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The Effectiveness of Total Physical Response (TPR) in Developing Students' Maharat al-Kalām at MTs Negeri 2 Banggai

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of Total Physical Response (TPR) in developing students' Arabic speaking ability (maharat al-kalām) at MTs Negeri 2 Banggai. A quasi-experimental design with a non-equivalent control group was applied to 32 seventh-grade students divided into an experimental class taught through TPR and a control class taught through conventional lecturing. Data were collected through oral pre-test and post-test, classroom observation, student questionnaires, and a teacher interview, and were analyzed using normality and homogeneity tests, Independent Samples t-test, and N-Gain. The experimental group showed a much larger gain in speaking scores than the control group, with N-Gain in the moderate category compared with low effectiveness for the control class, and the difference between groups was statistically significant. The findings indicate that TPR has a meaningful positive impact on students' Arabic speaking skills and offers a promising pedagogical alternative for madrasah contexts.

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1. PENDAHULUAN

Arabic speaking ability (maharatu al-kalām) is one of the core productive skills and occupies a strategic position in Arabic language teaching at the madrasah level. In practice, however, classroom realities at MTs Negeri 2 Banggai show that this skill is still relatively low. Many students are unable to read Arabic texts fluently and lack confidence in expressing their ideas orally. These problems are exacerbated by low learning motivation, limited active participation, the dominance of one-way lecturing, and inadequate learning facilities that do not sufficiently support vocabulary

development or the acquisition of grammatical structures. Differences in students' prior educational backgrounds (from madrasah ibtidaiyah and general primary schools) further widen the gap in their basic Arabic proficiency, indicating the need for an adaptive and communicative instructional approach that can bridge these disparities [1], [2], [3].

One method considered relevant to address these challenges is Total Physical Response (TPR). TPR links physical movement with linguistic input, creating a more natural, enjoyable, and comprehensible learning experience. Its relevance becomes stronger when viewed through the lens of Stephen Krashen's second language acquisition theory, particularly the notion of comprehensible input, which posits that language is acquired optimally when learners receive meaningful input at the level of i+1 [4], [5]. The physical responses embedded in TPR help learners process instructions in a multisensory way, reduce anxiety, and lower the affective filter so that language acquisition can proceed more effectively [6], [7], [8], [9], [10], [11].

From the perspective of Arabic language pedagogy, the principles of TPR are also in line with theories of maharatu al-kalām proposed by Rusdy Ahmad Thu'aimah and Mahmud Kamil al-Naqah, who underline four fundamental elements objectives, materials, methods, and evaluation and emphasize communicative, collaborative, and participatory approaches to build a supportive environment for speaking development [12], [13], [14], [15], [16], [17], [18], [19], [20], [21]. In a similar vein, Ali Al-Khouli highlights the importance of linguistic context, meaningful vocabulary use, and semantic understanding for enhancing oral communicative competence, including through natural interaction and continuous formative evaluation [22], [23], [24], [25], [26].

Previous empirical studies have reported the effectiveness of TPR in improving both maharatu al-kalām and Arabic vocabulary mastery. Classroom action research conducted in various settings has shown significant gains in speaking performance when TPR is implemented cyclically, while other studies have documented substantial improvements in students' speaking scores across two cycles of instructional intervention. Experimental research has likewise demonstrated that TPR can significantly enhance learners' vocabulary acquisition. Collectively, these findings confirm the potential of TPR as an instructional method capable of responding to the pedagogical challenges faced in Arabic language teaching at madrasahs [27].

In the specific context of MTs Negeri 2 Banggai, the implementation of TPR is integrated with the Arabic textbook mandated by KMA 183 of 2019. This textbook provides an appropriate curricular foundation for lower secondary learners and promotes action-based learning that supports the development of maharatu al-kalām. Nevertheless, despite this formal framework, empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of TPR for improving students' Arabic speaking skills in this institution remains limited.

