word is a complex interconnected process, including aspects of syntax, semantics, and phonetics (Meara, 1980; Thornbury, 2006; Nation, 2013). For teachers to facilitate vocabulary knowledge in young learners, some aspects of vocabulary learning must be considered. Stressing the importance of vocabulary knowledge alone is not sufficient; the significance of vocabulary learning must also be addressed.

### **The Role of Vocabulary Learning**

Successful communication is only possible when language learners know a sufficient number of words and can use them appropriately. As highlighted by Schmitt (2000), "lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and the acquisition of a second language" (p. xi). Moreover, Nation (2013) noted that language use and vocabulary knowledge are intertwined, as knowledge of vocabulary enables language use, and conversely, language use leads to an increase in vocabulary knowledge. Furthermore, learning a sufficient number of words will determine a language learner's success and communication proficiency, as using the language structure and applying its functions depends on vocabulary knowledge (Nunan, 1991).

Acquiring vocabulary knowledge is one of the most daunting challenges language learners face. The repertoire of words required for efficient communication is significant, and many meanings can exist for a single word (Meara, 1980; Oxford, 1990). Acquiring the first threshold of 1,000 words in English is considered crucial to successful language learning. However, in EFL contexts, reaching this first threshold can be difficult. In the Thai context, research has revealed that Year 6 students' receptive vocabulary size was approximately 480 words and the productive vocabulary size around 290 words (Kotchana & Tongpoon-Patanasorn, 2015). As such, it was lower than the 1,000 words required for English communicative skills and much lower than the outlined 1,050 - 1,200 words assigned in the national curriculum for year six students (Ministry of Education, 2008). Thus, there is a clear need to implement effective learning strategies in classrooms to help Thai learners acquire a sufficient number of words to reach the vocabulary size needed for effective communication. The significance of learning the first most frequent 1,000 words is highlighted by Nation (2006) in the excerpt below:

The most useful vocabulary that every English language learner needs, whether they use the language for listening, speaking, reading, or writing, or whether they use the language in formal and informal situations, is the most frequent 1000-word families in English. The vocabulary is

so useful that it covers around 75% of the running words in academic texts and newspapers, over 80% of the running words in novels, and about 85% of the running words in conversations.  
(p. 136)

More recently, Hees and Nation (2017) proposed six learning conditions that are required for successful learning to materialise and for authentic vocabulary learning to occur. If one or two of these categories are missing, vocabulary learning is likely to slow down. The six learning conditions are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

*Conditions for Vocabulary Learning*

<b>Learning condition</b>	<b>Receptive/productive</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Multiple encounters	Receptive Productive	Meeting words a number of times when listening or reading Producing words a number of times when speaking and writing
Deliberate attention	Receptive attention Productive attention	Deliberately noticing or recalling the word's form, meaning or use
Noticing	Receptive Productive	Paying attention to newly met words and being fascinated with words Noticing gaps in word knowledge
Retrieval	Receptive retrieval Productive retrieval	Meaningfully engaging with words while listening or reading Using and trying out words in speaking or writing
Varied use	Varied receptive use Varied productive use	Meeting and producing words in varied spoken and written contexts.
Elaboration	Receptive elaboration Productive elaboration	Learning more about the word, including its form and its meaning and its contextual use

*Note.* Adopted from Hees and Nation (2017, p. 40)

Overall, acquiring a word is a complex process that requires learners to be exposed to the target language with instruction focused on form, meaning, and use of words (Nation, 2013). The importance of developing a word-conscious classroom environment is essential in EFL contexts. Teachers must be aware of the need for appropriate input and provide learners with plenty of opportunities to explore and use the language in meaningful ways to develop good language skills. Hence, the teaching of vocabulary acquisition remains crucial for the successful acquisition of a second language.

### Teaching Vocabulary to Young Learners

Teachers and their teaching approaches remain an essential aspect of successful vocabulary acquisition in EFL learners who are almost exclusively acquiring L2 vocabulary in the classroom. Hence, teachers must carefully consider the approaches they apply to vocabulary teaching. Luckily, various methods are available to EFL teachers to enhance vocabulary acquisition, such as CLT (Communicative Language Teaching), TPR, songs, and Whole Language. Teachers must also consider their students' English level and use teaching approaches to ensure vocabulary acquisition is an integrated component of each teaching period. As teaching time is often short, teachers must bear in mind the importance of leading young learners up to and beyond the first threshold of vocabulary that enables them to communicate verbally and read simple text. The first 1,000 words suffice for most of the vocabulary needed for daily communication and reading. For teachers to achieve this, effective teaching methods must be applied so that both intentional and incidental learning of words can occur (Thornbury, 2006; Tokowicz, 2014; Hees & Nation, 2017). This is especially true for young learners, who are more likely to acquire words incidentally (Joseph & Nation, 2018).

Significantly, most new words are acquired through multiple incidental meetings of vocabulary in various sources, such as conversations, talking with teachers, and reading (Hees & Nation, 2017). It is vital to ensure that listening and reading exercises are understandable and meaningful to the learners to avoid meeting too many unknown words in the text, which may result in a lack of understanding and boredom. In addition, learners' previous knowledge of words can play an essential role in learning new words, as new words can be connected to words already known; for example, words with a similar sound (homophones) or spelling can easily be associated with a familiar word.

