

## Teaching English for Kids: A Case Study At Vus English Center

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### ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this was to explore teaching English methods for kids at VUS English Center. Teaching English methods for kids included three aspects in terms of approach to teach, how to use these methods, and the effectiveness of these methods. The study results revealed that the teachers are using mix-methods like CLT - TPR - DR to help the student feel more interested and enjoy lessons. The findings also suggest a contribution for the curriculum plans at VUS English in teaching children English.

**KEYWORDS:** teaching English, teaching English for kids, case study, VUS English Center

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### I. INTRODUCTION

English has fast become the world's most widely used and commonly spoken language today and the need to learn English for kids has increased exponentially with this growth. Most countries have now embraced the English language as a common denominator in communication across a plethora of fields, from trade & finance to travel. It is this widespread use that has defined it as one of the most influential languages in the world and as such many parents prefer their children learning English as a second language.

However, teaching English to children is not an easy job that require teachers understand for the world of children, their emotions and feelings. Besides, a successful teacher also needs to prepare communication and social skills, ability to explain difficult things into a simple way and connect well with children. Patience, responsibility, tolerance are important virtue of an English teacher. Therefore, it is still a problem which has not found the effective solution in some developing English for kids. Thus, this article is written to explore teaching methods for kids and find out the positive ways. The article also points out opportunities and challenges, which Vietnamese teachers need to overcome to develop kids' English skills. Therefore, some solutions for these problems are recommended in this paper.

In order to know how teachers teach as well as how kids study, we observe some classes at VUS English Center to find out the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the current situation with the hope that we will discover a right way to teaching English for kids.

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 1. Definition and important of teaching English

##### a/ Definition of Teaching English

Teaching English means that teaching of English to people whose first language is not English. According to Lin and Paul (2011), teaching English became a professional and academic field a half century ago. Many researches for teacher education and teacher training have been conducted in order to raise the English teachers' as well as the foreign language teachers' knowledge and capabilities in carrying out effective lessons in classrooms of English learning. During the 3rd millennium of speedily globalized world, teaching English as a common communication tool has become even more significant than two decades ago. Lin and Paul (2011) also pointed out that there are many terms of teaching English that had been developed during past five decades. So far, we can discover that teaching English can be portrayed as Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), and Teaching English as Other Language (TESOL).

##### b/ Importance of Teaching English

Today teaching English has been becoming a very important and essential work. The world-renowned United Nations (UN) has designated six official languages: English, French, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, and Arabic. English has gradually become popular worldwide. According to McCrum, MacNeil, & Cran (2002), there were more than 750 million people communicating in English. Therefore, with the trend of globalization, many Asia-Pacific people were fostering the capability in English learning progressively (Nunan, 2003). English

is one of the only working languages used by the UN Secretariat, and English is also commonly used in most business meetings (UN, n.d.). Additionally, the increasing number of international students coming over to English-speaking countries shows how important the English language is all around the world. Furthermore, Swales (1987) found there were more than several million research papers and published articles written in English, and he expected that “English will remain the primary language of research”.

Overall, these perspectives together pointed out English as one of the most important language that people have to study. English is the language of science, of aviation, computers, diplomacy, and tourism. It's also the language of international communication, the media and the internet, so learning English is important for socializing and entertainment as well as work. English can take you to amazing places: As well as opening up exciting new avenues for everyone. In summarize, having English proficiency is now essential for all people who wish to successfully find a good job, improve social status, gain admission to the top universities, build a good career, and so forth.

