

# Total Physical Response in Early English as a Foreign Language Teaching

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**Kuhar, Romana**

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**SVEUČILIŠTE U ZAGREBU**  
**UČITELJSKI FAKULTET**  
**ODSJEK ZA UČITELJSKE STUDIJE**

**ROMANA KUCHAR**

**DIPLOMSKI RAD**

**TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE IN EARLY  
ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE  
TEACHING**

**Zagreb, studeni 2018.**

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**DIPLOMSKI RAD**

**Ime i prezime pristupnika: Romana Kuhar**

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English as a Foreign Language Teaching**

**MENTOR: doc. dr. sc. Alenka Mikulec**

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## SAŽETAK

Cilj ovoga diplomskog rada je predstaviti *Total Physical Response* metodu poučavanja jezika. Poblježe će se ispitati korištenje ove metode u poučavanju engleskoga kao stranoga jezika u radu s učenicima mlađe školske dobi. Rad je podijeljen u dva dijela. Prvi dio rada sadržava teorijski pregled poučavanja engleskoga kao stranoga jezika učenicima mlađe školske dobi i glavne karakteristike *Total Physical Response* metode, kao što su teorijska pozadina metode, rezultati istraživanja, uloge učitelja i učenika, procedura i negativne strane metode. U drugom dijelu rada prikazani su i razmotreni rezultati istraživanja. Cilj istraživanja bio je utvrditi koliko budući učitelji znaju o ovoj metodi i kakva su njihova iskustva s primjenjivanjem ove metode u radu s učenicima mlađe školske dobi. U istraživanju su sudjelovali budući učitelji, studenti učiteljskih studija sa Sveučilišta u Zagrebu i Sveučilišta u Padovi, čiji su rezultati uspoređeni. Rezultati su pokazali kako je većina ispitanika upoznata s *Total Physical Response* metodom učenja engleskoga kao stranoga jezika, ali je manji broj ispitanika imao priliku primijeniti tu metodu u vlastitoj praksi poučavanja. Usporedivši rezultate studenata iz Zagreba i iz Padove primjećujemo da je veći broj studenata iz Zagreba koristio ovu metodu u radu s učenicima mlađe školske dobi. Svi ispitanici koji su koristili metodu zadovoljni su rezultatima s obzirom na ishode učenja i preporučuju korištenje ove metode u poučavanju engleskoga kao stranoga jezika.

**Ključne riječi:** *Total Physical Response* metoda, engleski kao strani jezik, učenici mlađe školske dobi.

## **SUMMARY**

The aim of this master's degree thesis is to present the Total Physical Response method of language teaching. The use of this method in teaching English to young foreign language learners will be examined more closely. The thesis is divided into two parts. The first part brings the theoretical overview of the English as a foreign language teaching with young learners and the main characteristics of the Total Physical Response method, such as background to the method, results of previous research, roles of teachers and learners, procedure and the downsides of the method. In the second part, research results are presented and discussed. The aim of the research was to determine how much pre-service teachers know about the Total Physical Response method and what their experiences with applying this method to young learners are. Research participants were pre-service teachers, students enrolled in the teacher education study programmes at the University of Zagreb and the University of Padova, whose results have been compared. The results show that the majority of the participants have heard about the Total Physical Response method of teaching English as a foreign language, but not many of them have applied it in their own teaching practice. Comparing the results of the students from Zagreb and the students from Padova it is noticeable that a larger number of students from Zagreb have used this method with young learners. All participants who have used this method reported being satisfied with the learning outcomes, and would recommend its use in English as a foreign language teaching.

**Key words:** Total Physical Response (TPR), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), young learners.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The main goal of this thesis is to present Total Physical Response (TPR) as a method of teaching English as a foreign language to young learners. The second chapter introduces the topic of English as a foreign language teaching, and in the succeeding section focus is on young foreign language learners and their characteristics. The third chapter covers the main characteristics of TPR, starting with the background of TPR method and the foundations on which this method was developed. In the following sections, we explain James Asher's first experiments and conclusions regarding TPR, and TPR approach to language learning itself with its three hypotheses. Also, the procedure of teaching a TPR lesson is presented, following the explanation of teacher's and learner's roles in TPR activities. Next, the use of TPR with young English as a foreign language learners is explained. It provides experiences and conclusions made by English teachers who have used or examined this method. Furthermore, discoveries about TPR in the last ten years are presented, and the downsides of using TPR in foreign language teaching are examined as well as. The succeeding chapter provides information about a method which is a combination of TPR and storytelling called Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS). The fifth chapter demonstrates the research conducted with the objective of investigating the use of TPR in English as a foreign language teaching with young learners. The participants were university students, pre-service English language teachers currently studying at teacher education study programmes in Croatia and Italy. The final chapter presents conclusions made from the theoretical overview of TPR and the research conducted on the topic.



## **2. ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING**

English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching is understood as teaching English language to non-native speakers in countries where English is not the language of the community. In those countries, English does not play an essential role in people's lives, but it is taught in schools as a part of foreign language teaching programmes (Broughton, Brumfit, Pincas, & Wilde, 2003). Since EFL learners are not exposed to English on a daily basis, it is the job of a teacher to bring the English language to the classroom and to motivate learners to use it as much as possible. In addition, EFL learners usually have instrumental motivation for learning English, such as to visit an English speaking country, to be able to talk to a person from an English-speaking world, or to be able to read publications written in English.

English as a foreign language teaching is an interdisciplinary field, which includes both applied and theoretical linguistics, as well as other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and pedagogy. An EFL teacher has to be proficient in all those disciplines to help learners acquire the language. In order to be able to do so, the teacher has to have an awareness of a wide range of possible factors which could affect learners' success in acquiring a foreign language. Even though language learning and teaching are intertwined in the acquisition of a new language, this thesis focuses on the teaching segment more closely. Firstly, it is important to distinguish the terms 'teaching' and 'methodology'. Foreign language methodology includes "the activities, tasks and learning experiences used by the teacher within the teaching and learning process" (Richards, 1990, p. 35). Ur (1996) explains that teaching, on the other hand, includes foreign language methodology as well as lesson planning, classroom discipline and relevant topics to teach. Therefore, teaching cannot be defined separately from learning. Teaching means guiding the learning process and giving learners opportunities to learn and to set the conditions for learning. It is an inductive process because the teacher lets learners discover the rules of a language inductively (Brown, 2007). The teaching process is a complex one and according to Ur (1996), it consists of three components: presenting and explaining new material, providing practice, and testing. The teacher is the one who chooses how he or she will present new material in order to make it clear, how much practice learners need, and what kind of assessment will be used.

Numerous language teaching methods and approaches have been developed with the objective to teach EFL successfully. Some of them are Grammar-translation method, Direct method, Audio-lingual method, and Communicative Language Teaching; while among the humanistic approaches, the best-known are Suggestopedia, The Silent Way, The Natural Approach, Community Language Learning, and Total Physical Response method (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). However, there is yet not one method which could be considered the most efficient or complete, and it is recommended that, especially novice teachers, should know of different methods and approaches and have insights from research and teaching practice in order to be able to make their own informed choices (Ur, 2014). As learners' needs and interests change, teachers need to adapt their teaching styles and combine different methods to find the one(s) which works best for them, as well as for their students.

### **2.1. English Foreign Language Teaching with Young Learners**

In the 1960s a major change took place considering learning English as a foreign language in primary schools around the world. Participants of The Hamburg conference, organized by UNESCO in 1962, came to the conclusion that as a result of changes in society, the education in primary schools should include other languages and other cultures (Byram, 2000). Because of that, in many countries around the world appeared a large number of EFL courses for young children, which were integrated into state primary school programmes as well as in the private sector (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2006). The teaching of foreign languages received strong support from the Council of Europe and flourished, especially in countries such as France, Germany, Italy and Yugoslavia (Broughton, Brumfit, Pincas, & Wilde, 2003). By learning a foreign language, young learners break the traditional parochial character of the primary school and furthermore, another international element is introduced in their education. This element is important because it raises cultural awareness of young learners from an early age.

When it comes to the question of whether it is better to start learning foreign languages early in life or later, many scientists mention the critical period hypothesis, first proposed by neurologist Wilder Penfield in 1959. It states that there is a period in a person's life, until the age of puberty, when languages are learned more easily.

Many studies support this view, but there are still many who oppose it (cf. Ellis, 1997). Ur (1996) states that the critical period hypothesis was not fully supported by research and that there may be several of those periods in a person's life, or maybe it does not exist at all. On the other hand, there have been some neuro-physical clinical investigations which suggest that the speech learning centre in the brain is at its peak between the first and ninth year of life, which would mean that young learners should learn languages more easily earlier than later in life (Broughton, Brumfit, Pincas, & Wilde, 2003). Also, Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović (2006) state that starting early in learning new languages may enhance learner's cognitive control. Even though starting early is commonly considered better than starting later in life, ideally, a learner should first learn to read and write in his or her mother tongue and then move to acquiring foreign languages (Broughton, Brumfit, Pincas, & Wilde, 2003). Young learners who are proficient in their mother tongue can start learning a foreign language, and their mother tongue could help the foreign language to be taught more easily (Gordon, 2007). As Lightbown and Spada (2006) point out after reviewing the literature on the subject of starting early in foreign language learning, there have been various studies showing that older children and adolescents make more progress in language learning than younger learners. Some of the reasons could be that they have increased cognitive abilities, which allow them to be taught by more abstract approaches, while younger learners cannot fully grasp abstract concepts. On the other hand, there is some evidence that learners who started learning as adults were not able to achieve native-speaker competence in grammar and pronunciation, while younger learners were more successful in doing that (Ellis, 1997). Starting learning languages early is not necessarily always a better approach, it is just considered to have some biological advantages in contrast to starting later in life.