Christ and Wang (2010) argued that word consciousness also plays an essential role in vocabulary teaching. On the receptive side, young children naturally pick up some words very quickly. However, less familiar or unknown words may be challenging to learn without scaffolding. These words are often acquired more quickly if the first encounter with the word is positive and engaging. Teachers can help make new words (that are just beyond their current level) easy to notice by altering their voice when reading a story or using vivid visuals when demonstrating a new word. Specifically, teachers can make a significant difference in children's vocabulary acquisition by applying the following four research-based vocabulary teaching approaches: 1) purposefully expose children to new words; 2) word meaning must be taught intentionally; 3) vocabulary learning strategies must be demonstrated; and 4) recycle new words in various ways (Christ & Wang, 2010).

Beck et al. (2005) have proposed three tiers of vocabulary learning, including 1) common words, 2) words with high utility, and 3) subject words, essential for teachers to understand. Common words are those that the children already know, and thus do not need to be taught. High utility vocabulary may be words that children are familiar with but cannot use well. These are also words that children need in daily life and for early literacy. Finally, subject words are vocabulary the children meet in other subjects

such as Physical Education and Computer Science. Teachers can use the three tiers to identify the type of words to teach and how to scaffold vocabulary teaching for each child.

Vocabulary researchers also stress the importance of recurrence, as meeting a word once or twice is not sufficient for it to stick in a learner's memory (Hees & Nation, 2017; Sukying, 2020; Nontasee & Sukying, 2021). Hence, teachers need to set up activities that reinforce previously met words. For example, the learners can work with words individually, in pairs and as a class, to ensure multiple meetings and discuss the words. Activities can also help students to think about the word in more creative ways, such as short writing or drawing tasks. Teachers may also consider designating a wall area in the classroom where students can move words around and make sentences on their own, which is an excellent opportunity to revise recently learned words on their own. Teachers could also make a vocabulary box and fill it with word cards, visual representations, spelling, and example sentences. The cards should be kept well mixed so learners can practise sorting and matching them with their equivalent. Finally, a pointing game, where learners can recognise previously learned words and identify them, can be played as a short review activity.

Social interactions are also considered an essential contribution to vocabulary acquisition (Hatch, 1978; Long, 1983; Gass, 1997). The interaction between learners and their interlocutors facilitates deeper engagement with target words. That is, the more learners are engaged with the target words through interaction, the more likely they are to acquire knowledge of them (Long, 1983). As new words are introduced through classroom activities, such as singing, doing TPR, and games, the interaction associated with these activities is considered an essential contribution to vocabulary acquisition. Thus, the learners remain more engaged and are more likely to acquire the target words. Physical activity is also considered a valuable part of vocabulary acquisition, especially for young learners and beginners. Physical movement reduces stress levels and engages the right hemisphere of the brain, which can help learners retain newly learned words (Asher, 1977; Brown, 2007; Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Emotional expressions are likewise considered essential to vocabulary learning. As children learn new words or learning languages in general, how they feel during learning is important. Learners who remain engaged during learning sessions are more likely to express positive feelings, including high classroom participation and interest in learning more.

Finally, two well-known teaching methods, singing and total physical response (TPR), facilitate vocabulary acquisition through social interactions, physical movement, and positive emotional expressions. Thus, both methods may be beneficial for vocabulary acquisition in young learners. These methods are described in more detail in the following sections.

### **Singing**

Songs have an ancient tradition in educational use and have long been used to educate children. Children have learned their tribal history, lineage, and language by singing with their family and friends.

Songs have also helped preserve cultures and languages close to extinction (Okorodudu, 2014). It is perhaps not surprising that singing is frequently transferred to language teaching and language learning (Davis, 2017).

There are many natural aspects of singing that contribute to language learning; hence, singing and using songs to teach languages is widely used in L1 and L2 classrooms (Castro Huertas & Navarro Parra, 2014; Chou, 2014; Shin, 2017; Ragsdale, 2017; Uthaya Kumar & Sandaran, 2018). Shin (2017) outlined several arguments for using songs and music in children's development. First, children naturally tend to initiate movement and dance to beats and rhythms they hear in their environment. Secondly, music, movement, and rhythm develop together as interaction with music and songs is progressive in children's development from simple clapping along with a tune to singing along and moving at around four years old. Finally, music is essential to a child's development throughout the primary years, as their choice of music changes as they grow.

Moreover, Shin (2017) provided some pedagogical steps for teaching songs. First, the song's topic should be introduced, and keywords should be highlighted, including known and unknown words. Next, the learners should listen to the song to get a feel for the tune, rhythm, and lyrics. Then, the lyrics should be implicitly taught. The refrain should be taught first, then each stanza, while repeating the chorus after each stanza. The children's attention should also be drawn to the meaning of the song, and any realia useful to convey the song's meaning should be introduced. Finally, hand and body motions should be incorporated to fit the song.

Davis (2017) reviewed nine studies related to using songs in the classroom. The findings revealed some advantages with singing songs in the classroom, including its impact on vocabulary learning. First, Davis and Fan (2016) compared singing songs with choral repetition with a control group. They found both singing and choral repetitions enhanced vocabulary production, but neither method was better than the other. Likewise, Medina (1990) compared two groups, one singing a story text and the other reading it, and found that both groups improved their receptive vocabulary significantly, with no difference found between the two methods. Moreover, four of the studies reviewed in Davis (2017), comparing control groups with intervention groups, found that songs positively impacted receptive vocabulary. However, only one study found a significant change in the participants' productive vocabulary on the posttest.

