

THE EFFECTS OF TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE SUPPLEMENTED  
WITH TEACHING PROPS ON THAI KINDERGARTEN 3 STUDENTS' CHINESE  
VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING BEHAVIORS

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## ABSTRACT

This article investigated the effects of Total Physical Response (TPR) supplemented with teaching props as the treatment on Thai kindergarten 3 students' Chinese vocabulary knowledge and learning behaviors at a public school in Nonthaburi, Thailand. Since their Chinese level was in the pre-production stage, one-group experimental design was adopted to test two hypotheses based on arguments that the treatment would provide them with comprehensible input and lower their anxiety. The experiment was conducted face-to-face in the classroom setting for four weeks during January and February 2022 with video recordings for the purpose of interrater reliability. One-Way ANOVA and SPSS version 21 used to analyze the findings from Chinese vocabulary knowledge tests confirmed the first hypothesis that the treatment could positively affect the students' knowledge, different at the statistical significance level of .041 ( $P < 0.05$ ). The frequency distribution used to count the occurrence of their active learning behaviors from the video records also supported the second hypothesis.

**Keywords:** TPR, Teaching props, Chinese vocabulary knowledge, Learning behaviors

## Introduction

Thailand has had close cooperation with China in economy, politics and culture since 1975, resulting in the largest number of Confucius Institutes founded to offer Chinese language and culture classes to one million Thai learners. The language has also been included as parts of the national curriculum for Thais to learn at school from kindergarten to higher education.

Despite the Thai governmental policy and support, Thai children in kindergartens lack Chinese vocabulary knowledge, and Yuan (2018) revealed such shortcoming due to a lack of standard Chinese textbooks, fewer suitable teaching aids, audiolingual teaching method and inadequate teaching hours per week. Since the solid foundation of vocabulary is crucial for second language acquisition in early childhood education, selecting teaching methods appropriate for kindergarten students' age and learning behaviors is needed.

Like many other nationalities' learning characteristics, Thai kindergarten students could not concentrate on their teacher's lesson for a long time as they were distracted easily, talkative with classmates and running around in the class. Total Physical Response (TPR) has been viewed suitable for young learners who are in the

pre-production or silent stage (Handayani & Amalia, 2021) because it requires teachers to verbally command their students to respond to the commands with their physical actions, which can engage them in the class. At the same time, the physical movements can create joyful and interesting learning classroom atmosphere, improve their understanding of words through the efficacy of comprehensible input and lower their affective filter (Bakhromovich, 2022), so they can grow vocabulary knowledge steadily to 500 words without speaking those words but do more physical response. TPR supplemented with related teaching props is also found to improve language learners' vocabulary knowledge.

The researcher, as a native Chinese teacher, shared similar experiences in teaching Chinese to Thai kindergarten 2 (K2) students at a public school in Nonthaburi in early 2021. He found that they could not master Chinese words in the class, for they tended to be passive, paid attention to his teaching for a short period of time and talked to their peers instead. To improve their little amount of Chinese vocabulary knowledge and passive learning behaviors when they moved up to kindergarten 3 (K3) in 2022, the researcher adopted TPR supplemented with teaching props

(i.e. wigs, toys, monster fish headgears, funny masks and glasses) that had vivid colors and images so as to catch their visual attention, make them laugh with fun and keep them engaging in learning in the class.

### Research Objectives

This study aims to investigate the effects of the use of TPR supplemented with teaching props on:

- 1) Thai K3 students' Chinese vocabulary knowledge; and.
- 2) Thai K3 students' learning behaviors.

The subjects included a group of K3 students studying at a public school in Nonthaburi in early 2022, for the researcher was only assigned to teach this group. It consisted of 5 boys and 9 girls, whose age ranged between 4 and 5. Their Chinese competence was still in the pre-production stage, confirmed in the first week of data collection.

### Literature Review

TPR and teaching props were used as a treatment in this study to improve Thai K3 students' Chinese vocabulary knowledge and learning behaviors. James Asher developed TPR based on Stephen Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, which could

provide the students with comprehensible input through body actions and concurrently lowered their affective filters or anxiety making them happy with acceptance of language input. Similar to acquiring a first language, TPR emphasizes listening first and then speaking with attention to their understanding of the target language in a relaxing and natural classroom setting (Asher, 2007).

