
APPLICATION OF THE TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE METHOD IN LEARNING ENGLISH IN EARLY CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the importance of applying the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in English learning for early childhood and highlights the crucial role of parents in supporting its implementation at home. TPR is a language teaching method that connects verbal input with physical movement, allowing children to acquire language naturally through action, imitation, and play. In early childhood education, TPR effectively enhances listening comprehension, vocabulary retention, and active participation, aligning with children's holistic developmental characteristics physical, cognitive, social, and emotional. By reducing anxiety and increasing motivation, TPR creates a joyful and meaningful learning environment where children learn English through experience rather than memorization. English is used often in daily life and has a variety of uses, including in business, education, tourism, and health. Students' English proficiency needs to be raised because, being an international language, English is used in many sciences. Therefore, communicating well in English is advantageous, even in the workplace. In this instance, the proper approach is required to aid in developing and introducing English, especially in the early years. Total Physical Response (TPR) Method application in English Learning is one of the most appropriate and effective for being applied in teaching and learning process in the classroom. Total Physical Response (TPR) is one of the most suitable and relevant strategies for introducing an object in English language learning. The Total Physical Response (TPR) method encourages young children to learn English actively.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most common languages spoken around the world is English. English for early childhood is complicated for teachers to teach as a foreign language (Copland et al., 2014). In this situation, the instructor is expected to constantly develop inventive and new ways to engage the class's attention during learning exercises so that the pupils can comprehend the subject being taught. Even if it is only used for greetings or farewells, such as "Good morning" or "How are you?" "See you," "goodbye," and other similar expressions using foreign languages as everyday language is nothing new in Indonesia. Additionally, simple vocabulary introduces English to early children, typically words related to colours, body parts, and motions.

Speaking about English language acquisition in early children is undoubtedly tricky because teaching English to early children differs from teaching English to adults (Kuhar, 2021). Therefore, teaching English to youngsters requires much patience from the teacher. Language learning in early childhood is a complex developmental process influenced by physical, cognitive, emotional, and social factors (Shan-shan, 2017). At this age, children learn most effectively through concrete experiences by doing, imitating, and moving. Teaching English as a foreign language in early childhood therefore requires methods that are interactive, engaging, and developmentally appropriate (Ramirez & Campuzano, 2021). Total Physical Response (TPR) is a language teaching method developed by Dr. James J. Asher in the late 1960s and formally introduced in his seminal work *Learning Another Language Through Actions* (1977) (Abebe et al., 2021).

The method emphasizes the link between language and physical movement. It is built on the idea that language learning is most effective when it involves bodily actions in response to verbal commands (Diana et al., 2022). In TPR, the teacher gives instructions in the target language (e.g., English), and students respond by performing physical actions that demonstrate comprehension (Risnawati & Nuraeni, 2019).

This kinesthetic involvement allows learners to absorb vocabulary and structure subconsciously, similar to how children learn their first language through listening, observing, and responding before they start to speak (Khairma & Suryana, 2019). Asher defines TPR as "a language teaching method built around the coordination of speech and action; it attempts to teach language through physical (motor) activity." (Sodikin & Gumiandari, 2021). Thus, TPR is not merely about moving; it is a neurolinguistic strategy designed to accelerate comprehension, lower affective barriers, and facilitate long-term memory through bodily involvement. The concept of TPR integrates theories from several disciplines psychology,

linguistics, and neurology to explain why movement supports language learning.

From a behaviorist perspective, learning occurs through stimulus response associations, such as:

1. In TPR, the teacher's command acts as the stimulus.
2. The learner's physical action is the response.
3. Through repetition and reinforcement, language comprehension becomes automatic.

This repetitive association strengthens memory and builds fluency without conscious grammar analysis. According to Piaget (1952) and Bruner (1966), early learners acquire knowledge through active engagement with their environment. Physical activity enhances cognitive processing because it connects abstract language with concrete experiences (Tran et al., 2020). In TPR, when children "jump," "run," or "touch their nose," they form mental links between the word, action, and sensory feedback an integrated cognitive process that deepens understanding (Sanfo & Malgoubri, 2021).

The Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) argues that emotional states influence language acquisition. A relaxed, enjoyable learning environment lowers the affective filter, allowing for greater input absorption (Celik et al., 2021). TPR reduces anxiety by removing pressure to speak early, letting learners participate successfully through movement first. The result is natural confidence and motivation.

TPR engages both hemispheres of the brain (Husanović, 2022):

1. The left hemisphere processes language (verbal input).
2. The right hemisphere controls movement and spatial awareness.

The simultaneous activation of both sides strengthens neural connections, facilitating longterm retention and automatic recall of vocabulary. Total Physical Response (TPR), a technique, can foster a positive learning environment for kids while also catering to their natural love of movement (Aprinawati, 2017).

TPR is a language teaching approach that focuses on the coordination of speech and action and attempts to teach language through physical (motor) activity, according to Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers in their book. Professor of psychology at the University of San Jose in San Jose, California, USA, Dr. James J. Asher developed TPR (Ummah & Wafi, 2017). As defined by Larsen and Freeman, TPR is the understanding approach or strategy of learning a foreign language using instructions or orders.

According to Fahrurrozi & Hamdi, (2017), the TPR technique emphasises command instructions for the teacher to utilise and is simple for the pupils to grasp because it uses body movements. Early children can learn and grasp a language using this TPR approach by

connecting orders, actions, speech, and motion. Students can reply verbally as well as nonverbally by making physical gestures.

METHOD RESEARCH

With a case study methodology, this research employs a specific sort of library research. This library research strategy tries to develop a thorough awareness of the challenges researchers encounter while collecting data. First, researchers' research papers were used to gather the data for this study. This article aims to aid instructors, make their jobs simpler, make it easier for them to teach English, and foster a positive learning environment. The findings from quantitative research can be predictive, explanatory, and confirming. As for the implementation, we use surveys, lectures, and mentoring methods. The details are explained below:

1. The observation method was used to learn the teacher's understanding of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method for learning basic English in early childhood.
2. Lecture method, outreach, and training methods regarding the Total Physical Response (TPR) method for Basic English learning for early childhood.
3. Assistance method for ongoing activities in applying the Total Physical Response (TPR) method for Basic English learning for early childhood. The training material, in general, includes understanding the theory and applying the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in the class.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Early childhood is a period of rapid physical and psychological growth and development for each young individual. According to Hartanti, early childhood is characterised by a variety of traits, including having a strong sense of curiosity, having a distinct personality, enjoying imitation, having a vivid imagination, enjoying exploration, having the most significant learning potential, displaying egotism, and being a social being (Asher, 1969). Early childhood has a distinct personality in terms of growth and development, particularly when learning English (Astri, 2018).

As a result, engaging teaching strategies are required for their learning process. According to Permendikbud No. 146 of 2014, "a child's success in achieving optimal development according to their characteristics, interests, and potential will depend on the right learning approach in early childhood." As a result, we must use the TPR method, which will help students comprehend the teacher's instructions and enable them to respond while learning English (Arumsari et al., 2019).

Exposing young children to languages other than their mother tongue, especially English, is crucial. Children can communicate more efficiently and gain the worldwide knowledge they need to succeed in life if they use English. The introduction of this basic vocabulary with a stronger focus on the correct pronunciation of English words and their writing forms the foundation for teaching English to early children (AUD).

In PAUD, learning English is packaged using engaging and enjoyable teaching techniques like games, which are adjusted to the student's developmental stage and the tenets of early childhood education, namely learning through play. In this study, the teachers and students were socialisation participants and questionnaire panellists about the Total Physical Response (TPR) method for essential English learning for early childhood and implementing training activities for applying the Total Physical Response method. (TPR) for essential English learning for early childhood. It can provide additional knowledge about learning methods in teaching and learning in the classroom (Mohan et al., 2022).

