

Effectiveness of TPR and Suggestopedia in teaching a second language at primary school

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ABSTRACT: *The growing importance of second language acquisition in early educational stages has intensified the need for pedagogical approaches that respond to children’s cognitive and emotional characteristics. This study analyzes the implementation of Total Physical Response (TPR) and Suggestopedia in a first-grade English classroom as an alternative to predominantly textbook-based instruction. Conducted as a qualitative action research study, the investigation involved nine primary students over a three-week intervention period. Data were collected through participant observation, field notes, and semi-structured questionnaires administered to fifteen participants, including English teachers and pre-service teachers with prior teaching experience. The findings reveal increased student participation, improved listening comprehension, enhanced vocabulary retention, and a more positive emotional climate in the classroom. Although the study does not include statistical measurement of academic performance, the qualitative evidence supports the pedagogical value of integrating movement, music, and emotionally supportive strategies in early second language instruction.*

KEYWORDS: *Second language teaching, TPR, Suggestopedia, action research, primary education, young learners.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English as a second language in primary education presents particular pedagogical challenges. Young learners require instructional approaches that align with their developmental stage, attention span, and emotional needs. Traditional methodologies centered on textbook exercises and mechanical repetition often limit interaction and fail to foster meaningful engagement.

Within contemporary second language pedagogy, increasing emphasis has been placed on communicative, multisensory, and emotionally supportive approaches. Campana (2020) describes teaching methods as dynamic components of the teaching-learning process, grounded in the interaction between teacher and students. Similarly, Ngozi (2020) outlines various orientations in second language teaching, including behaviorist and innatist perspectives, from which several methodologies have emerged.

Among these methodologies, Total Physical Response (TPR) and Suggestopedia have gained attention for their applicability to young learners. TPR emphasizes listening comprehension and physical response to commands, allowing learners to internalize language before producing it verbally. Suggestopedia, on the other hand, highlights the importance of emotional climate, relaxation, music, and role-play in reducing anxiety and facilitating acquisition.

This study originated from classroom observations in which a first-grade group demonstrated limited enthusiasm and participation during traditional English lessons. Some students showed resistance to attending class, and interaction was minimal. In response to this pedagogical concern, TPR and Suggestopedia were implemented consistently over a three-week period in order to explore their impact on student engagement and classroom dynamics.

The objective of this study is to analyze how the integration of TPR and Suggestopedia influences motivation, participation, and observable language development in a primary English classroom.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study was conducted as a qualitative action research project with a descriptive scope. Action research was selected because it allows the teacher-researcher to identify a pedagogical concern, implement an intervention, and reflect systematically on the outcomes within a real classroom context.

The research does not seek statistical generalization but rather aims to provide an in-depth analysis of observable changes following the instructional intervention.

Participants and Context

The study involved nine first-grade students enrolled at Centro de Aprendizaje Johannes Kepler. Prior to the intervention, English instruction primarily relied on textbook-based activities with limited incorporation of interactive or multisensory strategies.

Additionally, fifteen participants responded to a semi-structured questionnaire. These participants included in-service English teachers and university peers with prior classroom teaching experience and foundational knowledge of second language methodologies.

Intervention Procedure

The intervention was implemented over a three-week period and integrated TPR and Suggestopedia strategies into all English sessions.

TPR strategies included:

- Physical commands (e.g., stand up, touch your head).
- Movement-based vocabulary practice.
- Kinesthetic games.

Suggestopedia strategies included:

- Use of songs and rhythmic repetition.
- Role-playing activities.
- Creation of a relaxed classroom atmosphere.
- Encouragement of positive reinforcement and reduced error correction pressure.

The intervention sought to replace passive learning with active engagement.

Data Collection

Data were collected through:

1. Participant observation.
2. Field notes recorded after each session.
3. Semi-structured questionnaires administered to fifteen participants.
4. Thematic categorization of responses.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Observations and responses were categorized into recurring themes, such as emotional climate, participation, listening comprehension, vocabulary retention, teacher preparation, and perceived challenges.

