

**MOVEMENT AND COGNITIVE BREAKS
IN EFL: ENHANCING ENGAGEMENT AND
ACHIEVEMENT AT UNIDAD EDUCATIVA
PARTICULAR SAN FRANCISCO JAVIER, LA
ESCUELA JAVERIANA DE LOJA**

**PAUSAS ACTIVAS Y COGNITIVAS EN LA ENSEÑANZA
DEL INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA
(EFL): FORTALECIENDO EL COMPROMISO Y EL
RENDIMIENTO ACADÉMICO EN LA UNIDAD
EDUCATIVA PARTICULAR SAN FRANCISCO JAVIER, LA
ESCUELA JAVERIANA DE LOJA**

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Resumen

Este estudio cuasiexperimental examinó el impacto pedagógico de estrategias estructuradas basadas en el movimiento y pausas cognitivas en el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) en 60 estudiantes de 12 a 14 años de la Escuela Javeriana de Loja, Ecuador. Durante ocho semanas, el grupo experimental participó en actividades de Total Physical Response (TPR), energizadores y pausas de atención plena (mindfulness) durante dos sesiones semanales de 40 minutos, mientras que el grupo de control recibió instrucción tradicional. Los datos se recopilaban mediante pruebas de pretest y posttest, listas de cotejo de observación, encuestas de percepción estudiantil y registros docentes.

Los resultados indicaron que el grupo experimental obtuvo una mejora académica significativamente mayor (puntaje de ganancia = +17) en comparación con el grupo de control (+7), con incrementos notables en vocabulario, gramática, desempeño oral y participación en clase. Los estudiantes también reportaron mayores niveles de motivación, disfrute y concentración. Los registros docentes confirmaron una mejor participación y un ambiente de aula más positivo.

Los hallazgos sugieren que la integración del movimiento y de las pausas cognitivas en la enseñanza del EFL mejora tanto el rendimiento académico como el compromiso estudiantil. El estudio respalda la pedagogía basada en la neurociencia y los principios del aprendizaje activo como estrategias efectivas y de bajo costo para optimizar la enseñanza de idiomas.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje basado en el movimiento, pausas cognitivas, EFL, compromiso estudiantil, Total Physical Response.

Abstract

This quasi-experimental study examined the pedagogical impact of structured movement-based strategies and cognitive breaks on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning among 60 students aged 12–14 at La Escuela Javeriana de Loja, Ecuador. Over eight weeks, the experimental group participated in Total Physical Response (TPR), energizers, and mindfulness breaks during two 40-minute weekly sessions, while the control group received traditional instruction. Data were collected through pre- and post-tests, observation checklists, student perception surveys, and teacher logs. Results indicated that the experimental group achieved significantly greater academic improvement (gain score = +17) than the control group (+7), with notable increases in vocabulary, grammar, speaking performance, and classroom engagement. Students also reported higher motivation, enjoyment, and concentration. Teacher logs confirmed improved participation and a more positive classroom environment. Findings suggest that integrating movement and cognitive breaks into EFL instruction enhances both academic performance and student engagement. The study supports neuroscience-informed pedagogy and active learning principles as effective, low-cost strategies for improving language instruction.

Keywords: movement-based learning, cognitive breaks, EFL, student engagement, Total Physical Response

Introduction

EFL instruction frequently requires sustained concentration, memory retention, and active communication; however, many adolescents experience cognitive fatigue and reduced engagement during extended sedentary lessons. At Unidad Educativa Particular San Francisco Javier, La Escuela Javeriana de Loja, teachers observed declining participation after approximately 15–20 minutes of uninterrupted instruction. This challenge aligns with research emphasizing the relationship between attention, physical activity, and academic performance (Jensen, 2013; Sousa, 2017).

Neuroscience research demonstrates that physical movement stimulates brain function, increases blood flow, and supports memory formation (Ratey, 2008). Similarly, active pedagogy emphasizes that students learn more effectively when physically and cognitively engaged (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Within language education, Asher's (1977) Total Physical Response framework highlights the value of connecting language to physical action, while Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis underscores the importance of reducing anxiety to optimize language acquisition.

This study investigated whether structured movement activities and cognitive breaks improve academic achievement and behavioral engagement in EFL classrooms. The hypothesis proposed that students exposed to movement-integrated instruction would demonstrate significantly higher performance and engagement than those receiving traditional instruction.

Materials and Methods

A quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design was implemented with 60 students from grades 7–9, divided equally into experimental and control groups through stratified random sampling. The intervention lasted eight weeks during the 2024–2025 academic term, with two 40-minute sessions per week.

The experimental group received structured movement interventions, including: (a) five-minute movement warm-ups, (b) three- to five-minute cognitive breaks after 15 minutes of instruction, and (c) TPR-based grammar and vocabulary tasks. The control group received conventional instruction without physical or cognitive interruptions.

Data collection instruments included:

11. Observation Checklists assessing eye contact, participation, and task completion.
12. Academic Performance Tests evaluating vocabulary, grammar, and speaking.
13. Student Perception Surveys using Likert-scale responses.
14. Teacher Logs documenting implementation fidelity and student reactions.

Content validity was confirmed through expert review, and reliability measures included Cronbach's alpha values of .87 (tests) and .89 (survey), with inter-rater reliability of 92% for observations.

Results

The experimental group's mean score increased from 68 to 85 (+17), while the control group improved from 67 to 74 (+7). Independent-samples t-tests revealed statistically significant post-test differences favoring the experimental group ($p < .001$).

Behavioral engagement indicators also improved substantially in the experimental group: eye contact increased by 23%, participation by 30%, and task completion by 22%.

Survey findings indicated that 85% of students reported greater enjoyment, focus, and motivation through movement-based learning. Teacher logs consistently documented enhanced enthusiasm, stronger concentration, and improved classroom dynamics, though time management initially presented minor challenges.

Discussion

Findings support prior literature demonstrating that movement and cognitive breaks positively influence academic and behavioral outcomes (Donnelly et al., 2016; Jensen, 2013; Ratey, 2008). The significant improvement in the experimental group suggests that integrating structured physical activity supports language acquisition by enhancing attention, lowering anxiety, and improving memory consolidation.

These findings are particularly relevant in Ecuadorian educational contexts, where movement-based EFL research remains limited. The intervention's practicality and affordability make it especially useful for schools seeking innovative yet accessible pedagogical strategies.

Conclusions

Structured movement activities and cognitive breaks significantly improved EFL student performance, engagement, and motivation at La Escuela Javeriana de Loja. The study confirms that movement-integrated instruction is not merely motivational but pedagogically valuable. Incorporating TPR, energizers, and mindfulness into regular instruction can strengthen academic outcomes while fostering positive classroom environments.

Recommendations

Teachers should integrate short, intentional movement and cognitive breaks into EFL lessons. Educational institutions should provide professional development in neuroeducation and active pedagogy. Future research should explore larger samples, longer intervention periods, and technology-enhanced movement strategies.

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