Core Principles of Total Physical Response (TPR) The Total Physical Response (TPR) method operates based on several interrelated principles that reflect how humans naturally acquire language (Sari et al., 2022). These principles are not merely instructional techniques but represent psychological and linguistic insights into how comprehension, memory, and behavior interact in language learning.

The following description outlines the fundamental concepts that form the pedagogical foundation of TPR.

1. Comprehension Before Production. One of the most essential principles of TPR is that understanding comes before speaking. This idea mirrors the natural process of first language acquisition in children, who typically listen to thousands of utterances before they begin to speak. In the TPR classroom, learners are not pressured to produce words or sentences immediately. Instead, they are encouraged to listen attentively and demonstrate their understanding through actions. This approach allows children to internalize the sounds, rhythms, and meanings of English without anxiety. It respects their "silent period," during which they acquire language subconsciously through exposure and physical response (Andrade et al., 2018). When they are ready, speaking emerges naturally as a result of strong comprehension.
2. Learning Through Physical Response. TPR emphasizes the integration of speech and action. Language input is always accompanied by physical movement that represents meaning. When a teacher says, "Stand up," "Jump," or "Touch your head," students respond by performing the corresponding actions. This physical response reinforces

understanding by linking verbal commands to bodily experience. Movement transforms abstract words into concrete experiences, which are easier for young children to grasp and remember. It also helps create multi-sensory learning, engaging the auditory (listening), visual (seeing gestures), and kinesthetic (moving) senses simultaneously.

3. **Stress-Free and Enjoyable Learning Environment.** Another core principle of TPR is the creation of a low-anxiety, enjoyable atmosphere. Traditional language learning often causes stress because learners fear making mistakes. TPR removes this fear by focusing on comprehension and participation rather than correctness. Learners are not forced to speak until they feel confident. The use of games, songs, and playful commands makes the classroom a safe space where mistakes are part of the learning process. This enjoyable experience lowers the “affective filter” a concept proposed by Stephen Krashen (1982) allowing children to absorb language more effectively.
4. **Use of Imperative Sentences.** TPR instruction primarily employs imperative forms short, direct commands such as “Sit down,” “Open your book,” “Clap your hands.” This linguistic structure serves as an effective vehicle for beginners because it provides clear, immediate meaning that can be physically demonstrated. Imperatives allow the teacher to control the flow of the lesson, guide actions, and check comprehension simultaneously. Over time, learners internalize grammatical structures (such as verbs and pronouns) naturally, without explicit explanation. The frequent repetition of these commands also builds automaticity and fluency in understanding English instructions.
5. **Repetition and Variation.** Repetition is a vital aspect of TPR because it helps learners consolidate memory. However, repetition is always combined with variation to maintain engagement and cognitive challenge. For instance, after practicing the command “Touch your nose,” the teacher may combine it with “Touch your ears,” “Touch your head,” or mix commands in rapid succession. This unpredictable sequence keeps children alert and attentive, transforming repetition into an exciting activity. Repetition with variation ensures both accuracy and flexibility in language comprehension.
6. **Active and Playful Learning.** TPR integrates play as an essential part of learning. Playful commands, role-playing, and action songs engage children’s imagination and curiosity. Through play, learners use language in joyful and spontaneous ways, which enhances emotional connection and long-term retention. Movement-based learning also aligns with the developmental needs of young children, who naturally express themselves through motion, imitation, and interaction. The active nature of TPR

supports not only linguistic growth but also physical coordination, social bonding, and emotional regulation.

7. Teacher as a Model and Facilitator. In TPR, the teacher plays a dual role as both a model and a facilitator. Initially, the teacher demonstrates each command with exaggerated gestures, helping children associate words with actions. As comprehension increases, the teacher gradually reduces modeling, encouraging students to perform independently or take leadership by giving commands to their peers. This shift from teacher-centered to student-centered activity fosters autonomy, confidence, and peer learning. The teacher remains an active observer, ensuring safety, enthusiasm, and correct understanding throughout the process.