Every language learner is different, and foreign language teachers need to take into account different learner characteristics, such as their level of education, age, life experiences, intellectual abilities, strengths and weaknesses; native language(s) and personality traits (Brown, 2007). Young learners (children up to the ages of 9 or 10) are very different from adult learners. They rely more on memory-based processes, while adults rely more on rule-based learning. Children as learners benefit more from meaning-focused activities and procedural knowledge, which is considered to be more durable than declarative knowledge on which, in addition to as

explicit rules, young learners rely very little (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2006). Their understanding of the language comes from what they see, hear or do, and not from explanations. They find abstract concepts difficult to understand, so they learn more indirectly gathering information all around them and not focusing on the precise topic being taught (Harmer, 2007). It is noted that young learners have limited attention span and get bored easily if activities are not engaging; consequently English lessons for children from the age of 7 to 12 should be up to 45 minutes long (and for learners younger than the age of 7, they should be even shorter). To keep learner's interest it is important to frequently change activities and not to work on the same activity for more than 10 minutes. The best approach to teaching young learners is to use patterned activities like games, songs or dialogues which include a lot of repetition. Repeating new words or word structures gives children a sense of assurance and achievement (Broughton, Brumfit, Pincas, & Wilde, 2003). Young learners have greater need to be motivated to learn by the teacher or by the teaching materials. That is why teachers often use games, stories and pictures with young learners to grasp their attention and to teach more effectively (Ur, 1996). It is the teacher's task to recognize opportunities in those games, stories and pictures to develop them into learning experiences for their students (Cameron, 2001). Also, young learners need individual attention and approval from the teacher, which could at times prove to be rather challenging for the teacher (Harmer, 2007).

It is the job of an EFL teacher to adapt his or her teaching to the needs of young learners. EFL teachers should be well prepared with a variety of different activities, but also flexible enough to notice when learners are getting bored, and skilled enough to know how to get their attention back. It is very important to develop an affective relationship with young learners, to attract their interests and most of all to have good oral skills in English since children mainly tend to imitate their teacher's pronunciation (Harmer, 2007). Teachers are the most important figures in early foreign language teaching because their proficiency in both native and foreign language and their ability to apply age-appropriate methodology will result in learners' successful foreign language acquisition (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2006).

### **3. TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE (TPR)**

Total Physical Response (TPR) is a language teaching method developed by James J. Asher, a professor of Psychology at San Jose State University in California, in the 1960s. This chapter provides an insight into the background to this method, its main characteristics, procedure, applications of the method with young learners, as well as its downsides.

#### **3.1. Background to the Total Physical Response Theory**

Foreign language learning and teaching relies on discoveries from both linguistics and other related sciences such as psychology and pedagogy. Total Physical Response, as a method of language learning, draws on several traditions and one of them is developmental psychology. Asher claimed that foreign language learning acquisition is a parallel process to the way in which a child learns his or her mother tongue. Most of the speech directed to very young children are commands to which children respond physically before they learn how to speak. In the same way, children, as well as adults, could learn a foreign language, by responding physically to commands uttered in the foreign language (Richards & Rodgers, 1999). TPR is also related to the trace theory of memory in psychology. It states that the memory connection should be traced more often to have a stronger memory association (Katona, 1940). The stronger the association is, the more likely it will be recalled. In practice, it would mean that repeating new language several times will make it more memorable. Connecting verbal repetition with motor activities increases the probability of successful recall (Katona, 1940). In connection with the school of humanistic psychology, Asher shares the concern about the emotional factors in learning a foreign language. He thinks that there should be a teaching method which would be undemanding in terms of linguistic production and would involve more game-like movements. This kind of method would reduce stress while learning, and create a positive atmosphere, which would stimulate learning (Richards & Rodgers, 1999). Some TPR-like teaching procedures have been proposed by Harold and Dorothy Palmer in their book *English through Actions* (Palmer & Palmer, 1925). The Palmers described a series of various oral and action exercises for teaching English such as the imperative drills, which could be done individually or collectively. The

teacher says the orders in a logical order and learners do them. An example of a drill sequence is:

“Stand Up. Take your book. Bring your book to me. Put your book under my desk. Put your book under my chair. Pick up your book. Hold up your book. Put down your book. Go back to your place. Sit down.” (Palmer & Palmer 1925, p. 22).

It is important to mention that Palmer and Palmer (1925) stated these drills are especially useful to use when teaching absolute beginners, who need more encouragement. Gestures are used as responses instead of language and learners are not aware of the written words for the commands they are given.

TPR is considered to be part of a general approach to foreign language teaching named the Comprehension Approach. It is different from other approaches because it does not involve students in the speaking process right away, but first focuses on the listening comprehension, and speaking comes later on (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). In the 1960s and 1970s, studies have been conducted proposing the hypothesis that learning a foreign language should first start with understanding the language and only later should proceed to oral production (Winitz, 1981). It was very similar to the way in which infants acquire their mother tongue. Babies first listen to people around them for months before producing a single word. This 'silent period' gives the babies time to make sense of the sounds they hear, and when they are ready, they produce their first words spontaneously (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

### **3.2. Asher's First Experiments and Conclusions**

James Asher said that maybe “one of the most complex tasks in human learning is the problem of how to achieve fluency in a foreign language” (Asher, 1966, p. 79). To find a solution for this task he created a learning approach called the strategy of the Total Physical Response. In this approach the teacher says and acts out actions as a model, and the learners listen to the actions and repeat the movements after the model. The commands are at first very simple words such as “jump”, “turn”, “run”, “walk”, and later become more complex commands such as “Run to the window, pick up the book, put it down on the desk, and sit down on the chair.” (Asher, 1966, p. 80).

Asher's first two experiments were done on college students learning Japanese and Russian languages for the first time. In the first experiment, in the experimental group the TPR was used to teach the language. They listened to commands in Japanese and acted them out with the instructor who served as a model. One control group sat and observed the model, the second group listened to English translations of the actions, and the third group read English translations. Neither of the three control groups included any body movement in their learning. Two retention tests were given to subjects, one 24 hours after the teaching and the second one 2 weeks after the teaching. The experimental group had better results in retention tests than all three control groups thus showing that learning was more successful when the TPR method was used. The same study was conducted again on college students learning Russian for the first time. The results again showed that the experimental group had significantly better scores on the retention tests than the control groups, and even better on the retention test two weeks after the teaching (Asher, 1966, 2009).

Next, Asher wanted to examine if TPR would be as efficient with children as it was with college students. The same study with the Russian language was repeated first with 6<sup>th</sup> graders, and later with 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade learners. The only difference was that during the retention tests both experimental and control group acted out their responses instead of control group writing English translations. There was no difference in the results between the children who observed the model and those who acted with the model. The difference was noticeable in whether the learners wrote or acted during the retention tests. Those learners who acted out had significantly better results on retention tests than those who wrote. Since children are still learning to write, and writing is a more complex task for them than acting, the same experiment was done again with college adults. The results showed that the college adults who acted had significantly better results on retention tests than those who wrote, confirming the results from the previous research with children (Asher, 1966, 2009).

After these initial experiments, there were around twenty more studies done on the topic. Asher came to the conclusion that it is unrealistic to expect foreign language learners to become fluent in all foreign language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), and he recommended that listening comprehension should be

taught first. When listening is acquired, the transition to speaking may be less stressful and more efficient. The technique which Asher (1968) proposed for teaching listening comprehension is TPR. Further testing of this method confirmed that as the complexity of the tasks increased, the body movement became a powerful facilitation to learning no matter what amount of time had passed between training and the test. Also interestingly, one of the conclusions was that when adults and children are learning a foreign language in the same conditions, the adults are far superior to children in listening comprehension (Asher & Price, 1967). On the other hand, younger children are superior to adults in acquiring native-like pronunciation of the new language (Asher, 2009).

### **3.3. Approach to FL Teaching Using TPR**

Total Physical Response is a language teaching method which is built on the coordination of physical movement and instructions with the focus on listening comprehension. In Asher's opinion, language consists of abstractions and nonabstractions. Nonabstractions are represented by concrete nouns and imperative verbs, which are used in commands during TPR activities. Asher states that it is possible for learners to learn grammar structures of the language only with the use of nonabstractions. "Once students have internalized the code, abstractions can be introduced and explained in the target language" (Asher, 1977, p. 12).

Listening comprehension is important for acquiring both abstractions and nonabstractions of the language. By listening, learners passively acquire the structure of the language. Only when the structure and understanding of the language are developed, learners spontaneously start speaking a foreign language. Learners are never forced to speak a foreign language before they feel comfortable doing so. "To force speaking from the beginning of training may be somewhat analogous to the electroshock experiments with rats" (Asher, 1966, p. 81). If learners are forced to utter unfamiliar sounds, it may be a shock and learners may feel anxiety towards learning the language. Only after the listening comprehension is achieved, can learners start speaking a foreign language (Asher, 1966). In order for learning to be successful, it is important that learners have an opportunity to enjoy the foreign language learning experience and that stress is reduced (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).



The objective of this method is to teach oral proficiency at the beginning level. To achieve this, learners first have to acquire listening comprehension, which is trained through action-based drills in the imperative form (Richards & Rodgers, 1999). The instructor's commands in the initial stages of learning are combinations of objects around the classroom and verbs such as stand up, walk, point, touch, run, turn, sit (Byram, 2013). The imperative is used because it is the most frequently used type of speech directed to children when they are acquiring their first language. The same is done in TPR but with learners of all ages learning a foreign language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

While other methods rely on a grammar-based syllabus, TPR focuses on the meaning rather than the form of the language. Grammar is taught inductively through situations in the classroom. Vocabulary and grammar structures are emphasized over other language areas and are selected according to the situation in which they can be used in the classroom. Asher also suggested in his teacher's guidebook that a fixed number of new lexical items can be introduced at a time. In an hour, it is possible to assimilate 12 to 36 new items depending on the size of the group and the stage of training (Asher, 1977).

In TPR, language is put in context, in real-life situations. For example, young learners could be taught a foreign language by doing actions involving everyday hygiene routines. Commands to learn new verbs could be: "Wash your hands. Wash your face. Wash your hair. Look for a towel. Look for a comb. Look for a soap. Brush your teeth. Comb your hair" (Richards & Rodgers, 1999, p. 95). Through the use of commands, new nouns and adverbs can also be taught. For example, noun 'teeth' and adverb 'slowly' could be taught by commands: "Touch your teeth. Show your teeth to Dolores. Walk slowly to the window and jump. Slowly, stand up" (Richards & Rodgers, 1999, p. 96).

