

# THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS' LEARNING ENGLISH APPLYING TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE (TPR)

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## Abstract

The research aims to describe the visually impaired students' learning English using Total Physical Response (TPR). The research may contribute to the development of English learning model for the visually impaired students who need attention in their right to get better education and improvement in learning English using Total Physical Response (TPR). The research method was descriptive qualitative method. The study was conducted at Yaketunis Yogyakarta. There were fifteen visually impaired students who became participants in this research. The sources of the data were (1) visually impaired students as the participants of the study, (2) recorded actions (video-taped), (3) recorded interviews (audio-taped), and (4) field note.

The result showed that visually impaired students had new experience in learning English effectively, actively, stress-free and joyful. Total Physical Responses handled that students' limitation in visualization to get information through voice by their senses of hearing. The students practiced giving responses of some instructions, pronounced some words and repeated the words many times by maximizing their sense of hearing to activate their psychomotor competence. This process of learning activities supported them in developing their skill in mastering vocabulary, expression, and language command.

**Key words:** Total Physical *Response* (TPR), Learning English, The visually impaired students

## 1. Background

English is learned by almost all the students in some different levels and schools. It starts from elementary up to university level. It is learned by normal students and also students with special needs. Students with special needs are some students who in the process of growing or developing significantly undergo divergence or deviation (physic, mental intelligence, social, and emotional) compare with the other students in their same level of age need special educational service. It means that students who get certain deviation need special education needs (Depdiknas, 2004).

Students with special needs who learn English have some problems in receiving the materials given by teacher. They are not able see teacher's expression when she explains the material in the classroom. They are not able to receive teacher explanation fast. They are not able to copy what teacher writes in the whiteboard directly, teacher has to dictate the information to the students.

In the whole time, they used their ears as one of important sense of hearing in grasping all things of subject academically and responding to messages in communication in their live. In their learning English, they concentrated what the speakers said by optimizing their sense of hearing. Helping them in learning by facilitating their leaning activities using media, method, and giving chance to have some learning activities which were challenging and suitable to their characteristics brought positive effect to their learning achievement.

Kirk and Gallagher (1986) give an interpretation of visually impaired students as:

..., "a visually handicapped child is one whose visual impairment interferes with his optimal learning and achievement, unless adaptations are made in the methods of presenting learning experiences, the nature of the materials used, and in the learning environment".

Based on the idea of Kirk and Gallagher above, it can be clarified that to gain optimal leaning achievement, visually impaired learners need all sort of adaptation, namely education component adaptation, not only the method but also the material as well as the learning environment.

Applying suitable method for visually impaired students in learning English will brings positive effect and also gives new and fun learning experience in order to improve their ability in English. From this phenomenon, it would be beneficial if they have experience such valuable method to help and support them in learning English in order to become easier in learning and improve students' competencies. Total Physical Response (TPR) is one of a teaching technique that enables students to acquire new words by listening to and carrying out spoken commands. This technique built around the coordination of speech and action, and it attempts to teach language through physical (motor) activity. Students listen to commands in a target language and then immediately respond with an appropriate

physical action. The tutor models the commands and continually repeats and reviews them until the students can carry out the commands with no difficulty. Students are more likely to be and feel successful when the tutor provides constant support and eliminates the pressure on students to speak the new words. It is a popular technique for young learners and also useful for new English learner or learner with limited knowledge in English.

Total Physical Response (TPR) is a method that was developed by James Asher (1979). He is a professor of psychology at San Jose State University, California. He found through psychological research that we learn best when our muscles are involved along with our minds. In TPR students are given simple commands or directions such as, "Raise your right hand." Students then indicate their comprehension by raising their hands. Other commands or directions might be: "walk to the door," "put ... something on the table, "or "give me ... something, " (Asher, 1969). TPR is suitable for listening comprehension in theory. Literally, listening comprehension means, listen to the speaker and understands what he/she says. TPR itself emphasizes listening comprehension. Asher's emphasis on developing comprehension first link himself to a movement in foreign language teaching sometimes referred to as Comprehension Approach (Winits, 1981). The comprehension Approach scholars share the belief that a) comprehension abilities precede productive skills in learning a language; b) the learning of speech should be delayed until comprehension skills are established c) skills acquired through listening transfer to other skills; and d) teaching should emphasize learner stress-free environment etc.

