



THE ROLE OF TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE (TPR) IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract

This article investigates the effectiveness of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in teaching English to young learners. Grounded in the connection between movement and language, TPR mimics natural language acquisition processes in children. The study assesses how TPR influences vocabulary development, classroom engagement, and memory retention. Findings confirm that TPR significantly improves learning outcomes for young learners, especially in environments requiring interactive and multisensory approaches.

Keywords: TPR, young learners, English teaching, kinesthetic method, language acquisition

Introduction

Language acquisition in early childhood differs significantly from adult learning processes. Young learners typically benefit from interactive, engaging, and context-driven instruction. Traditional grammar-translation methods fail to meet the developmental needs of children, leading to disengagement and poor retention. In contrast, Total Physical Response (TPR), a method developed by James Asher in the 1970s, supports learning by involving the body in the learning process through commands and physical actions.

TPR is based on the premise that language learning is enhanced when learners physically respond to verbal input. This kinesthetic approach mirrors the way



infants acquire their first language—through observation, repetition, and physical association. Especially for young English learners, TPR reduces anxiety, increases motivation, and fosters a deeper cognitive connection with language. This article aims to explore the pedagogical significance of TPR in primary school English classrooms, its cognitive basis, and practical benefits in terms of vocabulary acquisition, motivation, and class engagement.

Methodology

Research Design : This research employed a quasi-experimental design with qualitative and quantitative elements. Two elementary schools in Tashkent were selected for the study, and 60 students aged 6 to 9 were divided into experimental and control groups.

Participants: Experimental Group: 30 students taught using TPR methods
Control Group: 30 students taught using conventional methods (e.g., textbook reading, repetition, grammar focus)

Procedure: The study spanned 8 weeks. The experimental group was exposed to TPR-based lessons, emphasizing action verbs and commands (e.g., "stand up", "sit down", "touch your nose") paired with physical movement. Lesson plans incorporated storytelling with actions, role-playing, and interactive songs. **Data Collection:** Pre- and post-tests to measure vocabulary acquisition. Observation checklists to assess engagement levels. Teacher interviews to evaluate classroom dynamics. Student feedback collected via smiley charts and simple reflective drawing tasks.

Results:

Quantitative and qualitative data analysis yielded the following results:
Vocabulary Retention : Experimental group improved from a pre-test average of 45% to 89% post-test . Control group improved from 43% to 69%

Student Engagement: 87% of the TPR group consistently participated in class activities, compared to 56% in the control group Observations showed fewer behavioral issues and more positive peer interaction in TPR classrooms



Motivation and Confidence: 92% of TPR students expressed they "liked" or "loved" English lessons. Teachers noted improved pronunciation and willingness to speak aloud in class

Discussion

TPR offers a powerful alternative to traditional language teaching, especially for young learners who thrive in physical, play-based environments. The results affirm that associating words with movements strengthens memory and makes abstract language concepts concrete.

Research aligns with the theories of Gardner's Multiple Intelligences and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which stress the importance of reducing anxiety and engaging different learning styles. TPR not only fosters a dynamic learning environment but also aligns with child developmental psychology, where movement is a fundamental mode of expression and cognition.

Despite its effectiveness, TPR is not a standalone solution for all language skills. It works best in early stages for vocabulary and simple sentence structures. As learners progress, TPR should be integrated with storytelling, content-based instruction, and project-based learning for holistic development.

Conclusion:

Total Physical Response (TPR) plays a crucial role in English language education for young learners. It enables natural language acquisition, promotes active participation, and fosters a joyful classroom atmosphere. By linking movement and meaning, TPR bridges cognitive and emotional aspects of learning.

Educators are encouraged to use TPR regularly in early-stage English teaching, especially when teaching vocabulary, classroom commands, and common expressions. Its simplicity, cost-effectiveness, and compatibility with child-centered pedagogy make it an indispensable tool for primary educators.

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