

The Effect of Teaching Short Stories on Listening Comprehension of Third Grade Libyan Pupils Using Total Physical Response

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Abstract

Total Physical Response (TPR) as a method of teaching young foreign language learners has gained popularity for decades now. A growing number of researches have been conducted in different levels of learning to see its influence on language skills. The aim of this pre-experimental study was carried out in order to test the listening comprehension of third grade Libyan pupils using TPR method. The stories from the prescribed textbook for grade three pupils were used as the subject matter. The participants of this study were 27 third grade primary school pupils of Shuhada Almatar School in Misurata city. The result was analysed using a paired-sample *t* test which showed that there was a significant difference between the pretest and the posttest results. It was also apparent that the pupils' participation increased when they were engaged in listening and acting out the stories. Thus, this study established that using TPR method in teaching short stories enhanced the listening ability of third grade pupils. It is strongly recommended that teacher trainings for Libyan primary school teachers should be intensified and schools should provide appropriate facilities to promote TPR in the classrooms.

Keywords: Total Physical Response, short stories, listening comprehension, third grade pupils

Listening is a mental process that is essential for the development of other English language skills. It is the first skill to learn in order to communicate effectively with other people. According to Rivers (1987), listening is needed for subsequent language skills such as speaking and writing. However, many English foreign language learners overlook its significance and consider it less important than speaking, reading, and writing. Teachers also give little attention to promote listening activities in the classroom. It is true that teaching listening remotely is unappealing to young learners; that is why, teachers should be creative in making learning more motivating. Children have short attention span; accordingly, it is necessary to engage them constantly in different activities during the class. As Bakhodirovna (2022) mentioned, learning English should be enjoyable and unforgettable for children.

The focal point of this research was the use of Total Physical Response (TPR) method. We conceptualised this study in order to explore the use of the prescribed textbooks for Libyan primary schools that require teachers to apply specific methods of teaching including the Total Physical Response (Curricula and Educational Research Centre, 2019). Asher (1969) promulgated TPR to teach foreign language because it has shown similar process on the way children acquire their mother tongue. Several studies showed positive results about Total Physical Response reinforcing students' listening skill (Ulfa, 2016; Oktavia et al., 2016; Lalaleo Pazmiño, 2023). Apart from TPR method, another interesting way of presenting a lesson is through short stories. Teachers use them as springboards to

teach concepts and ideas in the class. As mentioned by Krishna and Sandhya (2015), learners develop language skills successfully using short stories. Moreover, language can be easily acquired with the help of picture books, stories, rhymes and songs (Gerngross & Puchta, 1996).

In Libya, English is considered as a foreign language and most students are still struggling to learn it especially in the primary level. Learning English is sometimes frustrating for them because of their inability to comprehend and use it properly. Aside from that, several teachers focus more on some particular lessons in the book and leave out other topics that are complex to teach such as the stories at the end of the unit. Although TPR has been implemented for a considerable period, a limited number of researches have been conducted on its use in Libyan primary schools as of this date. Therefore, it is the aim of this study to determine whether third grade pupils are able to internalize the short stories in the prescribed Libyan textbook through TPR to enrich their listening comprehension.

Statement of the Problem

Listening skill is necessary to acquire a new language and should be developed in the initial stages of language learning. However, the majority of third grade Libyan teachers come across numerous challenges in teaching different English language skills to their pupils especially listening. They are expected to teach their pupils using primarily the Total Physical Response (TPR) method and in some lessons, the Synthetic Phonics Approach of teaching as stipulated in the prescribed textbook (Curricula and Educational Research Centre, 2019). For instance, there are several units in the textbook for third grade pupils and each unit is wrapped-up by a simple story. Unfortunately, numerous teachers overlook these stories because they feel that stories are less important and time-consuming than the other lessons in the book. They may also doubt the capability of their pupils to comprehend these stories aurally. Hence, these observed misconceptions sparked our interest to undergo this study.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of listening comprehension of the third grade pupils before the use of TPR in teaching short stories?
2. What is the level of listening comprehension of the third grade pupils after the use of TPR?
3. Is there a significant difference in the level of listening comprehension of third grade pupils after using the TPR as a treatment?

