
Research on Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS)

A handout for teachers, parents, students, and administrators, updated fall 2018

What is TPRS?

TPRS is a language teaching method designed to develop real fluency. Students and teachers spend class time speaking in the target language about interesting, comprehensible stories.

What is implicit vs. explicit language learning?

Implicit language learning is when you learn a language by hearing and seeing lots of words and sentences in that language, like children do. TPRS is a kind of implicit language teaching. Explicit language learning is when you are taught grammar rules and must produce correct grammatical structures. My research (Lichtman 2013; 2016) shows that explicit grammar teaching makes students less fluent and might not even help them become more accurate.

Is TPRS supported by research?

Yes—there have been 74 studies on TPRS so far. 29 of them directly compare TPRS with traditional foreign language teaching (using a textbook and grammar-based syllabus). In most studies, TPRS students outperform traditional students on some or all of the language skills tested. The rest of the studies show that TPRS students perform the same as traditional students, or better in some areas and worse in others. Here are 5 representative studies on TPRS. All were done in the United States with English speakers learning Spanish:

Study	Students	Length	Results
Varguez (2009)	83, ages 14-18	8 months	Poor TPRS students equaled rich traditional students; Rich TPRS students outperformed rich traditional students
Watson (2009)	73, ages 14-18	1 year	TPRS students scored significantly higher than traditional students on a written final exam and oral exam
Oliver (2012)	129, ages 18-25	½ year	College TPRS students outscored traditional students on a written final exam
Dziedzic (2012)	55, ages 14-18	1 year	TPRS students scored significantly higher on writing and speaking portions of Denver Public Schools Proficiency Assessment
Roberts & Thomas (2014)	16, ages 13-70	10 days	Adults with 10 days of TPRS equaled high school students with 3 years of traditional classes on a placement test

For references and more information about the studies, see page 364-379 of *Fluency Through TPR Storytelling*, Ray & Seely, 7th edition (2015) or visit forlangs.niu.edu/~klichtman/tprs.html

What benefits can I expect from TPRS?

The strongest benefits of TPRS over traditional teaching are on **vocabulary** (13 studies), **speaking** (13 studies), and **reading** (20 studies). TPRS also benefits students' grammar (10 studies) and motivation (11 studies).

Why does TPRS outperform traditional language teaching?

TPRS is an input-based method: students hear and read larger amounts of *comprehensible input* in the target language in TPRS classes than in traditional classes. Class time is spent using the language for real communication. TPRS focuses on the most useful vocabulary, and is highly engaging. All these factors help TPRS to build students' language proficiency.