

RELIGACIÓN

R E V I S T A

A proposal to use TPR and REALIA to enhance vocabulary acquisition in an EFL class

Una propuesta para utilizar TPR y REALIA para mejorar la adquisición de vocabulario en una clase de inglés como lengua extranjera

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the impact of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method and realia technique on vocabulary acquisition in an eighth-grade EFL class at Ejército Ecuatoriano Educational Unit. TPR, created by Dr. James Asher, is based on the idea that language acquisition is more effective when students engage in physical actions. Realia involves using real-life objects to facilitate language learning and understanding. This combination is helpful and fruitful, allowing young learners to acquire vocabulary differently from traditional methods. It is crucial for teachers to integrate these methods into their classes to make them enjoyable, interesting, dynamic, and participative. This means that students learn without feeling afraid, nervous, or shy; instead, they feel comfortable, integrated, confident, and motivated. The research uses a diagnostic test and a perception survey, employing mixed methods. The qualitative method provides a deep understanding by analyzing survey responses, while the quantitative method collects and analyzes numerical data. This combination boosts students' vocabulary acquisition, enhancing their ability to understand, communicate naturally, and improve long-term retention.

Keywords: method; vocabulary; acquisition.

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RESUMEN

Este estudio tiene como objetivo explorar el impacto del método de Respuesta Física Total (TPR) y la técnica realia en la adquisición de vocabulario en una clase de inglés como lengua extranjera de octavo grado de la Unidad Educativa Ejército Ecuatoriano. TPR, creado por el Dr. James Asher, se basa en la idea de que la adquisición del lenguaje es más efectiva cuando los estudiantes realizan acciones físicas. Realia implica el uso de objetos de la vida real para facilitar el aprendizaje y la comprensión de idiomas. Esta combinación es útil y fructífera, ya que permite a los jóvenes estudiantes adquirir vocabulario de forma diferente a los métodos tradicionales. Es crucial que los profesores integren estos métodos en sus clases para hacerlas agradables, interesantes, dinámicas y participativas. Esto significa que los estudiantes aprenden sin sentir miedo, nervios o timidez; en cambio, se sienten cómodos, integrados, seguros y motivados. La investigación utiliza una prueba diagnóstica y una encuesta de percepción, empleando métodos mixtos. El método cualitativo proporciona una comprensión profunda al analizar las respuestas de la encuesta, mientras que el método cuantitativo recopila y analiza datos numéricos. Esta combinación aumenta la adquisición de vocabulario de los estudiantes, mejorando su capacidad para comprender, comunicarse de forma natural y mejorar la retención a largo plazo.

Palabras clave: método; vocabulario; adquisición.

Introduction

In this globalized world, English is crucial for students to communicate as it provides access to a variety of personal, professional, and academic opportunities. According to Ilyosovna (2020), the importance of English cannot be overlooked and rejected given that it is the most common language spoken in the world. English is everywhere and it is part of people's daily lives. Minalla (2024) states that learning any language means growing one's vocabulary. Without a vocabulary, learning could not be possible. It involves more than just memorization of words; it also entails comprehension of words in relevant and realistic contexts.

In Ecuador, according to the Ministry of Education (2023), English is taught as a foreign language, in public schools, from the second year of basic education to the third year of Bachillerato, with three hours of English classes per week. Because of its importance, the institution states instructions for evaluation of this subject or area of knowledge with quantitative and qualitative scale. It means that the evaluation methods, instruments, and techniques are selected and applied based on the type of content that is addressed throughout the academic year. The Ministry of Education in accordance with the educational transformation process established in the Disposition Fifth Transition of Agreement No. MINEDUC-MINEDUC-2023-00063-A on seventh and tenth grade of Basic General Education and third year of Baccalaureate is applied a sub-level/level evaluation the following qualitative and quantitative scale for students scores, which was adapted using the information taken from the disposition.

Table 1. Ecuadorian qualitative and quantitative scale (2023).

Qualitative scale	Equivalence
To master the learning (DA)	9.00–10.00
To achieve the learning (AA)	7.00–8.99
Is near to reach the learning (PA)	4.01–6.99
Do not achieve the learning (NA)	Less than or equal to 4

Source: Own.

