

Pre-Service English Teachers' Use of Total Physical Response (TPR) in Teaching English to Young Learners in Online and Offline Mode

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Abstract:

Numerous studies have explored the implementation of Total Physical Response (TPR); however, most have primarily focused on offline teaching contexts. This study aims to describe the implementation of TPR in both online and offline young learners' English lessons. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, with classroom observations as the primary data source and interviews serving as supplementary data. The observation instrument was based on the 13 principles of TPR outlined by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011). The participants were two female pre-service English teachers: one teaching offline and the other online. The findings indicate that both teachers were unable to fully optimize the application of TPR in their respective settings. The observation results revealed variability in the number and frequency of TPR principles applied by each teacher, with some principles being implemented consistently, others infrequently, and some not at all. The interview data confirmed that the implementation of TPR was shaped by various factors perceived as either advantages or challenges in each context. The study suggests that teachers' knowledge and experience with TPR are critical factors influencing the effective implementation of TPR in both online and face-to-face classrooms.

Key words: Pre-service English Teachers, Teaching English to Young Learners, Total Physical Response (TPR)

INTRODUCTION

Although new pedagogical breakthroughs continue to be created to support the teaching-learning process, methods that have proven effective over the years also remain to be used to facilitate learning, including Total Physical Response (TPR). TPR is a learning method that was invented by famous American psychologist, Dr. James Asher who created this method in the 1970s as a result of his observation of first language acquisition in the 1960s, as cited in (Brown, 2000). TPR as we have come to know is also often utilized for the teaching and learning of English in the context of primary or young learners (Hounhanou, 2020). Since young learners learn first by listening or taking in language input aurally, the use of TPR in young learners' class necessitates a large percentage of spoken input besides plenty of physical movements. In this case, TPR involves not only physical movement, but also listening skill from the students. Total Physical Response often focuses more on teaching language, particularly vocabulary. This method encourages young learners to master vocabulary while keeping them engaged since it is enjoyable (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). It has long been a preferred method in early childhood education, where learning emphasizes activities closely tied to physical movement and engagement. (Astutik & Aulina, 2017).

Being known to have many benefits does not necessarily mean that TPR has no weaknesses. The benefits obtained from TPR cannot be optimized if it is applied monotonously. Sumarni et al. (2022), argued in their research that the application of TPR that is not facilitated with meaningful interaction can prevent students from experiencing the optimal benefits of

TPR. Hounhanou (2020) in her study at a secondary school explained that TPR use is often limited to beginner level due to its lack of flexibility in teaching all topics. She also added that TPR tends to disregard narrative forms due to its principal characteristic, the use of imperative sentences.

In practice, Total Physical Response can be applied not only in face-to-face activities, because of its ease and practicality, but it can also be applied online relatively well. Regardless, the implementation of TPR in online learning requires additional steps since teachers can only observe and interact with students remotely.

Previous studies exploring the effective implementation of TPR focused exclusively on a single mode of instruction, either online or offline; These include studies conducted by Qorih & Farisya (2022), Heriyadi (2022), and Astutik et al. (2019) which were carried out in offline classes. Meanwhile, research by Ekawati (2022) and Harahap and Panjaitan (2021) focused on online learning contexts. In addition, many existing studies of TPR also tend to direct their attention to how its use has effect on the development of certain language skills such as vocabulary and speaking (Abata et al., 2021; Celik et al., 2021; Hounhanou, 2020; Ngo & Pham, 2018; Sumarni et al., 2022). As of this recent study, it aims to explore the implementation of TPR principles by pre-service English teachers in both online and offline classes.

