

The Application of Total Physical Response in the Primary School English Classroom in China

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Abstract

The Application of Total Physical Response in the Primary School English Classroom in China

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With the development of education reform in China (1993), EFL teachers have been eager to adopt and utilize more effective teaching methods, such as Total Physical Response (TPR), in the primary school English classroom in China. Since it relies on the physical response which is more closely related to students who are in the early childhood of primary education, TPR plays a crucial role for its characteristics in EFL teaching, especially for those students who are in primary school. This paper intends to investigate the application of TPR in primary school English teaching and its effectiveness in enhancing student learning and teachers' teaching efficiency.

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Chapter I Introduction

Total Physical Response (TPR) has become a popular method in teaching English to primary school students of grades one and two in China. One reason is that the method focuses on using physical movement for students to react to verbal input in order to respond to target language without transforming the meaning from target language into mother tongue. Teaching and learning take place through “songs, games, and stories accompany actions which attracts the attention of young active learners” (Sühendan Er, 2013, p.1766). Since it relies on the physical response which is more in line with younger students’ cognitive development, TPR plays a crucial role in EFL teaching in primary school. Therefore, it has been widely applied in the primary school English classroom in China.

TPR also has a certain positive influence on teaching of most EFL teachers in the primary school. As English teachers of primary school, they should be required to learn more about TPR, because their students are so young that they are easily attracted by physical actions and are eager to respond by using physical actions. In a word, how to efficiently apply TPR in English teaching is also helpful for students to improve their English learning efficiency.

Statement of the Problem

The research question of this paper is how TPR can be used to help primary school students in China to learn English spontaneously and improve teacher’s teaching efficiency. Therefore, this paper will address the application and efficiency of the TPR method. Two major problems have been identified and will be discussed.

First, it is hard to assess the efficiency TPR in the primary school English classroom in

China because other class factors, such as students' preference, attention and proficiency, may also play an essential role in students' English learning. The research paper aims to discuss and explain that TPR undoubtedly has the positive influence on English teaching and learning, and some influences are effective. It is equally important to identify the ways in which the efficiency of using the TPR can be measured. Second, teachers could have some problems when using TPR, such as time and class task. Therefore, it is important to consider how to apply TPR productively.

Definition of Terms

Primary Education in China: It is part of basic education in China for children between six and twelve years of age. It has a total of six grades. The curriculum is designed to align with the cognitive development stages of student: grades 1-2; grades 3-4; and grades 5-6. Mandatory courses normally include Chinese, mathematics, physical education, music, basic science, ethics, and history. English is also a mandatory course in primary education (2001-) and is usually introduced in grade one in many private schools and grade three in public schools.

Total Physical Response (TPR): TPR (Total Physical Response) is believed to be an effective and interesting method of language learning, especially in the early childhood (James, 1960). Ashar was the first scholar putting forward this new teaching method and by emphasizing the coordination of speech and action. In particular, he underscored the necessity of applying TPR in primary school English teaching. When using the TPR method, the teacher takes on the role of the parent; giving prompts, setting patterns, playing games, and the student then responds

physically to the prompt. In giving feedback the teacher responds positively to the correct answer, in the same way that a parent would (Sühendan,2012).

Purpose of the Study

The study aims to affirm the significance of applying TPR in the primary school English classroom in China, and explore how to further efficiently apply it to improve students' English learning efficiency in primary school.

Significance of the Study

The study aims to affirm the significance of TPR to English classroom in primary school in China, identifies some problems, and provides some feasible strategies for effective application.

Methodology

The study is based on library research. About fifteen books and scholarly journal articles will be selected and used to help discuss that TPR can help improve classroom efficiency in the primary school in China. For example, pertinent literature will be reviewed and analyzed. Themes will be identified and discussed in order to further explore the relationship between TPR and classroom efficiency.

Chapter II Review of Literature

TPR is a language teaching method for children's English teaching in their early childhood. It has attracted many teachers' attention in China. An increasing number of them have applied TPR in English teaching in primary schools for its effective features, such as easy to apply, easy to effect, easy to understand in the early childhood of primary education, and more and more scholars have engaged in research on its application and efficiency.

This review will provide a general overview of TPR and explain its application and efficiency in primary school English classes in China.