In summary, songs have always been used in the classroom, and recent findings confirm the benefits of using songs in EFL/ESL settings and its positive impact on vocabulary acquisition.

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

James J. Asher developed TPR in the 1960s-70s. When observing children learning L1 from their parents, Asher noticed that most of the language to which children are exposed is composed of short commands, such as "pick up the banana" or "stop making that noise" (Brown, 2007). Consequently, children's interactions with their parents often result in simple actions according to the



adults' utterances. This led Asher to assume that children acquire language by listening to simple commands and physically responding to such commands.

Moreover, Asher reasoned that TPR activates the right hemisphere of the brain during learning, enhancing learning as the physical movement helps learners relax and enjoy acquiring languages (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Importantly, learners with low levels of anxiety are likely to better acquire vocabulary. This claim is also supported in recent research applying TPR to teach young learners (Naeini & Shahrokhi, 2015; Nuraeni, 2019).

When using TPR in the classroom, students first listen to an instructor giving the commands and acting them out. Then, they listen and repeat the actions without repeating the words. Notably, the teacher is at the centre and leads the class with pre-selected commands and chunks. The main principle of applying TPR in the classroom is that physical movements should consistently be demonstrated when a new word or sentence is introduced. Children should not be forced to produce language but should be encouraged to listen carefully, act out the actions, and speak when ready (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). A more recent study by Samir (2017) was conducted with 60 students in Year 2 to investigate the impact of TPR on learners' pronunciation. The experimental group was taught using TPR, while the control group was taught using a conventional method. A pronunciation test was applied after the intervention, and the results revealed that the experimental group improved their pronunciation significantly more than the control group. Hence, the study found TPR to be useful for enhancing learners' pronunciation. Additionally, a recent qualitative study on using TPR with songs revealed that young learners enjoy learning new words through songs incorporating TPR (Islami, 2019).

## **Methods**

### **Participants and Setting**

The participants in the current study were aged four to five years old and were students in a preschool located in north-eastern Thailand. A total of 72 children participated in the study and were allocated into three groups based on their classrooms: 22 in the TPR group, 22 in the singing group, and 28 in the TPR and song group (hereafter TPR&S). The children were enrolled in a preschool and kindergarten programme affiliated with a government university. English was taught in every class five days a week, for 30 minutes per day. The participants were all Thai nationals, and Thai was their native language (L1), except for one bi-lingual child with an English and Thai background. The bi-lingual child participated equally with his peers as he was enrolled in the program like all the others. The instructor, who had five years of experience teaching English in preschool, was also the researcher.

The three experimental groups were kept in their existing classrooms to ensure children remained in a familiar and safe environment. Hence, random selection was not applied to ensure a more realistic outcome from a preschool setting. The group as a whole was considered homogenous as the

participants had similar social and economic backgrounds. Since all participants were minors at the onset of the study, informed consent was obtained from essential stakeholders.

### Research Instruments

This study was designed as mixed-method research (MMR), which combined quantitative data collected from two vocabulary knowledge tests (productive and receptive tests) and qualitative data collected from video recordings. The productive vocabulary knowledge test was adapted from the Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test (Brownell, 2000). During the test, one picture representing the target word was presented to each participant, and the participants were encouraged to produce the word they thought the image represented. Productive language in English and Thai was accepted for the test. The productive pretest and posttest followed the same procedure. Scoring rubrics were used to assess the participants' productive vocabulary knowledge, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3

*Rubric Scores for Productive Vocabulary Test*

Rubric	Sampling	Score
– Nothing comprehensible is produced, or the wrong answer is given	-	0
– The word is familiar, and the word with the correct pronunciation is given in Thai	ปรบมือ [clap]	1
– The word is familiar, and the word with the correct pronunciation is given in English	Clap	2
– The word is used with partial semantic appropriateness in a simple sentence in English	Clap I. I am clap.	3
– The word is used with semantic appropriateness and grammatical accuracy in a simple sentence in English	I can clap. I can clap five times. I can clap and sing. I am clapping.	4

*Note.* Adapted from Sukying (2018)

In addition, a receptive vocabulary knowledge test was developed based on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test – 4<sup>th</sup> edition (PPVT) (Dunn & Dunn, 2007). The test included the same 12 target words as the productive test with three pictures displayed simultaneously. For each target word, the participants were shown three pictures simultaneously while the researcher uttered one target word. Then, the participants had to select the picture that represented the word that the researcher uttered. The scoring rubric presented in Table 4 was used to assess the participants' receptive vocabulary knowledge.