Although there have been studies on TPR in online contexts, their primary focus was more on the use of specific tools or add-on apps to mediate the implementation of TPR (Kuo et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2019). Additionally, despite the extensive literature on TPR, studies specifically involving pre-service English teachers remain limited as most of them chose to investigate students' development and perceptions regarding TPR utilization (Ha et al., 2020; Ilmi & Anwar, 2022; Tunru et al., 2024). Many of these studies also predominantly relied on surveys and/or mixed research methods, whereas the current study employs observational methods to closely examine and describe the key implementation of TPR across different class modes. Describing the implementation of key TPR principles in online and offline classes was necessary due to the limited studies examining both contexts simultaneously through observation, particularly involving pre-service English teachers. This study also aimed to determine whether TPR could be fully or effectively implemented, considering the unique constraints and affordances of each context and the teachers' limited teaching experience. This research thereby aims to provide insights into the learning process using TPR, specifically examining the extent to which its key principles are applied by the pre-service English teachers in both online and offline classes, with the purpose of identifying potential implementation challenges and maximizing its benefits to enhance learning.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used qualitative research design and observational study as the research method. Observational study is a study in which the researcher produces data as it is from the results of his/ her observations without any intention to intervene the output. As Creswell (2013) pointed out, this design and methods were used because detailed and thorough information about the direct application of TPR can be gained through observation that further aided the description of TPR implementation in the online and offline lesson sessions. This research was conducted in Yogyakarta and involved two teachers as the participants. The two participants were both pre-service teachers who taught in two different classes, and were selected based on different criteria, namely their class mode. The first participant being observed was teaching English to third graders of a public / state school online and the second

participant being observed was teaching English, also to third graders, in an offline class. Both study participants have more than two years of teaching experience, and had received little knowledge about the concept of TPR through their English teacher preparation program. While expecting to find out whether the TPR principles were consistently implemented by the pre-service teachers in both classes, this study also hoped to capture and identify whether there would be variation in their TPR application that may be influenced by their teaching experience and/ or class setting or mode of teaching. Both classes that were observed were in one-on-one teaching-learning format.

The researchers collected the data through observations and interviews; each data collection technique was carried out once. Observation being the primary technique of the data collection and interview as the secondary means. The observation checklist and the interview questions were evaluated for alignment with the 13 principles of TPR identified by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) and validated by an EYL subject matter specialist and practitioner to assess its content validity. First, the researcher conducted the observation, and made the transcript of the observed class. Lastly, the researcher conducted the interview after the data from the observation was gathered and transcribed. These two techniques were chosen as an attempt to sync and confirm the consistency of the observational and interview data. The observational instrument was made in reference to the 13 principles of TPR by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Observation checklist form

Construct	Components	Tally	Total (N)	Remark/ Note
Body language	Body movements Observe and act Feelings of success			
Target language usage	Language chunks Understand before speaking Teacher imperative sentence Flexibility in understanding combination of target language chunks Spoken over written Speak when ready			
Teacher correction	Unobtrusive correction Delayed teacher correction			
Class implementation	No fixed routines Fun Learning			

The researchers also conducted follow up interviews to gain more insight and to confirm about TPR principles that had been applied during the observed classes. The interview

questions were structured around the implementation of TPR principles, its benefits, and the challenges of its usage as faced by the teachers-participants:

List of Interview questions

1. How consistent are you in implementing the TPR principle in your English lesson?
2. How do you implement the principle in your class?
3. What was your reason for implementing these particular principles of TPR more than the others in your class?
4. What benefits did you experience from using TPR as a learning method?
5. Were there any challenges during the TPR implementation in your class? If so, please specify.

