


## Effectiveness of Total Physical Response in English speaking skill in EFL beginners

### Efectividad del Método “Total Physical Response” en la habilidad comunicativa del inglés en principiantes

### Eficácia do Método “Total Physical Response” na capacidade comunicativa dos principiantes em inglês


Abata, Mercedes; Suárez, Rodrigo; Portilla, Adamary; Vayas, Mirka



 **Mercedes Abata** fanny.abata@utc.edu.ec  
Universidad Técnica de Cotopaxi, Ecuador

 **Rodrigo Suárez** rodrigo.suarez@utc.edu.ec  
Universidad Técnica de Cotopaxi, Ecuador

 **Adamary Portilla** adamary.portilla@utc.edu.ec  
Universidad Técnica de Cotopaxi, Ecuador

 **Mirka Vayas** mirka.vayas@utc.edu.ec  
Universidad Técnica de Cotopaxi, Ecuador

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**Resumen:** El objetivo principal de esta investigación cualitativa fue determinar la efectividad del uso de “Total Physical Response (TPR)” para desarrollar la habilidad del habla en estudiantes principiantes en una escuela rural. Este estudio se aplicó utilizando el método de investigación-acción que involucró observación, planificación e implementación. El proceso se llevó a cabo en clases de cinco semanas durante el periodo noviembre 2019-enero 2020 con 26 alumnos de 7mo grado en la escuela “Belisario Quevedo”. Los instrumentos utilizados fueron ficha de observación estructurada y no estructurada y el diario del maestro. Los resultados mostraron que TPR es eficaz para desarrollar la habilidad del habla en principiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera. En conclusión, “Total Physical Response” ayudó a principiantes a familiarizarse con el idioma y a aprender inglés con el uso de movimientos, mímicas y gestos, haciendo que los estudiantes produzcan el idioma inglés para comunicarse.

**Palabras clave:** Total Physical Response, Habilidad del hablar, Pronunciación, Vocabulario, Fluidez.

**Abstract:** The principal objective of this qualitative research was to determine the effectiveness of using Total Physical Response (TPR) to develop speaking skill in beginner’s learners in a rural school. This study was applied using action research method, which involved observation, planning and implementation. The process was carried out in five-week classes during the term November 2019-January 2020 with 26 students from 7th grade at “Belisario Quevedo” Rural School. The instruments used were structured and unstructured checklist and teacher’s diary. The results showed TPR is effective to develop speaking skill in EFL beginners. Students could use English to communicate with their partners and the teacher using basic vocabulary, correct pronunciation and some fluency after applying the method. As a conclusion, Total Physical Response helped beginners to get familiar with the language and learn English with the use

of movements, mimics and gestures, making students produce English to communicate.

**Keywords:** Total Physical Response, Speaking skill, Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Fluency.

**Resumo:** O principal objetivo desta pesquisa qualitativa era determinar a eficácia do uso da Resposta Física Total (TPR) para desenvolver habilidades de fala em alunos iniciantes em uma escola rural. Este estudo foi aplicado utilizando o método de pesquisa de ação envolvendo observação, planejamento e implementação. O processo foi realizado em aulas de cinco semanas durante o período de novembro de 2019-janeiro de 2020 com 26 alunos da 7ª série na escola “Belisario Quevedo”. Os instrumentos utilizados eram formulários de observação estruturados e não estruturados e o diário do professor. Os resultados mostraram que o TPR é eficaz no desenvolvimento de habilidades de fala em iniciantes do inglês como língua estrangeira. Em conclusão, “Total Physical Response” ajudou os iniciantes a se familiarizarem com o idioma e a aprenderem inglês com o uso de movimentos, mímicas e gestos, fazendo com que os alunos produzissem a língua inglesa para se comunicarem.