The TPR approach is appropriate for the following activities: The child's learning style or type is firstly related to TPR. Since they have a lot of energy and short attention spans, kids need to move about a lot. Children frequently engage with their surroundings and strongly need tangible, real-world objects. Secondly, games are TPR activities, so they are appropriate for kids who learn best physically. When they are exercising or connecting memories to motion, they are better able to remember knowledge. The TPR method can also be helpful for kids who prefer to learn visually and produce images or videos by focusing on the movements associated with the spoken commands.

The words and rhythm of the song, along with the motions that the kid will remember when a song follows the TPR method, can assist children with an auditory learning type in addition to those with a kinesthetic learning approach. Early childhood learning concepts must be used when applying the TPR method to this age group.

For young children learning English, Total Physical Response is used with concrete materials, such as dollhouses, images, and natural settings. The Total Physical Response approach is implemented through enjoyable playtime activities, particularly motor games that encourage youngsters to move around. Early childhood English vocabulary will be introduced by the child's everyday activities and the theme. Nouns, verbs, and pronouns are among the English words that can be taught to young learners using the TPR approach so that the vocabulary can be introduced to the media and motions as directed by the teacher. The use of the TPR (Total Physical Response) technique to teach English to children offers a great deal of potential for helping them understand the language they are learning, whether it be English or a foreign language.

The TPR method can be used to teach English as a second language to young learners. It has several advantages for them, including increasing their vocabulary, assisting

them in understanding the target language or English right away, helping them learn meaning in context, making learning more enjoyable for them, involving them directly in the learning process, and stimulating their interest in learning.

The following is an example of application in teaching English, such as: This is a great game to hone students' activeness in learning in terms of remembering. Simon said that to do something, you have to do it the teacher, when in the classroom, usually asks all students to stand up to start. Throughout the game, students are asked to sit down if they missed a question, answered incorrectly, or answered when they should not. This game helps review vocabulary from a previous lesson or at the end of a tricky lesson. This game is also a practical activity to make it easier for students to remember something they did. The teacher gives orders to students, and students respond to the teacher by carrying out the orders. For example, the teacher tells students to close the door, point at the door, or walk to the door. Furthermore, when students understand the instructions given by the teacher better, the teacher can give longer orders.

For example: 1) Take out a pencil. 2) Get out the coloured pencils and eraser. 3) Grab a picture book. 4) Draw a house. 5) Colour the picture. 6) A series of commands is a series of actions or operations.

The success of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in teaching English to young learners lies in its wide range of interactive, kinesthetic, and playful activities that transform linguistic input into meaningful physical experience. These activities are designed to engage children's senses, stimulate memory, and build comprehension through movement, imitation, and repetition. In early childhood education, TPR activities are not limited to simple commands; they evolve into a structured yet playful sequence that includes games, songs, storytelling, and daily routines. Each type of activity serves a specific pedagogical function and addresses various aspects of children's development linguistic, physical, cognitive, social, and emotional Command-Based Activities.

At the core of TPR are command-based exercises, in which teachers give clear, simple instructions in English, and children respond through actions. This type of activity emphasizes the comprehension of imperatives and the connection between language and motion. Examples: "Stand up," "Sit down," "Open your book," "Point to the window," "Jump three times." The teacher gives several commands in sequence, gradually increasing speed or complexity.

Pedagogical Purpose: 1) Builds foundational vocabulary related to actions and classroom objects. 2) Encourages active participation and immediate feedback. 3) Trains

listening skills and short-term memory through auditory input and physical output. Command-based tasks are especially effective at the beginning stages of English learning, where children focus on understanding and reacting rather than producing speech. Action Games are a vital component of TPR because they transform repetition into enjoyable learning experiences.

