

# Total Physical Response (TPR): How is it used to Teach EFL Young Learners?

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## Total Physical Response (TPR): How is it used to Teach EFL Young Learners?

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**Abstract.** When teachers teach the English vocabulary about parts of the body, they use rhythm and body movements while mentioning its name. It is called Total Physical Response (TPR) method. This article investigates the implementation of the TPR method used by three teachers in teaching English vocabulary to young learners. Additionally, the researchers investigated the problems faced by the three teachers as well as potential solution for those problems. In this research, the researchers used qualitative descriptive to understand the way teachers implemented TPR in their classrooms. Data from this study indicates that, from the thirteen principles of TPR method found that; Teacher 1 (T1) used seven principles in the 1st observation and six principles in the 2nd observation, and Teacher 2 (T2) only used one principle in the 1st observation and two principles in the 2nd observation. Then, Teacher 3 (T3) used two principles both in the 1st and the 2nd observation. The difficulties faced by those three teachers implementing TPR stemmed from their lack of understanding about the implementation of the TPR method even they did not distinguish the appropriate theoretical basis of TPR. Finally, to address challenges in implementing TPR, the teachers expect additional training related to teaching English to young learners especially with a specific theory related to TPR method so that they can implement it well and have more practice with the principles of TPR method in teaching English to young learners.

**Keywords:** Total Physical Response, Teaching, English to Young Learners.

### 1. Introduction

Language learned by kindergarten students especially those in the region is not only the first language (local language) or the second language (Bahasa Indonesia) but also the foreign language that is English. English has been

recognized as an International language; it means that people from cultural, geographical, religious backgrounds have an agreed tool to communicate with each other (Astutik, 2017; Garcia, 2013; Leonardi, 2010; Smith, 2015). The use of English has a significant influence even though English is not spoken as often as the local language [Bahasa Indonesia] in everyday life one hears common English phrases; such as I Love You, Thank You, Bye-bye, Hello, Kiss Bye and so forth. Additionally, today's Kindergarten schools located not only in major cities but also in regions include English lessons in the curriculum.

The reason that the school manager or headmaster puts English into the curriculum is that at the age of kindergarten, children are in the stage of development where they can absorb information quickly (Asmali, 2017; Damar, Gursay, & Korkmaz, 2013; Maasum & Stapa., 2015). One of the most important things for children to communicate in English is to master English Vocabulary. Teaching English to young learners in kindergarten is not like teaching English to adults (Copland, Garton, & Burns, 2014; Setiawati, 2012). Therefore, the teaching methods that will be used by teachers is one of the essential components and must be considered in English teaching and learning activities to young learners (Astutik & Aulina, 2017; Bahtiar, 2017). Various methods can be used by teachers in delivering English lessons to their students; one of them is the Total Physical Response Method.

Total Physical Response (TPR) is an English learning method developed by (Asher, 1968). Total Physical Response is the language teaching method built around the coordination of speech and action; it attempts to teach the language through Physical activity (Richard & Rodgers, 2001; Rokhayati, 2017). It is a method of learning style that is structured in the coordination of command, speech, and movement and attempts to teach the language through physical movement. TPR is a popular method for introducing vocabulary about action or movement for early childhood (Rachmawati, 2013; Safitri, 2016; Sari, 2015; Zhen, 2011). (Tarigan, 2009) Also argues that in the TPR method of understanding and recollection obtained well through the students' body movements in answering or responding to the commands. Imperative forms of language are powerful tools for manipulating students' behavior and guiding them toward understanding through motion or action.

The explanation of some experts above is by Asher's theory in Larsen & Freeman's book (Er, 2013) that the total physical response is a comprehension approach. It means, in learning the target language, understanding takes precedence before language pronunciation. This method motivates and advances young learners' mastery of the target language (Wijayatiningsih & Mulyadi, 2014). In addition, this method does not require a lot of speech on the part of the teacher because the teacher gives instructions directly to the learner without having to translate it to the first language (Er, 2013; Putri, 2016; Sariyati, 2013). (Freeman & Larsen, 2000) also determined thirteen guiding principles of TPR, as below:

- 1) The target language should be presented in chunks, not just word by word.
- 2) The students' understanding of the target language should be developed before speaking.
- 3) Students initially learn one part of the language rapidly by moving their bodies.
- 4) The imperative is a powerful linguistic device through which the teacher can direct student behaviour.
- 5) Students can learn through observing actions as well as by performing the actions themselves.
- 6) It is very important that students feel successful. Feelings of success and low anxiety facilitate learning.
- 7) Students should not be made to memorize fixed routines.
- 8) Correction should be carried out in an unobtrusive manner.
- 9) Students must develop flexibility in understanding novel combinations of target language chunks. They need to understand more than the exact sentences used in training. Novelty is also motivating.
- 10) Language learning is more effective when it is fun.
- 11) Spoken language should be emphasized over written language.
- 12) Students will begin to speak when they are ready.
- 13) Students are expected to make errors when they first begin speaking. Teachers should be tolerant of them. Work on the fine details of the language should be postponed until students have become somewhat proficient.

The implementation of the TPR method can be said to be a success if students can understand and follow what the teachers submitted. However, it is uncommon for teachers who do not understand in applying this method which makes students confused even not interested in the lessons given by teachers. Especially the kindergarten students who want to play, sing and listen to stories.

From the preliminary observation conducted by the researchers in TK Aisyiyah 5 Tanggulangin it was noted that the teachers in this school have been using the Total Physical Response Method in teaching English vocabulary to their students. For example, in teaching English vocabulary, the teachers used rhythm and hand movements to point out part of the body and mention its name. However, the teachers seem confused about utilizing the method they used. Moreover, when some of their students were not focused and did not follow their instruction, they redirected students to listen to the teacher's explanation by using essential words in English, like "hello.. kids.. please listen and look at teacher Ani".

Based on the initial observation above, the authors of this article sought to investigate the implementation of Total Physical Response (TPR) methods in learning English vocabulary in TK Aisyiyah 5 Tanggulangin based on Larsen and Freeman principles, to learn more about the problems faced by teachers so they may offer potential professional advice to improve instruction.

## 2. Methodology

In conducting this research, the researchers used qualitative descriptive analysis because they wanted to explain the status of the phenomenon that occurs at the time of the study (Ary, 2002; Shakouri, 2014). The current state of wonder in this study is the implementation of the total physical response method used by kindergarten teachers in teaching English vocabularies. Therefore, the primary purposes of this research was to identify and analyze the implementation of TPR method accordance with Larsen & Freeman's framework employed by 3 (three) English teachers in TK Aisyiyah 5 Tanggulangin, Sidoarjo of class B. The data collected in this research were observations of the TPR method used by the teachers during their teaching activity. The sources of the data were the TPR method used by teachers of kindergarten school in teaching English vocabularies both verbal and non-verbal. In this study, the researchers also did two procedures in collecting the data. They were observation and interview.

In observation, the researchers played a role as a nonparticipant observer because they did not get involved in the class activity and they just took the seat inside of the room (Urquhart, 2015). Therefore, the presence of the observer did not disturb the classroom activities. The observation was conducted two times in every Friday on May 12 and May 19, 2017, during English classroom activity from 9.00 am until 10.30 am. There were some steps in conducting the observation and analyzing its data. First, observing the way the teachers used TPR method proposed by Larsen - Freeman both verbal and non-verbal by writing down into paper, while other researchers were recording all classroom activities both verbal and non verbal. Recording was needed to help researchers got an accurate data. Next, transcribing the oral speaking of the teacher and students, then selecting the data concerning with the research questions. Finally, identifying the TPR method which exist in English teaching and learning process from the subjects.

The researchers interviewed three teachers in class B of TK Aisyiyah 5 Tanggulangin to obtain the valid data from their perspective. Also, interviews were needed to determine the problems faced by teachers during English vocabulary lessons using the TPR method. It was also intended to find out what solution can be used to solve the problem. This interview was conducted after the teacher finished giving lessons in the class. Here, the researchers use unstructured interview because they wanted to get the data in depth and accurate. (Appendix 1)

## 3. Result and Discussion

This section explains the results of data analysis conducted by researchers to describe the implementation of TPR method in English teaching and learning process at class B of TK Aisyiyah 5 Tanggulangin Sidoarjo, and also to find out the problems faced by the teacher and how to solve it. The use of TPR methods conducted by English teachers in this kindergarten was seen based on the principles proposed by (Freeman & Larsen, 2000). There were three subjects in this reaseach and all of them are female.

