

## **Empowering Children's English Literacy by Listen and Do Song**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Song is an effective and interesting teaching tool in the classroom of language learning. It is regarded as one of the most enjoyable ways for practicing and developing English literacy of young learners. It is also useful to encourage them to be active in order to improve their skills. The purpose of this article is therefore threefold: first, theoretical discussion that presents about English literacy and young learners. Second, some suggestions of giving the selections of songs are given regarding the activities. Third, some recommended teaching instruction for listen and do song that empowers children's English literacy. Incorporating song into language learning serves not only as an effective teaching tool but also provides a positive learning experience for young learners.*

**Key words:** *English literacy, listen and do song, young learners.*

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## INTRODUCTION

**E**mpowering children's English literacy is very essential to help them be able to achieve their academic success in the future. Both teachers and learners have to consider about the important role of developing English literacy from early age because children who start earlier in EFL learning is better in EFL achievement than older learners (Diem, 2004). Therefore, it is very important to engage children in learning by making it meaningful, and keep their attention in this way through motivation and direction of the activity. Learners will be motivated to learn when they see how the learning connects to their lives and interests, and how they can use the learning in meaningful ways. This is in line with Pintrich and Schunk (1996) who verify that learners are more motivated when they can see the usefulness of what they are learning and when they can use that information to do something that has an impact on others.

EFL learners, especially young learners, usually learn through observation and participation in learning activities which are crucial for their literacy development. Their learning is also influenced by the social situation

and the familiarity with the task materials given to them. Therefore, learning instruction and materials should be appropriate in terms of developmental characteristics and language proficiency. One of effective and interesting activities in EFL classroom is learning with music because integrating experiences with music in the early childhood supports English language learners' literacy development (Saricoban & Metin, 2000).

Providing children with structured musical activities can create enjoyable atmosphere in learning as they can sing while studying. This activity contributes to their oral language and literacy developments together. Young children need ongoing experiences where texts are shared and modeled through demonstrations from their teachers because providing opportunities for children to use what they know about language and literacy helps them transfer what they know to new situations. Therefore, this article raises *Listen and Do Song* technique as one of recommended instruction that can be applied in teaching English to young learners (TEYL) in order to empower their English literacy. As Pauette and Rieq (2008) find out that using music in English classroom can support the

literacy development of young English language learners.

In summary, incorporating song into language learning serves not only as an effective teaching tool but also provides a positive learning experience for young learners. Therefore, this paper elaborates the theoretical discussion about English literacy and young learners; some suggestions for selecting listen and do song; and recommended teaching instruction for listen and do song that empowers children's English literacy.

### **English Literacy and Young Learners**

There are various definitions of literacy. According to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2003, 'literacy' is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. In addition, Cameron (2001:123) states that "... literacy skills include being able to read and write different sorts of texts for different purposes. In most societies today, literacy is part and parcel of everyday life for children and adults, and life is full of different sorts of

written texts: in the home, on the street, on television, and on computer. Literacy skills are then, not just an additional set skill learnt in schools, but an integral part of people's lives."

Meanwhile, Hill (2008: p.3) also confirms that literacy is reading, writing, speaking and listening and involves the knowledge and skill required to engage in activities required for effective functioning in the community.

From those definitions, it can be concluded that literacy enables the learners to share information, to interact with others, and to make meaning. It is a complex process that involves building on prior knowledge, culture, and experiences in order to develop new knowledge and deeper understanding.

Due to its importance, literacy should be introduced to young learners from the early age. Literacy learning and language acquisition are essential to young children's cognitive and social development. The quality of education young children receive in their first years of schooling is often a critical indicator of their long-term academic success. However, the fact that there are still many children demonstrating below average achievement in literacy skills must have attention from educators.

Therefore, teachers of English should have various ways in attracting their learners' interest to develop their literacy skill.

### **Some Suggestions for Selecting Listen and Do Song**

Undoubtedly, song can be an effective means of developing children's language skills, but as a teacher, we have to pay attention to our main responsibility is not to teach singing skill but to teach English language. If songs are used inappropriately, students can become more entertained and not focus on the main purpose of using song in their literacy enhancement (Sevik, 2012). Songs that used in these activities have to be integrated into first goal of students' need in the classroom, and teachers have to follow some criteria in choosing an appropriate song that can be used in improving young learners' literacy skill (Curtain & Pesola, 1988 in Abdellah). Those criteria are:

1. The song should contain limited vocabulary.
2. The song should contain language compatible with that being used in the classroom.
3. The song should present a limited musical challenge.