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference between the pretest and posttest results after using the TPR as a treatment in teaching short stories to third grade pupils.

Significance of the Study

This study shall benefit primary school pupils, teachers, textbook writers, as well as other researchers. The result of this study shall pave the way to enhance the learning experiences of the pupils in the classroom. Teachers may also realise the need to be conscious of the language capabilities of their pupils. Moreover, they should be aware of the effect of teaching TPR method, not only in the listening skill of the pupils, but also in other English language skills. Furthermore, this can be a basis for textbook writers to enhance the existing prescribed textbooks in order to address the language needs of the primary grade pupils. Lastly, other researchers are encouraged to look into different aspects of TPR at improving the learners' listening skill especially in Libya.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study focused on the use of Total Physical Response (TPR) in teaching short stories to third grade pupils. It measured only the listening comprehension of the pupils and not the other language skills.

Literature Review

Teaching Young Learners

Young learners have several characteristics that teachers should consider when learning a language. Language acquisition starts as soon as babies are born (Asher, 1981). They do not utter words but internalise what they hear around them. As they grow, they accumulate words through listening that will eventually help them acquire the language. Gerngross and Puchta (1996) stated that even though children cannot say the words, they could comprehend them. It is similar to the process when learning a foreign language. Reilly and Ward (1997) believed that teachers should not compel young learners to speak since they tend to listen to the target language before they produce it. Equally, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) mentioned that young learners communicate verbally when the right time comes.

Children have limited comprehension of non-concrete ideas and it is difficult to keep them still (Onu, 2013). That is why teachers usually find it challenging to keep children's attention for a long period; therefore, teachers need to create an environment that reduces boredom, for instance, asking children to demonstrate movements, manipulate objects, or listen to picture stories. Based on the study of Sariyati (2013), children disliked sitting for a long time and they became passive in the class. Reilly and Ward (1997) suggested that learners can do several simple repetitive tasks such as an exclusion game "Simon Says." Thus, when children are involved in an activity, disruptive behaviour can be minimised (Linse & Nunan, 2005).

Positive reinforcement from the people surrounding the children also plays an important part in language learning. Wolf and Butler (2017) mentioned that encouragement from parents and schools influences children to do better academically and motivate them to learn a second language.

The Background of Total Physical Response as a Method

Children acquire their mother tongue through imitation of the words spoken by their parents. James Asher (1969), the proponent of Total Physical Response, believed that learning a foreign language is similar to the process on how babies learn their first language. According to Asher, students in a TPR class acted out the command physically after listening it in the target language. He believed that in the onset of learning a foreign language focusing on just one skill, i.e., listening comprehension, is deemed more effective. Richards and Rodgers (2001) also stated that TPR is a method used to teach language that involves bodily actions. As Linse and Nunan (2005) explained, pupils listen and watch how their teacher demonstrates the new simple words, for example, "jump," "stand" and "wave." Afterwards, the teacher gives the pupils orders, and then they act them out. When they master these words, more challenging orders, which are appropriate at their age, can be presented. They further emphasised that when teaching very small children aged five to seven years old, the teacher should introduce one order at a time.

The study of Calle (2016) which included beginner students with mixed age groups from Pereira concluded that learning words using bodily movements as well as listening promoted better understanding among students while heightening their self-confidence. Thus, through observation of

actions and doing the actions by pupils themselves made learning more stimulating. Rahmawati (2013) also conducted a qualitative study about Total Physical Response utilising games to improve the listening skill of fourth grade pupils. With the element of fun through games, classroom activities, and interactive classes, pupils became responsive through bodily actions, communicated in English, and developed their self-confidence.

A stress-free environment is essential for TPR to be effective as stipulated in Asher's concept (1981) of acquiring any kind of language. One of TPR's principles according to Larsen-Freeman (2000) is that it eases pupils' apprehension toward learning. It is deemed the best method of teaching for releasing negative feelings (Mariyam & Musfiroh, 2019).