This study observed the process of learning of visually impaired students by using Total Physical Responses (TPR) that was helpful to the students in learning English. Those teaching method is suitable to the visually impaired students' characteristics to promote their learning as they learned by optimizing their sense of hearing. Considering to the phenomenon, the study was conducted to explore and describe the participants' learning English through that method.

All of the reasons above had built up the researcher's way of thinking to observe the process of learning that was gained and experienced by the visually

impaired students in their English learning using Total Physical Response. How do visually impaired students do some tasks in learning using Total Physical Response (TPR) method? What kind of attitudes and psychological aspects that come up while they are learning English? Because of visually impaired student's weaknesses, they needed to get much attention in teaching learning process than normal students. What kinds of English competencies achieved using this method while the visually impaired students are learning by doing some tasks? In further learning, they could automatically learned by themselves—autonomous after several times. In conducting the research, the researcher identified how the method can be applied toward visually impaired students in learning English. This research aimed to respond current perspective in the world of education especially in helping marginalized students who had visual defects (in learning English).

The research is describing visually impaired students' learning English using Total Physical Responses. There is one problem that will be answered in this research, i.e.: How is the visually impaired student learning English using Total Physical Response (TPR)? The purposes of the study is to describe the visually impaired student learning English using Total Physical Response (TPR). There are some benefits of this study that are discussed in the following paragraph. These benefits substantiate how the study will account for the development of English language education particularly, in the teaching and learning English for the visually impaired learners. The original goal was to give children and students with a visual impairment a chance to learn English well enough to have good knowledge of a foreign language in order to reach the goal of education. The other benefits of this study i.e., firstly, the study may contribute to the development of English learning model for the visually impaired students who need some attention in their right to get better education and improvement in their learning. Secondly, the study is going to improve the visually impaired students' learning English using Total Physical Response. Thirdly, the study encourages teachers to improve their teaching techniques in handling problem with visually impaired learners by applying Total Physical Response (TPR) in order to help learners

improve their potential and life skill in learning English. Moreover, they can study autonomously and get self-fulfilling.

## **2. Methodology**

This research method used a descriptive qualitative method. Hancock and Algozzine (2006:16) state that this method attempts to present a complete description performance of a phenomenon within its context. In other words, it was applied because a case study research was richly descriptive and it was grounded in deep and varied sources of information. Since the data are about the visually impaired students, the observations included all the description of visually impaired students in learning English using Total Physical Response (TPR), especially explored in what they did, what they said about their learning, how they learnt, how they felt, and what they obtained as a result of learning. The participants were visually impaired students who were marginalized. This study attempted to reveal meaning based on the stories or narratives told by visually impaired students based on their perspectives. This narrative research allowed the researcher to go beyond what were said and done by the participants, but also what was meant by their stories and actions. This study worked on interpreted narratives which helped the researcher to arrive at a thick description.

The nature of data was descriptive narrative obtained from a series of in-depth interviews with the participants. The observation data were gained from a series of observations on learning English of visually impaired students by using Total Physical Response (TPR). The interview data were obtained from the participants opinion, idea, experience and feeling. The interview was in Indonesian that was translated by the researcher into English although, there were some extracts from the interview data that were written in English style of the participants to show their learning achievement of the material. The study conducted at Yaketunis Yogyakarta. There were fifteen visually impaired students who stays and study there. All of them were visually impaired students and become the participant of this research. The sources of the data were (1) visually impaired students as the participants of the study, (2) recorded actions (video-

taped), (3) recorded interviews (audio-taped), and (4) field note. In data gathering instruments and data presentation, researcher applied some instruments i.e. a series of class observations by using videotaped and field note and series of recorded interviews of the visually impaired students' learning process. The results of the data were described and used to construct questions in interview. The audio-taped was used to record what the participant said about the activities while the interview was going on. It was accompanied with a field note to ensure the researcher if the participant really did certain activities. It is used to describe and interpret how visually impaired students learn and to identify the competencies that are acquired based on in-depth interview.

### **3. Discussion**

The process of learning English started by introduction. The visually impaired students should introduce and tell a lot about their names, study background and what they had learn so far about English in their school. Their ages were between 13-18 years old, however they were generally still in the elementary school and junior high school. It was due to their lack motivation when they wanted to started study in a formal education. They did not have great confident and felt marginalized by society. They told their experience and some difficult things they faced when they learned English at school with their friends and teacher. The limited vocabulary was one reason why they felt so hard in learning English. Moreover, they had less motivation in learning English. They argued that English written was different with the spoken one.