Considering my experience as an English teacher of eighth, ninth, and tenth grades, I have noticed that youngsters do not have strong enough bases of vocabulary; therefore, it is difficult for them to develop speaking, writing, listening, and reading skills. The lack of vocabulary that nowadays young students suffer is alarming, this lack of knowledge triggers many consequences.

Vocabulary is paramount when learning; it is the basis to understand different topics. A rich vocabulary acquisition leads to effective communication, critical thinking, and intellectual growth. It can open doors to multiple opportunities. It is pivotal to build strong bases; a rich vocabulary that allows learners to express their ideas, feelings, and thoughts accurately. Learning new words is often linked to expanding knowledge, also acquiring vocabulary allows individuals to comprehend in a better way ideas, conversations, and information; on the other hand, it reduces the chances of misunderstandings.

Vocabulary should be learned since students are little children but unfortunately, they did not accomplish it. Hence, it is considered absolutely important to teach children through engagement activities that help them stay motivated and activities that can improve their vocabulary acquisition, boosting their long-term retention. However, young learners, especially teenagers, often find it difficult to build a solid vocabulary foundation. They cannot read simple text, they cannot write simple sentences, they cannot listen for specific or general information, and they are afraid to speak, all of these factors are affected by the lack of vocabulary. English teachers usually employ several techniques to help students in learning vocabulary: translation, dictionaries, miming, videos, visuals, realia among others. However, the only way to enable children to acquire the massive amount of vocabulary they need is to build their knowledge.

Celik et al. (2021), state that the most crucial aspect of learning a language is expanding one's vocabulary. In addition to receiving adequate exposure to the language, one can also actively learn a language through organization and comprehension of its vocabulary. To be able to communicate in a language, one must possess a sufficient vocabulary because vocabulary facilitates communication.

Asher (1969), mentioned that he had completely done thirty and forty experiments searching the conditions where TPR functions best, finding the following amazing results. The use of TPR accelerates the speed of comprehension, through developing several physical actions, furthermore, language-body interaction produces an extraordinary acceleration to acquire and retain new vocabulary, the factors according to body language interaction are the following; position, concurrency, cue that refers to location and sequence. Asher (1972), confirms that an instructional strategy that produces high motivation, is based on the model of how children acquire their first language, for example, first children develop listening skill, although children are not able to speak many words but they understand what adults are talking about, they are able to understand when someone say or ask them something for example “pick up your red truck and bring it to me!”. It is important to highlight that listening is preceding by speaking skill and it is important do not force to students to speak, since speaking has to be naturally.

Er (2013), cites that games are the most relevant component of the teaching process to young learners, especially if they are active games. The most well-known one is Simon Says which can be adapted and applied to learn body words, action words, and students can touch objects. The teacher helps the students learn, identify and react to basic indications and signals used in the classroom, like hands up, stand up, sit down, wave goodbye, etc. Teachers can relate words using pictures so that students can learn and imitate them. Adjectives like big, happy, small, and sad are some of the examples. Learners love to imitate, the most common topics are occupations, animals, cars, weather, and other things. Through these kinds of activities, first learners listen, then comprehend, after that students determine if messages are right or wrong, and finally, they take appropriate action. Furthermore, Er (2023), states that it is allowed teachers use in their classes classroom objects like books, furniture, puppets, toys, etc.

Duan (2021), remarks that Total Physical Response (TPR) method, proposed by James J. Asher is a process that facilitates learning naturally and makes it more efficient by not forcing students to speak in a language they are not yet familiar with. In 1974 Asher mentioned that he had developed some experiments and he has proved that this method was not only for children, it triggered adult students to learn vocabulary, however, adults prefer to learn through listening and body movements. Celik et al. (2021), indicate that TPR is applied to learn a foreign or second language with the following process: firstly, the listening skills should be developed before speaking skills, and after children start to respond physically to their commands. Besides they remark that TPR is a language teaching approach that focuses on teaching language through physical activities, specifically speech and action coordination. TPR is related to the psychological term “tracking theory” which is a rote re-learning technique that consists of intensive verbal repetitions accompanied by physical activities.

