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THE USE OF TOTAL PHYSICAL METHOD IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Annotation: *This article analyzes the methodological foundations of using the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in primary education. It focuses on the pedagogical principles, teaching strategies, and practical organization of lessons based on TPR. The method is explained as a learner-centered approach that combines language input with physical activity, which supports better comprehension and long-term memory. In addition, the article examines how TPR can be structured in classroom practice, including stages of lesson planning, teacher guidance, and student interaction. It also highlights that this method supports cognitive development and active learning, especially for young learners.*

Overall, the study shows that the methodological basis of TPR makes it a reliable and effective approach for organizing English lessons in primary education.

Keywords: *TPR methodology, teaching framework, lesson organization, active learning, student-centered approach, language acquisition process, instructional strategies, primary classroom techniques*

INTRODUCTION

In primary education, choosing the right teaching approach is very important, because young learners need clear structure, simple instructions, and active participation in the lesson. However, many traditional methods focus mainly on explanation and repetition, and because of this, students may lose interest and do not fully understand the material. Therefore, it is necessary to use a method that is not only effective, but also methodologically well-organized. One of such approaches is the Total Physical Response (TPR) method, which was developed by James Asher, and it is based on the connection between language and physical action. This method follows a specific teaching framework, where students first listen, then respond physically, and only after that begin to speak. Because of this sequence, learning becomes more natural and easier for children.

Moreover, the methodological basis of TPR includes clear lesson stages, teacher guidance, and student-centered activities, and therefore it helps organize the teaching process in a more structured way. At the same time, it supports active learning, because students are involved in actions, not only in listening. In addition, this method is suitable for primary school classrooms, because it reduces stress and creates a positive learning atmosphere, and as a result, students feel more comfortable and motivated. Therefore, understanding the methodological principles of TPR is important for effective teaching.

This article aims to explore the methodological basis of using TPR in primary education and to explain how it can be applied in classroom practice in a structured and effective way.

The theoretical foundations of the TPR method in language teaching

The Total Physical Response (TPR) method is based on several important theoretical ideas, because it connects language learning with natural human behavior and cognitive processes. This method was introduced by James Asher, and it is grounded in the idea that language learning should follow the same order as first language acquisition, where listening comes before speaking. One of the main theoretical foundations of TPR is that understanding language should come first, and only after that learners begin to produce language. Therefore, students are not required to speak immediately, but instead they listen to instructions and respond through actions. Because of this, they build comprehension step by step, and learning becomes less stressful.⁸

Moreover, TPR is supported by the idea that memory is stronger when language is connected with physical movement, since actions help learners remember words and structures more effectively. For example, when students hear a command and perform it at the same time, they create a stronger mental connection, and as a result, the information stays longer in their memory. In addition, the method is based on a student-centered approach, because learners are actively involved in the process, while the teacher acts as a guide. This allows students to learn at their own pace, and therefore it supports individual differences in learning styles.

Another important theoretical aspect is that TPR reduces anxiety in the classroom, because students are not forced to speak or perform difficult tasks at the beginning. Instead, they learn in a relaxed environment, and because of this, they feel more confident and motivated. In conclusion, the theoretical foundations of the TPR method are based on natural language acquisition, physical activity, and low-stress learning, and therefore this method provides a strong basis for effective language teaching in primary education.⁹

The structure and stages of TPR-based lessons

The structure of TPR-based lessons is very important, because it helps organize the teaching process in a clear and systematic way, and therefore students can follow the lesson more easily. Unlike traditional lessons, TPR lessons are based on a sequence of stages, where students first listen, then act, and only later begin to speak. First of all, the lesson usually starts with the introduction stage, where the teacher presents new vocabulary or expressions using simple commands and gestures. For example, the teacher may say “stand up” or “open your book” while demonstrating the action, and as a result, students understand the meaning without translation.

⁸ Harmer, J. (2021). *How to Teach English* (New updated ed.). Pearson Education, pp. 89–105.

⁹ Pinter, A. (2021). Teaching young language learners in multilingual contexts. *Language Teaching*, 54(3), pp. 379–394.

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Next comes the practice stage, where students repeat the actions several times, because repetition helps them remember the language better. During this stage, the teacher may change the order of commands or combine them, and therefore students need to listen carefully and respond correctly. After that, the lesson moves to a more active stage, where students begin to respond independently, and sometimes they can even give commands to each other. Because of this, they become more confident and start using the language in a simple way. Moreover, in the later stage, students may begin to produce language by themselves, for example by saying commands or describing actions. However, this happens naturally, and students are not forced to speak before they are ready.