This research data was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. Taking into consideration that the researcher needs to do interpretation while developing themes; also, the data analyzed is already theorized, not merely description (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006) there are six phases that must be carried out by researchers, with phase one: familiarizing with the data. In this phase, the researcher read and checked the data repeatedly, to shape the pattern identification during the process. The next phase, phase two: generating initial code, the researcher created initial codes for the data in order to organize it into meaningful groups. Afterward, phase three: searching for themes, where the researcher sorted the codes and compiled the codes into themes, sub-themes, or even created a set of codes that does not associate with any of the themes. Then, phase four: reviewing themes, the researcher enhanced the theme and made sure that each theme works coherently. The researcher re-read the data and edited the themes or codes as needed themes that do not reflect the data analysis. To complete the previous phases, phase five: defining and naming themes, in this phase the researcher defined the themes in detail and gave each theme a name that is able to make readers understand the meaning when reading the name. Lastly, phase six: producing the report, the researcher constructed a comprehensive report that included adequate evidence from the data to support the narrative that tells about the story of the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This subchapter presents all of the findings from the observation and interview session. In the observation session, both of the classes were learning about daily activities. Only the most frequently used principles that were shown from each observed class will be presented here, supported by data from the interview session. The researchers coded the online class teacher by T1 and the offline class teacher by T2. Below is the comparative table of the implemented TPR principles as observed and identified in the online class of the first teacher-participant (T1) and in the offline class session of the second teacher/ T2.

Table 2
Comparative Table of Applied TPR Principles by T1 and T2

Construct	Components	Code	Total (N)	
			T1	T2
			Online mode	Offline mode

Body language	Body movements	BM	0	2
	Observe and act	OA	0	3
	Feelings of success	FS	1	0
Target language usage	Language chunks	LC	43	3
	Understand before speaking	UbS	5	8
	Teacher imperative sentence	TIS	4	7
	Flexibility in understanding combination of target language chunks	UCLC	2	0
	Spoken over written	SW	6	3
Teacher correction	Speak when ready	SR	2	1
	Unobtrusive correction	UC	8	3
	Delayed teacher correction	DC	1	0
Class implementation	No fixed routines	NR	1	1
	Fun Learning	FL	2	2

The Implementation of Key TPR Principles in the Online Class

The finding from the observation showed that T1's implementation of the TPR principles in her class did not show a full use of all the 13 principles. T1 implemented 11 out of 13 principles, specifically the LC (Language Chunks), UbS (Understand before Speaking), SW (Spoken over Written), TIS (Teacher Imperative Sentence), UCLC (Flexibility in Understanding Combination of Target Language Chunks), SR (Speak when Ready), UC (Unobtrusive Correction), DC (Delayed Teacher Correction), FL (Fun Learning), NR (No fixed Routines), and FS (Feelings of Success). Principles that were most implemented are LC and UC as can be seen from Table 3 below which will be further discussed in the subsequent part of this section.

Table 3
Online Observation Result (T1/ 1st Teacher-participant)

Construct		Component	Code	Total
Target language usage		Language chunks	LC	43
		Understand before speaking	UbS	5
		Spoken over written	SW	6
		Teacher imperative sentence	TIS	4
		Flexibility in understanding combination of target language chunks	UCLC	2
Teacher correction		Speak when ready	SR	2
		Unobtrusive correction	UC	8
Class implementation		Delayed teacher correction	DC	1
		Fun Learning	FL	2
Body language		No fixed routines	NR	1
		Feelings of success	FS	1
		Observe and act	OA	0

Language Chunks

T1 applied the language chunks principle where she did not only use the target language word by word, but also as a whole sentence. Based on the interview, T1 said that she often applied language chunks in her teaching process. T1 used language chunks a lot when giving introductory words, giving instructions, asking questions, or explaining things, especially to students who according to T1 need a lot of exposure to the target language as can be seen in Extract 1.

Extract 1 Sample of T1 observation transcript

Field Note: The class ran conductively, Ss (Students) were able to complete the story using fill-in-the-blank format well even though there were still a few errors.

T: *Yes, very good! Good job, S (T1 gave a thumb up). And then S, after you already know about Ali's daily routine, and now Miss T need to know about your daily activity (T1 pointed at S). Can you speak in English about your daily activity? Start from when you wake up (T1 pretended she was waking up) until you go to sleep (T1 pretended she was sleeping), can you?*

In the implementation of language chunks, T1 still employed teaching aids such as visuals and movements for her student who needed extra help. The student also got modeling on how to pronounce or use a word when T1 applied language chunks. It is considered that the implementation of chunks can help students improve their understanding, fluency output, and accuracy of the target language itself (Albaqami, 2022). The application of chunks in T1 learning was based on several reasons, some of which were to make meaning conveyed clearer and make the student understand the learnt vocabulary. T1's emphasis on using language chunks from the target language aligned with Ellis and Sinclair (1996) suggestion that frequent use of language chunks facilitate better word retention, which ultimately contributes to more accurate pronunciation.