One of the strongest features of TPR is long-term retention, which may last weeks, months, and even years (Asher, 2003). When language is connected with physical movements, it is easier to recall and use it again.

In TPR activities mother tongue is used only during initial instructions. Later on, all instructions are made in the target foreign language. No mother tongue is necessary because meaning is made clear through nonverbal physical movements the

teacher makes (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Translation is not done because there is no long-term understanding of a foreign utterance when it is translated into the mother tongue. Translation is replaced by physical actions which are used to present language and explain meaning (Asher, 2007).

There are some instruction materials in TPR lessons, but they play a secondary role, especially in the beginning stages of learning. In the later stages, more materials are used since actions are sometimes insufficient for teaching abstractions. The supporting materials which TPR teachers use could be pictures, slides, word charts, realia and other classroom objects (Richards & Rodgers, 1999).

The atmosphere in a classroom while using TPR is always playful. The seating arrangement works better if desks are organized in a semicircle or a horseshoe with the board at the open end (Silvers, 2015). Teachers should keep the activities simple and appropriate to learners' level of foreign language proficiency, and most importantly help learners have fun and have fun themselves. If teachers have fun during the lessons, so will the students (Asher, 2010).

### **3.4. TPR - Three Learning Hypotheses**

Asher (1977) has elaborated three main hypotheses about learning a foreign language, which are embodied in the TPR method. These hypotheses are:

1. Language is learned primarily by listening.

Asher speculated that there exists a specific innate bio-program for language learning, which defines an optimal path for first and second language development. He asserted that second or foreign language learning is a parallel process to first language learning, and should reflect the naturalistic processes of learning a mother tongue. When learning their first language, children first develop listening competences before they develop the ability to speak. By responding physically to commands, children acquire listening comprehension from which evolves speech (Richards & Rodgers, 1999).

2. Effective language learning must engage the right hemisphere of the brain.

Brain lateralization defines different learning functions in the left and right brain hemispheres. Asher claimed that language activities are centred in the right

brain hemisphere, which is considered by psychologists to be intuitive and creative. Therefore, TPR is directed to the right brain learning, while other methods were more directed to the left brain learning. Left brain learning puts emphasis on correctness and does not allow the learner to take risks because the person may make a mistake. On the other hand, the right brain acquisition encourages learners to play without a fear of making a mistake (Asher, 2003). Motor activities performed within TPR are centred in the right hemisphere of the brain. At first, the left hemisphere just watches and learns from the right, and when there has been sufficient amount of learning done, the left hemisphere will be triggered to produce the language and to focus on abstract language processes (Richards & Rodgers, 1999).

### 3. Language learning should not involve any stress.

Stress intervenes between the act of learning and what is to be learned. The lower the stress, the greater the learning. To achieve stress-free learning, children should have a relaxed and pleasurable experience similar to that of a child learning a first language. The focus should be on the meanings interpreted through movements and not on the abstract language forms. In such environment, learners will be able to devote fully to stress-free learning (Richards & Rodgers, 1999).

### **3.5. TPR - Teaching Procedure**

The basic procedure of a TPR lesson could be divided into three parts: listen, watch and imitate. In any kind of TPR activity learners first listen to the commands and connect them with the actions, so that they themselves can imitate and perform them. Teachers who start using TPR for the first time should take only five to ten minutes to introduce new material that students have never encountered before. The introductory part of the lesson, where the teacher explains what learners are going to do, can be done in the mother tongue. All other parts of the lesson are done in the target language. The samples of the materials presented by the teacher should be as concrete as possible because abstractions should be taught later in the teaching programme. To prevent brain overload, learners should be silent during TPR activities because oral production will follow when learners acquire meanings of the actions done (Asher, 2007).

Larsen-Freeman (2000) and Richards and Rodgers (1999) described the procedure of a TPR lesson. If it is not the learners' first TPR lesson, the teacher starts the lesson by repeating familiar commands to each student individually as a warm-up part of the lesson. Following the warm-up is the presentation of new unfamiliar commands. Four volunteers come in front of the class and sit on the chairs together with the teacher. The teacher chooses a verb and adds different objects to the command. For example, the teacher wants to teach the verb "point" and the possible commands could be: "Point to the door.", "Point to the desk.", "Point to the chair.", having in mind that the learners are already familiar with the words "door", "desk" and "chair". The teacher encourages the rest of the class to listen and watch. The teacher gives the commands and does the actions. The four learners follow the teacher's example and do the same. Meaning of the command is explained through physical movement. Learners at first do not understand the word "point", but after watching the teacher raise his/her finger towards the objects, they connect the sound of the word with the action the teacher does. In TPR the target language is not taught word by word but is presented in chunks in the form of commands. After few repetitions, the teacher changes the order of the commands and says them more quickly, while learners perform all of them together.

After some time the teacher stops performing actions and continues to give commands. The learners now do not have a model to look at while performing actions, and depend on their own knowledge. If the teacher notices that learners are confused, he or she repeats the same command and performs the action one more time. Next, the teacher chooses only one learner to perform a command to check their listening comprehension individually. Finally, the rest of the class is included now to perform the actions together with the four students. If all learners have mastered these first few commands, the teacher can move to more complex ones and teach them in the same way. After students have learned new commands, the teacher introduces the novel commands, which are a combination of the two or more previous commands (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). For example, if learners are familiar with the command "Walk to the door" and "Touch the door", the novel command could be "Walk to the door and touch the door."

The next step is the role reversal, which could be used as a transition activity from listening to speaking (Asher, 2007). It does not take place at the beginning of

TPR training because learners are not yet ready to speak. Later on in the training, learners who volunteer can become instructors and give commands to the teacher and the rest of the class. Even though in TPR spoken language is emphasized over written language, at the end of the lesson the teacher writes down on the blackboard each new vocabulary item and acts out the sentence right after writing it. Learners copy the sentences in their notebooks (Asher, 1977).

Learners are not encouraged to ask for repetition or about meaning during TPR activities because it could lead to brain overload. During TPR activities, learners are encouraged to relax, listen and do the actions together with the instructor. If there are some questions, they should be discussed at the end of the lesson (Asher, 2007).

### **3.6. Teacher's Role**

The teacher plays an active and directive role of the instructor. He or she interacts with learners as a group and individually. At first, only the teacher is speaking and learners are responding nonverbally, but later on the roles are changed and learners are the ones making commands (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). This relationship could be compared to a stage play in which students are the actors and the teacher is the director who guides the actors (Asher, 1977). Teachers should be well prepared and organized with a detailed lesson plan so that the activities flow smoothly. Asher suggests that teachers should write down in the lesson plan exact utterances they will use in class because the pace of the lesson has to be fast and there is no time to create new commands spontaneously. The teacher is the one who decides what to teach and how to present the new materials. In TPR the teacher's role is not primarily to teach, but to create opportunities for learning. The teacher should not force learners to speak, but provide enough language input from which learners will start speaking at their own pace. Also, at beginning stages of learning the teacher should not correct every mistake learners make because it interrupts the flow of the lesson. Later on, the teacher intervenes more often and the learners' speech becomes fine-tuned (Richards & Rodgers, 1999).

### **3.7. Learner's Role**

Learners in TPR have the primary roles of listeners and performers. They are imitators of the teacher, who is a model for the actions. Learners perform actions individually or collectively, and they learn by watching each other perform (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Learners evaluate their own learning progress and are not encouraged to speak until they feel ready to do so. During initial lessons, they simply listen and show their comprehension by responding to teacher's commands by body movements (Lightbrown & Spada, 2006). After 10 to 20 hours of instructions, learners will start speaking, and their role can change from that of performers to the ones giving directions to the teacher and other learners (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). The content of learning is determined by the teacher and the learners have little influence over it. They are required to respond to novel utterances, which consist of previously taught items but combined in a different way. After hours of training, learners will be able to produce novel utterances of their own (Richards & Rodgers, 1999).

### **3.8. Total Physical Response with Young EFL Learners**

As previously described in Chapter 2, young learners have specific needs when it comes to foreign language learning. They want to be active and to participate, so if they are not given such opportunity, learners get bored easily. Based on the information described in the previous sections, we propose that TPR activities are excellent for young learners because they provide them with opportunities to be active and to enjoy themselves while simultaneously learning a language. Since most young learners are at the beginning stages of a foreign language learning, the TPR is an excellent teaching tool for their age group. This has been confirmed over the last 50 years, by numerous experiments that were conducted with young learners using the TPR activities in different ways and combining them with other methods.

In his first experiments, Asher used children as well as adults to prove the efficiency of TPR. Even though research results showed that older children outperformed the younger ones, it was proved that younger learners are better at achieving native-like pronunciation, which older learners and adults would probably never get to acquire (Asher, 2009), or would simply need more time and effort to do it.

Tim Murphey, an English language teacher, experimented with musical language activities with children aged 7 to 17 while working in an international sports and language camp in Switzerland. His findings with young learners show that the use of songs in learning English was more efficient when it was combined with actions. That is why he incorporated TPR activities with his music and found that children learn languages by doing physical movements. Young learners' natural desire to move and have fun was satisfied. Also, young learners were not aware that they were learning, they were playing and singing for fun, which made a perfect environment for a language to be acquired successfully (Murphey, 1987).

Stephen Mark Silvers (2015) also incorporated TPR activities in his teaching English to preteens in Brazil. He noticed that children and preteens perform actions enthusiastically and are always willing to participate. Silvers (2015) emphasizes that to get learners to be ready to cooperate teachers should never ask them to perform any action which they themselves did not first perform, and should never ask learners to do anything they do not wish to do. Silvers also proposed a variety of TPR activities for developing listening, speaking, grammar and vocabulary competences. These activities were primarily made for children, but with slight adaptations could also be used with teenagers and adults. One interesting activity he mentioned was the grammar activity “act and say”. “In these exercises, the students first hear a command, and then they say what they are going to do, doing, did or have done” (Silvers, 2005, p. 232). This “oral-motor” procedure is excellent for practicing the present progressive, the future with going to, the simple past and the present perfect tense. It shows that TPR is not limited only to specific vocabulary and the imperative form of the verbs.