Enough comprehensible input can help language learners understand and master vocabulary of a new language better (Seidenberg & MacDonald, 2018) and once they understand what is being taught in the classroom, their affective filter is low or zero while their language learning performance is high due to their positive feelings with happiness and relaxation. Their left-right brains also start working together when being required to respond to commands with whole body movements, strengthening the memory clue between the learners and what they have learned and their long-term memories.

Psychologically, Liu (2018) posits that TPR's fun activities involved with physical movements and long-term memory are advantageous for extrovert and kinesthetic students but disadvantageous for the introvert. Teaching props widely used

in language teaching to young students were supplemented to overcome the disadvantage in this study, for they have interesting shapes with bright and various colors, good for directly stimulating their interest in learning, keeping their enthusiasm in learning and satisfying their' curiosity in learning. Moreover, He (2018), Xiao (2019) and Fan (2021) had positive findings when integrating TPR and teaching props into their Chinese classroom in Thai schools.

Since TPR involves “listening-doing actions-speaking” and its teaching techniques can be divided into four steps to improve the Thai K3 students’ Chinese vocabulary knowledge and stimulate them to be active learners (see Table 1).

It was argued that the treatment would provide the Thai K3 students with comprehensible input and enjoyment to acquire Chinese vocabulary knowledge and become active learners. If they were active in learning, they had a smiley face, laughed, jumped, screamed excitedly, clapped their hands, put their hand up and ran in the class as the teaching methods stimulated their interest and enthusiasm. Passive learners, on the other hand, would sit still without any facial expression, do nothing, watch their surroundings or bow their head down.

### Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were generated based on the related literature review:

**Table 1** Four Steps of TPR teaching Techniques

Four Teaching Steps	Demonstration (Step 1)	Imitation (Step 2)	Practice (Step 3)	Application (Step 4)
The researcher as a teacher	Pronouncing words and doing corresponding actions	Pronouncing words and doing corresponding actions	Issuing the commands	Asking a student to give the commands
The Thai K3 students	Listening and observing the teacher's actions	Listening and imitating the teacher's actions	Doing the corresponding actions	Teacher with the rest of the students doing the corresponding actions

H1: TPR and teaching props could affect the Thai K3 students' Chinese vocabulary knowledge positively.

H2: TPR and teaching props could affect the Thai K3 students' learning behaviors positively.

### Conceptual Framework

Since the students were in the stage of pre-production in Chinese, neither understanding the researcher's basic Chinese words they learned in K2 nor responding to his questions, one-group experimental design was adopted to investigate the effects of TPR supplemented with teaching props (an independent variable) on Thai K3 students' Chinese

vocabulary knowledge and learning behaviors (dependent variables).

### Methodology

#### Research Instruments

A four-week lesson plan, video records, Chinese vocabulary knowledge tests, and behavioral observation forms were research instruments.

**Lesson Plans** The researcher developed a four-week lesson plan which implemented TPR and teaching props (i.e. wigs, toys, monster fish headgears, funny masks and glasses) to teach Chinese vocabulary related to the students' daily and school lives and chosen from this book "Growing Chinese" the school has used (see Table 2).

**Table 2** List of Topics and Vocabulary to be Taught for Four Weeks

Time	Topics	Chinese Vocabulary
First Week	Class Language	<p>1<sup>st</sup> session: 起立 (stand up), 坐下 (sit down), 举手 (put your hand up)</p> <p>2<sup>nd</sup> session: 放手 (put your hand down), 拉手 (hold teacher's hand), 喝水 (drink water)</p> <p>3<sup>rd</sup> session: Reviews</p>
Second Week	Daily Activities	<p>1<sup>st</sup> session: 起床 (wake up), 睡觉 (sleep), 刷牙 (brush teeth)</p> <p>2<sup>nd</sup> session: 洗脸 (wash face), 洗手 (wash hands), 吃饭 (eat)</p> <p>3<sup>rd</sup> session: Reviews</p>
Third Week	Ball Games Instructions	<p>1<sup>st</sup> session: 拍球 (bounce the ball), 接球 (catch the ball), 扔球 (throw the ball)</p> <p>2<sup>nd</sup> session: 传球 (pass the ball), 捡球 (pick up the ball), 踢球 (kick the ball)</p> <p>3<sup>rd</sup> session: Reviews</p>
Fourth Week	Physical Activities	<p>1<sup>st</sup> session: 跑 (run), 跳 (jump), 走 (walk)</p> <p>2<sup>nd</sup> session: 爬 (creep), 翻 (roll over), 蹲 (squat)</p> <p>3<sup>rd</sup> session: Reviews</p>

Each week included three sessions, 50 minutes each session. The researcher gave the treatment during Sessions 1 and 2; in Session 3, he would review the previous two lessons and assess the students' Chinese vocabulary knowledge informally.