The Impact of TPR Method on Pupils' Listening Comprehension

Various studies showed positive effect of TPR on the listening skill of the students. The studies of Ulfa (2016), Werdiningsih and Mardiyah (2019), and Yamin (2014) used a quasi-experimental design to explore the effect of TPR on the listening skill of elementary students. The findings showed that experimental group outperformed the control group, which means that TPR enhanced the listening comprehension of the students. Additionally, the pre-experimental study conducted by Lalaleo Pazmiño (2023) in Ecuador demonstrated the influence of TPR on the listening comprehension of young learners aged seven and eight. It was evident that the test scores of the participants were better in the posttest compared to pretest. It showed that simple phrases and commands were effective to develop their listening comprehension. Similarly, Sari et al. (2017) yielded the same result when TPR was used to teach listening skill to first year students of Negeri 22 Bandar Lampung in Indonesia.

It is also interesting to note that learners were more enthusiastic with the use of objects or realia. Aside from the positive influence of TPR in the listening skill of the learners, it also made them more dynamic and comfortable (Ulfa, 2016). As Linse and Nunan (2005) mentioned, TPR was effective using short stories with repetitive sentence patterns. It was also appealing to young learners as described in the study of Gao (2008) conducted at the kindergarten of Narathorn School in Bangkok. She mentioned that aside from improving pupils' listening comprehension, body movements and hands-on activities used in teaching TPR helped pupils gain confidence and for some of them to utter words in English.

The Significance of Stories in Teaching English

Short stories fascinate children in different ways because they bring them to a very different world. Nuraeningsih and Rusiana (2016) explained that TPR storytelling is to narrate stories in order to impart ideas using actions, pictures, and illustrations. According to Krishna & Sandhya, (2015), stories stimulate ones' imagination and they are appropriate genuine tools to enrich learners' language abilities as well as communication skills. Additionally, Er (2013) believed that with the use of action stories, children comprehend the language from the start as they listen, observe and emulate.

Storytelling is an interesting medium of instruction in teaching language to children as they help young learners interact naturally and learn without pressure. It can be used to motivate children as well as to increase their language aptitude (Nasir & Inayah, 2019). Several studies indicated that storytelling helped learners develop their language skills. Handiyani (2013) indicated that when short stories were used to teach children, they improved their reading comprehension. It is equally important to note that for Bala (2015), storytelling is a paramount method to improve listening and speaking skills. The findings of Maulidaty (2021) on the effect of storytelling methods on pupils in the kindergarten of TK

Tunas Harapan Batokan revealed that after applying the methods, the pupils' listening comprehension improved and they were interested in listening after each story.

However, it is interesting to note that aside from traditional classroom storytelling, wherein teachers tell the story by themselves, digital storytelling became prevalent nowadays. Recently, multimedia sources increasingly become popular to access digital stories. The study of Loniza et al. (2018) on the listening comprehension of young learners using digital storytelling showed that using multimedia (e.g., images, recorded audio narration, video and music) aroused the interests of the pupils in the experimental group as well as enriched their listening skill. In the same vein, Ramírez Verdugo and Alonso Belmonte (2007) conducted a quasi-experimental study for 22 weeks using digital stories on Spanish young learners. They concluded that the experimental group understood simple language structures as well as words better than the control group.

Positive outcomes using stories were highlighted in several cited studies, but without adverse consequences. For instance, Dolzhykova (2014) mentioned that although teachers agreed that storytelling could be an effective teaching technique, the class time was not enough to carry it out; consequently, they were hesitant to use storytelling in their lessons. Additionally, the study of Safdarian (2012) on the effect of stories on language proficiency and motivation of Iranian EFL students with elementary level of proficiency showed that while stories increased the language proficiency of the learners; their motivational level did not improve.

Methodology

Research Design

This study was quantitative in nature as it utilised the pre-experimental design specifically the single-group pretest-posttest design. Based on this design, "one group of subjects is given a pretest (O), then the treatment (X), and then the posttest (O). The pretest and posttest are the same, just given at different times" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014, p. 264). Additionally, this design only used an experimental group as a participant.