Table 4

*Rubric Scores for Receptive Vocabulary Test*

<b>Rubric</b>	<b>Score</b>
Receptive comprehension of the word is insufficient, and the wrong picture is selected	0
Receptive comprehension of the given word is sufficient, and the correct picture is selected	1

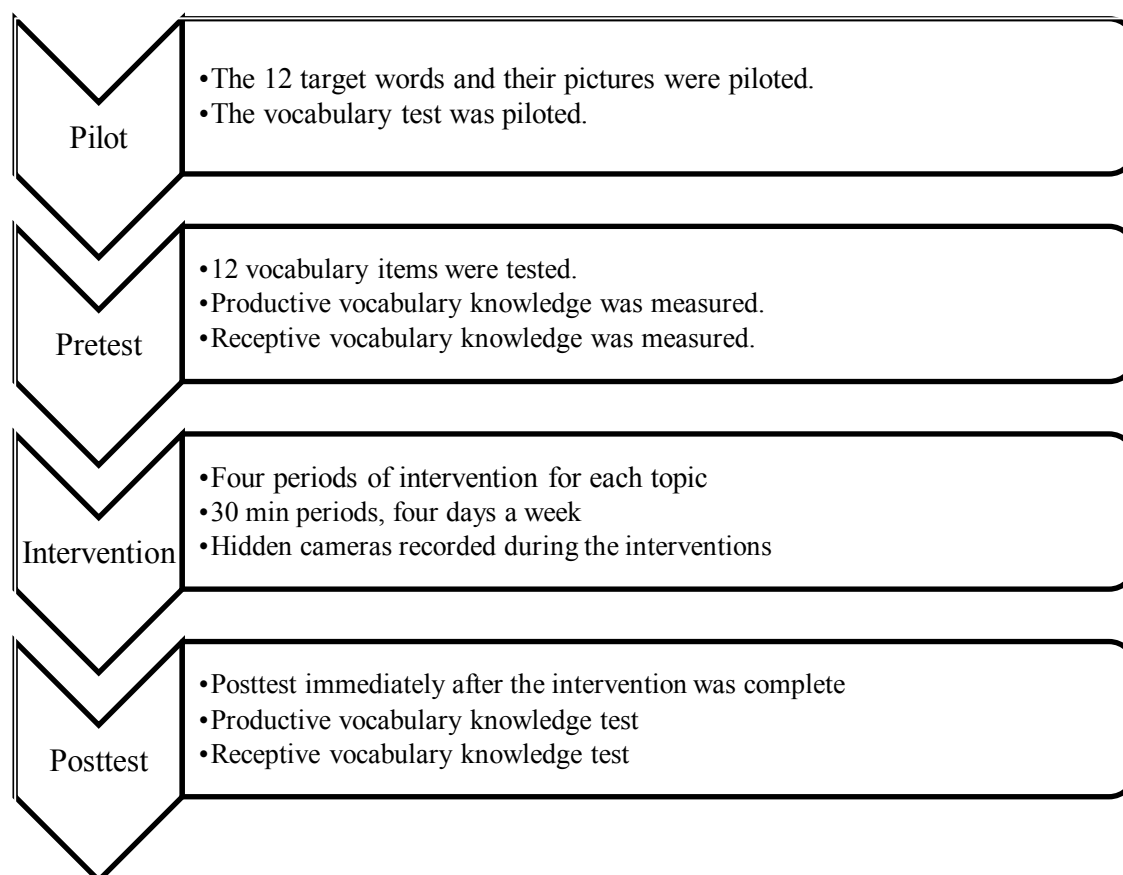
*Note.* Adapted from Sukying (2018)

The tests addressed the first research question by measuring the participants' receptive and productive knowledge of the target words. Moreover, qualitative data was collected with hidden video cameras. The surveillance cameras were installed in each classroom and used to observe the participants during the intervention. All interventions were recorded and stored but only selected samples of the video recordings were analysed as it was deemed too time-consuming to analyse all the recordings. The data were coded according to three pre-selected themes: social interaction, physical reactions, and emotional expressions. The three themes were selected as they relate to SLA theory and vocabulary acquisition.

The video recordings' analysis was intended to shed light on the participants' reactions to the teaching methods. Specifically, the qualitative data analysis focused on how the participants reacted according to the pre-selected themes during the intervention of each teaching method. Also, it was observed how the participant's reactions to the teaching methods impacted their vocabulary acquisition according to SLA theory. That is, how do the participants' levels of social interaction, their physical reactions, and their emotional expressions enhance their vocabulary acquisition?

The research procedure included four steps: pilot-study, pretest, intervention, and posttest. The pilot study was conducted prior to any of the tests to find the most suitable target words and ensure that the target words' images were clear. The pretest was conducted before the intervention began and ran over two days. The posttest was conducted six weeks later, after all the interventions were completed, and lasted for two days. The details of the research procedure are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

*The Research Procedure***Word selection**

The target words were carefully selected following specific criteria related to frequency and relevance. The New General Service List (NGSL) (Browne et al., 2013) was used to verify the frequency. The English Vocabulary Profile (English Vocabulary Profile, n.d.) was used to determine the relevance of the words based on CEFR's A1-A2 scales. In addition, an English vocabulary list used with the national curriculum in Thailand was employed. Additionally, the target words were piloted with another group, homogeneous to the experimental groups, to determine if any word was known to the participants, and if so, it was removed from the lists. The final 12 target words, as shown in Table 5, were all within the 1,000 most frequent words and were in the A1 scale of the CEFR.