Through the processes of teaching, learning, reviewing and assessing, although he could speak Thai to a great extent, he mainly instructed in Chinese with a Thai homeroom teacher's assistance to maintain classroom order. See a sample lesson plan in Table 3.

**Table 3** A Sample Lesson Plan

**Topic:** Classroom Language

**Students:** K3

**Time:** 50 minutes

**Objectives:** To enable the students to:

- 1) understand the meaning of these words, 起立 (stand up), 坐下 (sit sown) and 举手 (put your hand up); and
- 2) say each word comprehensibly or fluently in Chinese.

**Teaching Procedures:**

1. Warm the students up with an activity by showing the students a magic game and asking them to guess what topic was about in Chinese and Thai. (3 minutes)
2. Ask the students to close their eyes and then the researcher puts a green monster fish headgear on his head. (2 minutes)
3. a) The researcher makes “stand up” action first and say it out loud for the students to listen to and observe;
- b) The researcher says the word and does the action. Then the students need to listen and imitate his action, but they are not forced to say the word immediately;
- c) The researcher issues the command to his students and they are required to physically respond to the command by doing actions;
- d) The researcher asks one student to stand in front of the class voluntarily to give the command to other students, who will need to physically respond to the command by doing actions. (20 minutes)

(Sit down and put your hand up are taught by using the same four steps).

4. Practice

The researcher asks the Thai home room teacher to physically respond to the Chinese words by doing actions. If the researcher gives the command with a low voice, then the home room teacher needs to repeat the command loudly with physical responses. There is an example to show the students. After this, the students will do this practice with the researcher. (25 minutes)

**Video Records**

During the four-week lesson plan, a video recorder was used to record the processes of teaching, learning and assessing from the beginning to the end. The records were also employed for the purpose of interrater reliability of the students' Chinese vocabulary knowledge and learning behaviors.

**Chinese Vocabulary Knowledge Tests**

Four different tests were made based on the four-week lesson plan to assess the students' Chinese vocabulary knowledge weekly. Each test had two parts. The first part checked their understanding of six Chinese words' meanings while

the second checked their pronunciations of those words. If they could physically respond to the researcher's six commands, then they would be marked one point for each command or without any point if doing nothing. If they could say the words according to six pictures in Chinese comprehensibly or fluently, they would be marked one point for each picture, 0.5 point if they could say a certain part of the words in Chinese correctly or zero if saying nothing. The scoring rubrics were shown in Table 4. To prevent any bias, the researcher invited a native Chinese colleague to assess the students' Chinese vocabulary knowledge through watching the video records.

**Table 4** The Scoring Rubrics of the Chinese Vocabulary Knowledge Tests

Part 1	Descriptions
0 point	Students could not physically respond to any of six commands.
1 point	Students could physically respond to one command accurately.
Part 2	Descriptions
0 point	Students say nothing according to the six pictures.
0.5 point	Students could only pronounce Chinese vocabulary partly.
1 point	Students could pronounce Chinese vocabulary comprehensibly or fluently.

### Behavioral Observation Form

The researcher used this form, designed based on the four teaching steps of TPR, to observe and record each student's learning behaviors during each step through the video records. Another Chinese colleague also did the same in his own time.

### Validation of Research Instruments

All the research instruments were validated by three experts; one of them was competent in Chinese. The item objective congruence (IOC) of the research instruments was +1, which means all of them were acceptable and valid.

### Data Collection

After the approval of the University Ethics Review Board, two consent letters were sent to the students and their parents

who then permitted the experiment, and the letter of placement was successfully accepted by the target school. After that, this experimental research was conducted face-to-face in the classroom setting during January and February 2022, following the four-week lesson plan with video recording.

### Data Analysis

To test the first hypothesis, data collected from the four Chinese vocabulary knowledge tests were firstly scored and interpreted based on the criteria adapted from Roduta Roberts and Gotch (2019) in Table 5. Then one-way ANOVA was used to compare their mean scores to determine if there were statistically significance differences between those means, using SPSS version 21.

**Table 5** Interpreting Criteria of Chinese Vocabulary Knowledge Tests Scores

Number of Questions Answered Correctly	Number of Questions (Degree of Acquiring Chinese vocabulary knowledge)
10-12	very well
7-9	well
4-6	moderately
1-3	slightly

To test the second hypothesis, a frequency distribution was used to count occurrence of active learning behaviors from the behavioral observation forms during the four-week lesson plan and interpreted based on the criteria adapted from Xiao, Cao and Peng (2020) in Table 6.

students 6, 8, 9, 10, and 14 scored higher as a second best. Student 7 regressed to the moderate level, and students 12 and 4 had the same score.