**Palavras-chave:** Resposta física total, Capacidade de falar, Pronúncia, Vocabulário, Fluência, Fluência.

## INTRODUCTION

English speaking is a necessary skill to develop in students during their process of learning a language to succeed in today's world and teachers need to develop this skill since the beginners grades to guarantee that they can use fluent English at the end of their schooling. Soamole y Hanapi (2018) states that teaching speaking skill must start from the beginning until a higher level to make students practice English during a long period and be able to communicate fluently. Therefore, teachers must follow a specific method and process according to students' level, necessities and context. It is not the same to teach English in urban areas and rural areas since rural areas schools have neither an English teacher nor enough hours and material to learn the language. It is also know that teaching children to adult people is quite different as well.

“Teaching speaking to children is very rewarding since they are less-conscious than older learners” (Phillips, 1993, p. 22). It makes difficult to teach in an explicit way, so teachers need to teach the language as a natural way using the characteristics that children have to learn such as movements, mimics, repetition drills and listening to songs to learn the language. Arifin (2010) mentions that young learners seem to have greater facility for understanding and imitating what they hear than secondary students.

Cameron (2001) states that teaching and learning English to children must focus on oral communication to develop speaking skill. The author asserts that meaning come first to understand the language and then be able to use it. Thus, children need to be involved in speaking activities to familiarize with the language. According to Fachun (2009), “Teaching pronunciation should be taught at primary level because children are more effective and quickly

to learn sound systems, while adults have difficulties in the learning process because of their age” (p. 143). Similarly, Yağcıoğlu, (2018) states that teaching pronunciation is better in young learners from 6 to 12 because they have better motivation in learning language and make easier to remember the new words than the adults because their memories are strong to catch what they learn and listen around them and they have the ability to imitate perfect. Thus, Pratama y Awaliyah (2015) states that teaching speaking skill implies to develop chunks of vocabulary, phonological clarity, devices and fluency. In addition, Phillips (1993) explains that the use of songs as listening activities promotes stress and rhythm to improve speaking skill. The lack of these elements in teaching English has provoked that students have inconvenients in producing the language in students of 7th grade at “Belisario Quevedo” Rural School.

Therefore, it is priority to enhance this ability in EFL learners at rural school by applying Total Physical Response as an alternative to promote speaking in students. According to Putri (2016), Total physical Response (TPR) is a method created by psychologist professor James Asher, who applied this method in language teaching. It allows individuals to acquire any language naturally since it holds that the human brain has a biological program that facilitates language learning. In addition, TPR considers the way that children learn their mother tongue. Children acquire their mother tongue through verbal and physical aspects when they communicate with their parents. Thus, infants understand their parents’ speech and they respond physically. Consequently, English teachers can apply this method in the classroom to teach languages because it involves body movement, mimics, gestures, and listening skills to prepare children to develop speaking skills. In other words, TPR is a natural method in which children acquire the language by understanding the utterance through action. So, children learn to respond and produce speaking with no pressure.

Andas (2016) mentions that Total Physical Response (TPR) is one of the EFL methods used by English teachers to develop speaking ability in beginner’s learners. This method is in charge of developing vocabulary, fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and understanding. Moreover, this method is used to help students understand language with body language, movements and mimics. In this case, students must listen to the teachers’ commands and reply to them physically. Therefore, this method imitates the natural experience of learning English. In addition, several authors support this information through their research, obtaining positive results with the application of this method.

According to Soamole y Hanapi (2018), it has proven that the use of Total Physical Response as a teaching technique can improve speech ability by the implementation of body language, mimics and gestures, and work in pairs. It means these techniques contributes to understand meaning and be able to use them to communicate. In addition, Moscoso (2015) mentions that the use of the TPR Method with different communicative approaches is recommended to students to develop speaking skills with innovative activities, and in this way to take advantage of students’ interest in learning the English language and motivate them to use and practice it. Therefore, communicative approaches activities such as pair work, dialogues, discussion contribute in students to practice the language and be able to interact with their classmates. Furthermore, TPR is an effective

method of teaching English because students use the target language, using gestures, mimics, and body language that allow students to be more motivated in class.