Building on the complexity of the problems, the theoretical framework, and prior research, the present study focuses on examining the effectiveness of the TPR method in enhancing the maharatu al-kalām of seventh-grade students at MTs Negeri 2 Banggai. Specifically, this study addresses the following questions: (1) What is the level of students' Arabic speaking ability before the implementation of TPR? (2) How does their speaking ability change after the implementation of TPR? (3) Is there a significant difference in speaking ability between students taught using TPR and those taught through conventional lecturing? and (4) To what extent is TPR effective in improving students' maharatu al-kalām? Grounded in Krashen's comprehensible input theory, James Asher's TPR framework, Thu'aimah and al-Naqah's theory of Arabic speaking instruction, and Ali Al-Khouli's pedagogical linguistics, this study tests the hypothesis that students taught through TPR will attain significantly higher Arabic speaking scores than those taught using conventional methods.

This article is organized as follows. The next section presents the research method employed in this study. The subsequent section reports and discusses the findings related to the effectiveness of TPR in improving students' Arabic speaking ability. The final section offers the main conclusions and outlines theoretical and practical implications for Arabic language pedagogy in madrasahs.

2. METHOD

This study employed a quasi-experimental method using a non-equivalent control group design to examine the effect of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method on students' maharatu al-kalām. The study was conducted at MTs Negeri 2 Banggai, Central Sulawesi, in September. The population consisted of all seventh-grade students (48 students), while the sample included 32 students selected based on class availability: Class VII A (16 students) as the experimental group and Class VII B (16 students) as the control group. The experimental class received instruction through the TPR method, whereas the control class was taught using conventional lecturing.

Data were collected through oral speaking tests, observation sheets, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. The oral test, administered as both pre-test and post-test, assessed students' fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, and confidence in speaking. Observations were conducted during the learning process, questionnaires were distributed to the experimental class to identify students' responses toward TPR, and interviews with the Arabic teacher were conducted to obtain supporting information regarding the implementation of the method.

The research procedure consisted of preparation, pre-test administration, treatment, and post-test stages. The treatment in the experimental class was integrated with Arabic learning materials based on KMA 183 of 2019. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Shapiro–Wilk normality test, Levene's homogeneity test, Independent Samples t-test or Mann–Whitney U test, and N-Gain analysis to determine the effectiveness of the treatment. Meanwhile, qualitative data from observations and interviews were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Ethical considerations included obtaining school permission, maintaining participants' confidentiality, and ensuring voluntary participation throughout the study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Pre-test Results of Arabic Speaking Ability

The initial measurement of students' Arabic speaking ability (maharatu al-kalām) was carried out through a pre-test administered to both the experimental and control groups. The descriptive statistics of the pre-test scores for both groups are presented in Table 1.

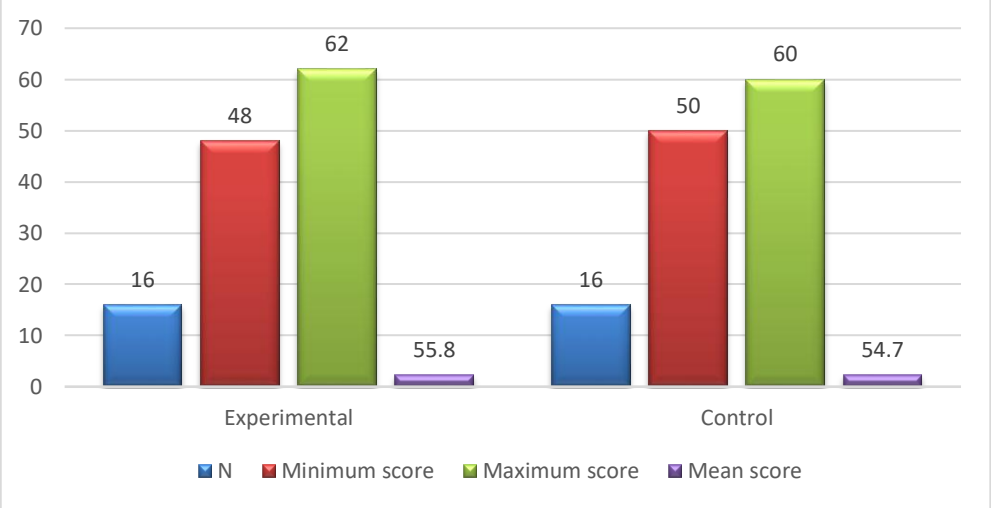
Table 1. Descriptive statistics of pre-test scores for experimental and control groups