Descriptive frequencies were calculated to identify the most recurrent themes among questionnaire responses.

III. DISCUSSION

The results of this action research study must be interpreted within the broader theoretical debate concerning effective methodologies for young learners in second language education. The observed transformation in classroom engagement highlights the limitations of strictly textbook-centered instruction and reinforces the relevance of multisensory and emotionally responsive pedagogical models.

From a methodological standpoint, the transition from traditional instruction toward TPR and Suggestopedia reflects a shift away from rigid behaviorist practices toward approaches that integrate cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. While behaviorist-oriented methods such as the Audio-Lingual Method emphasize repetition and habit formation (Ngozi, 2020), they may not sufficiently address the developmental characteristics of young learners, whose learning processes are deeply connected to movement, play, and emotional experience.

The consistent emphasis on emotional climate among participants aligns closely with the theoretical foundation of Suggestopedia. This method posits that language acquisition is facilitated when learners are in a psychologically receptive state and free from anxiety (Ngozi, 2020). The concept of “mental block,” understood as a psychological barrier that inhibits coordination of thoughts in a new language, provides a valuable lens for interpreting the initial reluctance observed in some students prior to the intervention. The incorporation of music, rhythm, and role-play appears to have contributed to reducing tension and fostering a supportive environment, consistent with Altun’s (2023) argument that emotionally positive settings enhance language receptivity.

Similarly, the impact of TPR activities supports Rambe’s (2019) assertion that comprehension-based instruction, particularly when accompanied by physical response, strengthens language internalization. The active involvement of the body in learning processes may reinforce memory through kinesthetic pathways, supporting cognitive theories that advocate for multisensory learning in early childhood education.

It is also significant that participants recognized the role of teacher preparedness in successfully implementing these methodologies. As Astutik (2020) suggests, inadequate understanding of TPR procedures

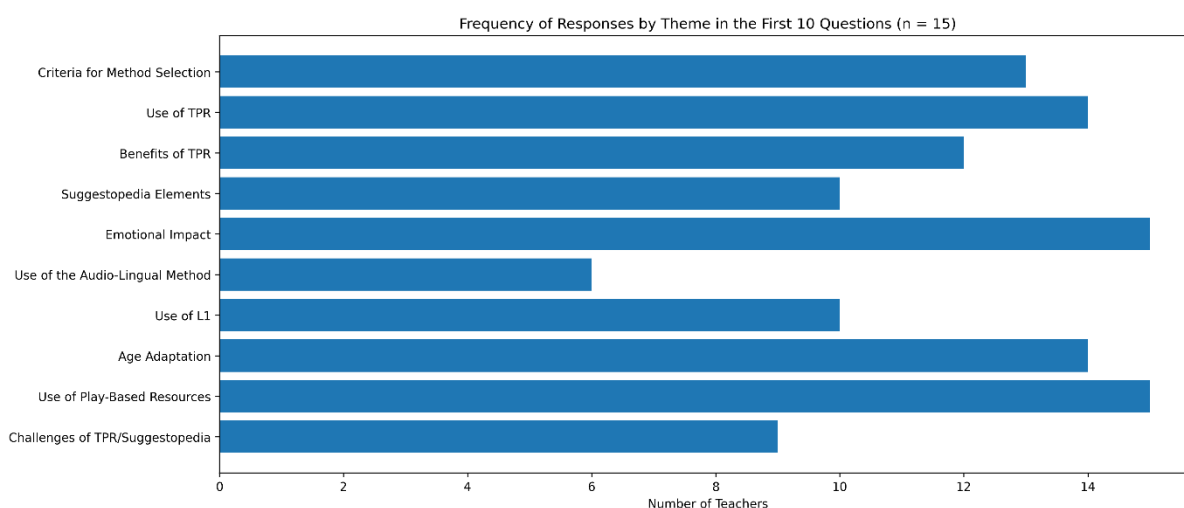
can lead to confusion and diminished effectiveness. The challenges mentioned by respondents therefore highlight an important pedagogical implication: innovative methodologies require reflective practice and intentional planning. The effectiveness observed in this study cannot be attributed solely to the method itself, but rather to its systematic and consistent implementation.