If TPR refers to physical movements, realia involves the use of actual objects. Rahmayani (2022), states that realia are objects or have the form of objects, that could be used with learners to facilitate their comprehension, for example, books, chairs, flowers, newspapers, pen, stones and others objects that could be provided by students or teachers. Realia media is a visual tool

in the learning process that emphasizes providing direct experience to students. Moku (2022), mentions that realia is a learning that could be used to learn a second and foreign language. Real objects let students comprehend real-life situations and other cultures. With an appropriate use of realia, students are free to use their senses. Its use makes the learning process more retained and pleasurable. This helpful tool is used by foreign teachers to enhance the vocabulary acquisition of pupils triggering them to establish connections between ordinary words objects and the objects themselves.

Realia and TPR are a great combination since they significantly improve vocabulary learning. Children focus on movements and realia on media, so they acquire the language unconsciously- It reduces the stress of learning a language just like Krashen (1982), defines as Affective Filter Hypothesis. It explains how affective factors influence the process of learning a second or a foreign language. A high affective filter can impede language learning by preventing the learner from efficiently absorbing and remembering new language information. This filter can be brought on by anxiety, a lack of motivation, or negative attitudes. Conversely, a low affective filter, which is typified by high levels of motivation, confidence, and optimism, can facilitate language acquisition by fostering an environment that is conducive to learning.

Pacheco et al. (2022), developed an experimental study with young children from Manabí Ecuador. The results show that young children's motivation in EFL increased from an average of 8.00/10.00 which was reported in the pretest to 9.00/100 in the posttest. The maximum motivation level reported is 9.00/10.00 for 1 of the 35 participants which represents 1,50% of the intervention group. The authors demonstrate that the students effectively increased their vocabulary acquisition. Rozo (2019), carried out some observations in her classes and she realized that the learning environment was not appropriate because students preferred to do other things like doing other class work, playing, and talking to each other. These characteristics showed that they were not motivated enough to learn English. The teacher started implementing new vocabulary with songs and words with movements and the students started to participate and improve in their language acquisition.

Irfan et al. (2021), conducted a research in a private school in Malaysia because the students' ability to learn vocabulary was slow. They noticed that teachers taught vocabulary without using teaching aids, and they concluded that teachers needed a strategy to facilitate the students' learning. For that reason, they used realia to encourage and motivate the students learning. The students improved from 10% to 70%, which was the slowest obtained percentage and from 70% to 90% which was the highest percentage in the research. After using realia the results show that students' attention, enthusiasm, and learning vocabulary improve significantly.

The main objective of this study is to check how is the level of knowledge on vocabulary acquisition of students and how the combination of TPR and realia would have an impact in an EFL class with students of eighth grade, parallel "B" at Ejército Ecuatoriano Educational Unit.

Methodology

This diagnostic research intends to verify the vocabulary acquisition of students of eighth grade, parallel “B” at Ejército Ecuatoriano Educational Unit and how the TPR and realia would have an impact in EFL classes. For that reason, this diagnostic research was based on mixed methods. Onwuegbuzie (2004), states that mixed methods research is formally defined as the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, and concepts into a single study. Similarly, Creswell & Clark (2007), mention the overall purpose and central premise of mixed methods studies is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems and complex phenomena than either approach alone.

The researcher applied mixed methods. It was necessary to specify that the quantitative phase collected data on vocabulary acquisition through a diagnostic test about vocabulary; while the qualitative phase helped the researcher to provide a thorough analysis and a comprehensive view of the collected data to identify how vocabulary acquisition impact on students. Also, this proposal is based on pragmatics because it is a realistic approach that shows the truth at the time based on evidence.

Sayed (2021), says the explanatory sequential design has two different designs that are implemented. The quantitative is often common and the results are interpreted by numeric data after there is the qualitative design in which the collected data is analyzed to explain the different findings. Creswell (2003), also points out the purpose of an explanatory sequential design is often to use narrative data to explain or interpret numeric findings, especially those that are unexpected. This design provides a comprehensive understanding about the impact of the total physical response method and realia technique to enhance the acquisition of students’ vocabulary, the procedure is the following: A quantitative research was conducted to get a general view of the problem. Then, qualitative research was used to explain the quantitative results. Finally, qualitative analysis was needed to explain the general results.