Group	N	Minimum score	Maximum score	Mean score	Initial ability category
Experimental	16	48	62	55.8	Low–Moderate
Control	16	50	60	54.7	Low–Moderate

Table 1 shows that the mean pre-test scores of the experimental and control groups were very similar and fell within the low-to-fair category. This indicates that, prior to the intervention, both groups had a comparable initial level of maharatu al-kalām. Thus, the two classes can be considered reasonably equivalent at baseline, so that any subsequent differences in post-test results are more likely attributable to the instructional treatment rather than to pre-existing disparities.

The comparison of the mean pre-test scores between the two groups is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Comparison of mean pre-test scores of experimental and control groups



As depicted in Figure 1, the mean speaking scores of the two groups at the pre-test stage were almost identical. This strengthens the conclusion that the initial conditions of the experimental and control groups were comparable, which is essential for the validity of the quasi-experimental design.

3.2. Post-test Results and Descriptive Improvement

After the treatment phase, the post-test was administered to both groups. The descriptive statistics of the post-test scores are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of post-test scores for experimental and control groups

Group	N	Minimum score	Maximum score	Mean score	Final ability category
Experimental	16	72	85	79.1	Good
Control	16	62	70	65.6	Fair

Table 2 indicates a clear divergence in the development of speaking ability between the two groups. The experimental group, which received instruction through the TPR method, achieved a higher mean post-test score and showed greater dispersion towards the upper score range. In contrast, the control group, which was taught using conventional lecturing, exhibited a smaller increase in mean score and remained largely within the fair category. The comparison of mean post-test scores is visualized in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Comparison of mean post-test scores of experimental and control groups

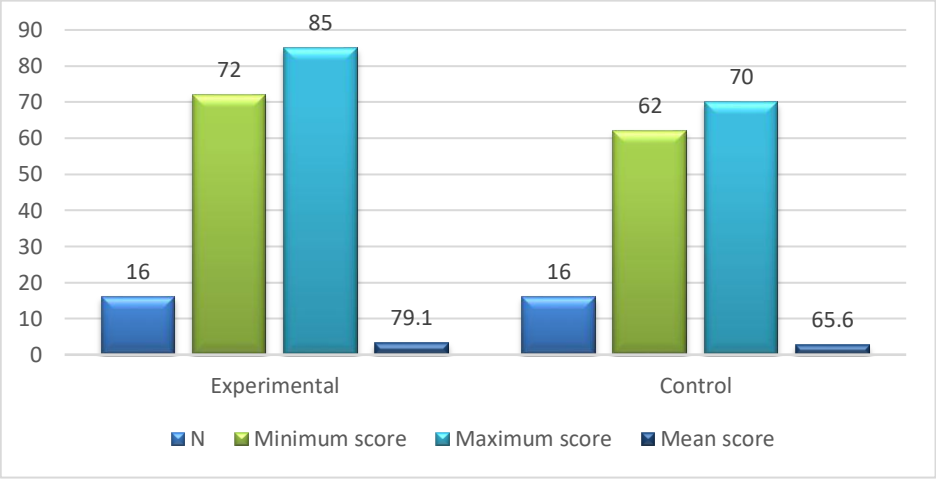


Figure 2 highlights the magnitude of the improvement gap between the two groups. While both groups experienced some progress, the experimental group achieved a much steeper increase in mean speaking scores than the control group. Observational notes support this pattern, indicating that students in the experimental class became more fluent, more accurate in pronunciation, more varied in vocabulary use, and more confident in expressing ideas orally, whereas students in the control class remained more hesitant and dependent on teacher prompts.