In action games, learners perform movements based on the teacher's or leader's verbal cues. These games combine fun, movement, and competition in a positive and inclusive way. Common TPR Games: 1. Simon Says: The classic TPR game where children must only follow commands if preceded by "Simon says." For example, "Simon says, touch your ears!" This game improves listening accuracy and attention. 2. Follow the Leader: Children imitate the teacher's or another child's actions while listening to English commands. 3. Do What I Say, Not What I Do: The teacher says one action but performs another, encouraging children to listen carefully instead of relying on visual cues. 4. Action Bingo: Each child has a bingo card with pictures of actions. When the teacher calls out an action, they perform it and mark their card.

Pedagogical Purpose: 1) Develops concentration, self-control, and auditory discrimination. 2) Promotes cooperative learning and group interaction. 3) Reinforces vocabulary retention through meaningful repetition and physical response. Songs and Rhymes with Movements Songs are an integral part of TPR because they combine language, rhythm, melody, and physical action.

Children naturally respond to music and enjoy performing gestures or movements that match the lyrics: Examples of TPR Songs: 1) "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes" (teaches body parts). 2) "If You're Happy and You Know It" (teaches verbs like clap, stomp, shout). 3) "The Hokey Pokey" (introduces directional language: left, right, in, out). 4) "Baby Shark" (integrates family vocabulary with actions).

Pedagogical Purpose: 1) Reinforces pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation naturally. 2) Builds aural memory through repetitive song lyrics. 3) Encourages group participation and emotional expression. 4) Provides a multi-sensory experience that enhances both linguistic and musical intelligence. Storytelling with Actions Story-based TPR activities allow children to act out narratives while listening to English stories. Teachers narrate a story using expressive gestures and encourage learners to mimic or dramatize key actions.

Examples: 1) Acting out "Goldilocks and the Three Bears": children mimic sleeping, eating, or walking actions. 2) Retelling "The Very Hungry Caterpillar": learners mime eating

fruits or transforming into a butterfly. 3) "Going on a Bear Hunt": children imitate wading through rivers, climbing hills, or tiptoeing quietly.

Pedagogical Purpose: 1) Enhances listening comprehension and imagination. 2) Connects language with emotional and contextual meaning. 3) Encourages creative expression through dramatization. 4) Builds sequential thinking and narrative understanding. Storytelling in TPR is not just linguistic it is experiential learning that integrates cognitive and affective growth. Role-Play and Simulation As learners become more confident, TPR can evolve into simple role-play or simulation activities, where children use English expressions in pretend contexts.

The teacher can guide them through short, repetitive dialogues reinforced with movement or props. Examples: 1) Playing "At the Market": using expressions like "Give me an apple, please," while miming shopping actions. 2) "At the Doctor's Office": acting out checking temperature, coughing, or taking medicine. 3) "In the Classroom": pretending to be the teacher giving commands, such as "Stand up," "Show me your book."

Pedagogical Purpose: 1) Encourages communicative use of English beyond simple commands. 2) Fosters social interaction and turn-taking. 3) Promotes imaginative thinking while reinforcing previously learned vocabulary. Role-play activities reflect the transition from comprehension to production, marking progress in the learners' language development. Classroom Routine Integration TPR can be seamlessly woven into daily classroom routines, allowing children to experience English as part of their environment rather than a separate subject.

Teachers can use English commands during regular activities so that children naturally associate language with real actions. 1) "Line up, please." 2) "Wash your hands." 3) "Clean up your toys." 4) "Let's go outside." Pedagogical Purpose: 1) Reinforces functional English vocabulary used in authentic contexts. 2) Develops children's understanding of instructional language. 3) Creates a consistent language-rich environment throughout the school day. When used consistently, TPR-based routines make English learning continuous and spontaneous, not limited to formal lesson time.

Object and Picture-Based Activities To introduce new vocabulary such as nouns or adjectives, teachers can use real objects (realia) or picture cards combined with physical actions. Examples: 1) Teacher shows an apple and says, "Show me the apple!". 2) Students point, hold, or pass the object as instructed. 3) Using picture cards: "Touch the dog," "Find something red," "Pick up the ball."