Unfortunately, little research has been conducted in the field of teacher education and their competences in using the TPR with young learners. It is not known what kind of training teachers who use TPR have nowadays and where they have found information about this method. Also, their beliefs and motivation about using specific teaching methods have hardly ever been researched (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2006).

### **3.9. Total Physical Response in the Last 10 Years**

James Asher's TPR movement is still a popular teaching technique even 50 years after his first experiments. The TPR is not limited to any language, since using it has showed good results in acquiring European, Asian, Indian and Semitic languages. Today it is developing even further and adapting to modern foreign language learners and their needs (Asher, 2007).

In 2010 Asher wrote a new note about TPR calling it the comprehension-first principle of language learning and insisting on not using the word “method” for it. The term method implies that there are formulas for language teaching and that teaching is a science. “Teaching is an art – the highest art form, not a science” (Asher, 2010, p. 2). Science can provide teachers with valuable tools but it depends on each teacher how they will use them. TPR should not be the only tool used in teaching. Secondary tools could be role reversals, storytelling sessions, skits, games and other techniques. In the same note, Asher lists his nine laws for the 21st century language teaching in which he repeats some of his previous findings and adds speculations for the future. In this century, it is possible to achieve fluency in multiple languages because of the various teaching techniques developed for different kinds of learners.

Asher also lists three words which language teachers should delete from their vocabularies. Those words are “methods”, “translate” and “memorize”. TPR is not a method but a tool which must be used in a skilful way. Direct translations should not be used because they give just a temporary meaning to a foreign utterance. Teacher should never ask learners to memorize any language utterance because it switches the brain into the slow-motion left-hemisphere learning. Learners should be encouraged to talk to each other, make jokes, stories or funny conversation just to play with the language given because just performing actions is not enough. Repetition is good, but not before learning. Learners should be encouraged to practice after learning because learning should happen at first exposure, and after the exposure the more learners play with the language, the more they will acquire it (Asher, 2010).

Asher also proposed that TPR should be combined with left brain hemisphere teaching activities after the comprehension of the language is achieved. The teacher



should transfer constantly from the right brain TPR activities and the left brain traditional teaching exercises to teach speaking, reading and writing (Asher, 2007). Teachers should keep the activities simple, running smoothly, and should have fun themselves to successfully teach by the TPR (Asher, 2010).

Will TPR be used in future foreign language learning with the increase of new methods which use modern technologies? That is to be researched in the future.

### **3.10. TPR - Downsides**

Although TPR seems like a fun, efficient and stress-free tool to use in teaching, it also has a few disadvantages. First, TPR is considered to be limited in the amount of language which can be taught. It focuses on the nouns, the verbs and adverbs provided in commands. Other more abstract grammatical features of the language are difficult or cannot be explained by using TPR. Asher proposes argument against this claim saying that “most of the grammatical structures of the target language and hundreds of vocabulary items can be learned from the skilful use of the imperative by the instructor” (Asher, 1977, p. 4).

Doing actions and moving physically could be a challenge for shy learners. If learners do not feel comfortable in a place and with other learners around them, they will not be free enough to do the actions. Also, TPR is not an appropriate tool to use with very advanced learners since simple commands are too easy and do not challenge their language skills. In addition, even though physical movements are amusing, overusing TPR and related activities can have the opposite effect, and even become boring for most learners.

In TPR activities learners are not generally given opportunities to express their own thoughts in a creative way. They are instructed exactly what to do, which makes the learning more mechanical. Even when they get the opportunity to give commands, their speech is still limited to the imperative. For that reason, TPR should be combined with other more creative approaches, or it could be introduced as part of a storytelling session (Richards & Rodgers, 1999).

The most common myth about TPR is that it will only work when applied to children. Even Asher's first experiments show that TPR can be used successfully with both children and adults (Asher, 2009). It is considered to be intended for

children because of its playful way of teaching. The TPR is the most efficient when used with beginning learners of a foreign language of all ages, young or adults. Since more beginning learners are usually young children, it is considered to be intended for their age group.

#### **4. TEACHING PROFICIENCY THROUGH READING AND STORYTELLING (TPRS)**

Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) is a method of teaching foreign languages developed by a Spanish teacher Blaine Ray in late 1980s. It combines James Asher's Total Physical Response method and Stephen Krashen's language acquisition hypotheses. This method provides a comprehensible and low-stress environment in which learners acquire conversation skills and understanding of the target language. As well as the TPR, it also applies the target language in context. Target phrases and key structures are repeated in the story throughout the lesson.

The teacher has to be positive and excited in order for learners to have fun. The role of the teacher is to present the vocabulary lists and together with the class create gestures or motions, which learners will associate with each word. The next step is to use those words to ask personalized questions to each learner. These questions will make the students feel important to the class and to the teacher. After the questions, the teacher moves on to a mini-story acted out by student volunteers. The stories consist of two or three paragraphs in a foreign language and can be bizarre, exaggerated or personal. Also, to provide visual associations, pictures which show what is happening in the story are presented (Kariuki & Bush, 2008). Learners can also write retells of the stories, or read either in groups, pairs or individually.

Kariuki and Bush (2008) examined the effects of the TPRS and traditional learning styles on high school students. The significant difference was found in learners' acquisition of vocabulary items. Learners taught using TPRS had significantly better results than those taught using the traditional method. Moreover, the learners who used the TPRS appeared positive, engaged in the lesson, and excited to get started at the beginning of a class period.

## **5. RESEARCH**

In the following pages information on the aim, research questions, participants and instruments used in the research will be presented, after which will follow the description of the procedure, the obtained results and the discussion.

### **5.1. Research Aim**

For the purposes of this thesis, a study has been conducted with the aim to establish how much pre-service EFL teachers, who are currently enrolled in teacher education programmes at the university level, know about the Total Physical Response method of teaching English as a foreign language. In particular, the study focuses on pre-service teachers' experiences with using this EFL teaching method.

The second aim of this research was to compare the data obtained from the students currently enrolled at the Faculty of Teacher Education University of Zagreb with those provided by the students enrolled at the University of Padova, Primary Teacher Education studies. Some of the parameters by which they were compared are students' motivation, level of education, knowledge about the courses, self-assessment of English language knowledge and English teaching experiences.

### **5.2. Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The purpose of this research was to answer the following research questions about pre-service English as a foreign language teachers and their experiences with the Total Physical Response method of EFL teaching:

1. How much do pre-service EFL teachers know about the Total Physical Response method of teaching English as a foreign language?
2. Why did pre-service EFL teachers choose to use the Total Physical Response method in teaching English as a foreign language?
3. How satisfied were pre-service EFL teachers with the outcomes of using the Total Physical Response method in teaching English?
4. Are there differences in the answers to the above-stated questions between the students from the University of Zagreb and the University of Padova?

The above research questions are related to the following hypotheses:

1. It is expected that the participants will report certain knowledge of the TPR method.
2. It is expected that the participants chose to use TPR because it is considered to be a fun learning tool.
3. It is expected that some participants who used TPR will be satisfied with the outcomes of using it in EFL teaching.
4. It is expected that there will be certain differences in the answers between the students from the University of Zagreb and the University of Padova.

### **5.3. Participants**

Data for this study were gathered from 85 university students who are currently studying to become primary school and English language teachers to young learners. The questionnaire was completed by 46 students from the University of Zagreb and 39 students from the University of Padova during the second semester of the academic year 2017/2018.

There were 83 female and 2 male participants. The average age of the participants was 23 years. Students from the second to the fifth year of their studies voluntarily participated in the research. There were 31 fifth year students, 31 fourth year students, 13 third year and 10 second year students. When they were asked about their teaching preferences, 24% stated they would like to be English language teachers; 68% said they would rather teach other subjects, and 8% chose both, or they reported not having made up their mind yet.

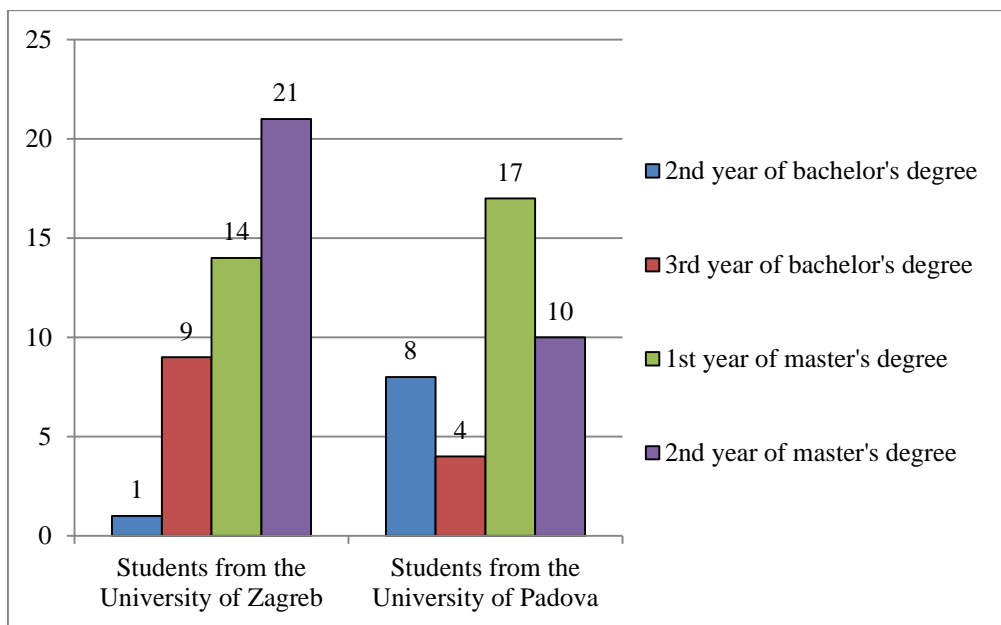


Figure 1. *Participants' currently enrolled year of study (data are presented as frequencies)*