3.3. N-Gain Analysis and Level of Effectiveness

To further examine the effectiveness of the intervention, N-Gain values were calculated by comparing the pre-test and post-test scores of both groups. The results of the N-Gain analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. N-Gain scores and effectiveness category of speaking improvement

Group	Mean pre-test	Mean post-test	Mean N-Gain	Effectiveness category
Experimental	55.81	79.13	0.53	Moderate
Control	54.69	65.81	0.24	Low

Table 3 shows that the experimental group obtained a higher mean N-Gain than the control group and reached a higher category of effectiveness. This means

that the TPR-based instruction produced a substantial and educationally meaningful improvement in students' maharatu al-kalām. By contrast, the control group's N-Gain value fell into a lower category, indicating that conventional lecturing provided only modest gains in speaking ability.

3.4. Assumption Tests: Normality and Homogeneity

Before conducting inferential analysis, the assumptions of normality and homogeneity were examined. Normality was tested using the Shapiro–Wilk procedure for both pre-test and post-test scores in the experimental and control groups. The results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Shapiro–Wilk normality test for pre-test and post-test scores

		Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Class	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Result	Pre test (Control)	,096	16	,200*	,981	16	,969
	Post test (Control)	,098	16	,200*	,976	16	,924
	Pre test (Eksperimen)	,117	16	,200*	,968	16	,800
	Post test (Eksperimen)	,094	16	,200*	,981	16	,971

Table 4 shows that all Sig. (p) values for the pre-test and post-test scores in both groups were greater than 0.05. This indicates that the data did not significantly deviate from a normal distribution, so the assumption of normality was met.

Homogeneity of variance was examined using Levene's test for equality of variances. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Levene's test of homogeneity of variances for post-test scores

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Result	Based on Mean	3,770	1	30	,062
	Based on Median	3,742	1	30	,063
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	3,742	1	25,586	,064
	Based on trimmed mean	3,756	1	30	,062

As shown in Table 5, the Sig. (p) value of Levene's test exceeded 0.05, indicating that the variances of the experimental and control groups were homogeneous. Taken together, the normality and homogeneity results justify the use of parametric tests specifically, the Independent Samples t-test to compare the post-test means of the two groups.

3.5. Inferential Analysis: Independent Samples t-test

To test the research hypothesis regarding the difference in maharatu al-kalām between students taught with TPR and those taught with conventional methods, an

Independent Samples t-test was conducted on the post-test scores. The results of the t-test are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6. Independent Samples t-test for post-test scores of experimental and control groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Result	Equal variances assumed	3,770	,062	-12,234	30	,000	-13,312	1,088	-15,535	-11,090
	Equal variances not assumed			-12,234	24,986	,000	-13,312	1,088	-15,554	-11,071

Table 6 shows that the mean post-test score of the experimental group was higher than that of the control group, and the Sig. (2-tailed) value was less than 0.05. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the speaking scores of students taught using TPR and those taught using conventional lecturing. In other words, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference between the two groups is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. These findings confirm that the TPR method has a significant positive effect on students' maharatu al-kalām.

3.6. Findings from Classroom Observation

Classroom observations were conducted systematically to capture the dynamics of teaching and learning in both groups. In the experimental class, the teacher consistently implemented TPR procedures, including modelling commands, demonstrating movements, and organizing pair or group activities that required students to respond physically to spoken Arabic input. This pattern of instruction created a learning environment rich in comprehensible input and meaningful interaction. Students were actively involved in listening, performing actions, and gradually shifting from physical responses to oral production. The classroom atmosphere was lively, students appeared enthusiastic, and their willingness to take speaking turns increased over time.

In the control class, teacher activities were dominated by explanation, translation, and written exercises. Although students listened and completed tasks, opportunities for spontaneous speaking practice were relatively limited. Observers noted that students in this class tended to be more passive during oral activities, relied heavily on teacher cues, and were less inclined to initiate speech. The classroom

climate was more static, with fewer instances of peer interaction compared with the experimental class.

These observational findings support the quantitative results by showing that the TPR-based instruction not only improved test scores but also fostered a more communicative and interactive classroom environment that encouraged students to use Arabic orally.