Pedagogical Purpose: 1) Builds associations between visual symbols and verbal input. 2) Strengthens categorization skills (colors, animals, shapes, etc.). 3) Enhances fine and gross motor coordination. This approach allows teachers to integrate visual literacy with kinesthetic learning, which is especially beneficial for children with varying learning styles. TPR-Based Assessment Activities Evaluation in TPR can also take the form of activity-based assessment, emphasizing comprehension rather than written tests. Teachers can observe how well learners respond to English commands and follow instructions correctly.

Examples: 1) Giving multi-step commands: "Touch your head, then jump twice, then clap your hands." 2) Observation checklists to record each child's response accuracy and enthusiasm.

Pedagogical Purpose: 1) Provides authentic, formative assessment of listening comprehension. 2) Encourages learners to demonstrate understanding naturally without stress. 3) Helps teachers identify progress and adapt instruction accordingly. Creative Movement and Choreographed Drills In addition to games and songs, teachers can create short movement sequences or dances that follow English commands or vocabulary themes.

Examples: 1) A "morning warmup" dance using commands such as stretch, jump, shake, turn around. 2) Movement drills to review vocabulary categories like animals ("Fly like a bird," "Hop like a frog") or transportation ("Drive a car," "Sail a boat").

Pedagogical Purpose: 1) Supports physical development and coordination. 2) Reinforces verb comprehension through full-body movement. 3) Promotes group rhythm and social cohesion. This creative integration of movement and language deepens memory retention while supporting physical growth appropriate for early childhood education. The TPR method mirrors the natural process of first language acquisition. When learning their first language, children listen, observe, and respond physically long before they start speaking.

Similarly, TPR emphasizes listening comprehension before verbal production, giving children time to understand English commands and vocabulary comfortably and confidently. Movement reinforces memory. When children act out words physically, the combination of auditory (hearing), visual (seeing), and kinesthetic (moving) elements creates a multi-sensory learning experience. This strengthens neural connections in the brain, making vocabulary easier to remember and recall. For example: When children jump while hearing "Jump," or clap while hearing "Clap your hands," their bodies "record" the meaning through motion. Research shows that TPR enhances long-term retention of language because it involves physical participation and emotional engagement.

TPR integrates language, movement, and play, fulfilling the holistic needs of early childhood physical, cognitive, emotional, and social. Through TPR activities, children not only learn English but also develop coordination, memory, social interaction, and self-confidence. In early childhood classrooms, maintaining attention can be challenging. TPR solves this by alternating between calm and active phases through interactive commands.

The method keeps children focused, responsive, and disciplined while learning language implicitly. Commands like “Stand up,” “Sit down,” or “Raise your hands” not only teach language but also help manage classroom behavior in a fun way. By linking comprehension and action, children develop the ability to understand contextual meaning and later express themselves verbally. TPR provides a solid base for communicative language teaching as children begin to use English naturally in daily contexts. The most effective TPR learning occurs when teachers and parents collaborate. Teachers introduce English through structured classroom activities, while parents provide reinforcement in daily contexts.

CONCLUSION

Total Physical Response (TPR) is a language teaching method built around the coordination of speech and action; it attempts to teach language through physical (motor) activity. James Asher, a professor of psychology at San Jose State University, California, developed it. Total Physical Response (TPR) is a teaching method emphasizing active learning through actions. It means learners' speaking skills through listening to their teacher before requiring them to speak and asking them to practice verbal communication accompanied by physical actions. Three basic steps used in this method are to listen, watch and do. The application of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in English learning for early childhood is a dynamic, joyful, and developmentally appropriate approach. It respects the natural way children learn through listening, movement, and play while building comprehension, memory, and confidence. However, the true success of TPR depends on the collaboration between teachers and parents. When parents continue using TPR principles at home, children receive consistent exposure, practice, and emotional support, leading to stronger mastery and long-term enthusiasm for learning English.

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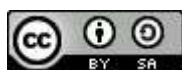
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