Applying the qualitative method helped the researcher to provide a thorough analysis and a comprehensive view of the collected data to identify how vocabulary acquisition impacts on 23 students, (14 females, and 9 males), of eighth-grade parallel B at Ejército Ecuatoriano Educational Unit. First, the researcher asked the permission to the headmaster and also the coordinator of the English area to have the respective authorization to carry out the diagnostic research. Second, a consent letter was given to students to get the respective authorizations signed by their parents.

The diagnostic test was applied to students of eighth grade, parallel B. It had 13 questions; from 1 to 13, each question had four answers, except for question 11, which had 2 answers, giving a total of 50 correct answers for the whole diagnostic test. The topics were taken from the book “I know” which is currently being used by the students of this level. The topics were about family, sports, verbs, daily routines, and imperatives to know the level of vocabulary of students. Finally,

the perceptions survey which was composed of 4 open and closed questions, it was applied to students to know their point of view about the English and vocabulary acquisition importance, the activities that students like most, and to know if they would like the teacher use TPR and realia activities in the classes. This design provided a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the total physical response method and realia technique to enhance the acquisition of students' vocabulary.

Results

Instrument 1

Table 2 shows that 7 students, who represent the 30,43% of the population got a score between 0-4 in vocabulary acquisition. According to the Ecuadorian system school, students are in the qualitative scale of NA (table 1), which means that students did not achieve the required learning. It indicates that students have a low level of vocabulary that is not according to the grade they are. According to Xie (2021), TPR increases students' confidence and self-esteem, students feel safe when they follow instructions with their motor movements since the activities are simple to follow and comprehend. Students feel confident, and enthusiastic, the activities help them to improve their skills to interact with their classmates without any difficulties. Besides, Xie (2021), points out that TPR helps students to feel confident and participate freely even if they have a low level of vocabulary. Furthermore, Moku (2022), manifests that realia allows students to be free, enjoy the classes, and interact with their classmates making background connections. According to the opinion of these authors, TPR and realia are the most adequate to boost students who have low scores to excel in their vocabulary acquisition, the key is starting on building a strong self-esteem that helps them to interact with other people naturally; the enjoyable activities will let them move and participate actively, taking their experience to connect with the new learning activities.

Table 2. Results of the diagnostic vocabulary test.

Score	Students	Percentage	Qualitative score
0-2	0	0%	NA
3-4	7	30,43%	NA
5-6	15	65,22%	PA
7-8	1	4,35%	AA
9-10	0	0%	DA
TOTAL	23	100%	

Note: Data collected by author on the 21st of March 2024.

The results in table 2 indicate 15 students, who represented 65,22% of the population got a score between 5-6 in vocabulary acquisition. In agreement with the Ecuadorian system school, students are in the qualitative scale of PA (table 1), which means that students are near to achieve the required learning. Abdalla (2024) specifies that vocabulary is paramount when students are learning a new language for that reason is essential that educators apply TPR and realia activities to improve the students' vocabulary acquisition. The collected results indicated that the majority of students have a limited vocabulary and it has not allowed them to develop their understanding. There is an evident necessity to implement meaningful activities that could help students enhance their vocabulary acquisition and guide them to expand their comprehension skills and communication abilities to overcome their difficulties. TPR and realia activities could help them in the learning process to enhance their comprehension skills and communication abilities.

The gathered results indicate that only 1 student, who represents the 4,35% of the population got a score between 7-8 in vocabulary acquisition. Following the Ecuadorian system school, one student is in the qualitative scale of AA (table 1) which means that only one achieved the required learning. The collected data in the graph bar have shown that 0 students of the population got a score between 9-10 in vocabulary acquisition and in concordance with the Ecuadorian system school, any student is in the qualitative scale of DA (table 1) nobody of them have mastered the required learning. Celik et al. (2021) agree it is required to have enough vocabulary to be able to express a language to improve communication, comprehend, and use it. Having clear the situation educators should design and apply TPR and realia activities to increase the vocabulary acquisition of students. Vocabulary is fundamental to develop the students' communication skills.

Instrument 2

The perception survey was composed by 4 questions. It was an anonymous survey to give the chance to students to answer sincerely. The total population was 23 students. This perception survey was applied in Spanish, which is the students' mother tongue, to have a better understanding of the questions and they can express their answers freely.