3.7. Questionnaire Findings (Experimental Group)

To explore students' perceptions of the TPR method, a questionnaire was administered to the experimental group. The analysis of responses revealed four main tendencies. First, most students expressed positive attitudes toward TPR, stating that it made Arabic lessons more enjoyable, interactive, and easier to understand. They felt that combining language with movement helped them grasp the meaning of expressions more quickly and remember them more effectively.

Second, students reported that TPR increased their confidence to speak. Because they could initially respond through physical actions, they were less afraid of making mistakes when later asked to speak. Third, many students indicated that their vocabulary and understanding of basic sentence patterns improved through repeated exposure to commands and classroom routines. Fourth, several students mentioned that TPR enhanced their motivation to attend Arabic classes and reduced feelings of boredom.

Overall, the questionnaire results confirm that TPR is perceived by students not only as effective in developing maharatu al-kalām but also as supportive of their affective needs, such as motivation, interest, and confidence.

3.8. Interview Findings (Teacher's Perspective)

Interviews with the Arabic teacher showed that TPR was considered highly relevant for the level and context of MTs Negeri 2 Banggai. The teacher noted that TPR made it easier for students to understand new vocabulary and expressions because they were always connected to concrete actions and classroom situations. The teacher also observed that students became more responsive, more courageous in speaking, and more engaged in the learning process.

However, the teacher also pointed out several challenges in implementing TPR, such as the need for careful preparation of commands and activities, the arrangement of classroom space to allow movement, and the management of time when conducting physically active tasks. Despite these challenges, the teacher regarded TPR as a practical and beneficial method that could be integrated with the existing curriculum and the Arabic textbook mandated by KMA 183 of 2019.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that the Total Physical Response (TPR) method is effective in improving the Arabic speaking ability (maharat al-kalām) of seventh-grade students at MTs Negeri 2 Banggai. Both groups started from a comparable level of speaking ability, with pre-test means of 55.8 in the experimental class and 54.7 in the control class. After the intervention, the experimental group's mean post-test score rose to 79.1 in the "good" category, while the control group reached only 65.6 in the "fair" category. N-Gain analysis indicated moderate effectiveness for the experimental group (0.53) and low effectiveness for the control group (0.24). Normality and homogeneity tests confirmed that the data met the assumptions for parametric analysis, and the Independent Samples t-test showed a statistically significant

difference between the two groups ($p < .05$). These results confirm that the improvement in students' speaking ability is largely attributable to the implementation of TPR rather than to conventional lecturing.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings are consistent with Stephen Krashen's theory of comprehensible input, which emphasizes the importance of meaningful input at the level of i+1 and a low-anxiety learning environment. In TPR-based lessons, verbal instructions were consistently paired with physical actions so that vocabulary and sentence patterns were understood with the aid of visual and kinaesthetic cues [4], [5], [10], [11]. Classroom observations and questionnaire responses indicated that students found it easier to understand new expressions when they were demonstrated physically, and they reported feeling more relaxed, interested, and motivated during TPR activities. This pattern is in line with Krashen's notion of a lowered affective filter, where reduced anxiety and increased motivation create better conditions for language acquisition [6], [7], [9]. Thus, TPR in this study can be viewed as a practical embodiment of both comprehensible input and affective filter hypotheses.

The results also corroborate James Asher's core principles of TPR. Asher argues that effective language learning begins with comprehension and physical response before demanding oral production, mirroring the sequence of first language acquisition. In this study, students in the experimental group were not immediately required to produce complex utterances. They first responded to the teacher's commands through actions such as standing, sitting, pointing to objects, or moving to different locations in the classroom. This progression from comprehension to physical response and then to spoken output reduced pressure, made lessons more playful and engaging, and gradually built students' confidence to speak. The significant improvements in fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary use in the post-test align with previous research showing that TPR strengthens vocabulary retention and supports more accurate oral production [28], [29], [30]. Other studies have demonstrated that TPR principles can be adapted to technology-enhanced learning and various classroom formats [31], [32], [33] and the present research extends these findings to the context of a lower secondary madrasah.