## 2. Definition and methods of teaching English for kids

### a/ Definition of Teaching English for kids

Teaching English for kids means that teaching of English to students from 4-12 years old, and their first language is not English. According to Harmer (2001), teaching young learner differently from adult learners. Kids easily get bored, losing interest after a short period of time. In order to keep them engaged, it's necessary to supplement the activities with lots of brightly colored visuals, toys, puppets, or objects. Using these activities a language teacher could make the language input enjoyable and comprehension as well. Meanwhile, Mozelle Marshall (1940) said that grammar method was a tool which determine the relation of words in sentences, it's the basic for the art of writing, speaking and interpreting. Grammar was the science which has to do with the principle that govern the correct use of language. However, many people disagree with that statement. Another aspect worthy of consideration was the child's knowledge and level of thinking by Santrok (2011). In other words, the set of pre-existing knowledge of the young learner and the fact that they probably have their own particular ideas, very different from those of adults. Therefore, a teacher should show enough patience in order to interpret what a student is saying and should respond on the same level as the student's. For instance, when teaching English to young learners, a teacher ought to be patient and allow enough time for children to internalize the language taught. He or she should also pay attention to adapting the level of teaching to the age of the students and their capacities.

### b/ Method teaching English for kids

In classroom activities, using Total Physical Response (TPR) by James Asher (1977) is seen as a great way to teach English especially for kids. That method keeps children active in learning process while it links the language with physical movement. Kids are easily distracted and have very short attention spans; therefore, it is better to keep in mind that 5 and 10 minutes activities are best to engage them in learning. According to Scott and Ytreberg (1990), there should be various activities having a balance among them. It is suggested that each task focuses on different skills while using individual, pair work, group work or whole class activities alternately. It is also wise to let children learn from each other by integrating pupil - pupil interaction into the activities in addition to teacher - pupil interaction. Lastly, Scott and Ytreberg (1990) pointed out the balance between quiet and noisy activities to create both peaceful and dynamic learning environment. Moreover, using stories in foreign language teaching is of great value as they are naturally acquired and contextualized (Slatterly & Willis, 2001). Stories use a “holistic approach to language teaching and learning that places a high premium on children's involvement with rich, authentic uses of the foreign language” (Cameron, 2001:159). Cameron (2001) indicated a mental processing called ‘mentalese’ which is used in formulating meaning language independently. Therefore, when children are told a story in foreign language, they are able to get the gist and summarize it with the help of visuals in their first language. However, it is not probable to narrate the story in the target language. Speaking is far demanding than listening and grasping the meaning is not enough to retell the story. While as Pinter (2008) stated meaning focused input is crucial, it had also high importance to ensure production with language focus activities.

To conclude, this strage has a lot of advantages. TPR can be used to teach and practise many things: vocabulary connected with actions (smile, chop, headache, wriggle), classroom language (open your books), imperatives/instructions (stand up, close your eyes), ... It is a lot of fun, students enjoy it and it can be a real stirrer in the class. It lifts the pace and the mood. Besides, it can be used in large or small classes. It doesn't really matter how many students you have as long as you are prepared to take the lead, the students will follow. In additional, it doesn't require a lot of preparation or materials. As long as you are clear what you want to practise (a rehearsal beforehand can help), it won't take a lot of time to get ready. TPR is very effective with kids. It involves both left-brained and right-brained learning.

Although the TPR methods has been successful in the teaching of foreign languages, it has some shortcomings which cannot be overlooked. First of all, it is not a convenient method for some kids who needs to

learn a language within a short period of time. It is a childish method to use for advanced learners. Students who are not used to such things might find it embarrassing. This can be the case initially but I have found that if the teacher is prepared to perform the actions, the students feel happier about copying. Also the students are in groups and don't have to perform for the whole class. This pleasure is reserved for the teacher. It is also not flexibly used to teach everything and if used a lot it would come repetitive.

#### Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Besides, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is also an effective technique to teaching English for kids. Developed in the 1970 by Noam Chomsky, and in critical reaction to the formal and boring types of exercises used under the Audio-lingual Method ('drill-and-kill' exercises), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), also referred to as "communicative approach, is an approach that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language". According to Larsen (1986), in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), grammar is taught as a means to help learners convey their intended meaning appropriately. Meanwhile, Brown (2000) presented that the overt presentation and discussion of grammatical rules are less paid attention to that is completely suitable for kids. In Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the teacher spends less time on the structures of the language and more time encouraging kids to use the language. It is frequent that communication activities such as games and puzzles which are often carried out in pairs or group are encouraged in teaching with no much correction or intervention during the activity. However, as reported by Butler (2005), the conducting of communicative lessons is not easily accomplished in the primary classroom owing to a variety of factors, the most prominent of which are difficulty in understanding the concept of CLT, local culture, and class size.