Table 3. Results of the perception survey.

Criteria	YES	NO
Do you think English is important?	100%	0%
Do you think vocabulary is important to speak and write? Why?	100%	0%
Considering your current learning preferences and experiences, do you believe incorporating TPR and realia into our vocabulary lessons would positively impact your motivation and interest in learning new words? Why?	100%	0%

Note: Data collected by author on the 21st of March 2024.

Table 4. Results of the perceptions survey.

Criteria	Games	Pictures	Movement	Real objects	Book
Mark two options. Which of these methods or techniques would you like your teacher apply to teach vocabulary?	82,6%	17,4%	30,4%	69,6%	0,0%

Note: Data collected by author on the 21st of March 2024.

In question number (table 3) one the collected results indicated that 23 students, who represented the 100% of students think that English is important. Ilyosovna (2020), says that it is the language most used, its value cannot be ignored or rejected. Nowadays, English means not only communication, also it is an open door to a world of opportunities, innovation, technological breakthroughs, science, employment opportunities, education, investment, culture, etc. To sum up, English globally means the combination of historical, political, economic, and cultural factors.

In question number two (table 3), the gathered data show that 100% of students think vocabulary is important to speak and write. One student said is important to understand information that is sometimes in English. Ten students agreed that is important for the communication and understanding of English classes. Furthermore, 11 students commented that vocabulary is pivotal to travel to other countries and understand foreign people. Alam (2023), says that productive vocabulary is the words that students can comprehend and pronounce accurately such as speaking and writing in a proper and correct time, for that is essential students expand their vocabulary terms to use and distinguish them from basic vocabulary while they are speaking and writing. Improving productive skills means that students will emphasize learning new words and terms to improve their understanding, facilitating their communication skills to share their ideas and thoughts more effectively to achieve success.

In question number three (table 3), the results specify the techniques that students would like the teacher to apply in class. Each student chose two techniques. 17,4% of students chose pictures, 30,4% chose movements, 69,6 chose real objects, 82,6% chose games, and nobody chose a book as a technique of learning. Er (2013), manifests that the teacher adopts a parent role by playing games, establishing routines, and providing cues, to which the pupil physically reacts. Similar to how a parent would, the teacher gives positive feedback for the right response. This helps to solidify the lessons learned and motivates more action. Despite its strength, TPR works best when it is combined with games, songs, stories, or demonstrations. Games are the most popular among young students, they love active games such as Simon says. It can be used with body vocabulary, and action words and learners can touch objects. Er (2013), states that teachers can use TPR in every class, it is used with gestures like stand up, sit down, waving good-bye, and raising hands, it is common to associate words with pictures to imitate them, for example, big, happy, small, sad. It should be kept in mind that they love to mime professions, animals, vehicles, weather conditions,

etc. Students listen and understand, and determine if they are correct or not to after mimic them. Er (2013), mentions that teachers can use common classroom objects such as books, toys, puppets, and furniture. The use of games, realia, gestures, and movement activities are the preferred ones by students, when students are developing these activities, they feel highly motivated, these activities engage students to enhance their vocabulary acquisition, improve memory retention, reduce anxiety, promote participation, and improve self-esteem.

In question number four (table 3), 23 students, who represented the 100% of students agree that TPR and realia would have a positive impact on their motivation and interest in learning new words. Celik et al. (2021), mention that the main purpose of the Total Physical Response method is to motivate and engage students reducing their stress during the language acquisition process. According with Fitri Ana Rahmayani (2022), quotes that realia media is a visual tool used for learning that works providing direct experience to students. To teach vocabulary to students who have low level is indispensable to start teaching them vocabulary using TPR and realia so that make it easier the students understanding, when students develop these kinds of activities; they feel relaxed and motivated in class. They actively participate and engage in the learning using different activities. These activities can be applied in every class without difficulties.

Discussion

The findings in the diagnostic test of learning vocabulary and English language proficiency were the following. 100 % of students confirmed that English and its relevance is important in their lives. Additionally, 100% of students are aware that English is important to speak and write, it means that every student realizes that vocabulary is paramount and pivotal for personal, professional, and social benefits. Vocabulary is the first thing that should be learned, and a good vocabulary level helps to emphasize effective communication. These results highlight the importance of language proficiency. It plays a crucial role in the globalized world because English is the most common language spoken in the world. English is essential in different aspects of life such as communication, education, employment, cultural understanding, access to information, social integration, technology, scientific inventions, and so on.