Table 5

*Selection of the 12 Target Words according to Wordlists*

No	Nouns	CEFR	NGSL	Thai NC	No	Verbs	CEFR	NGSL	Thai NC
1	Book	A1	192	Included	7	Talk	A1	82	Included
2	Room	A1	413	Included	8	Play	A1	166	Included
3	Paper	A1	499	Included	9	Watch	A1	306	Included

4	Table	A1	637	Included	10	Eat	A1	453	Included
5	Key	A1	712	Included	11	Drink	A1	720	Included
6	Clock	A1	836	Included	12	Clean	A1	813	Included

### Selection of songs and construction of TPR commands

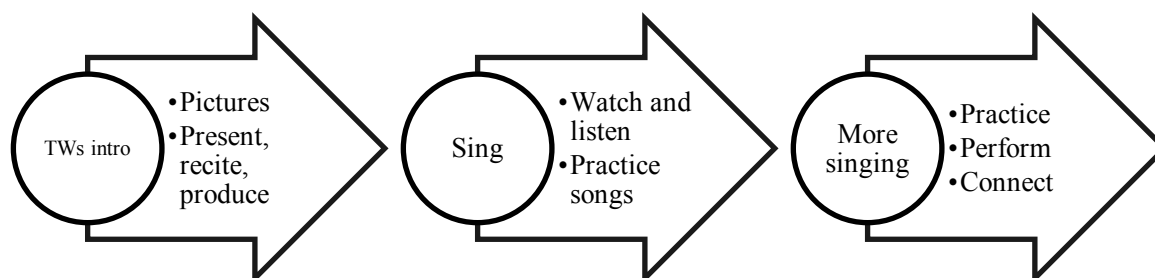
Three songs were selected that included the target words, or the target words could be easily incorporated into the lyrics of the songs. The songs used were popular children songs on YouTube: 1) What Do You Do Every Day? 2) What's This? and 3) What Can You Do? All the songs were brief, approximately one to two minutes each, with easy to sing lyrics.

The TPR commands and utterances were constructed to contain the target words, and simple sentences were formed to reinforce the use of the target words. Moreover, hand motions were selected from two online databases to match the target words. In addition to the songs' lyrics and TPR hand motions, pictures were used to support the learners with visual representations of the target words. The twelve images were selected carefully to ensure they accurately represented the target words. All research instruments, including songs, TPR movements, and pictures, were piloted with a group of children similar to the target groups before the onset of this study.

The song group was exposed to one song for each topic. The songs were introduced by the use of a computer monitor with speakers. After that, the lyrics were taught implicitly with a focus on the target words. The selected images illustrated the target words. In the following lesson, the target words were reviewed several times by singing the songs in various ways. Also, the pictures were used in each revision session. Although singing consisted of singing and related activities, some physical movement was tolerated, such as clapping and swaying movements. The procedure for teaching the target words using songs is outlined in Figure 2.

Figure 2

*The Procedure for Teaching the Target Words with Songs*

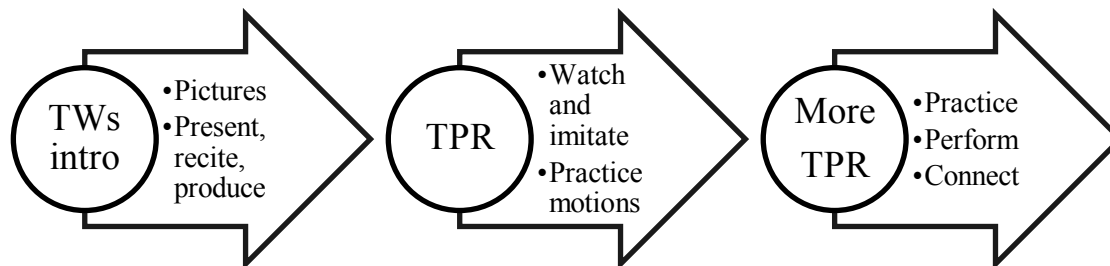


The TPR methods' movements consisted of hand motions. The criteria for the hand motions were that they had to be simple and easy for young children to learn. Also, each hand motion should be distinctly different from any other hand motion. Finally, each motion was attached to a simple sentence that the participants could easily act out; for instance, the sentence "I can clean my room" was performed

by three different motions illustrating “I”, “clean”, and “room”. The motions were acted out while saying the sentence. The three distinct steps for the implementation of TPR are outlined in Figure 3.

Figure 3

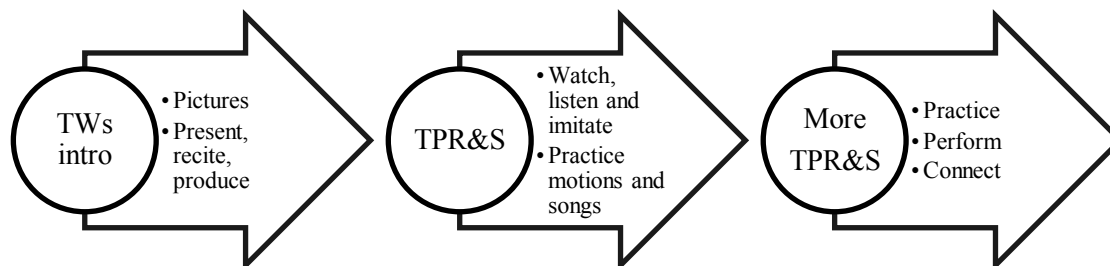
*The Procedure for Teaching the Target Words with TPR*



The third approach, TPR&S, followed the same pattern of instruction as for songs and TPR alone. However, mixing the two methods somewhat altered the procedure. The procedure is illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4