Unobtrusive Correction

As observed, the student of T1 sometimes still made mistakes when answering some questions. As this happened, T1 attempted to provide correction to the student in the best way possible. T1 tried to be consistent in applying and carrying out unobtrusive correction in various ways; trying to direct the student to the correct answer, used positive examples from other students, or provided explanations. Extract 2 showed when T1 made direct feedback while giving appreciation by saying "Good job".

Extract 2 Sample of T1 observation transcript

Field Note: T1 asked SS to read the title of the topic that would be studied that day, SS confidently read the title and translated it into Indonesian when asked by T1.

S : *I wake up in the morning.*

T : *What do you think about this one? Kira-kira artinya apa nak?*

S : *Aku bangun saat pagi. (I wake up in the morning)*

T : *Yes, good job, aku bangun di pagi hari (T1 gave a thumb up). Nah, today, we have a list vocabulary. This is a new vocabulary list for you. The first is... apa S? Can you read this one?*

Sometimes, the student did not completely make a mistake, but T1 still highlighted the correct answer so that the student was also exposed to the correct form. According to T1, teaching in classes of students who received unobtrusive correction would make learning run more effectively because student motivation can be maintained since the correction for the mistakes does not feel like judgment or punishment. When providing feedback, it is important to consider the student's personality as well as other factors to determine the most suitable feedback method (Shabani & Safari, 2016). TPR, which is part of the natural learning approach, does not make corrections immediate to students making mistakes; it, in a way, sees the mistakes as an indicator of students' current abilities for the teacher to notice and further address (Celce-Murcia, 1991). As was done by T1, she carried out unobtrusive correction by deliberately overlooking the students' immediate mistakes, instead rephrasing or echoing the more appropriate form to subtly guide them.

The Implementation of Key TPR Principles in the Offline Class

The observation taken from the offline class showed the range of T2's implementation of TPR principles. As observed, T2 did not fully implement the key TPR principles in her learning process. It can be seen from Table 4 that T2's class only showed 10 out of 13 principles of TPR, particularly the UbS, TIS, LC, SW, SR, OA, BM, UC, FL, and NR. The most used principles in her class were UbS (Understand before Speaking) and TIS (Teacher Imperative Sentence) which will be further analyzed and discussed in the subsequent part.

Table 4
Offline Observation Result (T2/ 2nd Teacher-participant)

Construct	Components	Code	Total
Target language usage	Understand before speaking	UbS	8
	Teacher imperative sentence	TIS	7
	Language chunks	LC	3
	Spoken over written	SW	3
	Speak when ready	SR	1
	Flexibility in understanding combination of target language chunks	UCLC	0
Body language	Observe and act	OA	3
	Body movements	BM	2
	Feelings of success	FS	0
Teacher correction	Unobtrusive correction	UC	3
	Delayed teacher correction	DC	0
Class implementation	Fun Learning	FL	2
	No fixed routines	NR	1

Understand before speaking

This TPR principle signifies how students are required to understand the material being taught before the speaking / spoken production stage. The speaking stage itself is part of the production stage in which learners have previously had the exposure to the language input before they can produce the expected output. In Extract 3, T2 gave her student an explanation and examples of daily activities verbally using visual aids in the form of flashcards while also modeling the activities shown in the flashcards.

Extract 3 Sample of T2 observation transcript

Field Note: The learning process has been going on for quite some time, but Ss was still passive even though there were only few sound distractions that interfere the learning.