In summary, CLT has many advantages for children. Firstly, communicative approach is much more pupil-orientated, because it is based on pupils' needs and interests. Secondly, communicative approach seeks to personalize and localize language and adapts it to interests of pupils. Meaningful language is always more easily retained by learners. Next, it also seeks to use authentic resources that is more interesting and motivating for children. Finally, children acquire grammar rules as a necessity to speak so is more proficient and efficient, it's so suitable to develop speaking skill.

On the other hand, CLT still has some disadvantages. First of all, it pays insufficient attention to the context in which teaching and learning take place. Also, the communicative approach often seems to be interpreted as: "If the teacher understands kids we have good communication" but native speakers of the target language can have great difficulty understand kids. Another disadvantage is that the CLT approach focuses on fluency but not accuracy. The approach does not focus on error reduction but instead creates a situation where learners are left using their own devices to solve their communication problems. Thus, they may produce incoherent, grammatically incorrect sentences.

Moreover, The Direct Method (Dodson - 1900), or The Natural Approach (Krashen - 1980s), ... are also present day popular teaching methods for kids. In simpler terms, each method has its own strengths and weaknesses, and it provides a 'recipe' for various practical classroom ideas and procedures; a good method that stems from a good theory can produce a number of ideas. Depending on the content and the purpose of the lesson, teachers choose and combine many methods in a lesson as long as these methods are suitable and effective for teaching English for kids.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 1. The aim of the study

This paper focuses on finding what teaching methods used to kids who are studying at VUS English Center so that we can evaluate whether these methods are suitable or not for the subjects. And we will suggest another methods better to improve English teaching for kids at VUS English Center in particular. Also, the results of the study can be used for other young students in Viet Nam.

#### 2. Research questions

Question 1: What are teaching methods used to teach at VUS English Center?

Question 2. How are teaching methods used at VUS English Center?

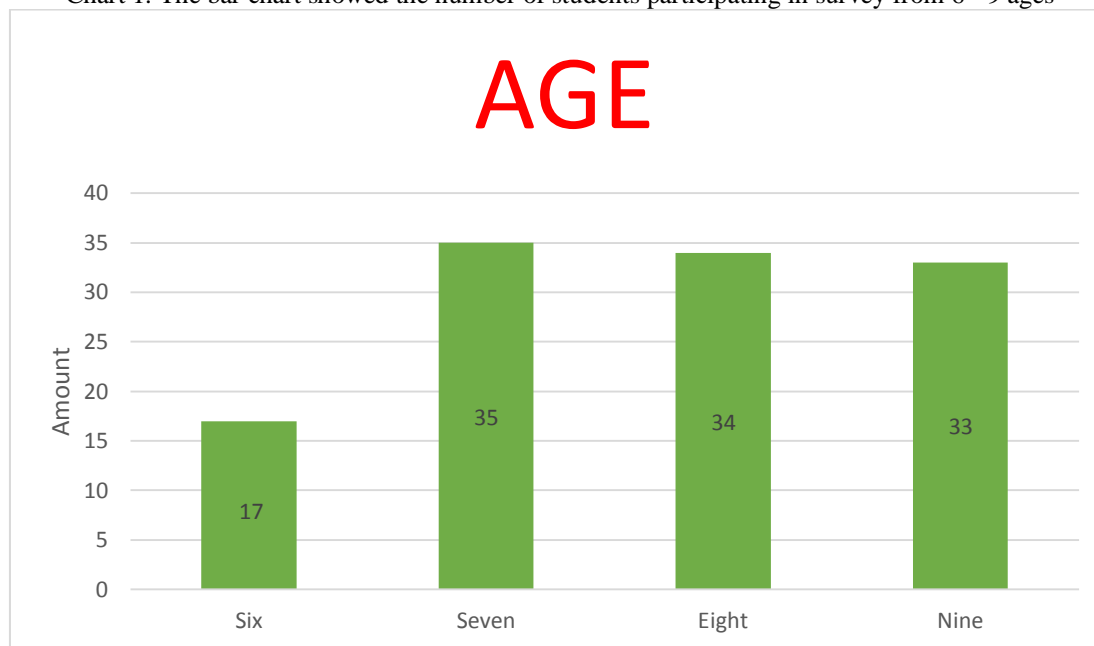
Question 3. How is the effectiveness of these methods at VUS English Center?

