

# Total Physical Response Method for Mastering English Vocabulary

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**Abstract:** The difficulty of teachers in teaching English to children pushed the writers to conduct a community service in the form of the training of vocabulary mastery to elementary school children using total physical response (TPR) method. This training was aimed to introduce the method to the teacher to make the students interested, happy and easy when learning English, especially to master vocabulary. In this training, the participants involved were 36 students of the third grade. To evaluate the achievement of this training program, *pre-test* and *post-test* were used to know the students' ability before and after being given the treatment. Besides, observation by field notes was employed to know the students' response to the implementation of this method. From data analysis, the result revealed that TPR method is effective to be used to improve the students' English vocabulary mastery as the score of *post-test* was significantly improved from the one of *pre-test*. Besides, the result from observation showed that generally, the students had good response toward the use of the method. It means this method can be applied in teaching English vocabulary to children by the teachers even by the parents when teaching their children English vocabulary at home.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the form of teaching English vocabulary to elementary school children using total physical response (TPR) method. It is the results of researches that show TPR method is the most suitable one to be applied to teach vocabulary to young learners as this method offers them enjoyable and active roles in the learning experience as one of the principles and best practices for teaching English to elementary learners (McCloskey, 2003). Besides, TPR method has enhanced students' motivation and interests of elementary school in Taiwan in learning English (Hsu and Lin, 2012).

Therefore, this paper is aimed to introduce TPR to the teacher to make the students interested, happy and easy when learning English, especially to master vocabulary. Moreover, it is to convince whether TPR method is effective to be applied in teaching English vocabulary to elementary school children and to know if the students respond well to the application of the method.

Hopefully, the TPR method used in this teaching English vocabulary can minimize the students stress. Besides, the teacher can use it to enrich the teaching method, so he or she has various methods to be applied in teaching English, especially English vocabulary. Furthermore, the teacher can introduce

TPR Method to the students' parents to make them be able to apply this method to teach English to their children, so it can be created the culture of learning to improve human resources as early as possible.

## 2 THE TEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

TPR that is introduced firstly by Asher, a professor emeritus of psychology at San José State University is designed based on how the children learn their mother tongue (Neupane, 2008). In implementing TPR method, Richard and Rodgers (1987) state that the learners have a main role as a listener and a player. They believe that teachers play an active role as models that decide what should be taught and what learning materials should be delivered to students in the classrooms. They claim that teachers should also learn from how parents provide feedback for their children. At the first place teachers can give some corrections. As children grow, teachers tolerate mistakes made by the students.

On the other hand, there are some types of vocabulary that must be mastered by second language learners, such as single words, set phrases, variable phrases, phrasal verbs and idiom (Folse, 2008).

Single words include vocabulary that is more commonly used than others. Set phrases are words that can change, such as on the other hand which cannot be replaced by in the other hand or in other hands or in other fingers despite that the alternatives are semantically related.

Variable phrase are classification that consists of similar components with the use of personal pronouns, possessive adjectives, or word order. For example, in the expression of 'it has come to our attention that', the word 'our' can be replaced by 'my'. Meanwhile, phrasal verbs are a combination of a verb followed by particles, such as take up, take down, take on, take off, take in, take out, take away, take back, and take over. Idiom is a collection of vocabulary that the meanings of each word are different from the overall meanings. For example, 'a person lets the cat out of the bag' means that someone reveals the secret (Folse, 2008).

Meanwhile, vocabulary in a text can be categorized into four levels, namely high frequency words, academic vocabulary, technical vocabulary and low frequency words (Nation, 2001). High frequency words are vocabulary which are unmarked in the text, including in, for, the, of, a, and many others. These words are mostly found almost 80% in spoken and written texts. The second is academic vocabulary which are taken from academic text and printed in bold (9%), while technical vocabulary are in italic in the text (5%) and are easily found because they are written in Latin or Greek (Chung & Nation, 2003). The last is low frequency words which are only few of them found in the text.

McCarten (2007) argue that there are many parts of vocabulary that can be learned (meaning, forms, collocations, connotations, grammatical features, and so on), and it is essential for teachers to introduce those parts to students from highly used vocabulary to low frequency vocabulary. Teachers should repeat the vocabulary so that students can acquire the vocabulary, and teachers should also vary their ways of teaching the vocabulary to avoid boredom. He adds that teachers need to help students understand that learning is a gradual process that goes from little things, improves over time, and stimulates them to seek additional information on their own, making the learning experience a means to meet its own particular needs.

Meanwhile, in education, the term children (as adapted from Harmer, 2007) is usually used for learners between the ages of 2 and 14. Phillips (1993) describes Young Learners as children from the first year of formal schooling (aged five or six years) to eleven or twelve. As a language learner, according to

Scott and Ytreberg (1990), children have characteristics that teachers should consider in teaching them.