4. The rhythm should be straightforward and repetitive.
5. Song topics should be within the experiences of children.
6. For primary level 4 and 5 it is useful if songs are accompanied by actions.
7. It is also helpful if the words of the songs are highly repetitive and if they have a refrain: a repeated stanza, between verses of the song.

Further information that was declared by Ersöz (2007, p.20) teachers should be careful to choose songs that:

1. Contain simple and easily understood lyrics.
2. Link with a topic or vocabulary that learners are studying in class.
3. Contain repetitive lines.
4. Allow children to easily do actions (to help emphasize meaning).

Thain (2010) also gives suggestions for choosing musical materials to teach young learners: the first point is songs must be catchy, that is song in the classroom has no different from commercial song that hit in the daily life. Hooks, which are fun for our ears, and make listener want to hear that song over and over again. In short, we have to choose song which is interesting, memorable and appealing. Second point is song should be conversational. Songs

that are conversational in nature are good choices for the language classroom. The phrasing, intonation, and common features of everyday conversation can all be found in vocal music, making it an excellent vehicle for language teaching. Songs that feel and sound conversational are ideal for the classroom as they transfer easily into speech. The third point is choosing the materials that are suitable for the age and the level of abilities of the students. And the last but not least point is song should be meaningful. Choose the song that children can understand.

Here are some links for teachers to select songs which can be used to apply *Listen and Do Song* technique: [www.supersimplelearning.com](http://www.supersimplelearning.com), <http://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/songs>, [www.kididdles.com](http://www.kididdles.com), and [www.songsforteaching.com/index.html](http://www.songsforteaching.com/index.html).

### **Recommended Teaching Instruction for Listen and Do Song**

In developing this lesson plan, the writers of this article develop theory from Cameron (2001) consists of three stages, namely preparation, core activities and follows up. Then, they

adapt with some related ideas of lesson plan from Sevik (2010).

#### **a. *Pre Teaching Activities (Preparation)***

In this stage, teacher explains how to achieve the goal in core activities. To get students interested in the topics of the song and to warm them up, the writers use this useful way. To think what actually song is about and find something related to the song, teacher uses pictures to help students understand about the topic of the song. The students are allowed by the teachers to use bilingual language to explain their opinion. Next, read the title of the song aloud, and explain it through actions and visuals. Ask the students who already know any words in English related to the title of the song, to help some students who still do not know the meaning of the difficult words by giving an explanation using actions and visuals. The aim of this activity is to make students ready to sing songs in the core stage and can improve their speaking skill.

#### **b. *Whilst Teaching Activities (Core Activities)***

This stage is helpful for learners to understand the text through activities and allow the students involve on it and

maximize their interest; it would be advantageous to sing the song several times. Based on Sevik's experience, he provides four times in listening the song.

1. To make students have an opportunity to hear the music and the lyrics in this free listening, the teacher allows the students to listen to the song freely, and enjoy that song without any interruptions. After the free listening, tell the students to look at the lyrics of the song, read aloud it and demonstrate action from this lyric, ask the students to do the same actions. For example "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes" song. After students have demonstrated the action from lyric, the teachers have an opportunity to check students' understanding and comprehension of the vocabulary and actions.
2. In the second until fourth listening, try to ask the students to do the same action from first listening. In these stages as a teacher, we have to check for correct intonation of language not music and pronunciation, and do some remedial works on any problematic intonation or pronunciation. It can

make them eager and more interested in the topic of the song and to encourage their confident to sing the whole song and perform with actions. This activity can help students develop their speaking skill too.