Additionally, 100% of students said they would like the teacher to apply TPR and realia activities in class because these are active and interesting techniques that keep students motivated to acquire new vocabulary naturally. Furthermore, it was given to students 4 options that contains activities for learning English vocabulary, so they had to choose two of them. The ones that they would like their teacher use in class, obtaining the following results: 82,6% of students preferred games. Games keep students motivated, to improve self-esteem, to increase participation, to reduce stress and anxiety, to make the learning more enjoyable, to establish a dynamic, participative and collaborative environment, the use of games make learning more engaging. On the other hand, 69,6 of students chose real objects as a tool for learning vocabulary. Realia triggers a better understanding, by observation and touching, students create connections making the learning

more meaningful and improving their retention. 30,4% selected movement activities, learning vocabulary with movements motivates and promotes participation and collaboration. It improves retention to make the learning more valuable. Besides, it enhances the coordination hand-eye to reduce depression, and to stay motivated into the learning process. 17,4% of students liked pictures. The use of pics help students to establish a connection with their previous experiences, to improve attention, to stimulate retention memory, to make vocabulary learning more enjoyable and interesting.

These results show that using TPR and realia in vocabulary lessons are effective learning tools that promote students' interests and learning preferences. Teachers can create dynamic and stimulating learning environments to increase student motivation and engagement by implementing several techniques that keep them interested and motivated. They must establish connections between their experiences and the new vocabulary, collaborative and participative activities. Through the use of TPR, students can learn vocabulary through physical actions. Here students associate words with movements to make easy to remember them. Similarly, the use of realia can enhance vocabulary learning and facilitate understanding.

Furthermore, students are conscious how TPR and realia might impact in their vocabulary acquisition. They understand the importance of hands-on and interactive learning opportunities that provide more engaging, memorable and enjoying experiences. Teachers can develop activities which help to create a dynamic learning environment where students are actively involved in learning vocabulary by incorporating TPR and realia into their vocabulary instruction. Here are some ideas to use with TPR and realia.



The findings, in summary, TPR and realia support that would be successful and beneficial for students to implement this perfect and interactive combination into vocabulary learning process. These approaches would help to teachers and students to be proficient in vocabulary acquisition.

Conclusion

Given that the majority of students of eighth grade parallel B at Ejército Ecuatoriano Educational Unit got a low-level vocabulary acquisition between 5/10 and 6 /10, teachers should change their teaching techniques to persuade and motivate students to enhance their vocabulary acquisition. The lack of vocabulary is a learning barrier and students do not improve their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

The findings of the research provide a valuable contribution regarding to the use of TPR and realia to enhance vocabulary among students. The importance of English and vocabulary is evident because they facilitate the communication for professional, and personal contexts. Moreover, the results indicate the students' preferences for instructional methods in vocabulary acquisition, revealing a strong inclination towards activities related with physical movements and real objects. This preference suggests that students are more motivated and engaged when learning through hands-on experiences. Additionally, the expressed interest in movement-based activities aligns with TPR method, which integrate actions, movements involve students in a natural way due to it activates the participation and facilitates de comprehension and deeper understanding of vocabulary.

The benefits of TPR and realia techniques for vocabulary instruction are numerous because this combination helps to increase the students' self-esteem being confident at the same time, they are learning new vocabulary. Furthermore, the positive response from students regarding the potential impact of TPR and realia on their motivation is because this is a perfect and practical fusion technique; both include activities that are practical and linked to as a natural process of learning a foreign language. Students enjoy the activities because they reduce their level of stress and nervousity, improve the memory retention, facilitate the communication, and foster the collaboration. Also, it is important to mention that they are useful for everybody, there is not a limit of age.

In conclusion, the findings of the research are helpful for all students who have struggled in learning vocabulary and for those ones that are interested in learning a foreign language. The combination of TPR and realia help students to acquire vocabulary easily through meaningful activities, and teachers to keep their students motivated and actived to learn.

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Statement

Conflict of Interest

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