Then, Mahmud (2018) performed a research based on the effectiveness of Total Physical Response in teaching speaking skill following the experimental approach and the relational design. This research was carried out through the objective to know the effectiveness of Total Physical Response in teaching students' speaking skill in the second grade of SMA Darussalam in the academic year 2016-2017. The population was divided into two groups where the first was the experimental class, and the second was the control class. Therefore, the TPR method was applied just to the experimental group. The data was collected through a pre-test score, a post-test score, an interview, and documentation. Thus, it was found that the TPR method has a high influence on student speaking skill improvement. In addition, it was proven that this method motivates students and encourages them to practice English.

So, Nuraeni (2019) mentions that Total Physical Response makes possible to integrate physical movements, games, songs and mimics naturally to enhance not only linguistic knowledge, but also speaking skill in children. Then, teachers can use this method to engage students in class and make them funny. Budiarti (2012) states that children from seven to ten years enjoy movements in classes and this contributes to remember a variety of English vocabulary. As a result, students can use that vocabulary to produce communication. In addition, Mahmud (2018) states that the purpose of the method is to use action activities to make them learn and be actively engage in the learning process. Then, the application of this method may contribute to solve students' problems in speaking skill in rural areas.

Regarding students' inconvenients in speaking, they cannot express their likes, dislikes, and activities they are doing at the moment of speaking at the level they are. They have a low level of vocabulary to express information related to the topics and the fewer words they know; they pronounce as it is spelled. Furthermore, learners have problems to articulate the sounds in English due to they do not have a teacher to teach them how to do so. Moreover, they pronounce those words as in Spanish. These factors make students unable to speak in English; therefore, there is no any fluency to establish good communication between their classmates and teachers. Then, the purpose of this research is to train pre service-teachers to apply Total Physical response as an alternative method to develop speaking skill as it focuses on making students understand English using mimics, movements or gestures to promote learning as a natural way and help them to develop speaking skill. It will contribute to increase students' knowledge in English for the next level. Thus, teachers need manage and teach how to apply this method appropriately and make it easier to provide students the ability to convey intelligible messages to communicate and satisfy their necessities, knowledge, information and thoughts using the language.

In that way, this research is relevant since it can provide a guideline for teachers to apply Total Physical Response to help learners to remember English by using body language, mimics, movements and listening. It may contribute to teach English and develop speaking skill in beginner's students around 8 to 12 years old (Rokhayati, 2017). It also can guide the use of planning using Presentation,

Practice and Production framework (PPP) with the strategies of Total Physical Response to develop speaking skill. As a result, teachers and pre-service teachers can manage this method and contributes to improve better results in learning English. Therefore, this article focuses on determining the effectiveness of using Total Physical Response (TPR) to develop speaking skill in beginner's learners in a rural school.

## METHOD

This research is qualitative because it focuses on describing the student's problems and their improvement in speaking ability through the application of Total Physical Response. The type of design was descriptive due to the results described student's improvement in speaking skill. Furthermore, the researchers applied action research to determine the effectiveness of the method. The implementation was developed in five class sessions with students of seventh grade "A" of a rural area in a School of Cotopaxi Province- Ecuador during the academic period 2019-2020. The instruments were observation files structured, unstructured observation files, and teacher's diary. The classes were done by the application of Total Physical Response and the topics used were performed according to the students' book using Presentation, Practice and Production framework as a lesson plan. In this framework the teacher did: in the presentation, the teacher gave feedback about the last class and introduced the new topic showing didactic material as pictures and flashcards. During the practice, the students started to use the target language on techniques like songs, Simon says, vocabulary repetition and mimics. In the production, the teacher did some activities using the body language such as work in pairs, individual classwork, and dialogue. At the end of the class, the professor assigned additional work to reinforce the students' mastery of the lesson objectives. These activities helped students to practice their vocabulary, fluency, and pronunciation. In addition, the action research process followed the phases mentioned above.