Then, to make it easier in mentioning the subject term, the researchers named the first teacher as T1, second teacher as T2 and third teacher as T3 and principles of TPR no.1 to no.13 as P1 to P13. Table 1 explained in detail the use of TPR method by teachers of class B in TK Aisyiyah 5 Tanggulangin on teaching English vocabulary.

**Table 1. Principles of TPR found on May 12, 2017**

No	subject	Principles of Total Physical Response Proposed by Larsen and Freeman												
		P 1	P 2	P 3	P 4	P 5	P 6	P 7	P 8	P 9	P 10	P 11	P 12	P 13
1	T1	-	√	-	√	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	-	-
2	T2	-	-	-	√	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	T3	-	-	-	√	-	-	-	-	-	√	-	-	-

From table 1 shows that in the first observation on May 12, 2017. It was found that all research subjects did not use all of the TPR method principles proposed by Larsen and Freeman. In this observation, the teachers gave the theme of "Tribes in Indonesia," especially about traditional clothing. It can be seen that from thirteen principles of the TPR method, T1 used seven principles such as P2, P4, P7, P8, P9, P10, and P11. Then T2 used only one principle that was P4. And T3 used two principles such as P4 and P10.

For instance when T1 used P2, wherein this part of principle the teacher did not immediately ask her students to speak, but she tried first to give an advance understanding of what was being discussed. Like the example of the transcript below:

- 1) T1 : *Ayo dengarkan Teacher...ini Gambar apa?*  
(T1 asks the students to listen and shows the picture to them)
- Students : *Orang.....(man)*
- T1 : *Siapa yang tahu.. ini gambar orang pakai baju apa?*  
(T1 asks the student about what picture is that.)
- Students : *..... (silent)*
- T1 : *Ini Pakai baju madura, orang pakai baju apa?*  
(T1 explains the picture is about Madura)
- Students : *Madura (students repeat it)*
- T1 : *Right.. betul ini adalah Suku Madura, Suku apa anak- anak?*  
(T1 explains it once more about Madura Tribe)
- Students : *Suku Madura.(Students repeat it)*
- T1 : *good... anak-anak kita sekarang akan belajar tentang suku Madura pakai bahasa Inggris. Ada yang tahu bahasa Inggrisnya suku Madura?*  
(T1 asks to the students whether they know how to say "Suku Madura" in English or not, and told to the students about the theme of English Lesson today is about Madura Tribe)
- Students : *Belum... not yet. (students were laughing)*

T1 : *sekarang tirukan teacher....*  
 (T1 starts to teach vocabulray about madura Tribe)  
 M (em)

Students : M (em)

T1 : A (e)

Students : A (e)

T1 : D (di)

Students : D (di)

T1 : U (yu)

Students : U (yu)

T1 : R (a')

Students : R (a')

T1 : A (e)

Students : A (e)

T1 : T (ti)

Students : T (ti)

T1 : R (a')

Students : R (a')

T1 : I (ai)

Students : I (ai)

T1 : B (bi)

Students : B (bi)

T1 : E (i)

Students : E (i)

T1 : Madura Tribe....(English)

Students : Madura Tribe

T1 : *Suku Madura* (Indonesian)

Students : *Suku Madura*

From the excerpt of transcript 1) shows that before speaking the teacher supported students' understanding of the vocabulary that would be studied by showing a picture of the traditional clothing of the Madura tribe. After that, students were asked to color the picture of the customs of Madura tribe. It is in line with the second principle (P2) offered by Larsen and Freeman that before speaking the student must be given an understanding of the target language.

Besides P2, T1 also tend to use P4 in class teaching activities. According to Larsen and Freeman, the imperative is a powerful linguistic device through which the teacher can direct student behavior (P4). It was utilized by T1 when she taught English vocabulary lesson. For example, when the students talked to others and did not want to listen to the teacher's explanation, T1 gave students commands to take a seat, like:

2) T1 : "*Anak-Anak* (kids) listen to me please....".  
 (Teacher provides order to the students, and they understood)

Not only T1 who used P4, T2 and T3 also used P4 during the process of teaching and learning in class to help T1 to make students discipline in listening

teacher's explanation. The result of first observation on May 12, 2017, was also seen that T1 did not use memorizing as a fixed routine in learning activities, and it is related to P7 that students should not be made to remember set methods. In this observation also indicates that T1 also used P9, according to Larsen and Freeman that novelty or giving something new is motivating way in teaching and learning process, in this chance T1 also taught something new that students never heard before that was "Madurese tribe."

