

Application of Total Physical Response and Songs in the ESL Classroom for Young Learners

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Abstract: This essay explores the integration of songs and Total Physical Response (TPR) in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to young learners, aligning with educational policies advocating for motivating and enjoyable language learning experiences. The essay underscores the value of employing songs and TPR to enhance language acquisition among children. Songs, with their rhythmic and repetitive nature, engage young learners while fostering language awareness, motivation, and pronunciation skills. Similarly, TPR utilizes physical activities to reinforce language comprehension and memory retention. The combined use of songs and TPR creates an active and stress-free classroom environment, maximizing children's cognitive development and effectively facilitating the acquisition of action vocabularies in ESL classrooms.

1. Introduction

Due to the trend of English as a lingua franca, the predominance of teaching English to children has been rapidly acknowledged worldwide. To pin down how to make an effective way of language teaching and learning for younger learners, both theory and practical methods have been debated continuously. Based on teachers' experience and empirical research, the value of using songs to teach young learners in ESL classroom has been discussed a lot. The rhythmic and repetitive nature of the song could facilitate young learners' language learning. Various types of songs can be used in ESL classroom, among which, action songs, well combined songs and physical movements, are acknowledged as a potential tool to teach verbs. Using songs and total physical response, focuses on students' language awareness, aiming to develop students' specific linguistic skills.

2. Policy

Under the guidance provided by the department of compulsory education, based on various specific circumstances, English teaching at different stages should set their own principles^[1]. Primary English programs usually aims to foster students' motivation to learn a language. It points out that, during the initial stage, the main purpose is introducing English to young learners through a motivating and enjoyable way. By creating a pleasant environment, it is expected that, during the learning time, students are willing to actively participate into the class interactions and activities, cooperate with their classmates well, and initially develop a good habit to learn English in their further language learning process.

It has already been acknowledged that motivation is a key element in L2 language learning at the elementary stage. In young learners' ESL classroom, the main sources of motivation come from their teachers, the classroom resources and activities they experience. According to English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education, for students who are in the low grades of primary school, teachers should use rich and diverse teaching resources and organize various kinds of class activities and games in ESL classroom to ensure the vivid of the teaching process, fitting the characteristics of children's cognitive development. Thus, teachers are encouraged to actively use audiovisual materials, songs, picture books and etc. to diverse the recourses for leaners to learn English, motivating young learners to the maximum extend.

Thus, using songs and TPR approach is in line with the policy. Through the way combining physical actions and music with language learning, students would be maximally motivated.

3. Rationale for the approaches

3.1 Songs

Musical expression dominates a vital position in human experience. Songs have been an integral part of human language experience, and it is of great value to use songs in a language lesson. There are both theoretical and neurological support for including music in the language teaching process. It has been discovered by neurologists that both music and language are similarly processed in the same area of human brain^[2]. Songs have been claimed to be an ideal vehicle for language learning and using songs has been actively chosen as a methodology in learners' EFL classroom.

Children have a keen interest in songs, welcoming and responding actively and enthusiastically to them. Because of the instinct of children, the lesson designed for young learners should be different from adults. First, when doing things appealing to them, children always show greater motivation and could be more easily engaged than adults. In addition, children always have less concentration span, changing their mood frequently. Hence, to attract students and create a more student-centered atmosphere, using songs seems to be a good choice since it is catchy. As for lots of syllabus designed for ESL classroom to young learners, songs, chants, and rhymes are actively involved^[3]. Taking children's characteristics into consideration, instruction provided in a classroom should be "enjoyable and interesting; active and hands-on; supported and scaffolded"^[4]. Using songs seems to be one of the most valuable ways to assure all these qualities to be illustrated at the same time in an ESL classroom for young learners.

As for the affective reasons, first, teaching through songs, being noted by several researchers, would develop a friendly classroom atmosphere, enhancing their language learning process. Based on the Affective Filter Hypothesis developed by Steven Krashen, it has been acknowledged that the affective factors are strongly related to language learning^[5]. Only when the affective filter is weak, which means learners hold a positive attitude and are in a low level of anxiety, optimal learning would occur. Children are keen on listening to songs and they often hold strongly positive views on music. It is their affinity with music that makes songs useful tools to create a comfortable and natural learning atmosphere, which means that songs effectively lower the affective filter of learners, helping them get rid of feelings of shyness and anxiety. A relaxed learner shows more willingness and would be more easily engaged in the learning process than a learner who is highly anxious. In that way, it is necessary for teachers to build a motivating and enjoyable classroom environment through songs for young learners.