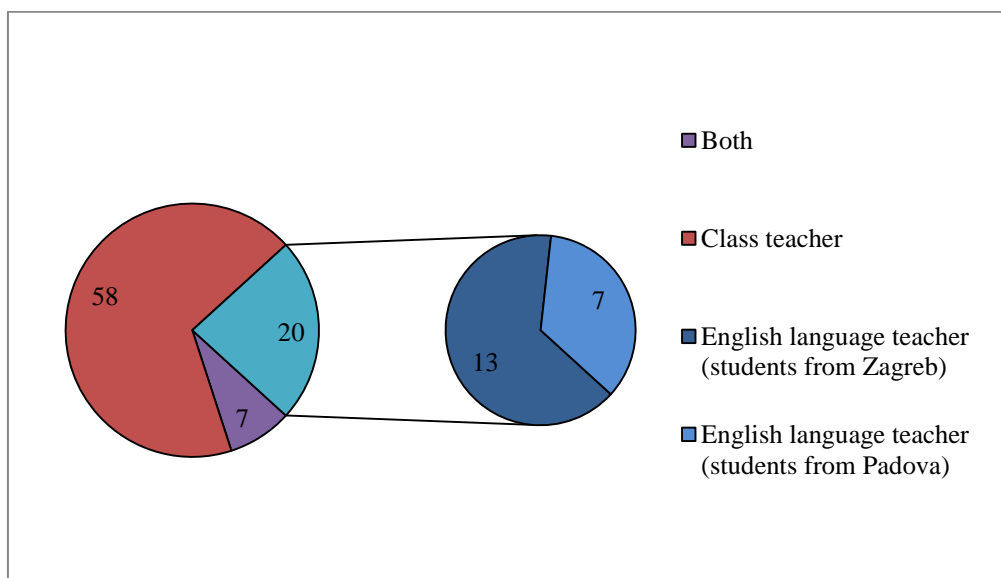


Figure 2. *Participants' teaching preferences (data are presented as frequencies)*

When comparing these two groups of students it is necessary to take into consideration differences in their study programmes and the amount of teaching practice opportunities that students have had during their studies. Students from the University of Zagreb who took part in this research are enrolled in the academic programme of primary teacher education with the English language, which means that at the beginning of their studies, they had the opportunity to choose whether, in

addition to being class teachers, they wanted to be English language teachers or teachers of some other subjects (e.g. ICT, visual arts...). While students from the University of Padova are a part of primary teacher education programme in which all students enrolled have to take English teaching methodology courses, as well as the methodology courses of other subjects, even though some of them probably do not have the aspiration to become English language teachers in future. Both groups of students have teaching practice courses incorporated into their study programmes.

#### **5.4. Research Instrument**

The type of instrument used in this research for data collection was a multiple choice and open-ended questionnaire. Before filling in the questionnaire, all participants were informed about the purpose of this research and the manner in which their data would be used in the future. They were then asked to sign an informed consent form, and only the data from those who agreed to participate were used in this research analysis.

The questionnaire was distributed online via e-mail to pre-service EFL teachers enrolled in the second to the fifth year of teacher education studies at the University of Zagreb and the University of Padova. The questionnaire was anonymous in order to encourage participants' honesty. The research instrument consists of three parts. The first part comprises general information questions on the participants' background: their gender, age, university at which they are studying, year of the studies, self-assessment of EFL knowledge, self-assessment of their English language teaching competences, number of English language teaching courses taken so far, teaching preferences, number of English lessons taught so far and the teaching methods used. The second part consists of questions about the Total Physical Response method: whether students have heard about it and where, which of its main characteristics they know, whether they have ever seen a lesson in which TPR was used and whether they have ever used TPR in class with young EFL learners. The final part of the questionnaire inquired about the participants' personal experience with using TPR: their motivation for choosing this method, satisfaction with the learning outcomes, their opinion on the learners' satisfaction with using this method and recommendations for using TPR in an EFL classroom.

## **5.5. Procedure**

The criteria by which the pre-service teachers were chosen for this study was that they were in the second or higher year of their studies and that they were enrolled in teacher education programme at the University of Zagreb or at the University of Padova. All participants received the consent form and questionnaire via e-mail, and those who were willing participated in the research. The data were collected, the answers were analysed and some conclusions are proposed. Although this was a small-scale qualitative and quantitative study, it gives a unique insight into the experiences of pre-service teachers using the TPR method of EFL teaching.

## **5.6. Results and Discussion**

By analysing the results of this research, the following research questions were answered:

*1. How much do pre-service EFL teachers know about the Total Physical Response method of teaching English as a foreign language?*

The obtained results indicate that of 85 university students who participated in this research, 65% (N=55) have heard about TPR method of EFL teaching. Further analysis showed that 42 of them were from the University of Zagreb and only 13 from the University of Padova. It is noticeable that a significantly larger percentage of students from Zagreb (91% (N=42) of the total number of participants from Zagreb) have heard about the method in comparison to only 33% (N=13) of the participants from Padova. These results are presented in Figure 3.

A possible explanation for this could be that students from Zagreb have had more EFL teaching courses at the university than the students from Padova.



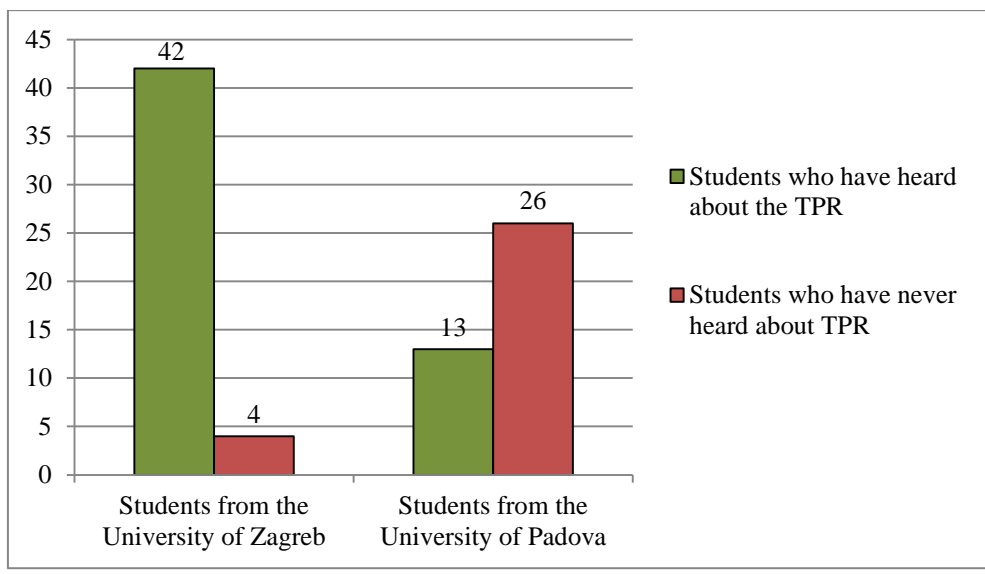


Figure 3. Number of students who have (never) heard about TPR method (data are presented as frequencies)

All students from Padova stated that they have taken only 1 to 5 EFL teaching courses so far while 80% (N=37) of students from Zagreb stated that they have taken more than 10 EFL teaching courses, and 17% (N=8) of them reported having taken 5 to 10 of the same courses. These results are presented in more details in Figure 4. The difference in English teaching programmes at these two universities is obvious, and students from Zagreb, who have had more courses, could be considered to have had more opportunities to come across the TPR method.

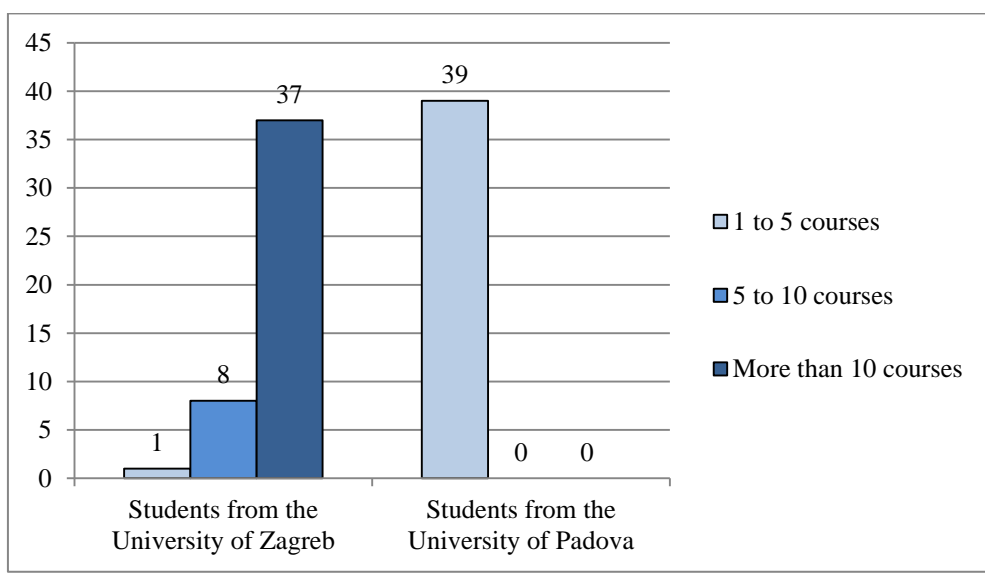


Figure 4. Number of English teaching courses taken during the studies (data are presented as frequencies)

When the results are compared with the year of the studies, we can notice that most students who have heard about TPR were in the fifth year of their studies (47% (N=26) of those who have heard about TPR), and the percentage is decreasing as the results of the students from lower years of the studies are examined. This result was expected since students in the higher years of studies have taken more English teaching methodology courses and have had more English teaching practice, but also the largest number of students who participated in the research were in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year of their studies.