T1 was also known for performing English teaching and learning process with fun, for example asking the students to color a picture about Madura tribe. In this occasion, T3 was also seen actively helping T1 to make the class more fun. It is in line with Larsen and Freeman's principles that language learning becomes active when it is done with fun (P10). Also, T1 also tend to use spoken language in her teaching activities rather than the written word. What T1 did in this part is appropriate with Larsen and Freeman's theory in P11.

Not only on the first observation, in the second observation on May 19, 2017, also found that the English teachers in TK Aisyiyah 5 Tanggulangin did not apply the TPR method as like the principles offered by Larsen and Freeman. As seen in table 2 below.

**Table 2. Principles of TPR found on May 19, 2017**

No	subject	Principles of Total Physical Response Proposed by Larsen and Freeman												
		P 1	P 2	P 3	P 4	P 5	P 6	P 7	P 8	P 9	P 10	P 11	P 12	P 13
1	T1	-	√	√	√	-	-	√	-	-	√	√	-	-
2	T2	-	√	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	√	-	-	-
3	T3	-	√	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	√	-	-	-

Table 2 presents that on May 19, 2017, the English teacher in class B of TK Aisyiyah 5 using the principles of TPR method offered by Larsen and Freeman: T1 used six principles: P2, P3, P4, P7, P10, And P11. Then, T2 and T3 were seen using the same principles: P2 and P10. In this observation, the teachers gave the theme to the students about "names of days and months" by singing and coloring the pictures.

Like in the first observations, in second observation T1 also provided an explanation in advance about the names of days and months to students. T1 did not directly ask students to speak in English, but she tried first to get students understood about the names of days and months in English, as the excerpt of the transcript below:

- 3) T1 : Good Morning students....  
 Students : good Morning teacher....  
 T1 : How are you today?  
 Students : fine.. and you?  
 T1 : I am fine....  
 What day is today *hari apa hari ini?* (English- Indonesian)  
 Students : *Jumat..* (Jumat Means Friday)



- T1 : *Apa bahasa Inggrisnya Jumat?* (T1 asks the students, "what is *Jumat* in English?")
- Students : .....(silent)
- T1 : *Friday.... Jumat is Friday.. apa anak-anak?* (T1 explains that *Jumat* in English is Friday)
- Students : *Friday...* (Students repeat it)
- T1 : *Ok hari ini kita akan belajar nama-nama hari yaaaa....ikuti teacher...*  
(T1 gives the students explanation about the names of days in Indonesian and English)

The excerpt of transcript 3) above indicates that T1 seeks to provide an understanding of English about the day before students started to speak, and this is in line with P2 that students' knowledge about English as a target language should be developed before they talk. T2 and T3 in this session also seem actively involved in teaching the names of days and months in English to students by singing. Besides, when the researchers did the 2nd observation, they found some students interrupted T1. Those students ran and moved around the class. Knowing her students bothering others then T1 gave order as follow:

- 4) T1 : *Ok kids... back off.. come on back off .. back off...*  
(by moving her hands)

Transcript 4) shows that T1 uttered quickly by saying "back off" to students and students immediately followed the T1's command by moving backward. It showed that students were able to learn a language quickly by moving or practicing directly, according to Larsen and Freeman's principle 3 (P3) that "students can initially learn one part of the language rapidly by moving their body." Transcript 4) also can be said as P4, which T1 gave the command "back off" to direct the students' behavior to be more orderly and not disturb their friend.

P7 is also used by T1, she did not force students to memorize all names of the day as a fixed routine, but T1 also alternated commands with names of the month like "January, February ... and so on". It means that class activities were not just memorizing the fixed routine. From second observation was also known that T1, T2, and T3 used delightful things when they were teaching the English vocabulary to their students, like singing the names of days and months. The excerpt of transcript below shows how those three subjects were teaching English with fun by singing:

- 5) T1, T2, T3 : *If you happy and you know say Hore.....*
- Students : *Hore...*
- T1, T2, T3 : *If you happy and you know clapYour hand..*
- Students : (students clap their hands once time)
- T1 : *If you happy and you know and you really understood call teacher....*
- Students : *Teacher..... (laughing)*

From transcript 5) shows that T1, T2, and T3 implement Larsen and Freeman's principle in teaching English to students that the target language learners become effective when it is fun (P10). Those three teachers sang together with the student by using the target language. The observation of this session indicated that the students were happy and enjoyed the class activity. Then the last principle the researchers discovered in the second observation was P11. In this part, T1 tended to use spoken language rather than written word. She actively spoke in front of the class to say the names of the day and month rather than writing the names of the day and month on the whiteboard.