#### 3. Subjects

The participants of this study were 119 students (63 males and 56 females) who came from 10 classes at VUS English Center, including three levels: smart kids, pre-super kids and super kids. They are studying at many different primary schools such as: Bilingual Primary school, Nguyen Thai Hoc Primary school, Bau Sen Primary school or Trung Vuong Primary school, ... And the main materials are Super Safari British English edition and Everybody Up that VUS English Center is using for all kids at three levels. The students in this survey were just chosen randomly without any requirements. The first participants were 17 students who were

just 6 years old (smart kids). Those participants have not had many opportunities to be familiar with English as well as VUS English school activities. The next participants were 69 students from 7 to 8 ages (pre-supper kids) who had more times to be involved in those activities. Finally, the most interactive participants were 33 of 9 years old students (supper kids) who had the longest attendance at the VUS English Center. They have about 2-4 years to experience many occasions and various types of activities. Therefore, they had most reliable comments.

Chart 1: The bar chart showed the number of students participating in survey from 6 - 9 ages



#### 4. Instruments

To do this research, we used three main instruments. First of all, we applied survey and questionnaire method to collect many answers about teaching English methods at VUS. Besides, we also used observation method to observe teaching and learning English for kids in 10 classes at VUS. Finally, after having the data from the questionnaire, observation, these numbers will be processed and analyzed by excel software.

### IV. FINDINGS

To answer the research questions, we design a questionnaire as follow:

Table 1: Survey items

| CATEGORY  | No. | QUESTIONS   | RATE             |       |              |          |                     |
|---|-----|---|------------------|-------|--------------|----------|---------------------|
|   |     |   | completely agree | agree | partly agree | disagree | completely disagree |
| 1. What are teaching methods used to teach at VUS English Center? | 1   | Teachers give commands to you in English with body movements.                   | 72               | 41    | 6            | 0        | 0                   |
|   | 2   | In your class, everyone just speak English, not Vietnamese.                     | 67               | 46    | 8            | 0        | 0                   |
|   | 3   | Teachers give you lots of opportunities, situations to practice English at VUS. | 70               | 44    | 5            | 0        | 0                   |
| 2. How are teaching methods used at VUS                           | 4   | The teacher methods are varied and not boring.                                  | 70               | 41    | 8            | 0        | 0                   |