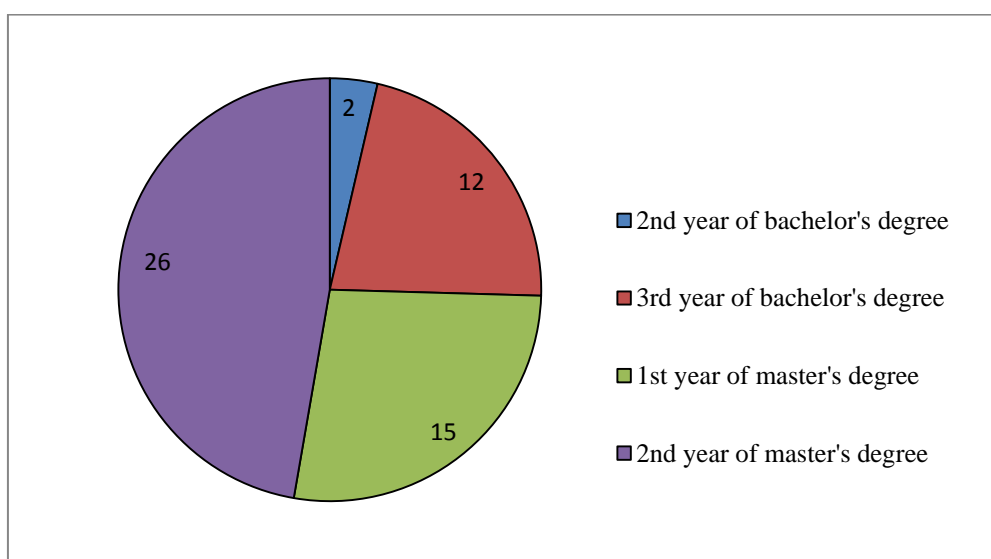


Figure 5. *The year of the studies of the students who have heard about TPR (data are presented as frequencies)*

Participants were asked to self-assess their English language knowledge and English language teaching competences to see if there was a connection between these factors and their knowledge about the TPR. Students from the University of Padova assessed their English language knowledge mostly with grade C (3), while students from the University of Zagreb mostly assessed their knowledge with grade B (4). More detailed results are presented in Figure 6.

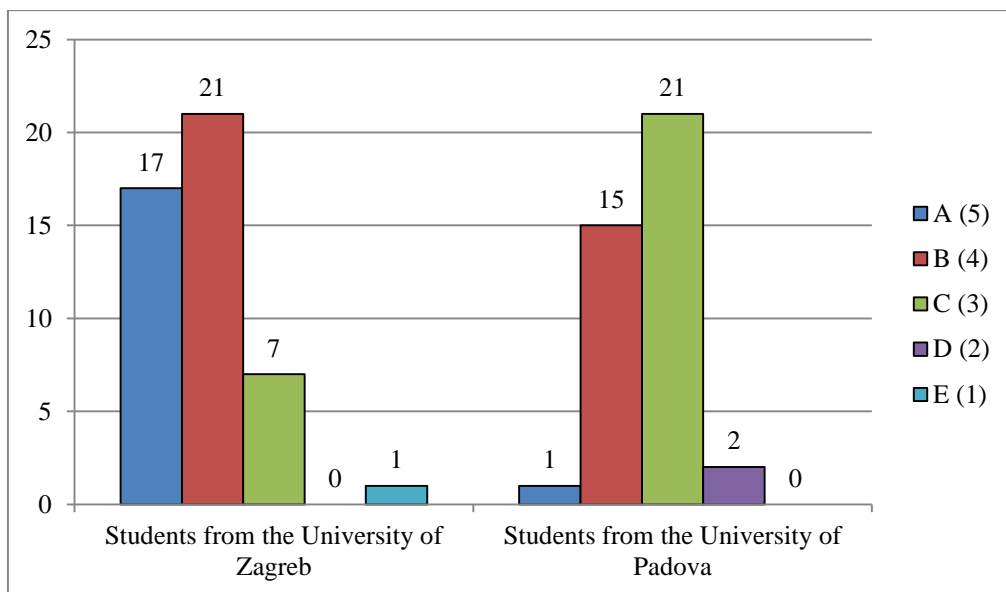


Figure 6. *Students' self-assessment of their English language knowledge (data are presented as frequencies)*

When students were asked to self-assess their English language teaching competences, the results were similar to the ones obtained from the self-assessment of English language knowledge (Figure 7).

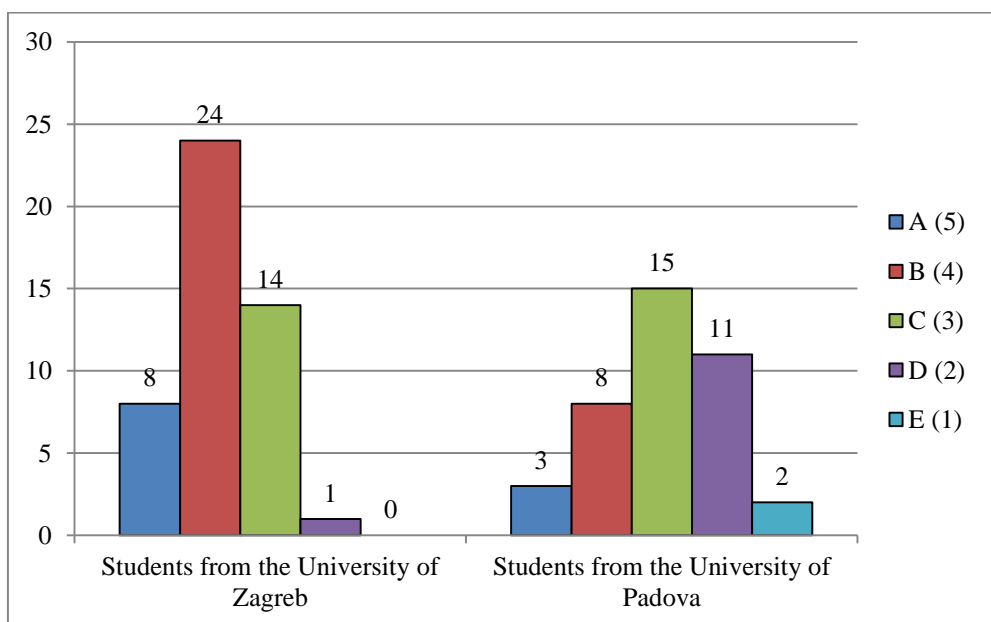


Figure 7. *Students' self-assessment of their English language teaching competences (data are presented as frequencies)*

It is noticeable that students assessed their English language knowledge and English teaching competences with approximately the same grades. When students who graded their teaching competences with an A (5) are examined more closely and compared to the information about TPR, it may be observed that of 8 students from Zagreb, 7 have both heard about and used TPR in a classroom with young learners. On the other hand, only three students from Padova graded their teaching competences with an A (5), and of those, two have never heard about TPR and only one student has heard about it, but has never used it in a classroom. Since fewer students from Padova assessed their teaching competences with higher grades, it is assumed that their knowledge about TPR will also be lower in comparison with that of the students from Zagreb.

Those participants who stated that they have heard about the TPR method ( $N_{\text{University of Padova}} = 13$ ,  $N_{\text{University of Zagreb}} = 42$ ) were asked to write the main characteristics of this method. This was an open-ended question, the answers to which were analysed qualitatively, and the characteristics of TPR are presented in the following text:

*“The use of whole-body actions by children after a command that teacher gives them.”* (a third year student at the University of Padova)

*“Learning language by doing actions.”* (a third year student at the University of Padova)

*“Students start speaking when they are ready to do so, teacher gives them instructions and they do as they are told, the instructions gradually become more complex...”* (a fifth year student at the University of Zagreb)

*“It is good for all learning styles, there is direct connection with English (not mother tongue), instant understanding of what is being taught.”* (a third year student at the University of Zagreb)

*“Whole-body actions, the coordination of speech and actions, learners as listeners and performers.”* (a fifth year student at the University of Zagreb)

*“The instructor gives commands using the imperative mood.”* (a fourth year student at the University of Padova)

*“Learning language through movement.”* (a fifth year student at the University of Zagreb)

*“It uses and incorporates movement into the lesson, and in this way children learn better.”* (a fifth year student at the University of Zagreb)

*“The comprehension of the verbal indications through movement and gestures.”* (a fifth year student at the University of Padova)

*“Higher motivation of young learners, they remember everything easier if TPR is used.”* (a third year student at the University of Zagreb)

*“Using movement to include the whole body in the process of learning a foreign language, adding movement to rhymes, poems etc. for children to learn.”* (a fifth year student at the University of Zagreb)

It is noticeable that participants know the main characteristics of TPR method described in the first part of this thesis, such as body movement, teacher giving instructions in the imperative mood, learners as performers, learners speaking when they are ready to do so and others. Some students even mentioned its efficiency with young learners and their thoughts that children learn better if TPR is used.

Also, the source of participants' knowledge about this method was examined; whether they know about the TPR method from the university courses or from private research on the topic of EFL teaching. The results show that from 55 participants who have heard about TPR, 85% (N=47) have heard about it during their English teaching courses at the university, 10% (N=6) have heard about it during other courses at the university and only 4% (N=2) have learned about it during private research of the topic. It is interesting to notice that almost all students from Zagreb (except 2 of them) have heard about it during English teaching courses while approximately the same number of students from Padova have learned about it during private research and during other courses as they did from the university English language teaching courses.

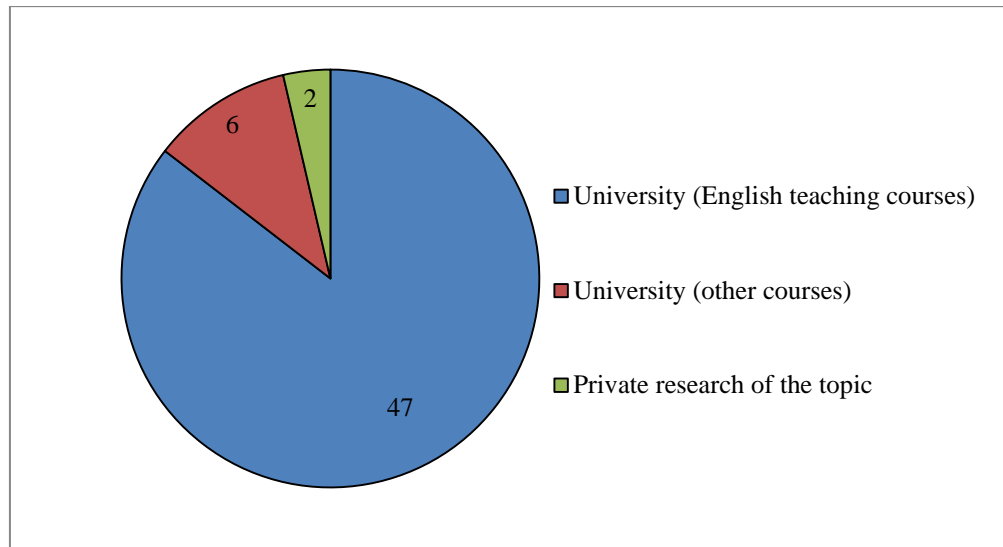


Figure 8. *Source of information about TPR (data are presented as frequencies)*

Pre-service EFL teachers were also asked to state whether they have ever seen a lesson in which an EFL teacher used TPR, either in a classroom or on video. Almost all (93%, N=39) students from Zagreb who have heard about TPR have seen this kind of lesson, while only 38% (N=5) of students from Padova who have heard about TPR have seen a lesson in which it was used. If we take a broader view, it may be said that 52% (N=44) of all participants in this study have heard about and seen a TPR lesson, which is a rather positive result. A possible explanation may be that English teaching courses at both universities have rather comprehensive and quality teaching methodology programmes. However, as expected, most students who have never seen a lesson in which TPR is used have not used TPR in their own lessons either. In other words, if more students have an opportunity to see that kind of a lesson, maybe they would be more encouraged to try it in their own teaching as well.