*c. Post teaching activities (follow up)*

This stage is generally accepted as the stage when the teacher moves on from listening and speaking practice to focus on other language skills such as reading and writing. In this activity, the portion of speaking practice also develops deeply. In this context, Listen and Do songs are suitable for competitions, games, and simple drama activities. To strengthen students' speaking skills, the teacher only performs the actions randomly, without saying the correct word, and asks the students to mention the correct words or the correct commands. It is very useful for students' speaking skill, because they practice to produce the correct pronunciation and try to understand every command from teacher. To foster students' writing skills, the teacher ask one of the students to stand in front of the class and ask the other of the students to describe the body of their friend who stand in front of the class. In

regarding to the topic of the song that part of the body, teacher can ask the students to write simple structure. For example, he has slanted eyes, he has black hair, he has handsome face, etc. And the last is to foster reading and literacy skills. The teacher makes sets of cards with a key word from the song on each (e.g., *mouth*, *head*) and then cuts each card in half, with a part of the word on each half. Next, the teacher asks the students to work in pairs to find and put the two halves correctly. Once the students finish the activity, the teacher asks the pairs to show and read aloud the words that they have reconstructed. Alternatively, using the structure "He has \_\_\_\_\_," the teacher writes different sentences on cards (e.g., "He has slanted eyes") and cuts each sentence into pieces with a word on each piece. Then, the teacher asks the students to form small groups and gives the pieces for a different sentence to each group. Next, the teacher asks the groups to construct a sentence by using the words they have. Finally, each group is asked to read its sentence aloud.

## CONCLUSION

In short, in combining *listen and do song* into learning environment, young learners get fundamental teaching

tool and have a positive learning experience in order to achieve their academic success. *Listen and Do Song* provides some important activities in empowering their English literacy such as competitions and games. Listening to the enjoyable song can enhance their listening skill. Asking the students to say the word in lyric of the song with correct pronunciation can improve their speaking skill. Writing a good sentence using the keyword in the lyric of the song can empower students' writing skill. Then, by asking students to read what they have written loudly can improve their reading skill. After recommending these activities, the writers hope that teachers will consider listen and do song technique as one of effective ways in empowering English literacy to young learners.

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**Appendix: Examples of Listen and Do Song (Lyric and Action)**

1. Song Title : One Little Finger  
 Language Focus : Parts of Body  
 Vocabulary : Up, Down, Finger, Head, Nose, Chin, Arm, Leg, Foot

**Lyrics and Actions**

**One little finger 3x** [*Hold up your index finger and bend it up and down*]  
**Tap tap tap** [*Tap your finger against your other INDEX FINGER 3 times*]  
**Point your finger up** [*Point up!*]  
**Point your finger down** [*Point down!*]  
**Put it on your head** [*Put your finger on your head*]  
**Head!** [*Say in a loud voice, Head!*]

**One little finger 3x** [*Hold up your index finger and bend it up and down*]  
**Tap tap tap** [*Tap your finger against your other INDEX FINGER 3 times*]  
**Point your finger up** [*Point up!*]  
**Point your finger down** [*Point down!*]  
**Put it on your nose** [*Put your finger on your nose*]  
**Nose!** [*Say in a loud voice, Nose!*]

**One little finger 3x** [*Hold up your index finger and bend it up and down*]  
**Tap tap tap** [*Tap your finger against your other INDEX FINGER 3 times*]  
**Point your finger up** [*Point up!*]  
**Point your finger down** [*Point down!*]  
**Put it on your chin** [*Put your finger on your chin*]  
**Chin!** [*Say in a loud voice, Chin!*]

**One little finger 3x** [*Hold up your index finger and bend it up and down*]  
**Tap tap tap** [*Tap your finger against your other INDEX FINGER 3 times*]  
**Point your finger up** [*Point up!*]  
**Point your finger down** [*Point down!*]  
**Put it on your arm** [*Put your finger on your arm*]  
**Arm!** [*Say in a loud voice, Arm!*]

**One little finger 3x** [*Hold up your index finger and bend it up and down*]  
**Tap tap tap** [*Tap your finger against your other INDEX FINGER 3 times*]  
**Point your finger up** [*Point up!*]  
**Point your finger down** [*Point down!*]  
**Put it on your leg** [*Put your finger on your leg*]  
**Leg!** [*Say in a loud voice, Leg!*]

**One little finger 3x** [*Hold up your index finger and bend it up and down*]  
**Tap tap tap** [*Tap your finger against your other INDEX FINGER 3 times*]  
**Point your finger up** [*Point up!*]  
**Point your finger down** [*Point down!*]  
**Put it on your foot** [*Put your finger on your foot*]