1. Overview of TPR of China

TPR is an approach based on a model of infants learning their first language (Huo, 2012) by following the order of listening first and then speaking (Asher, 1993). It means that reading and speaking are deliberately involved by helping students learn effectively through listening and speaking in the TPR learning process. Huo figured out the three major features of TPR, they provided a more explicit explanations of TPR to the primary school English teachers in China. Firstly, TPR focuses on the rapid understanding of integral target language, instead of learning word by word. Secondly, TPR can help students maintain long-term retention of learned knowledge. Thirdly, TPR is full of many novel items that can coordinate thinking with physical response like flash card, funny game, group working and so on, which makes target language learning thoroughly enjoyable and comprehensible.

In *Total Physical Response in an Early Education Setting: Connecting Literacy, Movements, and Families*, Farrow stated that TPR is an approach used to harness learning through the process of incorporating kin-esthetic and generalized movements to the new

vocabulary and content (Farrow, 2008). In her opinion, English words and sentences are not a kind of sign. Instead, they are given the equivalent actions that help students better memorize English language points. There are some movements to apply TPR in English classroom of primary school, such as using gestures, mimicking, action and so on. These movements finally dropped when learners have successfully identified the target language points that have become internalized prior to student recognition.

Zulpan deemed that TPR requires learners to respond physically to imperatives given by the teacher who teaches language through physical (motor) activity. In this context, correct setting and heading straight into the activities section can increase student's comprehension in reading the procedural text (Zulpan, 2018). Additionally, TPR is made to coordinate action by movement. Zulpan made a more explicit definition of TPR and further affirmed the significance of applying TPR in language teaching.

Some scholars shared similar views of the importance of TPR. Song suggested, "do" plays a very important role in English learning, and TPR is a kind of "Do" activity with fun and playfulness (Song, 2000). It affirms the role of doing in applying TPR in the primary school English classroom, because learners in the early childhood study while having fun playing interesting games, and doing diverse activities, and respond to their teachers by action or gestures. If taught by teachers using other teaching methods, young learners may need time to think and transform when they participate in these class activities, then respond to their teachers by speaking or writing. Therefore, it's believed that TPR builds a bridge between the mother tongue and the target language, which can make the target language contents be promptly internalized and impressed.

2. Significance of TPR

There is no doubt that applying TPR in English language teaching in primary school has influence on both teaching and learning efficiency, some of them are significant for both teacher and student. In Wong's research, she found that TPR approach can facilitate greater success in English learning of student, especially for beginning language learners (Wong, 1983). The author made a comparison between audio-lingual approach and TPR approach, and resulting from the outcome of this study is the application of the TPR approach to teach English as a second language to limited-English-proficient Chinese students in the early childhood. Therefore, the TPR method can facilitate greater success in English learning, especially for beginning language learners. As for teaching efficiency, Khairma and Suryana affirmed that TPR method is the right way to be used by English teachers in teaching for basic material about English language learning in the classroom and also in interacting and communicating every day (Khairma & Suryana, 2018).

When it comes to the significance of TPR, its significance to teachers cannot be ignored as well. Zuhdi and Mintohari expounded that the role of TPR in the Primary Teachers Education (PGSD). In their view, TPR is the right method to be implemented in the stage of introducing English to PGSD students because they can recognize and improve their English skills not only by learning it but also by experiencing it (Zuhdi & Mintohari, 2019). According to their research to class C students of class C PGSD FIP UNESA, the result can be concluded that TPR helps teachers effectively in improving student's English proficiency and communicative competence, which not only promotes teachers to enrich their teaching methods and skills, but also improves their teaching proficiency and efficiency by means of different self-made teaching tools, such as objects, pictures and cards.

3. Application of TPR in the primary school English classroom in China

With the development and wide recognition of TPR, a considerable number of English teachers in primary schools in China have applied TPR in their teaching. From these descriptions, it is easy to observe the actual application of TPR in the primary school English classroom now. In the daily application of this method, the teacher often plays the role as an order taker, a model provider and an action monitor, teachers are responsible for precisely presenting target language and focus on learners' inputting and outputting. While learner plays the role as both an audience and a performer, they listen attentively to the teacher and responded physically to the teacher's commands. In a word, both the role of teacher and students are equivalently important in a class, they need to work together to go through every class activity. Primary school students will be happier to learn through this kind of classroom activities because they imitate their teachers like action, gesture and pronunciation, respond to the teacher's command by physical action well, build their sense of achievement, and then improve their academic performance in the English classroom.