T : *Okay, inget-inget kata-katanya. (Okay, remember the word) Ini apa tadi? Wake up, artinya? (means?) (T2 pretended she was waking up) Wake up...*

S : *Bangun.*

T : *Terus (and then) take a bath (T2 pointed to a picture with a kid taking a bath), take a bath, ayo.*

S : *Take a bath.*

T : *Artinya apa? (what does it mean?) Take a bath (T2 pretended she was taking a bath)*

S : *Mandi.*

Several times during the lesson, T2 provided language input to her student and most of the time she did so by employing the same simple techniques that involve verbal, physical, and visual cues or tools. When interviewed, T2 said that she did not have a special technique for applying this principle and only attempted to give variation using flashcards while physically demonstrating it. In conformity with Harmer (2001), it is a must that students are first exposed to the target language through listening or viewing before expected to produce output independently. He further asserted that this exposure can be achieved through activities such as listening to tapes, using gestures, objects, or pictures. While observing T2's class, her student appeared to have a shy personality which made the student not so active during the learning process. This was when TPR played its effective role as it aimed to create an enjoyable and less stressful learning environment by allowing the student's self-confidence to grow and as their understanding of the target language set in; as a result, the student naturally started to speak, ask, and respond to questions (Nigora, 2018). Based on the results of the interview, T2 also admitted that she chose to apply this principle because she felt that her students' abilities were still lacking, therefore she resorted with this principle and coupled it with teaching aids (i.e.: flashcards) to make the material understood more easily.

Teacher imperative sentence

One of the focal teaching-learning characteristics implementing TPR is the use of "Teacher imperative sentence" principle. During the learning process using this principle, the teacher acted and served as a guide by giving instructions to the students, and either to reprimand them or ask and instruct them to demonstrate or do something as shown and exemplified in the following observation extract:

Extract 4 Sample of T2 observation transcript

Field Note: T2 asked her Ss (Sly, a pseudonym) to create sentences based on previously learned vocabulary, by providing sentence modeling first. Ss imitated right after T2 spoke:

T : *Betul. Sekarang, coba sekarang Sly sendiri yang bilang, inget nggak? Miss dulu ya (Yes, true. Now Sly, please try to say it, do you remember? I'll go first) (T2 held up her finger). I wake up in the morning, I-*

S : *I...*

T : ***Bentar, nanti Sly habis itu ya...**(Wait for your turn, you say if after me ya ...) I wake up in the morning, I take a bath in the morning (T2 pretended she was taking a bath), I have breakfast in the morning, I go to school in the morning. Okay, I wake up in the morning (T2 pretended she was waking up)...*

In Extract 4, T2 asked the student to repeat after T2's words, but the student did not fully understand that he was supposed to repeat her after she was done speaking. In turn, the student accidentally interrupted T2's speech because he immediately repeated T2. T2's response as this event occurred was to ask students to be patient or to wait for his turn, which is included in the imperatives as commands type. In addition, the researcher found that during the observed learning process, T2 only used imperatives as a command, that was "*lihat sini*" (look here). This happened as the student lost their focus considering that young learners have a shorter attention span compared to adults. Imperative sentences were used in T2's class in her response to several situations such as when students lost focus, unable to understand T2's instructions, or when T2 reprimanded her student. T2 believed that when a student's focus wandered, it could hinder their learning. T2 also integrated gestures to help students refocus in the class. Therefore, besides giving her student commands to do something or to follow her instructions, T2 used imperative sentences as her classroom management strategy. Along the same line, Ibrohim et al. (2018) argued that the concept of TPR involved a combination of what students hear, for example through instructions; and what student responses to these instructions.