From the findings above, it proves that not all the principles of the TPR method offered by Larsen and Freeman (2000) are implemented by teachers in class B at TK Aisyiyah 5 Tanggulangin in teaching English vocabulary in the classroom. Although the teachers tend to use monotonously way in the teaching process, they had a good performance in teaching English vocabulary to the young learners. However, there were some problems why the teachers felt difficult in conducting the teaching-learning process.

From the three teachers who served as the subject of this study, only one of English teachers was more dominant in teaching process either on the first observation or second observation. When asked in interview, it turned out that those two teachers were co teacher to help the process of learning activities of students on English lessons. Those two teachers did not mean doing anything; they did teaching English even though it was only helping the primary teacher, such as directing students to calm down, assisting students in doing the work and so on. The researchers interviewed three teachers in class B at TK Aisyiyah 5 Tanggulangin as the way to know the problems faced by them in teaching English vocabulary to students. At the same time, the researchers also wanted to know the best solution to solve those problems with the teacher's perspective. The interview with the three subjects (T1, T2, and T3) was conducted after the English lesson finish.

From the results of the interviews showed that the teachers did not understand the steps of the TPR method they used so far. They did not realize that they have applied the technique of TPR in teaching English to kindergarten students. Based on their answers, they taught English only by maximizing their abilities and by searching for references through the internet. They also said that their ignorance about the theory and the proper use of the TPR method was because of from the six teachers in TK Aisyiyah 5 Tanggulangin, only one teacher (T1) who was graduated from English education, and five others were not graduated from English Education or not graduated from early childhood education. Including T2 who was graduated from culinary training and T3 who was graduated from senior high school. This condition was not natural for those teachers to do the teaching to children especially teaching English to young learners. There were a lot of basic things they have to master such as techniques, strategies, and methods to show early childhood, especially in English subjects.

In the interview, the researchers also asked the three subjects about what solutions that they expected to overcome their ignorance of the use of TPR methods to teach the English vocabulary to their students in TK Aisyiyah 5 Tanggulangin. They said that the primary solution they need was the training of teaching English to young learners. They also expected that they could get an understanding of the appropriate theory of TPR method. So that after knowing the proper theory about TPR they will be able to utilize it well and use the TPR method more in teaching English to young learners especially to their students at TK Aisyiyah 5 Tanggulangin Sidoarjo.

#### 4. Conclusion

After explaining the results of the research above, it can be concluded that the teachers do not use all the principles of total physical response method based on Larsen dan Freeman's framework. This problems caused by the teachers who do not know even do not understand about the way how to apply TPR method. Additionally, it is known that some teachers who teach English at the school do not have an English teaching field. So far, they teach English to young learners only use the reference from the internet without knowing the appropriate theory about Total Physical response itself. Hence, to overcome the problems the teachers need to be given the training of teaching English to young learners especially about TPR. So, the school should equip teachers with training in teaching English for young learners by sending them to educational institutions or bringing in an expert to train them on how to teach English to EFL young learners.

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## Appendix 1

### Unstructured Interview in TK Aisyiyah 5 Tanggulangin Sidoarjo

1. Q: Do you know what TPR Method is?  
A: Yes, I do
2. Q: Do you use TPR method in your classroom activity?  
A: I am not sure, I think I did not use TPR so far
3. Q: So, how do you teach English to your students so far?  
A: we try to get more ideas to teach English for young learners from the internet.
4. Q: Did you know that you actually use TPR in class?  
A: oh yea? I did? I am not sure, I don't know the specific way how to use TPR, as I know I just teach them English like "learning by doing", that's all.
5. Q: what do you need to make your teaching easier, especially using TPR?  
A: we hope we are given training that is relevant to our field of teaching English in early childhood. Especially maybe about the TPR method, what is TPR? How is TPR? What is the right theory about the TPR? How is TPR practiced in the classroom?
6. Q: after knowing the TPR method properly, what are your next hopes? Especially for English language teaching activities in class?  
A: we hope to be better and more optimal in teaching English to our students.

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