Larsen and Freeman recommended applying procedures of TPR by dividing it into two steps. In the first step, the teacher should introduce the target learning contents and provide some detailed examples may by physical action or other ways for students, so that they can get a better understanding of what teacher have presented. Then the teacher should give them clear instructions and keep them follow the class pace. In the second step, the teacher should help students in time when they face difficulty, and encourage students to demonstrate what they have understood from comprehensive introduction given by the teacher. If students can respond to the teacher's instructions or commands, which indicates that they have acquired the target learning contents, so they can move on to read, write them down or consolidate through other ways. This

procedure has been widely applied in TPR classroom in the primary school in China. Students of grades one and two like to learn from each other and from imitating teacher. TPR activities are vivid and help engage students in active learning.

Generally speaking, productive class activities, such as discussion and games, are indispensable in the primary school English classroom. Because students can think and memorize target language points while participating in these activities or in the process of doing tasks. Therefore, Khairma and Suryana emphasized the crucial role of action games in their paper, it can introduce new languages such as English in an effective way. The teacher interacts with the children in the following order: giving commands, modeling behavior, desires, trying actions after several repetitions (when the child responds with confidence) then combining commands in a creative way or turning them into a competitive game (Khairma & Suryana, 2018). In a word, students speak in action, and act in speaking in TPR English classroom, which places more emphasis on the relationship between speaking and action.

The significance of TPR class activity to students are obvious in English classroom in the early childhood especially in grades one and two. In TPR classroom, the time most students participate in class is the specific class activity like discussion or games. For family reason, some students have no peer brother or sister but classmate, they desire to study with them, discuss with them, learn from them and make up a works with them. That is the reason why students have the higher interest in class activity in TPR classroom in China.

Some scholars designed the integral models of applying TPR in the primary school English classroom. They designed some feasible and interesting class activities and tasks which can be added in TPR English classroom (Ummah, 2017; Khairma and Suryana). Hao who is one of them, paid more attention to the detailed way of applying TPR in English classroom in the

primary school in China. She summarized many appropriate class activities and illustrates the reason why teachers should use them according to Chinese education situation, such as role play, group competition, painting and actual object. As for reason, it can be considered that those students in primary education whose psychological characteristics is often easily attracted by specific visual objects in the early childhood are fond of above class activities, and the more specific object is, the more intuitive image is, the more interested students get.

4. Strategies to Apply TPR

Since most English teachers have recognized the significance of applying TPR in the English teaching in primary education, and suggested strategies to apply TPR in response to the proper time and conditions. It is well-known that TPR is based on the brain and physical actions, meaning people can understand something and respond through target language without transforming target language to mother language. For example, some infants who are not able to speak, but they can respond to the commands given by parents. It shows that infants can understand the target language without language let alone mother language after a certain of listening and watching. In Asher's perspective, this actual phenomenon can be called "a language-body conversation"; it seems that infants respond the words of parents by physical actions, such as watching, smiling, crying, running, holding, grasping, turning and so on. Therefore, the first strategy focuses on the beginning time of applying TPR, Li did a research about the efficiency of applying TPR in kindergarten, and the outcome showed that children around 3 years old are very suitable to learn English as their second language (Li, 2018). Namely, the earlier application of TPR teaching method, the more effective students' English learning.

The second strategy is about arranging the time of input. It means that the inputting time of target language should be enough instead of only speaking one or two times in a lesson, which can be presented by various class activities and tasks. Students need to learn from repeating target learning contents and constantly improving themselves in pronunciation, memory, spelling or something else. Only in this way can students do the same job like the infants who are able to understand the target learning contents at the end.

The third strategy emphasizes the right procedure of applying it. Li put forward to a principle which addressed the right procedures of applying TPR in the Primary School English Classroom in China. She held that students should listen before speak, then write to consolidation. Therefore, this strategy requires teachers to ensure students go through a large amount of listening input before speaking, it can help them make enough preparation and get ready for output. Listening first can efficiently remove anxiety from students when they engage in learning English, and motivate them to get more interested in it.