|  |    |   |    |    |    |   |   |
|--|----|---|----|----|----|---|---|
| English Center?  | 5  | You don't feel pressured in studying at VUS.                                  | 66 | 43 | 10 | 0 | 0 |
|  | 6  | You can express your thought and ideas during the lesson.                     | 73 | 36 | 10 | 0 | 0 |
|  | 7  | The classroom area is spaceful and comfy; classrooms decoration is beautiful. | 72 | 43 | 4  | 0 | 0 |
|  | 8  | Teachers always encourage, give inspiration and help you in class.            | 66 | 51 | 2  | 0 | 0 |
|  | 9  | Teachers always help you with your misconceptions in the class time.          | 60 | 54 | 5  | 0 | 0 |
|  | 10 | The lessons have many interesting activities, games, quizzes, ...             | 74 | 40 | 5  | 0 | 0 |
|  | 11 | The textbooks have many beautiful and vivid pictures.                         | 62 | 52 | 3  | 0 | 0 |
| 3. How is the effectiveness of these teaching methods at VUS English Center? | 12 | The lesson helps you get clear information about the topic.                   | 73 | 42 | 4  | 0 | 0 |
|  | 13 | You are very interested in participating in activities.                       | 60 | 48 | 11 | 0 | 0 |
|  | 14 | The lessons are fun, attractive and easily understandable.                    | 76 | 41 | 2  | 0 | 0 |
|  | 15 | You can solve mostly tasks and homework.                                      | 74 | 37 | 8  | 0 | 0 |
|  | 16 | You can apply what you have learned when communicating with foreigners.       | 53 | 54 | 12 | 0 | 0 |
|  | 17 | Your English skills have improved a lot while studying at VUS.                | 70 | 45 | 4  | 0 | 0 |
|  | 18 | You want to continue your long term studies at VUS.                           | 71 | 45 | 3  | 0 | 0 |

V. RESULTS

✓ Question 1. What are teaching methods used to teach at VUS English Center?

**Table 2:** The table show the percentage of three teaching English methods using at VUS English Center.

| ITEMS | QUESTIONS   | RATE             |       |              |          |                     |
|-------|---|------------------|-------|--------------|----------|---------------------|
|       |   | completely agree | agree | partly agree | disagree | completely disagree |
| 1     | Teachers give commands to you in English with body movements.                   | 60.5%            | 34.4% | 5.1%         | 0        | 0                   |
| 2     | In your class, everyone just speak English, not Vietnamese.                     | 56.3%            | 38.6% | 5.1%         | 0        | 0                   |
| 3     | Teachers give you lots of opportunities, situations to practice English at VUS. | 58.8%            | 36.9% | 4.3%         | 0        | 0                   |

Based on the research result and examinations, there are 3 main of English teaching methods used at VUS. They are Total Physical Response, Communicate Language Teaching and The Direct Method. As teachers give commands to students in English with body movements which expresses Total Physical Response, the portion of those giving the completely agreement make up a massive 60.5%. The second largest total agreement rate is Communicate Language Teaching where teachers give you lots of opportunities, situations to practice English at VUS with 58,8%. These VUS students also enjoyed the Direct Method (53,6% of totally agree answers) which allows students to speak English rather than Vietnamese in the class time. In general, these teaching methods are used in VUS to highly support for students to understand and practice better in real life.

✓ Question 2. How are teaching methods used at VUS English Center?

**Table 2:** The table show the percentage of eight items which tell how the three teaching methods are used at VUS English Center.

| No. | QUESTIONS   | RATE             |       |              |          |                     |
|-----|---|------------------|-------|--------------|----------|---------------------|
|     |   | completely agree | agree | partly agree | disagree | completely disagree |
| 1   | The teacher methods are varied and not boring.                                | 58.8%            | 34.4% | 6.8%         | 0        | 0                   |
| 2   | You don't feel pressured in studying at VUS.                                  | 55.4%            | 36.1% | 8.5%         | 0        | 0                   |
| 3   | You can express your thought and ideas during the lesson.                     | 65.5%            | 30.2% | 4.3%         | 0        | 0                   |
| 4   | The classroom area is spaceful and comfy; classrooms decoration is beautiful. | 60.5%            | 36.1% | 3.4%         | 0        | 0                   |
| 5   | Teachers always encourage, give inspiration and help you in class.            | 55.4%            | 42.8% | 1.8%         | 0        | 0                   |
| 6   | Teachers always help you with your misconceptions in the class time.          | 50.4%            | 45.3% | 4.3%         | 0        | 0                   |
| 7   | The lessons have many interesting activities, games, quizzes, ...             | 58.8%            | 33.6% | 7.6%         | 0        | 0                   |
| 8   | The textbooks have many beautiful and vivid pictures.                         | 52.1%            | 43.6% | 4.3%         | 0        | 0                   |