Second, using songs would boost learners' motivation. By nature, children enjoy having fun. Combining their learning goals and interests, it seems that one of the most effective principles for teaching young learners a language is to motivate them to do things that they are really interested in. When holding the positive attitude and highly motivated, young learners are open to language

acquisition. Also, with positive emotive involvement, neural paths in various areas of the brain would be stimulated, achieving a deeper process of language learning. Compared with the traditional way of teaching vocabulary, learning with great motivation in an appealing environment would facilitate young learners' learning process, enhancing the development of their lexical competency.

There are also some linguistic reasons for applying songs in the young learners' ESL classroom. The didactic role of songs would effectively foster learners' the awareness of language, such as vocabulary items, pronunciation and grammar. First, songs provide the authentic language materials to learners. Song has been regarded as "a distortions of the normal speech patterns of a language", representing a form of communication in the linguistic sense^[6]. Being authentic, the lyrics of songs consists of spoken language that is available and commonly used in human lives, which provides young learners with the opportunity to familiarize the real language use, reinforcing their language awareness. Additionally, Songs have rhyming patterns which strongly associate with speech. Being sensitive to rhythm is fundamental to learn a language. Young learners are more sensitive to rhythm. When exposing students to the rhythms of the language, the intonation and sounds in songs is beneficial for developing young learners' pronunciation skills.

In addition, songs offer opportunities to repetition and practice. Using songs are considered as one of the most effective ways to teach language since there are always sufficient sources of vocabulary, structure and sentence patterns. With the nature of repetition and consistent, songs could exemplify a structural and grammatical language point. It has been proved that as a useful tool, songs could enhance language competencies, like vocabulary acquisition and language usage. Having practiced the same grammatical structure several times in the song, children would gradually familiarize and internalize the patterns of the foreign language, which made it easier for learners to relate it with their own linguistic experience. Being exposed to such a rich rhythmical input, learners are provided an opportunity to develop more natural and implicit language knowledge. It is out of question that using songs would equip learners with the linguistic skills for using language when they will be confronted in the authentic situations.

3.2 TPR

TPR, developed by Dr. James Asher, has been applied in young learners' language classroom for almost four decades. Total Physical Response is a "natural method", simulating the way children acquire their first language, since Asher believes that foreign language learning is as parallel as the naturalistic process of children' s native language acquiring^[7]. In this regard, TPR is designed and applied based on the process children learn their first language. ESL students will make connection between the target language they hear and the meaning on their own without any translation or verbal explanation by the teacher. Being immersed in the environment with language accompanied by physical activities, during the time young learners are expected to learn a language when they are actively involved and grasp what they hear.

As a teaching technique, TPR focuses on the interaction and cooperation of speech and action, attempting to teach language through kinaesthetic activity. Body movement seems to be a useful mediator in the learning process, facilitating the understanding of input^[8]. As children's characteristic who are physically active, language learning to children will be more effective through Total Physical Response since they are activated during the learning. Moreover, through TPR, involving other parts of brain in processing information, students would have a long-term memory of what they have learnt.

Similar to using songs, applying TPR in the classroom also contributes to build an active and stress-free classroom environment where children feel free to involve and attentively focus on the

learning process, playing with language. Imperative drills and practice are important forms of classroom activity in TPR. In this situation, learners perform the role as a listener and performer, listening with attention and responding physically; a teacher plays the role as a director, giving commands and monitoring learners' actions. Thus, in the classroom, carrying out the instructions provided by teachers, children need to give physical response to the target language. There is no doubt that this activity creates fun and amusement in learning and students will enjoy it. Since through TPR, students are in high motivation level and low anxiety level, TPR is a definite asset to teach language for young learners.

In addition, TPR could help learners to strengthen their memory. Through skillful support of physical actions, hundreds of grammatical structures and vocabulary items of target language can be learnt. According to the cognitive load theory, when getting touch with various resources such as visual, auditory and kinesthetic during the learning process, learners would obtain higher learning achievement^[9]. Additionally, with the trace theory in psychological field, it suggests when highly associated the target language with physical movements, the recollection in memory would be longer and stronger. In that way, when learning language through doing physical actions, the vocabulary that teachers want learners to grasp would be better memorized.

4. Conclusion

In a nutshell, applying songs and TPR approaches could create a pleasant and relaxed classroom environment, highly motivating the young learners, which is highly in line with the policy suggested in English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education. Also, based on the children's characteristics of cognitive development developed by Piaget, the combination of songs and TPR maximizes the advantage of song's repetitive nature and the bonus of using students' physical movement, which fits young learners' nature, promoting their learning process^[10]. Through the two approaches, the aim to develop students' knowledge of language will be better achieved. Overall, when songs and TPR are well amalgamated in a lesson, it could be considered as an ingenious way to activate and promote the young in the process of comprehending action vocabularies.

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