Viewed through the lens of Rusdy Ahmad Thu'aimah and Mahmud Kamil al-Naqah's framework for teaching maharat al-kalām, the implementation of TPR in this study demonstrates how objectives, materials, methods, and evaluation can be integrated coherently. The instructional objectives were explicitly directed toward developing students' oral communicative competence. The materials were drawn from a nationally standardized Arabic textbook based on KMA 183 of 2019 and were transformed into series of commands, short dialogues, and communicative tasks that suited TPR principles [12], [13], [18], [20]. The method encouraged interaction, participation, and collaboration in line with recommendations for communicative and learner-centred speaking instruction. Evaluation was conducted not only through pre-test and post-test oral assessments but also through systematic observation, questionnaires, and a teacher interview, reflecting the comprehensive and continuous assessment model promoted in this framework [16], [19]. The more communicative classroom atmosphere in the experimental group indicates the emergence of a supportive bi'ah lughawiyyah that sustains ongoing speaking practice.

The findings are also compatible with Ali Al-Khouli's pedagogical and linguistic perspectives, which highlight the importance of semantic and contextual meaning in developing Arabic speaking skills. In TPR, each vocabulary item and sentence pattern is embedded in a concrete situation and physical action, so students learn to associate language with meaningful contexts rather than isolated memorization [25], [26]. This contextualization helps learners perceive differences in meaning across situations and use language more flexibly in communication. At the same time, the humanistic, learner-centred nature of TPR gives students space to move, respond, and experiment without excessive fear of making mistakes. The observed increase in students' confidence, as well as questionnaire responses indicating that they felt less anxious and more willing to speak, are in line with [24], who stress the importance of humanistic approaches in teaching speaking. The use of clear rubrics and structured oral tasks in this study also shows that TPR can be integrated with speaking standards required by the curriculum, as suggested by [23] and Fachrul [22].

When compared with previous empirical studies on TPR, the results of this research are both consistent and reinforcing. Studies by Rizpawa et al. at the junior high school level, Wahyuningsih and Musfirah at MAN, and Afifah and Mashuri at madrasah ibtidaiyah indicate that TPR can significantly improve students' speaking skills and increase their motivation through cycles of classroom action research. [34] found that TPR has a positive effect on Arabic vocabulary mastery, while Fahrurrozi and Lutfatul Qolbi et al. reported that TPR enhances students' courage and fluency in speaking Arabic in elementary and pesantren settings. The present study confirms these patterns at the MTs level using a quasi-experimental design with a control group, formal assumption testing, and N-Gain analysis, thereby providing stronger evidence that TPR is responsible for the observed differences in speaking performance. It also shows that TPR can be systematically integrated with a national textbook under KMA 183 of 2019, making it highly relevant for formal madrasah curricula.

Furthermore, the context of MTs Negeri 2 Banggai adds an important nuance. The students in this study came from heterogeneous educational backgrounds, including graduates of Madrasah ibtidaiyah and general primary schools. Despite these initial disparities, TPR was able to promote significant gains in maharat al-kalām and help reduce the gap between learners with different starting levels. This suggests that TPR is not only effective in general terms but also potentially useful as a remedial and equalizing strategy in diverse classrooms. Overall, the discussion of these findings shows that TPR is both theoretically grounded and practically effective for improving Arabic speaking skills in madrasah settings, and it offers a viable alternative for teachers who seek to respond to the persistent problem of low maharat al-kalām in their classrooms.

5. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the effectiveness of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in improving the Arabic speaking ability (maharatu al-kalām) of seventh-grade students at MTs Negeri 2 Banggai through a quasi-experimental design with a non-equivalent control group. The findings show that both groups started from a comparable level of speaking ability, yet the experimental group that received TPR-based instruction achieved substantially higher post-test scores than the control group taught through conventional lecturing. The mean score of the experimental group

increased from 55.8 to 79.1 in the good category, while the control group rose from 54.7 to 65.6 in the fair category. N-Gain analysis indicated moderate effectiveness for the experimental group (0.53) and low effectiveness for the control group (0.24), and the Independent Samples t-test confirmed that the difference between the two groups was statistically significant. These results demonstrate that TPR has a significant and meaningful positive impact on students' maharatu al-kalām.

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