The teaching methods are varied and not boring. The table indicates that the most effective method used at VUS is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which accumulates 65.5% completely agree, 30.2% agree, 4.3% partly agree. At VUS, children can express their thought and ideas during the lesson. Additionally, CLT provides a learner-centered environment for developing students' L2 skills through interaction. In VUS's classroom, some kids are active and communicative speakers, while others are reticent learners. VUS's teachers always encourage students' communicative competence all the time, and besides their limitations to use language fluently and accurately, they provide the children with spaces to interact with others or to immerse them in speaking activities that enhance kids' ability to use the target language.

The second effective technique used at VUS is Total Physical Response (TPR) with 55% completely agree, 39.45% agree and 5.55% partly agree. At VUS, learners' role in TPR is to listen and perform what the teacher says, they monitor and evaluate their own progress. The children are encouraged to speak when they feel ready to speak. Teacher is the model and the director. The teacher provides opportunities for learning including quizzes, song, stories, etc. When TPR is integrated into routines, the kids will immediately become involved in the language and engaged in reacting to it. The teacher takes on the role of the parent; giving prompts, setting patterns, playing games, and the children then responds physically to the prompt. In giving feedback the teacher responds positively to the correct answer, much in the way that a parent would. This reinforces the learning and encourages further steps.

Meanwhile, The Direct Method is also the practical method using at VUS with 52.1% completely agree, 43.6% agree and 4.3% partly agree. At VUS, if some children do not know the meaning of the words that spoken by teachers, the teachers may not translate but she/he uses visual aids, through demonstrations or teacher use the textbooks have many beautiful and vivid pictures to illustrate the meaning of the words. The use of visual aids in Direct Method will make students be fun to learn English. In Direct Method, vocabulary is taught every meeting. So, it can enrich the kids' vocabulary. If they have enough vocabulary they will able to speak. Then, grammar is taught inductively. Through this method, the kids will be motivated to improve their ability in speaking.

✓ Question 3. How is the effectiveness of these teaching methods at VUS English Center?

**Table 3:** The table show the percentage of seven items which tell how the effectiveness of these teaching methods is at VUS English Center.

| No. | QUESTIONS   | RATE             |       |              |          |                     |
|-----|---|------------------|-------|--------------|----------|---------------------|
|     |   | completely agree | agree | partly agree | disagree | completely disagree |
| 1   | The lesson helps you get clear information about the topic.             | 60.5%            | 35.2% | 4.3%         | 0        | 0                   |
| 2   | You are very interested in participating in activities.                 | 50.4%            | 40.3% | 9.3%         | 0        | 0                   |
| 3   | The lessons are fun, attractive and easily understandable.              | 63.8%            | 34.4% | 1.8%         | 0        | 0                   |
| 4   | You can solve mostly tasks and homework.                                | 62.1%            | 31%   | 6.9%         | 0        | 0                   |
| 5   | You can apply what you have learned when communicating with foreigners. | 44.5%            | 45.3% | 10.2%        | 0        | 0                   |
| 6   | Your English skills have improved a lot while studying at VUS.          | 58.8%            | 37.8% | 3.4%         | 0        | 0                   |
| 7   | You want to continue your long term studies at VUS.                     | 59.6%            | 37.8% | 2.6%         | 0        | 0                   |

The utilizing of the three methods (Total Physical Response- The Direct Method- Communicative Language Teaching) by teachers from VUS has brought back better results. The results were observed and proven via particular numbers from the survey. Overall, the portion of kids giving the completely agreement answers was by far the dominant whilst nobody expressed the disagreement and completely disagreement. Concerning the first question, there were about 60.5% students completely agreed and 35.2% agreed that the lesson helped them to get clear information about the topic compared to 4.3% of partly agreement.