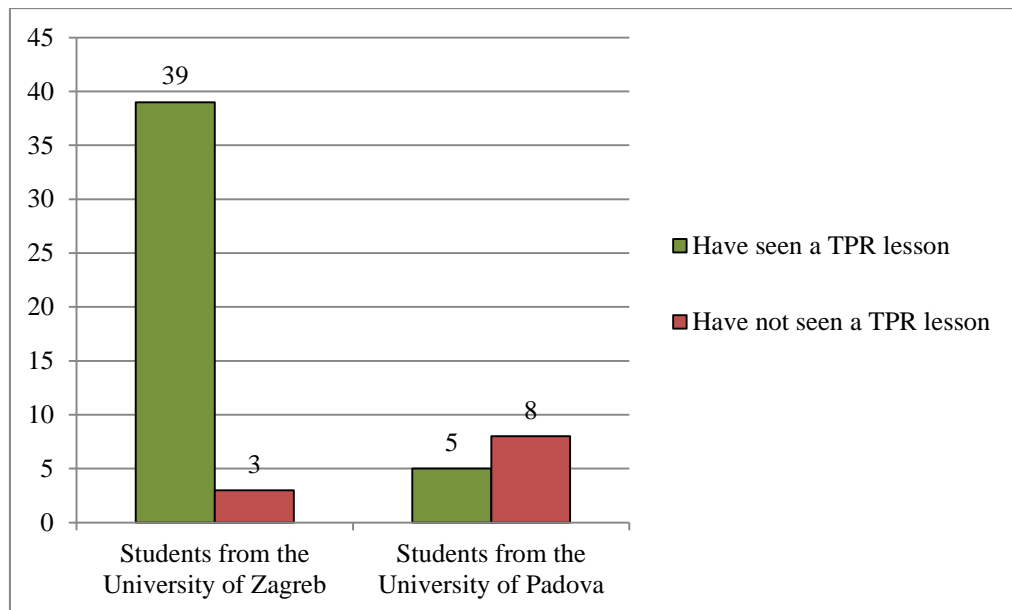


Figure 9. Number of participants who have (not) seen a TPR lesson (data are presented as frequencies)

The results showed that the majority of all participants (65% (N=55)) have heard about TPR and know some of its main characteristics, which partially confirms the 1<sup>st</sup> hypothesis. Those participants were mostly in the 5<sup>th</sup> year of their studies and have heard about TPR in English teaching courses at the university.

*2. Why did pre-service EFL teachers choose to use the Total Physical Response method in teaching English as a foreign language?*

From the group of students who confirmed that they are familiar with TPR (N=55 students), the students who reported using it in a classroom (N=24 students) were asked about their experiences. It is interesting to notice that there were 23 students from the University of Zagreb who used this method in practice, while only 1 student from the University of Padova reported using it. That could be explained with students from Padova having had fewer teaching practice courses in total since they only have one practice course per year.

In order to obtain more information about the participants' teaching experiences, they were asked to state how many English language lessons they have taught so far during their teaching practice courses at the faculty. The results differ significantly between the students from Padova and those from Zagreb. From the

total sample of participants, 39% (N=18) of the students from Zagreb stated they have taught 3 to 5 EFL lessons so far, while 67% (N=26) of the students from Padova stated they have never taught an EFL lesson at all, and only 26% (N=10) taught 1 to 5 lessons as part of their teaching practice courses at the university.

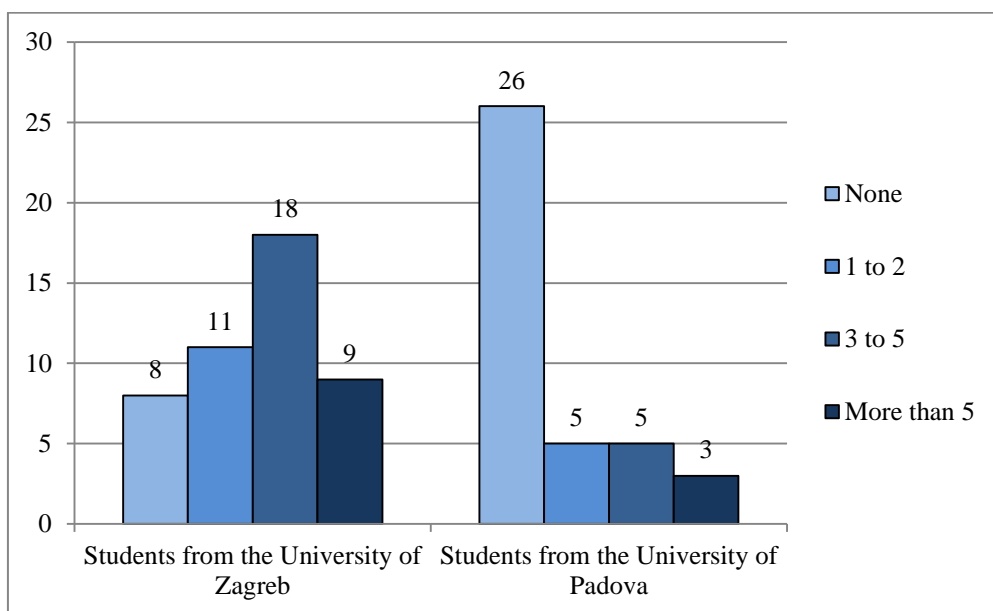


Figure 10. *Number of English lessons taught so far by the participants (data are presented as frequencies)*

In addition to the previously examined question, participants were asked if they have ever taught English privately, outside university teaching practice courses. Approximately the same number of students from both universities answered that they have taught English privately, 15% (N=6) of students from Padova have taught English once or twice a month, and 18% (N=7) of them have taught English regularly every week. Similarly, 13% (N=6) of students from Zagreb have taught English privately once or twice a month and the same percentage have taught it regularly every week. Teaching English outside university teaching practice courses could have given them additional experience and courage to use new methods in their teaching, but the results of this research do not support that. From the total sample of the University of Padova students (N=39), no one has conducted an EFL lesson using TPR activities, and only 4 of them have heard about TPR. In the sample of the University of Zagreb students (N=46), 7 students who teach privately have conducted TPR lessons, 3 of them have heard about it, and only 2 have never heard



about TPR. This shows that the more teaching practice the pre-service teachers have does not necessarily mean they have used TPR in practice.

The 24 participants who stated that they have used TPR in an EFL classroom ( $N_{\text{University of Padova}} = 1$ ,  $N_{\text{University of Zagreb}} = 23$ ) were asked to explain why they chose this specific method of teaching. These are some of their answers:

*“Because students learn through body movements and remember better.”* (a fifth year student at the University of Zagreb)

*“It seems like it is the most entertaining and efficient. Our professors often encourage us to use it.”* (a fifth year student at the University of Zagreb)

*“For its efficiency with young learners.”* (a third year student at the University of Padova)

*“Because it was effective and fun when we did it in our class at the faculty.”* (a third year student at the University of Zagreb)

*“To make class dynamic and interesting for students.”* (a fifth year student at the University of Zagreb)

*“Because students learn faster if the word is connected to the action.”* (a third year student at the University of Zagreb)

*“Because young learners react really good\*<sup>1</sup> to it, in encourages them to involve\* and it is also interesting and makes the learning process easier.”* (a fifth year student at the University of Zagreb)

*“Because it is suitable for teaching EFL to very young learners.”* (a fifth year student at the University of Zagreb)

*“I chose it because it reawakens the lesson and learners. They remember more easily and are more attentive.”* (a fifth year student at the University of Zagreb)

*“The students like it, it's fun, motivating and especially good when dealing with language anxiety.”* (a third year student at the University of Zagreb)

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<sup>1</sup> Since the quotes have been taken directly from the students' questionnaires, \* marks minor language mistakes observed in their answers.

According to the participants' answers, it is noticeable that many students have used this method because it is an effective and fun way to teach young learners. Students consider it to be good for motivation and to make young learners more attentive. Also, once again the quality of the university programmes is noticeable because some students commented that their university professors have encouraged them to use TPR more often. The second hypothesis stating that pre-service teachers used TPR because it is considered to be fun is confirmed. Participants also added the efficiency of this method being used with young learners.