Participants and Setting

The participants in this study were 27 third grade pupils of Shuhada Almatar School. There were 18 boys and 9 girls, in particular. The school is located in Misurata, the western region of Libya.

Data-Gathering Instrument

This study used a test as a pretest and a posttest. The questions were about the first three short stories of 21st Century English for Libya (2019) textbook for third grade pupils. The 12-item test included test types such as true or false, multiple-choice, and matching which composed of four items each.

Validity and Reliability

Before conducting this study, the test had undergone a validity test wherein two English language experts evaluated it using the Research Evaluation Instrument by Good and Scates (1972) which yielded 2.55 out of 4 in a 4-point Likert scale. It means that the test was valid. To assess the reliability of this test, it went through a test-retest wherein 27 third grade pupils from Al Ghiran Al Markazia School took the test and after two weeks, the same test was given to these pupils. The result was tabulated using the *t* test and indicated a significance of .291 that was higher than .05 level of confidence as shown in Table 1, which means that the test was reliable.

Table 1
Reliability Test Result

	Paired Differences					<i>t</i>	Sig. <i>df</i>	(2-tailed)
	M	SD	SD. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 VAR00001 – VAR00002	-.51852	2.50185	.48148	-1.50822	.47118	-1.077	26	.291

Data Gathering

Before conducting the experiment, we sought the permission of Misurata Education Inspectorate and the headmaster of Shuhada Almatar School through a formal letter. The pupils were also informed about their role in this study. After that, they were instructed about the procedure of the entire study. For the initial step, the pretest was conducted to 27 participants for 40 min and then tabulated.

After conducting the pretest, this experimental group was taught three short stories namely, “The Magic Pencil”, “The Clever Crow”, and “Ben’s Messy Room” using TPR method as an intervention. These short stories were from the prescribed textbook for third grade Libyan pupils. Pupils had two sessions per week in the duration of one month wherein each class took 40 min. At the end of the intervention, the posttest was given using the same test as the pretest with all 27 pupils present.

Data Analysis

To analyse the level of listening comprehension of the third grade pupils before and after the use of the TPR, one sample *t* test was used. To know if there is a significant difference between the pretest and the posttest results, a paired-sample *t* test was employed.

Ethical Considerations

The consent of the concerned institutions and individuals in this study was obtained. The participants were duly informed of their role in the entire process as well as their right to withdraw from participating if they wish to do so. The results were kept with utmost confidentiality.

Results and Discussion

As shown in Table 2, the total number of participants who took the pretest were 27 pupils. The minimum score was 3.00 and the maximum was 10.00, respectively. The mean score of the level of listening comprehension of third grade pupils before the use of TPR was 5.5185, while the standard deviation was 1.71801. The posttest result indicated that the mean of listening comprehension of pupils after the use of TPR was 8.5556 with an SD equivalent to 2.56205. There were 27 participants with minimum and maximum scores of 4 and 12.

Table 2

Level of Listening Comprehension Before and After the Use of TPR

	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Pretest	27	3.00	10.00	5.5185	1.71801
Posttest	27	4.00	12.00	8.5556	2.56205
Valid <i>N</i> (listwise)					

The one-sample *t* test was used to know if a particular sample of participants is similar or different from pupils in general. The one-sample *t* test examined whether the mean of pupils' population was statistically different from a known or hypothesised value that was six which is half value of the exam total score. Based on the results of the one-sample *t* test as shown in Table 3, the *p* value from the *t* test of pretest scores was .157 which was greater than .05, which means that result was not statistically significant. Meanwhile, the *p* value of the posttest scores was .000 less than .05 ($p > .05$) which was statistically significant.