a. The Problem Identification Phase: At this phase, the teacher could identify the main problem using observation. The problem was the poor speaking ability of the students due to the absence of an English teacher in the School. Another teacher taught English without any experience and sufficient resources to develop the language. As a result, it led to some difficulties in students such as lack of vocabulary, fluency and pronunciation due to the lack of a correct guidance of the Teacher. Another problem that we could observe was the lack of motivation in the students and their difficulty in transmitting ideas because they were worried about making mistakes and were fearful of criticism.

b. The Planning Phase: After the analysis of the problem, the teacher did some theoretical research about methods to develop speaking skill. Thus, the teacher concluded that the T.P.R method is an alternative to develop the students' speaking ability. This method allows teachers to focus on speaking activities and movements to make students learn the language. That's why, the teacher decided to apply this method following all the steps to get results in de speaking skill.

c. The Action Phase: The teacher applied Total Physical Response in classes during five weeks using mimics, movements and speaking activities. The teacher used topics from the students' book. Moreover, the teacher applied the

Presentation, Practice and Production framework as a lesson plan, taking into account characteristics from the method. In the presentation, the teacher gave feedback about last class and introduced the new topic showing didactic material as pictures and flashcards. The teacher gave the instructions using mimics and movements so, the students can understand the language and relate with the words. During the practice, the teacher applied techniques like songs, games, vocabulary repetition and mimics to make students produce and practice the language. In the production, the teacher applied speaking activities like short conversations in pairs and dialogues. Students practice the dialogues using some structures. These activities helped students to practice their vocabulary, fluency, and pronunciation.

d. The evaluation phase: the teacher used the checklist after five classes in order to evaluate if the application of the method helped to enhance the students' speaking skills. The items contained if students could use vocabulary learned, correct pronunciation and the fluency used in the conversations. The options or alternatives were yes and no.

e. The Reflection phase: The researchers analyzed the data of the teacher's diaries and checklist to present the results of the students at beginning and after the implementation in the three elements to develop speaking skill: vocabulary, pronunciation and fluency.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of total physical response method contributes to improve speaking skill in the three elements: vocabulary, pronunciation and fluency in EFL beginners. The main findings are presented in the following Table 1.

**Tabla 1**  
Results of teacher's diary and checklist.

Speaking components	The diagnosis phase	The implementation phase	The evaluation phase
Vocabulary	The students did not know almost any word in English.	The students remembered some vocabulary from each class	The students used some vocabulary from each class un short conversations
Pronunciation	The students used the Spanish pronunciation for English words.	The students articulate sounds to pronounce the words	The students' pronunciation was more understandable
Fluency	The students pause a lot to think about the words to speak	They produced words in the conversation with some pauses.	Students did not pause too much to speak speaking

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To beginwith, in the diagnosis phase the students were unable to use vocabulary to communicate and understand simple words like colors, numbers, body parts and phrases like commands, greetings, answer yes/no questions,

and so on. Another evident problem was students' pronunciation. They read some sentences and they mispronounced almost all words. It was because they were not familiarized with English language, so they pronounce using Spanish pronunciation. All these problems affected the production of beginners' speaking making difficult for them to use the language.

In the implementation phase, the students were interested in learning new vocabulary, so they started to remember some words to use in some exercises. The pronunciation was articulated better because they started to get familiarize with the teacher's pronunciation. It contributes to understand the words pronounced. Then, in fluency, students started producing English slowly without pausing too much. It creates a little fluency in students when talking.

During the evaluation phase, the students remembered and used some vocabulary in short conversations. It makes the students feel comfortable producing some language and using some structures to create conversations. Their pronunciation was not perfect but it became better because it was more understandable. They articulate better the sounds to produce the language. Concerning fluency, the students showed some fluency when producing short conversations. They stopped to think and remember words and structures but not long periods of time. It created that students could followed the conversation.

## Discussion

The investigation found that the implementation of the Total Physical Response method in EFL beginners contributed to enhance speaking skills in students from 7th grade at "Belisario Quevedo" Rural School. The comparison of the diagnosis phase with the evaluation phase determine the improvement in the three main components: vocabulary, pronunciation and fluency.

