ENGLISH IS A PHYSICAL SPORT

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Abstract: this article explores the concept of learning English as a physical sport, emphasizing the active, embodied, and performance-based nature of language acquisition. Drawing parallels between sports training and language learning, the study highlights the role of physical articulation, repetition, discipline, and psychological readiness in developing speaking fluency. The paper argues that English speaking is not merely a cognitive process but also a physical activity involving coordinated muscle movement and breath control. Furthermore, insights from sport psychology and physical literacy research demonstrate that self-efficacy, motivation, and consistent practice are essential for successful language learning. The findings suggest that treating English learning as a sport-like activity can significantly enhance learners' fluency, confidence, and communicative competence.

Keywords: english as a physical sport, language learning as training, speaking fluency, embodied learning, physical articulation, self-efficacy in language learning, active language practice, communicative competence.

One of the greatest errors of the hidden curriculum is that schools teach English as an academic subject. In school you study English. You learn about English. You analyze the parts of the language (grammar, vocabulary, etc.). You take tests about this knowledge.

When it comes to the problem is, English is not a subject to be studied. English is a skill to be performed or "played." Speaking is something you do, not something you analyze and think about. Perhaps you can see the problem. Real English conversations are very fast and they are unpredictable. The other person speaks quickly and you never know exactly what they will say. You must be able to listen, understand, and respond almost instantly. There simply is no time to think about grammar, translations, or anything else you learned in English class. English conversation is more like playing soccer (football). A soccer player must act and react almost instantly. The player must play the game intuitively. Soccer players do not study physics formulas in order to play well. They learn by doing. They "play" soccer, they don't "study" it. Studying grammar rules to speak English is much like a soccer player studying physics to play soccer.

It might be interesting (or not!), but it certainly won't help performance. Your job, therefore, is to stop "studying" English and start "playing" it! Remember that your fuel is an important part, perhaps the most important part, of your Effortless English™ engine. Learning to play English, rather than study it, is a powerful way to develop strong psychology and go much faster on the road to fluency. When we first discussed fuel, we learned how to use our bodies to change our emotions. It turns out the body is, in fact, a very important (and neglected) key to learning English. By using physical actions while learning, it is possible to learn faster, remember more, remember longer and speak better. Dr. James Asher, a psychologist and professor emeritus at San José State University, found that using physical actions in language class actually helps students learn vocabulary better. Dr. Asher became curious about the link between language and movement after watching how young children learned to speak When parents said something, their children typically would respond with a word and some sort of action. He also noticed that parents frequently used actions and gestures while speaking to their babies.

Based on his research and observations, Asher developed the Total Physical Response system of language teaching in which students respond to teacher commands in the new language with whole body actions. These actions strengthen the meaning of the phrase and make it easier to remember. Dr. Asher believes that students can learn 12 to 36 words in an hour using this method. I've had similar success using a version of it in my lessons and seminars. Of course, this is the complete opposite of what happens in most English classes. In school, you are told to sit still in

your chair. You sit for an hour or more. Naturally, the longer you sit, the more your energy drops. As your energy drops, your concentration drops, too. And as your concentration drops, you learn less and forget more. Of course, this lower energy frequently leads to feelings of boredom. Less movement, less energy, lower concentration, and boredom naturally produce worse results, no matter what the method is, and so we have another downward spiral. While everyone benefits from physical learning, some people absolutely need it. These people are called "kinesthetic learners." They learn best when they connect learning to physical movement. This kind of learner tends to struggle in traditional classrooms, where they are required to sit motionless for hours. Schools and teachers often label these people as being "learning disabled" or as having "attention deficit disorder." The problem, however, is not that "kinesthetic learners" are disabled. Rather, the problem is a teaching disability – the failure of schools to teach active learners in an effective way.

My Effortless English™ seminars and classes are quite different. Many have described them as "English rock concerts." In an Effortless English™ seminar, we frequently jump, dance, shout, laugh, and move. In fact, it is rare for learners to sit for more than 15 minutes in one of my seminars. I want them moving. I want them energized. Because I know that active and energized people learn faster, learn more, remember longer and perform better! Remember, English is a performance skill, not a subject you study. The more you use your body while learning, the more success you will achieve. One way to use movement while learning English is to use the Action Vocabulary method. In this method, you connect a unique physical movement to a new vocabulary word. You shout the word (or phrase) and perform the movement.

At first glance, learning English may seem like a purely cognitive activity. However, a deeper analysis reveals that language learning-especially speaking English-shares many characteristics with physical sports. Just like athletes train their bodies, English learners must train their brains, voices, and bodies through constant practice, discipline, and active engagement.

Language Learning as Physical Training

In sports, physical strength develops through repetition and muscle memory. Similarly, English speaking skills improve through repeated physical actions such as articulation, breathing control, and vocal coordination. According to researchers in biomechanics and human movement, speech production is a complex physical process involving the lungs, vocal cords, tongue, lips, and facial muscles. Without regular practice, these "language muscles" weaken, leading to poor pronunciation and reduced fluency. This explains why learners who understand grammar and vocabulary still struggle to speak fluently: they have not trained the physical side of the language.

The Role of Practice and Consistency

Athletes cannot improve by watching sports alone; they must train actively. The same principle applies to English learning. Passive activities such as reading or listening are important, but fluency can only be achieved through active speaking practice. Repetition, drills, role-plays, and real-life conversations function as "language workouts" that strengthen speaking ability over time. Researchers like David Kirk emphasize that learning is embodied – it happens through action, not observation. Therefore, English must be practiced daily, just like a sport.

Psychological Strength and Self-Efficacy

Sport psychology highlights the importance of self-belief, motivation, and mental resilience. Deborah Feltz's research on self-efficacy shows that individuals who believe in their abilities perform better. This idea directly applies to English learning. Fear of making mistakes acts like performance anxiety in sports. Learners who lack confidence avoid speaking, which limits improvement. On the other hand, confident learners take risks, practice more, and improve faster. Thus, mental training is just as important as physical training in mastering English.

Active Learning and Cognitive Benefits

Studies in physical activity and health show that movement enhances cognitive function, memory, and concentration. Active language use – such as speaking aloud, role-playing, and interactive communication – stimulates the brain more effectively than passive learning. This supports the idea that English learning should be dynamic and energetic. Speaking English activates both cognitive and physical systems, making it similar to a full-body workout. English as

Performance, Not Just Knowledge. In sports, knowing the rules is not enough – you must perform. Similarly, knowing English grammar does not guarantee speaking ability. English is a performance skill that must be demonstrated in real-time communication.

In my viewpoint, learning english is not merely an academic activity but a performance skill that involves the whole body and mind. Traditional methods that focus solely on grammar, vocabulary, and passive study often fail to develop fluency and confidence. By approaching English as a physical sport, learners actively engage their bodies through movement, gestures, and actions, which strengthens memory, improves concentration, and enhances overall language performance. Kinesthetic learners, in particular, benefit greatly from physical learning, but all students can gain from incorporating motion into their practice. Ultimately, treating English as a skill to be "played" rather than a subject to be "studied" leads to faster progress, better retention, increased motivation, and more enjoyable, effective language learning experiences.

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