Table 3

The Difference Between the Levels of Two Means (One-Sample Test)

	Test Value = 6					
	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig	M Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Pre	-1.456	26	.157	-.48148	-1.1611	.1981
Post	5.183	26	.000	2.55556	1.5420	3.5691

To ensure the validity of the differences in terms of their significance, a paired-samples *t* test was used to compare results of pretest and posttest. It was clear that there was a significant difference between the pretest (M= 5.5185, SD = 1.71801) and posttest (M = 8.5556, SD = 2.56205) conditions; $t(26) = -6.777$ and the statistical significance of *p* value was .000 (see Table 4). Thus, the result suggested that TPR as an intervention had a positive effect on the level of listening comprehension of third grade pupils after teaching short stories.

Table 4

The Significance of the Listening Comprehension (Paired Samples Test)

	Paired Differences					<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig (2-tailed)
	M	SD	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 pre-post	-3.03704	2.32844	.44811	-3.95814	-2.11594	-6.777	26	.000

There is no doubt that the result of this study substantiates the claim that TPR method can be an effective means to enhance the listening skill of third grade Libyan pupils when teaching short stories. This is congruent to the conclusions of other studies (Ortega Calle & Peña Ortega, 2011; Lalaleo Pazmiño, 2023) that TPR method supports the development of different English language skills. By implementing TPR as a method of teaching in the intervention stage of this study, pupils experienced that they could be physically active during the class without being a nuisance. In addition, most of the pupils were drawn to participate in the class activities since they were encouraged to comprehend the concepts of stories using different medium of instructions such as concrete objects, picture stories, and audio recordings. They were also taught to use bodily movements to internalise the given short stories; as a result, they understood the over-all concept easily while improving their level of motivation. This finding showed that the use of short stories and other instructional materials enriched the teaching-learning experiences of the third grade pupils at Shuhada Almatar School. According to Linse and Nunan (2005), varied activities such as TPR songs and fingers plays, TPR storytelling, Yes/No cards, TPR drawing, and rhyming words among others can be helpful in learning a second or foreign language.

The result of this study implies that young Libyan learners are capable of learning English easily when they are physically active and socially involved. With the use of TPR method in learning a foreign language, the pupils become more enthusiastic in carrying out classroom activities, and at the same time, it helps to develop long-term retention because of these meaningful experiences. Furthermore, pupils can be exposed to new dimensions of learning that may serve as a venue for discovering their individual interests as well as linguistic capabilities rather than learning through traditional methods such as rote learning and memorisation. It has been a prime goal of any educational institution including the Libyan educational system to develop a positive outlook towards English language learning especially among young learners. In order to achieve this, it is important that both teachers and educational stakeholders work hand in hand to improve the current educational system in Libya especially the primary schools through the implementation of TPR method and other suitable methods.

Hence, shifting the mindset of the teachers on how to teach the English language may help pupils understand that English is not difficult as they previously thought. TPR can also help teachers introduce the English language gradually without giving too much pressure on pupils. In this way, learning becomes pleasant and memorable at the same time. With proper orientation and training of teachers, the application of TPR method alongside other strategies and techniques in teaching young learners can promote their over-all development since teachers are expected to develop not only their pupils' cognitive abilities, but also to cultivate their emotional and social skills..

Despite of the positive result of this study, it may not be enough to claim that TPR will be effective to other learners in the same way given the different factors that may affect them. Thus, it may be useful to conduct more studies about the efficacy of TPR in teaching other language skills in different levels of language learning. Other researchers are also encouraged to look into providing more concrete basis as there are limited studies in line with this area in Libya.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The influence of Total Physical Response in pupils' listening skill using short stories is positive. There is a significant increase on the posttest scores compared to the pretest results of the pupils'

listening comprehension. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. To conclude, the level of the listening comprehension of the third grade pupils improves after the application of the TPR method in teaching short stories. While the study yields positive result, it is highly recommended that educational officials in Libya need to work hand in hand with primary school teachers to apply the TPR method properly so as to enhance not only the pupils' listening comprehension skill, but also their other language skills. Thus, there should be adequate seminars and trainings available for primary school teachers all over Libya and at the same time the provision of sufficient school facilities to make English classes more enjoyable.

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