Furthermore, the findings contribute to the broader discussion on holistic pedagogy for young learners (Garton, 2022). The integration of songs, movement, and interactive dynamics reflects an understanding of language learning as an experiential process rather than a purely cognitive task. In this sense, the intervention aligns with communicative and cognitively oriented perspectives that recognize language acquisition as a socially and emotionally situated process.

Although the study does not provide statistical measurement of academic performance, the qualitative transformation in classroom atmosphere and student willingness to participate should not be underestimated. In early second language education, affective readiness often precedes measurable linguistic accuracy. Therefore, increased motivation and reduced resistance may represent foundational conditions for sustained language development.

This study supports the argument that effective second language instruction for young learners must integrate cognitive engagement, emotional support, and physical interaction as interconnected components of the learning process.

IV. FINDINGS



The data collected through classroom observation and semi-structured questionnaires were organized into thematic categories based on recurring patterns identified across responses and field notes. The analysis focused on observable behaviors and participant perceptions during the three-week intervention period.

These categories emerged consistently across responses from teachers and pre-service educators.

Emotional Environment

All fifteen respondents emphasized the importance of creating a supportive and relaxed classroom atmosphere. Participants described emotional safety as a necessary condition for student participation. Observational records indicated that students appeared more comfortable volunteering responses during sessions that incorporated music and collaborative activities.

Compared to earlier sessions characterized by traditional textbook-based instruction, students demonstrated less visible reluctance to engage in tasks during the intervention period.

Movement-Based Learning

Twelve respondents highlighted the use of movement and physical commands as particularly effective. During TPR-based activities, students consistently responded to instructions such as pointing, standing, or identifying objects through action.

Field notes documented increased energy levels and sustained attention during movement-based tasks. Students who previously showed limited verbal participation were observed actively responding through physical demonstration.

Teacher Engagement and Classroom Dynamics

Nine participants noted the importance of an active instructional role. The intervention required continuous modeling, gesturing, and interactive guidance. Observations indicated that teacher mobility and dynamic delivery contributed to maintaining student focus.

The classroom configuration during these sessions shifted from predominantly seated individual work to more interactive group participation.

Music, Songs, and Role-Play

Nine mentions referred to the integration of songs and game-based activities. Vocabulary introduced through rhythmic repetition was later recalled by students during review exercises.

Role-play activities generated collaborative interaction among peers. Observations recorded spontaneous repetition of target vocabulary during informal classroom moments.

Listening Comprehension

Eight respondents associated the intervention with improvements in listening comprehension. During later sessions, students responded more promptly to verbal instructions without requiring translation.

Observational data indicated that repeated exposure to oral commands contributed to quicker and more accurate responses.

Teacher Preparation and Challenges

Six participants emphasized the need for planning and creativity when implementing these methodologies. Five mentioned logistical or organizational challenges, including time management and classroom control during high-energy activities.

Despite these challenges, respondents did not characterize them as barriers but as aspects requiring adjustment.

Observed Behavioral Changes

- Across the three-week intervention, classroom observations recorded:
- Increased voluntary participation.
- Greater enthusiasm toward English sessions.
- Higher peer collaboration.
- Faster reaction to oral input.
- Reduced visible reluctance to attend class.

No formal quantitative assessment was conducted; therefore, these findings are based on descriptive observation and participant perception.

V. CONCLUSION

This qualitative action research study examined the integration of TPR and Suggestopedia in a first-grade English classroom. The findings indicate that these methodologies contributed to enhanced student motivation, participation, and listening comprehension within a short intervention period.

The study underscores the importance of emotionally supportive and multisensory instructional approaches in primary second language education. While limited by small sample size and absence of formal quantitative measurement, the research offers practical insights for educators seeking alternatives to traditional textbook-centered instruction.

Future research could incorporate longitudinal designs or pre- and post-assessment tools to provide further empirical validation. Nevertheless, the present study highlights the transformative potential of dynamic methodologies in early language learning contexts.

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