**Foot!** [*Say in a loud voice, Foot!*]

**Put it on your leg** [*Put your finger on your leg*]

**Leg!** [*Say in a loud voice, Leg!*]

**Put it on your arm** [*Put your finger on your arm*]

**Arm!** [*Say in a loud voice, Arm!*]

**Put it on your chin** [*Put your finger on your chin*]

**Chin!** [*Say in a loud voice, Chin!*]

**Put it on your nose** [*Put your finger on your nose*]

**Nose!** [*Say in a loud voice, Nose!*]

**Put it on your head** [*Put your finger on your head*]

**Head!** [*Say in a loud voice, Head!*]

**Now let's wave goodbye** [*Wave goodbye with your index finger*]

**Goodbye!** [*Say in a loud voice, Goodbye!*]

2. Song title : If You're Happy  
 Language focus : Emotions  
 Vocabulary : Emotions (happy, angry, scared, sleepy) Actions (clap hands, stomp feet, say, "Oh no!" take a nap).

### Lyrics and Actions

**If you're happy, happy, happy** [*Smile and put your index fingers on your cheeks*]

**Clap your hands** [*Clap your hands*]

**If you're happy, happy, happy** [*Smile and put your index fingers on your cheeks*]

**Clap your hands** [*Clap your hands*]

**If you're happy, happy, happy** [*Smile and put your index fingers on your cheeks*]

**Clap your hands** [*Clap your hands*]

**Clap your hands** [*Clap your hands*]

**If you're happy, happy, happy** [*Smile and put your index fingers on your cheeks*]

**Clap your hands** [*Clap your hands*]

**If you're angry 3x** [*Make an angry face and cross your arms over your chest*]

**Stomp your feet** [*Stomp your feet*]

**If you're angry 3x** [*Make an angry face and cross your arms over your chest*]

**Stomp your feet** [*Stomp your feet*]

**If you're angry 3x** [*Make an angry face and cross your arms over your chest*]

**Stomp your feet** [*Stomp your feet*]

**Stomp your feet** [*Stomp your feet*]

**If you're angry 3x** [*Make an angry face and cross your arms over your chest*]

**stomp your feet** [*Stomp your feet*]

**If you're scared 3x** [*Make a scared face and place your hands on your cheeks*]  
**Say, "Oh no!"** [*Say, "Oh no!"*]  
**If you're scared 3x** [*Make a scared face and place your hands on your cheeks*]  
**Say, "Oh no!"** [*Say, "Oh no!"*]  
**If you're scared 3x** [*Make a scared face and place your hands on your cheeks*]  
**Say, "Oh no!" Say, "Oh no!"**  
**If you're scared 3x** [*Make a scared face and place your hands on your cheeks*]  
**Say, "Oh no!"** [*Say, "Oh no!"*]

**If you're sleepy, sleepy, sleepy** [*Make a sleepy face*]  
**Take a nap** [*Rest your head on your hands and pretend to sleep*]  
**If you're sleepy, sleepy, sleepy** [*Make a sleepy face*]  
**Take a nap** [*Rest your head on your hands and pretend to sleep*]  
**If you're sleepy, sleepy, sleepy** [*Make a sleepy face*]  
**Take a nap, take a nap** [*Rest your head on your hands and pretend to sleep*]  
**If you're sleepy, sleepy, sleepy** [*Make a sleepy face*]  
**Take a nap** [*Rest your head on your hands and pretend to sleep*]

**If you're happy, happy, happy** [*Smile and put your index fingers on your cheeks*]  
**Clap your hands** [*Clap your hands*]  
**If you're happy, happy, happy** [*Smile and put your index fingers on your cheeks*]  
**Clap your hands** [*Clap your hands*]  
**If you're happy, happy, happy** [*Smile and put your index fingers on your cheeks*]  
**Clap your hands** [*Clap your hands*]  
**Clap your hands** [*Clap your hands*]  
**If you're happy, happy, happy** [*Smile and put your index fingers on your cheeks*]  
**Clap your hands** [*Clap your hands*]

Source: [www.supersimplelearning.com](http://www.supersimplelearning.com)