In Week 3, students 2 and 3 remained the top. Students 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14 kept getting the second top scores.

**Table 6** Interpreting Criteria of Learning Behaviors of Four weeks

Frequency	Descriptive Rating	Meaning
12	Always	Highly active
6-11	Mostly	Moderately active
1-5	Seldom	Slightly active
0	Rarely	Passive

### Research Results

1. Data collected from 14 Thai K3 students' Chinese vocabulary knowledge tests were analyzed to test the first hypothesis. From Table 7, all the students acquired Chinese vocabulary knowledge with different levels in the first week. Out of 12 marks, students 2 and 3 received the top score, students 1, 5, 7, 11 and 13 earned the second highest score, students 6, 8, 9, 10, 12 and 14 scored moderately, and only student 4 scored slightly. In Week 2, students 2 and 3 remained in the top. Students 1, 5, 11 and 13 stayed in the second highest scores while

Students 4 and 12 also scored the same as Weeks 1 and 2 while students 1, 7 and 8 made progress. In Week 4, students 1, 2, and 3 remained the top scores. Students 5, 7 and 10 improved to the top scores. Students 6, 9, 11, 13 and 14 remained the second top scores. Student 8 regressed to the second top scores. Student 4 and 12 scored the same as Weeks 1, 2 and 3. In sum, two students received top scores every week, nine students progressed after Week 2, one student improved in Weeks 3 and 4, and two students never made any progress.

Table 7 Chinese Vocabulary Knowledge Tests Scores from Week 1 to Week 4

Student No.	1 <sup>st</sup> week score	Acquiring the knowledge	2 <sup>nd</sup> week score	Acquiring the knowledge	3 <sup>rd</sup> week scores	Acquiring the knowledge	4 <sup>th</sup> week scores	Acquiring the knowledge
1	8	well	9	well	10	very well	11	very well
2	10	very well	10	very well	11	very well	10	very well
3	10	very well	11	very well	11	very well	10	very well
4	2	slightly	3	slightly	3	slightly	3	slightly
5	7	well	8	well	8	well	10	very well
6	4	moderately	7	well	9	well	8	well
7	7	well	6	moderately	7	well	10	very well
8	5	moderately	8	well	10	very well	9	well
9	6	moderately	7	well	9	well	9	well
10	6	moderately	8	well	8	well	10	very well
11	7	well	8	well	7	well	9	well
12	4	moderately	6	moderately	4	moderately	6	moderately
13	8	well	9	well	7	well	9	well

When comparing the students' four-week mean scores: 6.43, 7.64, 8 and 8.79 as shown in Table 8, the significant value was .041, (p-value > 0.05). The results showed

statistically significant differences indicating the positive effect of the treatment on their Chinese vocabulary knowledge.

**Table 8** The Comparison of the Four-Week Tests' Mean Scores

	1 <sup>st</sup> week scores	2 <sup>nd</sup> week scores	3 <sup>rd</sup> week scores	4 <sup>th</sup> week scores
Mean	6.43	7.64	8	8.79
Std. Deviation	2.24343	1.94569	2.28709	2.04483
Sig. (2-tailed)		.041		
Significance Level (p): < 0.05 (significant)				

2. Data collected from observing those 14 Thai K3 students' learning behaviors through the video records were analyzed to test the second hypothesis. From Table 9, students 1, 2, 3, 5, 11 and 13 were highly active in learning from Week 1 to Week 4; students 6, 8, 9, 10 and 14 started to be highly active in Week 2 onward; student

7 was highly active every week except Week 2; students 4 and 12 remained slightly active every week. It can be said that all students were active learners with different degrees, and it appeared that the students' learning behaviors were in line with their acquired Chinese vocabulary knowledge.