Regarding the use of mimics, and gestures and body language, they were essential techniques to the development of vocabulary in beginning learners. All of them allow children to understand meaning and be able to use in the exercises. Apart from the movements, the teacher also applied flashcards connected with the physical movements to show an implicit meaning of the words, so children could remember easily. It created a positive impact on the students to understand the vocabulary and catch their attention. In this context, Brewster et al. (2002) states "Children are good observers and they make use of such contextual clues like movements (body language), intonation, mimics and gestures, actions and messages in order to understand and interpret language itself" (p.135). This interest at their age allows children to learn easily and acquire the language in a natural way.

Furthermore, Nation (2005) mentions that "vocabulary is best acquired when it is used both receptively and productively" (p.4). That is why this method was useful to develop speaking skill since children need to learn the meaning of words, but also to use and practice in a real communication, using repetition exercises as a first step to develop speaking skill. (Jiménez, 1997). All this process totally engages and motivate students to learn and know what to use to produce English language. This result contributes to the same findings of Nuraeni (2019);

Budiarte (2012); Mahmud (2018) who state that movements, action activities contributes to learn vocabulary in an enjoyable way and develop speaking skill.

Another fundamental finding in this research was that students develop pronunciation by listening to the teacher's voice as a resource to familiarize with the sounds of the language. The teacher was in charge of repeating the vocabulary and the structures in real conversations. It allows children to repeat and remember the pronunciation of words. One helpful exercise was to read the conversation in pairs, so students could practice pronunciation. It permits that children knows how to pronounce the words and imitate to memorize and remember the words to be ready to participate in the conversation. According to Kartikasari (2014), "repetition drill enables the students to be aware of the relationship between form, meaning, and language use, and also helps students to memorize words or phrases and manage to use them in oral exercises" (p.6). Consequently, repetition is an alternative that contributed in this research to start developing pronunciation because the teacher could provide feedback and students improved the way they pronounce the words. Related to this, Jiménez (1997) mentioned that learning and memories start from repetition as children learn their mother tongue, however, the mechanical repetition of words, rules or a text in English is not in itself a guarantee of memorization, and therefore, of learning (p.808). It could cause demotivation and loss of interest to learn. Then, teachers need to manage how much repetition should be done in each exercise to take advantage of it.

The last finding was about the use of conversation activities models to improve the students' fluency. The dialogues prepared for children to practice the language had the vocabulary previously presented and practiced before in classes. This practice was done in pairs by using the structures given in the book as a model. In addition, the students should exchange their roles during the activity to be any participant in the conversation. As a result, this process contributes to make children emulate the conversations and then present their own information clearly with some fluency. Therefore, beginner learners improve their fluency compared from the initial diagnosis of the research. According to Cobas and Rodriguez (2008); Patterson (2013); Holmes (2004). The speaking activities must be the central part of students practice and they must be about topics of interest that engage students to learn and develop speaking fluency. Similarly, Moscoso (2015) mentions that the use of the TPR Method with different communicative approaches is recommended to students to develop speaking skills with innovative activities, and in this way to take advantage of students' interest in learning the English language and motivate them to use and practice it. Therefore, communicative approaches activities such as pair work, dialogues, discussion contribute to students to practice the language and be able to interact with their classmates.

## CONCLUSIONS

Total Physical Response is an effective method that promotes language learning, especially, to enhance speaking skills in beginner learners at rural areas. This method contributes to improve some main components of speaking skill such as vocabulary, pronunciation and fluency. All these elements were developed

with the use of physical movements, mimics, listening to the teacher, flashcards and conversations. Moreover, these techniques contributed to not only motivate and engage students in the learning process, but also to practice and improve the use of language. Students could remember vocabulary to produce some sentences using structures patterns and be able to work in short conversations. As a result, beginning learners could improve their speaking skills in communicating some ideas related to basic topics. Furthermore, the researchers found that students had a positive attitude to learn the language. Based on the findings, the researchers suggest teachers to implement the use of Total Physical Response with children to start learning the language and avoid the low level of learning the language.

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