



EXPLORING STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN LEARNING SPEAKING THROUGH TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE METHOD

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Received: September 2025

Accepted: October 2025

Published: October 2025

DOI:

Abstract : *This study aims to explore students' experiences in learning English speaking through the implementation of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method. Using a qualitative descriptive design, the research focuses on how students perceive, respond to, and engage with speaking activities that involve physical actions and commands. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and students' reflective notes. The findings indicate that TPR creates a more interactive and enjoyable learning atmosphere, reduces students' anxiety in speaking English, and helps them remember vocabulary and expressions more effectively. Students reported that the use of gestures and physical movement facilitated better comprehension and increased their willingness to participate in speaking tasks. However, some challenges were also identified, such as limited vocabulary coverage and the need for teacher creativity in designing varied activities. Overall, this study suggests that TPR can be an effective strategy to enhance students' speaking ability and foster positive learning experiences in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom.*

Keywords: *Total Physical Response; Students' Experiences; Speaking Skills*

Abstrak : *Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman siswa dalam belajar berbicara bahasa Inggris melalui penerapan metode Total Physical Response (TPR). Dengan menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini berfokus pada bagaimana siswa mempersepsi, merespons, dan terlibat dengan aktivitas berbicara yang melibatkan tindakan dan perintah fisik. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan catatan reflektif siswa. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa TPR menciptakan suasana belajar yang lebih interaktif dan menyenangkan, mengurangi kecemasan siswa dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris, dan membantu mereka mengingat kosakata dan ekspresi dengan lebih efektif. Siswa melaporkan bahwa penggunaan gestur dan gerakan fisik memfasilitasi pemahaman yang lebih baik dan meningkatkan kemauan mereka untuk berpartisipasi dalam tugas berbicara. Namun, beberapa tantangan juga diidentifikasi, seperti cakupan kosakata yang terbatas dan perlunya kreativitas guru dalam merancang aktivitas yang bervariasi. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa TPR dapat menjadi strategi yang efektif untuk meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara siswa dan menumbuhkan pengalaman belajar yang positif di kelas Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL).*

Kata Kunci : *Total Physical Response; Pengalaman Siswa; Kemampuan Berbicara*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is a fundamental skill in English language learning because it enables learners to express ideas, share opinions, and engage in real communication. However, in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), speaking is often regarded as the most challenging skill to master. Learners frequently struggle with limited vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, and fluency, which can lead to low confidence and speaking anxiety (Brown, 2007; Harmer, 2007). For this reason, teachers are encouraged to apply methods that create supportive, interactive, and motivating learning environments to help learners overcome these challenges (Ur, 2012).

One method that has been widely recognized for its effectiveness in language teaching is Total Physical Response (TPR), developed by James Asher in the 1970s. TPR is based on the coordination between speech and physical movement, following the natural way children acquire their first language. In this method, teachers give instructions in the target language and students respond with corresponding actions. The approach emphasizes comprehension before production, allowing learners to listen and act before they are required to speak. This principle helps reduce anxiety, promotes active engagement, and enhances memory retention through kinaesthetic learning (Asher, 2009; Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Although TPR is primarily known for improving vocabulary and listening comprehension, it also plays a significant role in developing speaking skills. By repeatedly responding to commands and participating in meaningful physical activities, students gradually internalize language structures and become more confident in producing spoken responses. The interactive and stress-free environment created by TPR lowers learners' affective filter, making them more willing to speak without fear of mistakes. Moreover, the integration of movement provides a memorable context for communication, enabling learners to recall vocabulary and use it in authentic speaking situations (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

Thus, the TPR method offers not only cognitive but also affective benefits in language learning. It supports learners in acquiring speaking skills more naturally while simultaneously reducing anxiety and fostering motivation. In line with this perspective, learners' confidence and belief in their ability to perform language tasks have been shown to significantly influence their performance, as students with higher self-efficacy tend to engage more actively and demonstrate stronger thinking and language abilities (Novitaningrum & Daristin, 2025). Therefore, understanding how students experience speaking activities through TPR is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of this method in EFL classrooms and to explore its potential as an alternative strategy for speaking instruction.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore students' experiences in learning speaking through the Total Physical Response (TPR) method. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it provides a deeper understanding of learners' perspectives, behaviours, and feelings during the learning process (Creswell, 2014).

The participants of the study were 15 eleventh-grade students at a senior high school who had been introduced to speaking activities through TPR. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, as they were directly involved in the implementation of TPR in

their English classroom. The research was conducted over four sessions of classroom activities facilitated by the English teacher.

Data were collected through three techniques: classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and students' reflective notes. Observations were carried out to record students' participation, engagement, and verbal as well as non-verbal re-sponses during TPR activities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a group of selected students to gain insights into their experiences, perceptions, and challenges in learning speaking through TPR. In addition, reflective notes written by students after each session were used to capture their personal reflections on the learning process.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. The analysis involved familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, identifying recurring patterns, and categorizing them into broader themes that represented students' experiences. To ensure the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was applied by comparing observations, interviews, and reflective notes. Peer debriefing was also conducted to validate the interpretations.

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the research process. Permission was obtained from the school authorities and the English teacher, while informed consent was secured from all participants. Students' participation was voluntary, and their identities were kept anonymous to maintain confidentiality.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Result

The findings of this study revealed that students had generally positive experiences in learning speaking through the Total Physical Response (TPR) method. Classroom observations showed that TPR created a lively and enjoyable learning atmosphere where students actively participated in activities such as following commands, performing role plays, and practicing movements in groups. Students were enthusiastic and more willing to speak English compared to traditional lessons. The interviews supported these observations, as many students admitted that they felt less anxious when learning speaking through TPR. One student even mentioned that acting out commands reduced their fear of making mistakes, as everyone was moving and speaking together, which made the class more relaxed. This indicates that TPR successfully lowered students' anxiety and encouraged active engagement.