*The Procedure for Teaching the Target Words with TPR&S*



## Results

### Thai Preschoolers' Receptive and Productive Vocabulary Knowledge

The effect of each teaching method (TPR, song, and TPR&S) on the participants' receptive vocabulary knowledge was investigated using a paired samples *t*-test. As shown in Table 6, based on the mean difference scores, the TPR group showed the most improvement in their receptive vocabulary, followed by the Song group and the TPR&S group. The analysis also showed that the TPR&S group (2.24) had the biggest effect size, followed by the TPR group (2.21) and the Song group (1.70), suggesting that the TPR&S approach was more effective to teach vocabulary compared with TPR and songs individually. However, a one-way ANOVA found that there was no significant difference between the teaching methods. Therefore, the results indicate that no teaching approach was significantly more useful than the others to enhance the participants' receptive vocabulary knowledge.

Table 6

*The Overall Performance of Thai Preschoolers' Receptive Vocabulary Knowledge*

Groups	N	Pretest		Posttest		Mean diff	t-value	Effect size
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
TPR	22	59.09	22.11	96.59	11.69	37.50	7.42*	2.21
SONG	22	56.82	24.08	90.53	15.49	33.71	5.44*	1.70
TPR&S	28	64.88	23.39	97.31	5.58	32.43	7.17*	2.24

Note. \*  $p < .05$  (two-tailed)

The effect of each teaching method (TPR, song, and TPR&S) on the participants' productive vocabulary knowledge was investigated using a paired samples *t*-test. As shown in Table 7, based on the mean difference scores, the TPR&S group showed the most improvement in their productive vocabulary (27.75), followed by the Song group (26.29) and the TPR group (16.67). The analysis also showed that the TPR&S group had the biggest effect size (2.44), followed by the Song group (1.73) and the TPR group (1.16). A one-way ANOVA showed no significant difference between the teaching methods. Hence, no teaching approach was significantly more effective than others in fostering participants' productive vocabulary knowledge.

Table 7

*The Overall Performance of Thai Preschoolers' Productive Vocabulary Knowledge*

Groups	N	Pretest		Posttest		Mean diff	t-value	Effect size
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
TPR	22	27.36	14.56	44.03	14.06	16.67	10.59*	1.16
SONG	22	24.61	7.13	50.90	23.17	26.29	5.85*	1.73
TPR&S	28	23.81	4.96	51.56	17.73	27.75	9.67*	2.44

Note: \*  $p < .05$  (two-tailed)

**Thai Preschoolers' Behaviour during Vocabulary Learning**

Qualitative data collected via video recordings were analysed using a coding scheme with pre-selected aspects to answer the second research question. The selected themes were social interactions, physical movement, and emotional expressions, as described in Tables 8, 9, and 10, with some key points highlighted in italics. Table 8 illustrates the participants' social interactions during vocabulary acquisition in the TPR, song, and TPR&S groups. The findings showed that different implementations led to various classroom interactions, such as a desire to present the song to others in the class.

Table 8

*Participants Social Interactions in Vocabulary Acquisition*

Theme	TPR	Song	TPR&S
Social interaction	<p>The participants were <i>keen to raise their hands so they could answer the instructor's questions.</i></p> <p>Hand raising is an indication of social interaction as they try to express interest and participation. Also, when the instructor demonstrated the hand motions, the <i>participants eagerly wanted to imitate him.</i></p> <p>After some time, most of <i>the participants could verbally express the words.</i></p> <p>Sometimes the participants were not sure how to make the motions, so <i>they looked at their friends or the teacher for clues.</i></p>	<p>After a few rounds of singing, <i>the participants wanted to sing the song with the instructor in front of the class. Also, they interacted with the instructor as he gave them instructions</i> on how to sing.</p> <p><i>The interaction between the participants and the teacher helped them to produce the target words multiple times.</i></p>	<p>When the participants practised the hand motions, <i>they interacted with their friends by demonstrating how they could make the motions.</i></p> <p>Combining the two methods seemed to <i>stimulate high levels of social interaction as the participants' expressions appeared more vibrant than in the other groups as they both sang and moved.</i></p>

Table 9 shows the participants' physical movement during vocabulary acquisition. It was found that physical movement increased the participants' interest in the target words and provided them with a physical connection with the target words. Specifically, the TPR movement facilitated non-verbal communication for those whose speaking skills were less developed.



Table 9

*Participants Physical Movements during Vocabulary Acquisition*

Theme	TPR	Song	TPR&S
Physical movements	<p>The TPR method <i>encouraged a great proportion of physical movement</i>. When the instructor demonstrated the hand motions, the <i>participants keenly imitated him</i>. Some hand motions were slightly difficult for them to learn; however, they <i>seemed to enjoy trying to get the hand motions right, even after several failed attempts</i>.</p> <p>Specifically, the <i>hand motions allowed those who hesitated to speak to take part in the classroom interaction</i>.</p>	<p>Although singing did not require any physical movement, the <i>instructor encouraged the participants to clap out the rhythm and stand up while singing</i>.</p> <p>Split into two teams, they <i>stood up and sang in turns</i>. Taking turns to sing <i>kept the participants on their toes and allowed them to move</i>.</p>	<p>The TPR&amp;S method also <i>encouraged much physical movement</i>. The participants first learned the song's lyrics. Then, they learned the hand motions. After that, <i>they sang the song while making the hand motions</i>.</p> <p>When singing the songs, the participants <i>stood up to move more freely and make the hand motions simultaneously</i>.</p>

Table 10 shows excerpts of the participants' emotional expression during the intervention. It reveals how the participants' interaction with the target words helped them stay emotionally engaged with the classroom activities while acquiring the target words.