Table 9 The Frequency of the Four Weeks' Learning Behaviors

Student No.	The frequency of active learning behaviors during the four teaching steps of TPR				Interpretation (active learning)								
	Week 1	2	3	4	Week 1	2	3	4					
1	1	1	1	1	Highly								
2	2	2	2	2	Highly								
3	3	3	3	3	Highly								
4	4	4	4	4	Slightly								
5	5	5	5	5	Highly								
6	6	6	6	6	Slightly	Highly							
7	7	7	7	7	Highly	Slightly	Highly						
8	8	8	8	8	Slightly	Highly							
9	9	9	9	9	Slightly	Highly							
10	10	10	10	10	Slightly	Highly							
11	11	11	11	11	Highly								
12	12	12	12	12	Slightly								
13	13	13	13	13	Highly								
14	14	14	14	14	Slightly	Highly							

### Results Conclusion and Discussion

H1: TPR and teaching props could affect the Thai K3 students' Chinese vocabulary knowledge positively.

The results confirmed the first hypothesis with statistically significant differences at .041 ( $P<0.05$ ). After giving the treatment in Week 1 to all 14 Thai K3 students who were in the pre-production

stage in Chinese, two of them acquired Chinese vocabulary knowledge very well, five acquired well, six moderately acquired, and one slightly acquired. It can be said that TPR supplemented with teaching props in this study allowed enough comprehensible input to help them acquire the words of a new language at different levels in such a short period of time.

During Weeks 2 and 4, the number of students who acquired very well and well increased from 2 to 6, and 5 to 6, respectively. Once they constantly accepted comprehensible input, they began to understand what was going on in the class, take part and learn successfully (Guan, 2012). Furthermore, their left-right brains worked together through multiple body actions, and the muscle memories formed by their physical responses could help them with long term memory. One student had regression with a moderate-scored level in Week 2 probably because this week's teaching topic was not attractive to him, pointed out by Che (2019) that uninteresting topics would lose some young children's attention and desire to learn and lower their learning performance. Two students' Chinese vocabulary knowledge remained the same throughout the experiment perhaps because they were introverted as Zhang (2019) clearly explained that TPR did not work very well for this type of language learners.

The above findings were supported by Zainudin's (2018) study in that TPR was a good teaching method to enhance young children's second language vocabulary and TPR was suitable for kindergarten students who were in the pre-production or silent stage to learn any target language

vocabulary. Shang and Yang (2014) additionally proposed that TPR could attract young children's attention well while improving their vocabulary knowledge.

H2: TPR and teaching props could affect the Thai K3 students' learning behaviors positively.

The results confirmed the second hypothesis since all 14 students were active in learning after giving them the treatment during Week 1 and Week 4. Six of them stayed highly active throughout the treatment while five others began to engage with the activities highly after the first week. It was obvious to identify those six students as kinesthetic learners as they always moved around in the class (Putri, 2016), and physical responses to the researcher's commands made them feel free and joyous turning them to active learners in the Chinese classroom. They may also become familiar with the teaching techniques.

One student had regression and was only slightly active in learning in Week 2 because he seemed to lose interest in the teaching topics, similar to Tang's (2021) argument that sometimes the teaching topics or the content could not stimulate their imagination, curiosity and desire, which led to passive learning behaviors. At the same time, two students remained slightly

active in all four weeks because they were introvert who tended to keep themselves in their own space, prefer to be quiet and learn passively (Ai, 2017). It could be said that different teaching props with colorful and exaggerated funny images which supplemented TPR could decrease negative effects of this teaching method on these two introverts, for they were not passive in any week but stayed slightly active in learning every week.

The above findings were supported by He (2018), Xiao (2019) and Fan (2021) because their studies showed that TPR supplemented with teaching props could improve young Thai students' Chinese vocabulary and stimulate them to actively learn the language. Their props included balls, simple objects and dolls with some games. In this research, the teaching props were wigs, toys, monster fish headgears, funny masks and glasses, aiming to create some joy and excitement during each lesson. Different tones of voices were also used to give the commands and then all kinds of toys were offered to the students to help them take part during the treatment. The results also indicated a relationship between their learning behaviors and

Chinese vocabulary knowledge in a manner that the students who were active in learning in the classroom would acquire the knowledge better than those passive learners. In line with Yue (2016), language learners' active learning behaviors and achievements are mutually affected.

### Recommendations

Although TPR supplemented with teaching props in this research was only conducted with one group of Thai K3 students at a public school for a four-week period of time, the findings revealed positive effects on their knowledge in Chinese vocabulary and learning behaviors. It is recommended that non-native and native Chinese teachers in a similar context extend the experiment to K1 or K2 students with a longer period of time or covering an entire term if there is no time constraint. The teachers can also try out this technique with vocabulary in other parts of speech e.g. adjective and noun. If their students appear to be introverted or pay less attention to learning in the class, the teachers can consider using teaching props that are colorful, vivid and funny.

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