The fourth strategy pays attention to the teacher's instruction. To begin with, the instruction needs to be considered around student, it is believed that every instruction must be right, clear and comprehensible for students. Then the teacher should keep giving more instructions when some students have problems. Although TPR classroom is student-centered, the teacher cannot overlook the students' performance at every level or watch them doing, they still be responsible for keeping every student follow the class pace. Finally, if it is necessary, the teacher should demonstrate an example after explaining the instruction.

The fifth strategy is using lots of colorful classroom games. There is no doubt that every class should be designed according to students' characteristic and proficiency. Students who in this period like learning from playing game in the primary school English classroom in China.

Yang found it that students are more likely to use physical action to participate in various games, and they usually get a better performance than answering questions. Therefore, there are many classroom game She provides for teachers: 1) Teacher says (To do as I say, not as I do); 2) TPR tornado, it means that the teacher reads the words and students make a circle according to their listening; 3) Body touch, students touch the different word with different parts of their body according to the teacher or classmates' instruction; 4) Smash golden eggs, students select a golden egg with target word, and say out the word correctly (Yang, 2014).

The Sixth strategy is reviewing regularly. In TPR classroom, it also needs to review regularly, but teacher can select various ways to facilitate students to review and consolidate instead of using TPR again, such as spelling game, flash card, drawing and guessing and so on.

5. Problems to Apply TPR

In spite of the constant improving application of TPR, teachers may still encounter some application problems in the daily teaching. In TPR classroom, teachers no longer stand at a fixed position like one in traditional classroom in the primary school in China, mechanically teach language points by repeating again and again, and consolidate students' impression by retelling and copying words, while now most teachers are eager to create the relaxed atmosphere to learn the language points through abundant class activities like playing, singing, chanting, drawing, etc. However, as interesting and suitable for students in the early childhood some teaching activities of TPR are, they can effectively motivate students' English learning interests, whether all of them are effective and necessary or not still needs to be considered. For teachers, every class activity plays the key role in improving students' proficiency instead of only amusing students. In other words, teachers should avoid the problem that designing too much meaningless

amusing class activities, they should think twice about the purpose of each class activity before adding it in the classroom.

Except for seriously selecting every class activity at first, teachers also need to give priority to the sequence of using class activity and avoid the problem of class activity disorder. It means that teachers should keep every class activity in a right order from easy activity to difficult activity, and also need to design around class stages: presentation, practice, production, because no matter how efficient the teaching method is, students are still need time and process to input. Namely, teachers should not neglect the gradual process with cognitive law of students though some test questions which frequently put at first are helpful to improve students' grade in formal examination in China.

Yu (2012) argued that lack of language environment is the next problem they need to face. Although TPR presumably helps students understand and memorize required language learning points, students will find it hard to exert and review what they have learned because they have very limited exposure to the language environment once they leave school.

Another problem is neglecting reading and writing skills. Yang realized that there is a kind of erroneous zone in the application of TPR English teaching method in China: The activity of TPR English teaching method is only used to the practice of listening and speaking, but it is very difficult for the students to practice the skills of reading and writing (Yang, 2014). From the total physical response, it can be seen the importance of direct perception in this teaching method, but it can't deny the importance of other learning skills like reading and writing. Based on the cognition theory, both listening and speaking are the process of input, reading and writing are the process of output, so the four English skills are indispensable and indivisible.

Additionally, for application, listening and reading skills can help students input

information, while speaking and writing can help students output information and practice their thinking and logic. Thus, it is wise for teachers to focus on all the students' four English language skills in any teaching method, including TPR, and encourage students to fully develop the skills especially in their primary learning period.

The last problem is effective evaluation the efficiency of applying TPR. Generally speaking, there are many factors joint influence on one class, such as students' state, learning attitude, learning skill, preference and so on. Consequently, teachers are hard to evaluate the only efficiency of applying TPR through a common examination because of too many students in one classroom in the primary school in China, but can evaluate it by several multiple ways, which should be seriously considered according to the actual situation of students.