Similarly, the percentage of students agreed and completely agreed that the lessons were fun, attractive and easily understandable and most of tasks and homework could be solved were also high, with over 62% of complete agreement and over 30% of agreement. The figures for those thinking their English skills have improved a lot and they want to continue their long term studies at VUS were relatively identical with almost 60% totally agree and 37.8% agree. In stark contrast, however, there was just under 51% of students complete agree that they are very interested in participating in activities and be able to apply what they have learnt when communicate with foreigners while the agreements rates for these two questions were absolutely larger than other questions accounting for 40.3% and 45.3% respectively. Interestingly, it is note-worthy that the partial agree answers made of insignificant rates on each questions' ranging from 1.8% to 10.2%.

## VI. DISCUSSION

The result indicates that the most effective method used at VUS is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which accumulates 65.5% completely agree, 30.2% agree, 4.3% partly agree. It means that with kids at VUS, this method is very interesting and effectiveness. According to Brown (2000), in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the teacher spends less time on the structures of the language and more time encouraging kids to use the language. It is frequent that communication activities such as games and puzzles which are often carried out in pairs or group are encouraged in teaching with no much correction or intervention during the activity. Besides, CLT provide opportunities for learners to develop both accuracy and fluency. Linking the different skills such as speaking, reading and listening together can help the students occur frequently in their real world. Therefore, CLT methodology is really appreciate for kids at VUS English Center. This method helps children develop their ability to communicate before they learn about writing skill. At the same time, children can improve their ability to reflect on the situation around them which are the goals of the desired VUS English Center. That is also the reasons why CLT is used to most of all stages in lesson, especially when teach speaking skill.

The second effective technique used at VUS English Center is Total Physical Response (TPR) with 55% completely agree, 39.45% agree and 5.55% partly agree. It means that this method also is supported from students at VUS English Center, just after CLT. TPR makes kids brain's link to words stronger, and thus remember longer. TPR combines meaning and practical action to stimulate the right brain hemisphere, help children absorb language best, and the brain is not stressed, helps wake up, has more energy to learn. Learning by TPR is still very fun. There are hours at VUS English Center where every time TPR is made witty, funny, the whole class laughs, people feel extremely comfortable and happy when learning English. But as you can see 5.55% kids just partly agree with this methods, because TPR is used more when teachers give instruction, at short time, especially in pre-teaching. So it is not the main method that kids are usually experienced.

Finally, The Direct Method is also the practical method used at VUS English Center with 52.1% completely agree, 43.6% agree and 4.3% partly agree. The figure of this method was lower than the others. It may be hard for some students to study well because in The Direct Method, the teachers will never explain or translate, the teachers should demonstrate in the target language, so the children can learn language naturally. But some kids who just are the beginner in studying English can't understand completely. Therefore, they can feel bored and waste time in the classroom. Dodson (1900) presented that The Direct Method should apply for advanced learners instead of. The Direct Method is often used during the lesson, especially in the stage of while-teaching and post-teaching at VUS English Center.

In general, each of methods has its different strengths and weaknesses, so it is better when we clearly know about these methods so that we can flexibly combine them in a current situation. Taking advantages and overcoming disadvantages by replacing different methods in a lesson can be showed us the best choice at VUS English Center.

## VII. CONCLUSION

After observing and surveying at VUS, we can conclude that the combination of three methods is suitable for teaching English to children. It also means that we reach the aim to find what teaching methods used to kids who are studying at VUS English Center. There are Communicative Language Teaching, Total Physical Response and The Direct Method.

The results suggest that English teachers should apply all these methods in the same lesson, but before using them we should definitely understand about strengths and weaknesses of each method as well as we should choose appropriate stages for methods. We advise you should use Communicative Language Teaching more when teach speaking skills; Total Physical Response when give instruction or teach vocabulary; The Direct Method for advanced learners who can speak and listen better.

Besides, we advise teachers to organize more games, activities, Q & A in each method because kids would rather play than study. Let's make difficult knowledge into fantastic, funny and effectiveness one.

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