*3. How satisfied were pre-service EFL teachers with the outcomes of using the Total Physical Response method in teaching English?*

The 24 participants who have used TPR in a classroom were asked whether they were satisfied with the learning outcomes of using this method and their answers were positive. Next, the participants were asked to estimate if they thought the learners enjoyed TPR activities. Again, almost all participants (N=23) answered that they believe learners did enjoy these activities, and only one student stated that he or she cannot tell if the learners enjoyed them or not. The last question was about recommending the use of TPR in an EFL classroom, and again all participants (N=24) answered that they would recommend using it. When they were asked to elaborate their answer, the participants said:

*“In my opinion, with TPR learners are learning without being completely aware of it. It is efficient and not boring.”* (a fifth year student at the University of Zagreb)

*“It can make\* learners learn more naturally, learners are not stressed about learning.”* (a third year student at the University of Zagreb)

*“Young learners usually need movement generally in their life. It is a good way for them to learn and remember something.”* (a fifth year student at the University of Zagreb)

*“Yes! Because that is the best way for them to understand (they can barely write, but if they touch their leg, they will understand and learn it is a leg).”* (a fifth year student at the University of Zagreb)

*“It is really more interesting than any other method.”* (a fifth year student at the University of Zagreb)

*“Young learners usually need movement generally in their life. It is a good way for them to learn and remember something.”* (a fifth year student at the University of Zagreb)

*“Sometimes it is the only way for students to learn new vocabulary without translation.”* (a fifth year student at the University of Zagreb)

*“It activates students, helps them to learn the language better.”* (a fourth year student at the University of Zagreb)

From these comments it is obvious that all pre-service EFL teachers who have used this method in a classroom are satisfied with the results and see all the advantages that this method brings in early language teaching, which confirms the 3<sup>rd</sup> hypothesis. In addition, the majority of the students who have used TPR in practice were students of the 5<sup>th</sup> (N=16), and fewer were from the 4<sup>th</sup> (N=4) and the 3<sup>rd</sup> (N=4) year of their studies.

Pre-service English language teachers were also asked to list other teaching methods they have used while teaching young learners. Some of them are translation method, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), the Direct method, the Audio-lingual method, and Communicative Language Teaching. Participants also mentioned activities they have done with young learners, some of which are: playing games, questions and answers, role-play, songs and chants, gap filling activities, cartoons, board games, quizzes, discussions, brainstorming, projects, and others.

*4. Are there differences in the answers to the above-stated questions between the students from the University of Zagreb and the University of Padova?*

As seen from the answers to the previous three research questions there is an obvious difference in the answers between the students from the University of Zagreb and the University of Padova. Lesser percentage of students from Padova have heard about TPR (33%, N=13) than the students from Zagreb (91%, N=42). Even smaller number of students from Padova have had an experience with using TPR with young learners (N=1), while 50% (N=23) of all participants from Zagreb

have used TPR in practice. The reason for this significant difference could be lack of motivation on the part of the students from Padova about teaching English, since only 18% (N=7) of them stated they would like to be English language teachers in future. Also, their self-assessments of English language knowledge and English language teaching competences are lower than the self-assessment of the students from Zagreb. If students assess themselves with lower grades, it could mean that their confidence in language teaching is also lower and they do not feel confident enough to try using different teaching techniques. Also, it is necessary to take into consideration the already stated difference in teacher education programmes of these two universities.

Based on the presented research, it can be concluded that the majority of pre-service EFL teachers have heard about TPR method, but not many of them have had the opportunity to use it in a classroom with young learners. It may be that students feel more confident when teaching by other methods in which they have had more practice so far. Those who have used it in classrooms were very satisfied with the learning outcomes and they think that young learners enjoyed TPR activities. The most important finding is the fact that all participants stated they would recommend using TPR with young learners, which shows that pre-service teachers have had a satisfying experience with using this method so far, and will probably continue to use it in the future.

However, there is still room for further research on this topic. It would be a good idea to include information of experienced EFL teachers who have been using TPR in their classrooms for years and to compare it with the results from this study. Also, in future research, it might be beneficial to study how young learners react to TPR being used in EFL classrooms, and to examine their satisfaction with that type of activities being used.

## 6. CONCLUSION

English as a foreign language teaching is a complex process influenced by a number of factors. The teacher has an important role in the learners' successful foreign language acquisition. The teacher has to be proficient in linguistics, as well as psychology, sociology, and pedagogy to be able to choose the most appropriate methods and tools by which learners will be taught, taking into consideration their needs and interests.

Teaching foreign languages to young learners is beneficial for many reasons, one of which is raising cultural awareness from an early age. However, when teaching young learners there are many aspects that need to be considered. For instance, young learners have their specific needs. They rely more on memory-based processes, have limited attention span, need physical movement and find abstract concepts difficult to grasp. Teachers should be well prepared and flexible enough to frequently change activities to keep their learners engaged.

After considering the theoretical and practical aspects of using Total Physical Response in early English as a foreign language teaching, it can be concluded that it is a very effective tool to use if we want to achieve stress-free learning and long-term retention of the learned material. It includes physical movements, which are responses to commands uttered in a foreign language. The focus is on the listening comprehension, which should be acquired before speaking. This means that speaking is never forced, learners start speaking when they feel comfortable. It resembles the way in which infants acquire their mother tongue, first by listening and then gradually moving towards speaking. Furthermore, it is not limited only to children, as adults can also learn by TPR.

The aim of this thesis was to present the TPR method and to explore the knowledge and satisfaction of pre-service teachers about this method. Based on the presented results, it can be concluded that pre-service EFL teachers have had excellent experiences with using the TPR method in their own teaching. All participants who have used it would recommend using this method with young learners. Even though not many of the participants have had an opportunity to teach by TPR method, a large number of them have heard about the method. They were

able to state its main characteristics, and their answers showed that TPR is a well-known tool considered efficient when teaching young learners.

Nevertheless, there are certain limitations to this research. First of all, the number of participants from each university was smaller than 50 and most students who participated were in their 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> year of studies. Moreover, the differences in the study programmes of the two universities could have affected the results as well as the motivation of the students about becoming EFL teachers.

To summarise, TPR activities are an excellent tool to use in EFL classrooms with young learners as a break from the traditional approaches, which do not include a lot of movement, in order to gain learners' attention back. Young learners have a natural desire to move and if the teacher fulfils their desire for even a few minutes during a lesson, their satisfaction will increase. Learners are often not aware they are learning when engaged in TPR activities, they simply see that situation as an amusing game in which they want to participate. In the future research, it might be good to explore the experiences and opinions of experienced EFL teachers who have used TPR and also to examine learners' satisfaction with TPR activities.

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## **8. APPENDICES**

### **8.1. Appendix 1. Research Participation Consent**

#### Questionnaire – TPR in Early EFL Teaching

(comparison between pre-service primary English language teachers at the University of Padova and the University of Zagreb)

This questionnaire is for pre-service English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers who are currently attending English language teaching courses and teaching practice courses at their universities in Zagreb (Croatia) or Padova (Italy).

The purpose of this research is to find out how much pre-service EFL teachers know about Total Physical Response (TPR) method of EFL teaching depending on their knowledge and experiences in teaching English to young learners. It will also compare the answers provided by pre-service English language teachers from the University of Zagreb and the University of Padova.

This questionnaire is anonymous, neither your name nor identity will be disclosed in any form in the study, and your answers will only be used for the purposes of writing the master's degree thesis titled TPR in Early EFL Teaching.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can choose whether you wish to participate, not to participate or stop participating in the research. However, I would really appreciate it if you do choose to participate.

The estimated completion time for the questionnaire is 5 minutes.

If you have any further questions about the questionnaire, or if you would like to read about the results of this research and the thesis, please feel free to contact me by e-mail:

If you agree to participate and allow me to use your answers for the purposes of writing the previously mentioned thesis, please click "yes". By doing so you state that you have been informed about the purposes of this research and you are willing to anonymously participate.

## **8.2. Appendix 2. Research Questionnaire**

### Part 1: Future English Teacher Background

1. Where are you currently studying?
  - a) University of Zagreb, Faculty of Teacher Education
  - b) University of Padova, Primary Teacher Education
2. Please write your age:
3. Please mark your gender:
  - a) F (female)
  - b) M (male)
4. What grade would you use to assess your English language knowledge (1 – the lowest grade, 5 – the highest grade)?
  - a) 1 (F)
  - b) 2 (D)
  - c) 3 (C)
  - d) 4 (B)
  - e) 5 (A)
5. Which year of the studies are you currently enrolled into?
  - a) 1<sup>st</sup> year of bachelor's degree
  - b) 2<sup>nd</sup> year of bachelor's degree
  - c) 3<sup>rd</sup> year of bachelor's degree
  - d) 1<sup>st</sup> year of master's degree
  - e) 2<sup>nd</sup> year of master's degree

6. How many English as a foreign language teaching courses have you taken at your university so far?

- a) 1 to 5 courses
- b) 5 to 10 courses
- c) More than 10 courses

7. What grade would you use to assess your English language teaching competences (1 – the lowest grade, 5 – the highest grade)?

- a) 1 (F)
- b) 2 (D)
- c) 3 (C)
- d) 4 (B)
- e) 5 (A)

8. When you graduate would you rather be a class teacher or an EFL teacher?

9. How many English lessons have you taught to young learners during your university teaching practice so far?

- a) 1 to 2 lessons
- b) 3 to 5 lessons
- c) More than 5 lessons
- d) None

10. Are you teaching English as a foreign language to young learners privately, outside university teaching practice?

- a) Yes, once or twice a month
- b) Yes, regularly every week

c) No

11. What teaching methods have you used while teaching English as a foreign language to young learners?

12. Are you familiar with Total Physical Response method (J. Asher) of language teaching?

a) Yes

b) No

Part 2: Total Physical Response method

1. Where did you find information about this method?

a) At the university, during English teaching courses

b) At the university, during other courses

c) Private research of the topic

2. What characteristics of this method do you know?

3. Have you ever seen a lesson (or watched a video of a lesson) in which an EFL teacher uses TPR method when teaching?

a) Yes

b) No

4. Have you ever used TPR method in class with young EFL learners?

a) Yes

b) No

Part 3: Your personal experience with using TPR

1. Why did you choose to use this specific method in you lesson?
  
2. Were you satisfied with the learning outcomes after using this method?
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
  - c) I cannot tell
  
3. Do you think young learners enjoyed the activities?
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
  - c) I cannot tell
  
4. Would you recommend using TPR in an EFL classroom with young learners?
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
  
5. Could you explain your previous answer (would you recommend using TPR in an EFL classroom with young learners?).

### **Statement of Authorship**

Under full responsibility I declare that this master's degree thesis titled *Total Physical Response in Early English as a Foreign Language Teaching* has been my work written based on the above stated literature and the research conducted.

### **Izjava o samostalnoj izradi rada**

Pod punom odgovornošću izjavljujem da sam diplomski rad pod naslovom *Total Physical Response in Early English as a Foreign Language Teaching* u potpunosti izradila samostalno na temelju korištenja navedene literature i provedenog istraživanja.

Romana Kuhar

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