To sum up, how to efficiently and scientifically apply TPR in English classroom in the primary school in China is a major concern among teachers. Teachers could face various problems while applying any method, but it does not mean that this method is useless. Only through persistent and mindful application of TPR can teachers solve application problems.

6. Summary

All in all, the TPR method is effective for students in the early childhood due to its emphasis on physical response. It helps students learn and remember target language points from doing actions, even playing games. TPR has been widely used in the primary school English classroom in China and various strategies have been adopted for teaching effectiveness. However, nothing is perfect, and TPR is no exception. When it comes to the application, especially for putting theory into practice, teachers will encounter various problems when in

classroom. Therefore, the application of TPR in the primary school English classroom in China should be more researched, analyzed, and evaluated.

Chapter III Conclusions and Recommendations

In short, TPR is essential for students who are in the early childhood to learn English target language points. They are more likely to learn from fun, and TPR activities can help students maintain their attention and interest towards English learning, and improve their learning efficiency and skills. Generally speaking, students in grades one and two are easily attracted by body movements and emotional pronunciation, and enjoying responding the teachers' commands by physical action in the English classroom. Limited by their cognizance, they have limited exposure to other academic input ways such as reading non-fiction paper, talking with native speaker and listening to news from Voice of America (VOA) in this period of the primary education. However, they can learn most effectively through physical response, such as imitating, role-playing, game, chanting and so on. Because of inputting by totally physical response, most of them have no need to transform target language to mother tongue but can thoroughly and directly understand as well, it also avoids some problems of ambiguity in the process of translations.

On the other hand, TPR is known to be a kind of effective method to teach students in the early childhood in the primary education, especially in English language teaching. Except for the positive influence of TPR to students' English learning efficiency, it can also improve the teaching efficiency from lengthening the attention time of students and construct to students' confidence by encouraging them to follow the instructions to finish the class activity. In the daily teaching, the teacher can resort to TPR to provide actual context for students to exert what they have learned, and the better understanding obtained than other methods through the movements and thinking of students while in TPR activity. In a word, the form of target

language depends on imperative repeating and memorizing from the physical response, students remember the English target language points both in mental and physical way, which intentionally consolidates their learning achievement. Therefore, the more efficient students' learning, the more efficient teachers' instructions.

Since the TPR method is believed to play a significant role both in learning and teaching efficiency in the primary school English classroom in China, how to efficiently apply it in the daily teaching becomes the next problem to overcome. First, teachers should think twice and attentively select every class activity before lesson design in order to make every class activity meaningful and beneficial for students. Teachers also need to consider the sequence of each class activity, because students need the process from remembering to creating, which requires teachers to carefully arrange the teaching procedure to build a scaffold for students' learning. In addition, the primary school students in China have limited exposure to the English language environment. Therefore, teachers should establish a language environment for students and diversify instructional or learning activities in class and after class, like role play, letter writing, discussion, team-based learning activities in class. They should also encourage students to listen to English songs, read picture books, and watch videos after class, these activities can provide extra language environment after class, which is beneficial for students' language learning. Finally, although it is hard to evaluate the effectiveness of TPR based on a specific way, teachers may try multiple ways like analyzing from a series of tests or directly interview students to evaluate and assess students' performance. As for review activities, mixed methods can help students consolidate deeply.

Second, there are some other recommendations to the process of efficiently apply TPR in English classroom in the primary school in China. It is essential for teachers to design and

modify teaching for students in TPR classroom. Consequently, teachers need to (1) explain the instruction as clear as possible, and demonstrate by physical action if it is necessary; (2) provide students with some media, reliable sources to help students absorb learning points of a target language; (3) give students more exercise to practice; and (4) give students enough time before production.

Third, there is no doubt teachers interested in using TPR need to keep learning about TPR and design activities according to students' need and interest. Only in this way can they ensure the effective target language teaching with the scientific application of the TPR method.

In conclusion, TPR plays an indispensable role in the primary school English classroom in China, it has the significance both in learning and teaching efficiency. By applying the TPR method, students gradually have the ability to independently learn and try to learn from people around them. Additionally, in TPR classroom, students can not only learn English enjoyably and spontaneously, but also fully develop their overall learning abilities and four English skills. Therefore, it has a considerable research and useful value in efficiently applying TPR in the primary school English classroom in China as well.

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