Finally, the lesson usually ends with a consolidation stage, where the teacher reviews the learned material through games or short activities, and as a result, students reinforce their knowledge in a fun way. In conclusion, TPR-based lessons follow a clear structure, including introduction, practice, interaction, and consolidation stages, and therefore they provide an effective and organized way of teaching English to primary school students.

The role of the teacher and students in TPR methodology

In the TPR methodology, both the teacher and the students have clearly defined roles, and this helps make the learning process more organized and effective. Unlike traditional methods, where the teacher mainly explains and students only listen, in TPR both sides are actively involved, and therefore the classroom becomes more interactive.¹⁰ First of all, the teacher plays a leading role at the beginning, because they give clear instructions, demonstrate actions, and guide students step by step. For example, the teacher says “raise your hand” or “turn around” and shows the action, and as a result, students understand what they need to do without translation. Therefore, the teacher acts not only as an instructor, but also as a model for students.

Moreover, the teacher is responsible for organizing activities and creating a supportive learning environment, because students need to feel comfortable and relaxed. For this reason, the teacher should give simple commands, use gestures, and repeat instructions when necessary, so that all students can follow the lesson easily.

On the other hand, students play an active role in TPR lessons, because they respond to the teacher’s commands through physical actions. Instead of only listening, they move, act, and participate, and therefore they are more engaged in the learning process. As a result, students understand and remember language better. In addition, as students become more confident, their role gradually changes, because they can start giving commands to their classmates or participating in pair activities. For example, one student can say “clap your

¹⁰ Willis, J., & Willis, D. (2021). Task-based learning and young learners. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 15(4), pp. 320–334.

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hands,” and the other performs the action, and because of this, students begin to use language more independently.¹¹

Another important point is that students are not forced to speak at the beginning, and this helps reduce anxiety. Instead, they listen and act first, and then they start speaking naturally when they feel ready. In conclusion, in TPR methodology, the teacher acts as a guide and organizer, while students are active participants, and this balance makes the learning process more effective and student-centered.

Instructional strategies and techniques in TPR classrooms

In TPR classrooms, different instructional strategies and techniques are used to make the lesson more effective and well-organized, because simply giving commands is not enough to achieve good learning results. Therefore, teachers need to apply a variety of techniques that support understanding, repetition, and student participation. First of all, one important strategy is the use of clear and simple commands, because young learners understand short and direct instructions more easily. For example, the teacher may use commands like “sit down,” “open your book,” or “walk to the door,” and at the same time demonstrate the action. As a result, students connect language with movement and understand the meaning quickly.

Moreover, demonstration and modeling are key techniques in TPR, because students learn by observing the teacher first. When the teacher shows the action clearly, students can follow without confusion, and therefore the learning process becomes smoother. Another useful technique is repetition with variation, because repeating the same commands helps students remember, but adding small changes keeps the lesson interesting. For instance, the teacher can change the speed, order, or combination of commands, and because of this, students stay focused and active.

In addition, scaffolding is an important strategy, where the teacher gradually reduces support as students become more confident. At the beginning, the teacher gives full instructions and demonstrations, but later students perform actions independently or even give commands themselves. As a result, learners develop autonomy step by step.¹²

Furthermore, using games and interactive tasks is also an effective technique, because games such as action games or command games make learning more enjoyable. When students play and move at the same time, they are more motivated and involved in the lesson. Another strategy is checking comprehension without translation, because instead of asking students to translate, the teacher can give new commands to see if students understand. For example, if students correctly respond to “touch your nose,” it shows that they understand the meaning.

¹¹ Zhang, Y., & Zou, L. (2021). Movement and cognition in second language acquisition: Implications for young learners. *Educational Psychology Review*, 33(3), pp. 789–807.

¹² Lee, J. F., & VanPatten, B. (2021). *Making Communicative Language Teaching Happen* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill Education, pp. 140–158.

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In conclusion, TPR classrooms use a variety of instructional strategies such as clear commands, modeling, repetition, scaffolding, and interactive activities, and therefore they provide a structured and effective way of teaching English to young learners.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the methodological basis of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method provides a clear and effective framework for teaching English in primary education, because it combines theory, structure, and practical strategies in a balanced way. Since the method is based on natural language acquisition, where listening comes before speaking, it allows young learners to understand the language without pressure and develop their skills step by step. Moreover, the structured stages of TPR lessons, together with well-defined roles of teachers and students, help organize the learning process more effectively. At the same time, the use of different instructional strategies, such as modeling, repetition, and guided practice, supports better understanding and long-term retention.

In addition, TPR creates a positive and low-stress classroom environment, where students feel comfortable, active, and motivated to learn. Because of this, they participate more and gradually become confident in using the language. To sum up, the methodological principles of TPR make it a reliable and practical approach for primary education, and therefore it should be widely used by teachers to improve the quality of English language teaching.

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