In order to help them learn English, for the first time the instructor gave them motivation why they should learn English and showed how learned English easily and joyfully. The instructor told them what they should learn in that time. In applying total physical responses method the visually impaired students did some commands for practice in English learning process given by the instructor. This task involving physical movement that was imitated by the learners while they listen to some commands.

The commands expression were simple and short. They were “stand up”, “sit down”, “stand up”, “turn around”, “sit down”, “walk”, “stop”, “jump”, “touch the table”, “touch the box”, “touch your friend”, “pick up the box”, “open the box”, “touch your head”, “touch your nose”, “touch your eye”, “touch your ear”. While they were listening to the instruction, they tried to respond all the commands hardly. Some of them just kept silent because they did not know what kind of physical movement that was expected to be performed. The instructor then gave them explanation in their first language (L1) about the commands and what they should do. After several trials and they repeat as many as time so that every student got a turn to respond. For this kind of tasks, the instructor did not need to do the actions while she/he was speaking, because they could not see what the teacher did. They used their sense of hearing in doing what the instructor asked. Then the learners might do the actions together with their friends while listening to commands said by the instructor for several times. They usually found that they were a bit slower than other friends, but later most students found that they could completely understand these target language instructions and follow the instructor closely in doing the actions. There was kind of degree of complexity with this kind of activities. At its simplest, it may be a command like “sit down” or “stand up”. At the other extreme, learners may hear complicated instructions by playing Simon Says game. The commands might be given in many variations to add variety to students’ activity. Moreover, students had experience in learning English that joyful, fun and challenging. The students were active in the learning activities. They did not just listen but they also practiced and did the expression based on the materials given.

At the beginning of learning English as a foreign language, the visually impaired students may not understand or express themselves very well. They might listen and sometimes repeat what the instructor pronounced. On the other hand, when the instructor gave instructions and made the students do as she/he orders, the correct physical response can not only practice their listening comprehension, but also prove that they understood the teacher. Total physical response is one of the methods that directs students to pay attention to the language

meaning than the form. The visually impaired students are not able to receive the stimulus from the outside through their sight. Receiving of stimulus only can be done by using other senses except sight. Students of visually impaired needs a process of learning by applying a method that support them more actively in their psychomotor aspect and pronouncing rather than memorization. This model means that second language learning should be based on the model of first language learning. It has three vital aspects: a) understanding the spoken language must come before speaking, b). Understanding is developed through body movements, and c) the listening period creates a readiness to speak (Asher, 2000)

In the field of research, Total Physical Response could be used to support the visually impaired students in vocabulary mastery and pronunciation. The students gave responses by oral responses and action based on the instruction given by the instructor. Stripped down to its essentials, it is a way using movements, gestures and group dynamics linked with spoken language in the form of commands, to create an atmosphere in which learners quickly and easily acquire comprehension of new vocabulary and structures in a target language. In the process, something called “impulse to language” also comes into play (Cain, 2000). Students argued that they had new experience in learning English, it was so joyful and useful for them. They felt stress-free when they were learning, it was because they did not need to think hard in answering questions. They admitted that in the first time they were confused in responding the commands, but after several instructions they did it very well. Moreover, they wanted to do it more and more and they also pronounced what they heard continuously.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This method will handle that students’ limitation in visualization to get information through voice by their senses of hearing. Then they also applied it to detect a shape, media size in palpability. Moreover, the method was effective in helping students with visually impaired in learning English. Learning by doing the action would be effective than just memorizing. When the students did what they listened or spoke, they would be easier in comprehending English. The visually



impaired students needed method in learning English that suitable to their characteristics. In developing their English competencies, teacher should give a real picture of objects in learning process. The students learned something new effectively and actively applying Total Physical Responses. The students practiced giving responses of some instructions, pronounced some words and repeated the words many times. They practiced how to give instructions and respond by maximizing their sense of hearing to activate their psychomotor competence. This process of learning activities supported them in developing their skill in mastering vocabulary, expression, and language command.

The visually impaired students experience in learning English using Total Physical Responses described the activities that could be done by teacher's at school to motivate them in learning and improve their English competences. The method was helpful to the students in learning English. Those teaching method was suitable to the visually impaired students' characteristics to promote their learning as they learned by optimizing their sense of hearing.

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