Another important finding was that TPR improved students' vocabulary retention and boosted their confidence in speaking. Students were able to recall and use new words more effectively when these words were linked to physical movements. For example, they easily remembered verbs such as open, close, stand up, and jump because they had physically performed these actions in class. Some students also began to construct short sentences using the vocabulary they had learned. In their reflective notes, one student wrote that they could say, "I open the door," because they remembered the moment when the teacher asked them to act it out. This suggests that TPR not only facilitated memorization of vocabulary but also helped students use the language in meaningful speaking contexts, thereby increasing their confidence to speak in English.

Despite these positive outcomes, several challenges were also identified. Students pointed out that TPR was mostly effective for concrete and action-related vocabulary but less useful for learning abstract expressions or complex sentences. In addition, some students felt

that repeating the same actions became monotonous, which sometimes reduced their motivation. They expressed a desire for more variety in classroom activities. These challenges suggest that while TPR is effective in supporting speaking development at the basic level, teachers need to be creative in designing engaging activities and may need to combine TPR with other communicative strategies for more advanced language practice.

In summary, the results of the study highlight that TPR provided a supportive and interactive environment for speaking practice. It reduced students' anxiety, increased their vocabulary retention, and enhanced their speaking confidence. However, its limitations also indicate that TPR should be complemented with other methods to maximize its effectiveness in developing speaking skills in EFL classrooms.

2. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the Total Physical Response (TPR) method created a positive and supportive atmosphere for students to practice speaking in English. This supports Asher's (2009) view that language learning is most effective when it is stress-free and enjoyable. The students' reduced anxiety and increased willingness to participate can also be explained through Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which suggests that learners acquire language more effectively when their emotional barriers such as fear and nervousness are lowered. By engaging students in physical actions, TPR allowed them to focus on meaning rather than on linguistic form, which minimized the fear of making mistakes and encouraged oral participation.

The improvement in vocabulary retention and speaking confidence observed in this study confirms previous findings that TPR strengthens memory and comprehension through the combination of verbal input and kinaesthetic movement (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Associating words with physical actions gave students meaningful contexts, which helped them recall and use vocabulary more effectively. This is in line with Larsen-Freeman and Anderson's (2011) argument that repeated exposure to commands in TPR allows learners to internalize language patterns and gradually produce spoken responses. Students' ability to construct simple sentences from previously learned commands demonstrates that TPR not only supports receptive skills but also contributes to the development of productive skills such as speaking.

However, the challenges reported by students suggest that TPR has limitations when applied to more complex language learning. As some participants noted, TPR was less effective in teaching abstract vocabulary or longer communicative expressions. This limitation echoes the criticism highlighted by Ur (2012), who argued that TPR is best suited for beginners but may not fully address the needs of advanced learners. Furthermore, the repetition of similar activities sometimes led to boredom among students, highlighting the importance of teacher creativity in maintaining variety and engagement. Teachers need to design diverse TPR activities and integrate them with other communicative approaches such as role play, task-based learning, or project-based learning to sustain motivation and extend learners' speaking development.

Overall, the discussion of findings suggests that TPR can serve as an effective method for reducing speaking anxiety, enhancing vocabulary retention, and increasing students' confidence in speaking English. Nevertheless, its limitations point to the need for a balanced approach in which TPR is combined with other methods to address different aspects of speaking competence. By doing so, teachers can maximize the benefits of TPR while also

providing opportunities for learners to practice more advanced and authentic communicative skills.

CONCLUSION

This study explored students' experiences in learning English speaking through the Total Physical Response (TPR) method using a qualitative descriptive approach. The findings revealed that TPR created a positive and enjoyable classroom atmosphere, reduced students' speaking anxiety, and motivated them to participate more actively. By connecting vocabulary with physical actions, TPR facilitated better retention and recall of words, which in turn increased students' confidence to construct simple sentences in English. These results confirm that TPR can serve as an effective strategy for improving speaking skills in EFL classrooms, particularly at the beginner level.

Despite its benefits, the study also found certain limitations in the application of TPR. The method was less effective in teaching abstract vocabulary or more complex expressions, and repetitive activities sometimes reduced students' motivation. These challenges indicate that while TPR is highly useful for building foundational speaking competence, it may not be sufficient as a stand-alone method. To maximize its effectiveness, TPR should be combined with other communicative approaches that provide more variety and address higher-level speaking development.

In conclusion, TPR has significant potential as a language teaching strategy for developing speaking skills, especially in reducing anxiety and fostering learner confidence. Teachers are encouraged to use TPR creatively and integrate it with other techniques to create a balanced and engaging learning environment. Future studies may investigate how TPR can be adapted or combined with other methods to support more advanced stages of speaking competence in EFL contexts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

First and foremost, I would like to express my greatest gratitude to Allah SWT, the most Gracious and Merciful. Because of His Blessing, Mercy, and Grace, I can accomplish the writing of this article. I also would like to express my great appreciation and sincerest gratitude to the following people:

1. The chairman of STIT Miftahul Midad Lumajang
2. The leader of STIT Miftahul Midad Lumajang
3. All Lectures in STIT Miftahul Midad

Finally, I hope this thesis will provide some advantages for the writer himself as well as the readers. Any constructive suggestions or criticisms will be respectfully welcomed and appreciated to make this thesis better.

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