The results showed that TPR and songs allowed the participants to move and sing, which caused enjoyment while learning. Moreover, the participants in all three groups expressed excitement and were keen to show their hand motions and singing to their peers and teacher. Specifically, the participants in the TPR&S group appeared relaxed and seemed to enjoy the activities.

Table 10

*Participants Emotional Expressions during Vocabulary Acquisition*

Theme	TPR	Song	TPR&S
Emotional expressions	<p>The TPR intervention allowed the children to express their emotions while learning. For example, <i>the participants were keen to participate in the activities arranged in front of the class. They enjoyed moving and being in front of their peers.</i></p> <p>Also, competitive activities seemed to bring out many expressions. <i>When they competed, they were excited and eager to win.</i></p> <p>Moreover, <i>those who were sitting cheered their friends who were competing.</i></p>	<p>Singing also allowed for emotional expressions. Those joining the activities in front of the class expressed <i>excitement and happily contributed by their singing.</i> Moreover, the participants who remained seated <i>were eager to come forward to sing and kept raising their hand to let the teacher know their intention to participate.</i></p> <p>After several repetitions, many <i>expressed some kind of disinterest in singing the songs.</i> Singing a pre-known song with some expressive body motions <i>helped the participants to regain focus.</i></p>	<p>The TPR&amp;S participants <i>expressed amusement while singing and moving.</i> Seemingly, they <i>enjoyed the combination of both singing and making the hand motions</i> as mixing the two methods allowed for both <i>physical and musical expressions.</i> Like the other groups, the participants <i>seemed eager to participate in the activities in front of the class.</i> Some participants expressed <i>confidence and were expressive during the intervention;</i> others seemed <i>more refined in appearance and less active.</i> However, <i>everyone seemed to be having fun while trying out what they had learned.</i></p> <p>The participants seemed very satisfied and engaged with the songs and the TPR movements.</p>

Overall, the qualitative results indicated that the three aspects of SLA, including physical movements, social interactions, and emotional expressions, played a vital role in the participants' vocabulary acquisition. The quantitative data revealed that the participants learning with TPR, songs, and a mix of both methods acquired the twelve target words, both receptively and productively.

Additionally, the qualitative data highlighted the importance of social interaction, physical activity, and the natural expression of positive emotions, such as enjoyment, in vocabulary acquisition. The participants' social interaction, physical activity, and emotional expressions contributed positively

to the participants' vocabulary acquisition. All three aspects help to keep the participants' highly engaged in classroom activities and to lower anxiety levels during learning.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

The current findings revealed that the selected teaching methods positively affected receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge among young learners in Thai preschool contexts. The participants developed their receptive vocabulary knowledge more than their productive vocabulary knowledge throughout the intervention, which is consistent with previous studies (Nation, 2013; Sukying, 2017, 2018, 2020)

The participants' receptive vocabulary knowledge improved significantly from the pretest to the posttest for all three interventions. However, no teaching approach was significantly better than the others. These findings support previous studies that indicated that TPR and songs help enhance young learners' receptive vocabulary knowledge (Asher, 1966; Asher, 1977; Bernal Suancha, 2013; Naeini & Shahrokhi, 2015; Hees & Nation, 2017; Nuraeni, 2019).

These findings could be explained based on the theoretical framework of SLA research. Physical movement is believed to activate the brain's right hemisphere, which aids the retention of newly learned words (Asher, 1977). Hence, TPR has a longstanding impact on vocabulary teaching and learning in ESL and EFL contexts. Likewise, songs have proved useful to enhance receptive vocabulary knowledge as songs include authentic language that can be repeated multiple times in a fun and rhythmic way (Shin, 2017). Such exposure to authentic language and English interactions is more enjoyable for young learners than traditional methods applied in EFL classroom settings. Furthermore, blending TPR movements with songs was also an effective approach to teaching the target words receptively. Similarly, previous studies found the use of TPR and songs to be very useful with young learners as the TPR&S and similar methods facilitate multisensory learning (Bernal Suancha, 2013; Ragsdale, 2017; Uthaya Kumar & Sandaran, 2018).

In addition, the results revealed that the participants' productive vocabulary knowledge also developed significantly from the pretest to the posttest but much less than the receptive vocabulary knowledge. The findings are consistent with previous studies (Asher, 1966; Swain, 2000; Castro Huertas & Navarro Parra, 2014; Davis & Fan, 2016; Hees & Nation, 2017). Indeed, similar to previous studies, the participants' productive vocabulary knowledge benefitted from physical movement as the physical movements facilitate social interaction in the classroom (Naeini & Shahrokhi, 2015; Nuraeni, 2019). As the participants in the current study explored the hand motions, they also interacted with their peers in various ways. Moreover, when prompted to say the words while making the motions, they showed the hand motion and tried to utter the target words.