This study aimed to examine and describe how pre-service teachers implemented the key principles of Total Physical Response (TPR) in English language instruction for young learners, both in offline and online class formats. Hence, when comparing the key aspects of TPR implemented in both participants' classes, the observations revealed that TPR can particularly enhance the vocabulary learning process and yield significant results when used consistently and periodically. While it may not be fully effective in T1's and T2's cases, teachers' modeling and demonstration of the target vocabulary (whether or not their students imitated it), had helped the learners to better understand the meanings of the vocabulary being taught. In the meantime, the observation had also revealed different results in T1 and T2's application of TPR principles. Although there are 13 principles representing the ideal use of TPR, not all of them were implemented in T1's and T2's class. There were four distinct principles that stood out as the most prominent from both classes. In addition, as the interview was conducted for data confirmation, for example, regarding the most implemented principles, the challenges and the advantages of using TPR, the interview results from both participants also showed consistency in terms of the implemented principles as they were identified in the observed classes. The two most prominent principles from the online class were "language chunks" and "unobtrusive correction"; while the principles most frequently applied from the offline class were "understand before speaking" and "teacher imperative sentence".

However, there were certain principles that did not appear in each class. In the online class, "body movements" and "observe and act" did not appear, as T1 did not instruct the student to follow the movements even though the teacher had modeled it. In their study, Astutik and Aulina (2017) pointed out that kindergarten students' response to their teacher commands may not only be made through physical movements, but also verbally. This contrasts with the current

study, where students were observed as less active, and there was a lack of commands from the teacher to encourage imitation. As a result, the students predominantly respond verbally rather than physically. In the meantime, there were three principles of TPR that did not appear in the offline class, namely “flexibility in understanding combination of target language chunks” due to T2’s limited use of the target language, “feelings of success” due to the student shyness or passive involvement, and “delayed teacher correction”. The follow-up interviews further confirmed what these two participants had demonstrated during the observation phases.

The researchers found no significant differences in the implementation of TPR principles based on class mode. Both teacher-participants also confirmed that the class mode they experienced was not a determining factor in their TPR implementation. Furthermore, the findings of this study also highlighted the significant role of various factors that could influence the learning process, particularly the adoption of certain key aspects of teaching methods. These factors may include the teacher’s expertise or comfort with specific methods or techniques and the students’ personalities. Drew et al. (2007) believe that teachers’ knowledge and competence have a definite impact on classroom practices. As Asher (1981), cited in Al Harrasi (2014), posited, important features of TPR could effectively lower the affective filter, reducing learners’ anxiety and creating a more natural learning environment. This could also explain the situation with T1 and T2’s passive and shy students, who might have benefitted from performing physical miming or imitation had T2 encouraged him/ her to do so.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that while both teachers incorporated TPR, its principal or key components were not fully utilized. Out of the 13 principles of TPR outlined by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), some principles were more dominantly implemented, while others were not. The results varied in the ways in which they were implemented in the online and the offline class. The class mode did not significantly impact TPR implementation; instead, key factors such as student’s personalities, knowledge levels, and teachers’ understanding of TPR played a more influential role. This study also demonstrates that the TPR method can assist students in their learning vocabulary. Given the results, this study still has some limitations; the researchers thereby have several recommendations for teachers of young language learners and future researchers. For in-service teachers and/ or pre-service teachers, they can leverage their EYL TPR-based teaching by integrating other learning methods or various media. They can also review or enhance their understanding of TPR method by participating in teaching workshops or being part of a teacher professional development community, reviewing related literature, observing, and directly applying TPR in a variety of contexts. In addition, it is important to note that this study is limited to the specific topics being taught during the observed class, the (one-on-one) class format, the class mode, and the teachers’ knowledge and experience with TPR. Thus, future studies on this topic can advance by exploring a wider range of contexts and participants to produce more comprehensive results, for instance, by involving different types of classes, such as large classes of young learners or mixed-ability groups with a greater number of students. Future researchers might consider involving teachers with extensive teaching experience, as they may be more articulate in demonstrating their expertise in implementing the key principles of TPR, particularly to investigate how they would tackle issues and / or situations which were present in this study such as the online class format, the students’ personality and their understanding about the learning material. Conducting the study following the aforementioned recommendation using mixed research methods could also yield more in-depth findings.

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