Some of these characteristics as proposed by Harmer (2001: 38) are: they respond to meaning even though they do not understand the words and often learn indirectly; their understanding comes not only from explanations but also from what they see and hear and it is important for them to have a chance to touch and interact; they are generally enthusiastic to learn and have a curiosity about the world around them; they need the attention and approval of their teachers as well as they are interested in talking about themselves and respond well to learning involving oneself and his life; and they are less attentive, except on very interesting activities, they can quickly get bored after interacting after 10 minutes or so.

From the above characteristics, it can be deduced that children learn a foreign language in the same way as they learn the mother tongue. It is as stated by Clarke (2009) that, the activity of helping babies and toddlers learn English as a second language is no different from the activity to help those who learn English as their first language.

Because the target students in the study are elementary school students, the type of vocabulary taught is single word vocabulary (one word vocabulary) about numbers (1 to 10), colors, objects in the classroom, animals, and fruits. McCharten (2007) argues that teachers should introduce vocabulary bit by bit, starting with the most frequent, useful, and easiest vocabulary, the teacher should repeat the vocabulary often because the student must recognize the word or phrase many times before the acquisition occurs, and teachers need to vary the teaching so that the exercises are not boring and the learning styles are different.

### 3 METHODS

To find out whether the TPR method proved to be effective in improving English vocabulary mastery for elementary school students, quantitative methods with quasi-experimental design were used because the participants involved were not randomly selected. In addition, to know the student's response to TPR method, qualitative method by observation and field notes was also used in this study.

Participants involved in this research were third grade students of elementary school. Meanwhile, in conducting the treatment, the researcher provided training on the mastery of English vocabulary items (single word vocabulary items) on numbers, colors,

objects in the classroom, animals and fruits during four meetings by applying the TPR method and by introducing several instructional languages.

To evaluate the success rate of the training program, the pre-test and post-test measures were used to determine students' ability before and after treatment. In addition, observation activities were conducted using field notes to determine the students' response to the use of this method.

## 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 The results of Pre-test and Post-test

After obtaining the pre-test and post-test score of the students, paired t-test using SPSS for windows was used and the results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Paired Samples Test.

	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1 Pretest – Posttest	35	.000

As shown in Table 1, there was a significant result (2-tailed) with 0.00 which is less than 0.05 meaning that the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that there is a significant difference in the means between pre-test and post-test among the third grade students. This implies that English vocabulary mastery among the respondents improved significantly. Thus, it is clear that the TPR method is an effective method to increase Vocabulary mastery. This is indicated by the results of students' ability after being given treatment method.

### 4.2 The results of Observation

Based on data obtained from observations using field notes, the results show that students respond well to the use of the Total Physical Response method in teaching English vocabulary with the following indicators:

The first, generally, the students eagerly follow the learning activities and make a loud voice. There are some female students who are still shy and soft-spoken also there are a few male students who act excessively. Secondly, the students looked happy, comforted and laughed and they understood both the material and the instructional language well after being given examples and explanations. There are still some students who hesitate to do it. Third, the

students seemed to focus on the learning activities although sometimes the attention was somewhat distracted by other class students peeping through the windows, watching the learning activities that might interest them out of the classroom.

Thus, the results of observation showed that the use of TPR method is very useful to reduce the stress of students, as proposed by Shearon (2005). In addition, the data prove that students learn more when they feel relaxed.

The theory of Slattery (2004) which states that children acquire language by seeing, hearing, doing something and imitating, is also found in data obtained from field notes. For example, it is shown by the number of students who perform the teacher's instructions perfectly after the teacher becomes an example model and repeats his instructions several times. This means students learn a foreign language based on the way they learn the mother tongue by giving a physical response to the initial speech via the command in accordance with his explanation Neupane (2008).

In addition, the findings based on observations indicate that the TPR method is suitable to be applied in teaching children because they like to get up from their seats and move around. This reason is consistent with that of Levine (2005), in which the character of the child acquires and learns the language while moving and engages in fun language activities.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Based on the results of data analysis, it can be concluded that the TPR method has been proven effective in improving the vocabulary mastery of the English language of elementary school students, especially the third grade students. This can be seen from the result of post-test of student which significantly increase after given treatment method of TPR. The TPR method fits perfectly with the character of the child because they like to move and get bored quickly if they just sit on a chair. In addition, it is supported by their good response to the TPR method

The TPR method can motivate children to be interested in learning English vocabulary because this method is very entertaining them. This is evidenced by a sense of joy and enthusiasm and often laughs as they undergo a learning activity although this method may cause some students to overreact as they are too happy to participate in learning activities.

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