Singing also supported productive vocabulary acquisition of the target words. Learning to sing a song naturally involves verbal expressions by singing. After listening to the song a few times, some participants started to sing the songs even before they knew the song very well. The participants' natural

desire to sing may mirror the natural effect on productive vocabulary acquisition by singing songs. Few other language activities stimulate learners' productive use in such ways (Shin, 2017). Hence, it can be proposed that singing promotes productive vocabulary use in a more natural and relaxed way than other methods. Such findings may explain why the singing group had a higher mean difference score than the TPR group on the productive test.

Although the participants appeared to be singing, they were perhaps only mimicking what they heard. A closer look at what the children were producing revealed that they were not creating the words but rather mimicking or lip-speaking what they heard. This was similar to findings in previous studies (Castro Huertas & Navarro Parra, 2014). However, such attempts to participate are considered natural as young learners tend to mimic adults' speech. Importantly, teachers should find ways to ensure that students can produce words accurately.

Mixing songs with TPR movements seemed to reap the benefits of both methods as the TPR&S group's score on the productive vocabulary test resulted in the highest mean difference. Specifically, the TPR&S approach allowed for both physical and song activities to be applied simultaneously. Hence, it appears that the eclectic approach had several advantages as it facilitated multiple encounters with the target words with some deliberate attention to the words and some meaningful use of the target words. Notably, the participants in the TPR&S group appeared to enjoy themselves while learning with high levels of social interaction, much physical activity, and low anxiety levels. Thus, applying a mix of both TPR and songs is recommended.

In summary, both singing and TPR proved effective to enhance the participants receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge. Additionally, the combination of TPR and singing seemed to impact vocabulary acquisition positively. The TPR&S method may provide teachers with an excellent alternative approach to other currently used methods.

### **Participants' Reactions to Songs and TPR**

The qualitative data analysis revealed that the participant's reactions to the interventions helped their vocabulary acquisition. Theories in SLA, such as the interactionist perspective, Krashen (1982) affective filter, and Swain's (2000) output hypothesis, point to the importance of learners' behaviours and interactions in the classroom and how such factors impact vocabulary acquisition. Factors, including social interactions, physical movement, and emotional expressions, contribute positively to language acquisition. The results in the current study were similar to previous findings showing that physical movement and singing led to positive contributions in young learners' vocabulary acquisition (Asher, 1966; Krashen, 1982; Castro Huertas & Navarro Parra, 2014; Hees & Nation, 2017; Shin, 2017).

The results revealed that social interactions could help young participants develop their receptive and productive vocabulary learning. This is likely because the social interaction, verbal and non-verbal, helped the participants to engage with the target words and facilitated exchange in the target

language. For instance, some participants in the TPR looked for clues to answer the teacher's questions from their peers:

*"Sometimes, the participants were not sure how to make the motions, so they looked at their friends or the teacher for clues."*

For those who hesitated to speak, the TPR method still facilitated social interaction:

*"Making the hand motions allowed those who hesitated to speak to interact."*

These excerpts reflect young learners' natural need to interact and how social interaction stimulates deeper learning which agrees with Swain's output hypothesis (Swain, 2000). Moreover, the results revealed that the participants' physical movements facilitated vocabulary acquisition as they persistently practised the hand motions and the target words, as shown in the excerpt below:

*"The participants seemed to enjoy trying to get the hand motions right, even after several failed attempts."*

As enjoyment remained high during physical movements sessions, it appears that physical movements contribute positively to vocabulary acquisition. However, physical activity led to some less fortunate outcomes as follows:

*"The participants got so absorbed with making the motions that they paid less attention to the target words."*

Finally, the results revealed that the participants' emotional expressions also contribute to their vocabulary acquisition, as shown in the following excerpt:

*"The participants enjoyed moving and being in front of their peers."*

Being in the front of the class performing the hand motions or the song indicates the learners' high confidence and excitement to participate in the learning activities. This also helped some shy learners to overcome their shyness and resistance to participating, which is an important contribution to vocabulary acquisition.

### Conclusion

The current study sheds light on young learners' vocabulary acquisition in a Thai EFL context. The results from the receptive and productive vocabulary tests revealed that songs and TPR are compelling teaching methods and can be recommended for use in settings with young learners. Indeed, the participants' receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge was significantly improved after the intervention, which supports previous findings on young learners' vocabulary acquisition (Asher 1977; Bernal Suanca, 2013; Naeini & Shahrokhi, 2015; Hees & Nation, 2017; Davis, 2017; Nuraeni, 2019). However, neither method was significantly better than the others to improve the participants' vocabulary acquisition. The participants' reaction to the teaching methods suggests that TPR and singing promote social interactions as well as high levels of physical movement and positive emotional expressions. Finally, the current results suggest that songs and TPR stimulate effective vocabulary learning in young learners' settings and can be recommended for implementation in classrooms involving young learners.

### Limitations of This Study and Recommendations for Future Studies

This study's scope was limited to investigating the effects of two teaching methods on young learners' receptive and productive vocabulary acquisition and their reaction to these methods. However, many other aspects of language learning need to be addressed to ensure a truly effective teaching method. Indeed, the teaching method's effect on accuracy, pronunciation, and motivation can also affect vocabulary acquisition and should be explored in future studies. Furthermore, six weeks may be considered relatively short for a comparative study. Hence, more longitudinal studies, including a larger cohort of students, might help assess the long-term effects of using songs and TPR on vocabulary acquisition.

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doi:10.11113/lspi.v5n2.81

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