

BEST PRACTICES

IN TEACHING LISTENING FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

Oleh: Eva Nikmatul Rabbianty
(Dosen Tetap Prodi Tadris Bahasa Inggris STAIN Pamekasan)

Abstract:

English as an international language, in Indonesia, formally begins to teach since elementary school. Moreover nowadays, many people realize the importance of learning English as an international language. For, parents try to send their young learners into school that has an English subject in their curriculum or into English courses. Children who learn English at their early age is called young learners. In learning English, the young learners will learn the four language skills at least. They are; listening, speaking, reading and writing. This article is going to discuss about any best practices to teach listening, as the first skill acquired by the young learners, in a language classroom.

Key Words:

Listening, Young Learners.

The Characteristics of Young Learners

In Indonesia, formally elementary school students are those whose age are around 7 to 12 years old. As stated by Scott and Ytreberg¹ that young learner is around 5 to 7 years old and 8 to 10 years Old. Teaching young learners is quite different with teaching adult or adolescent. Those differences are due to their different characteristics. Young learners' characteristics according to Scott and Ytreberg² are:

- They understand situations more quickly than they understand the language. That is why, we have to use a lot of body movements and expressions when teaching them;
- Their own understanding comes through hands and eyes and ears. The physical world is dominant at all times;
- They are very logical – what you say first happens first. 'before you turn off the light, put your book away' can mean, 1. Turn off the light and then 2. Put your book away; and
- They have a very short attention span.

Young learners learn by doing. They learn through using their senses more than adults do. They will enjoy role

¹Wendy A. Scott and Lisbeth H. Ytreberg, *Teaching English to Young Learners* (Longman: New York, _), p. 1-2.

² *Ibid.*, p. 6-9.

play more if they can dress up for it and use real things. They learn language by using it – listening to it, speaking it, reading it, writing it. They also learn best when:

- they are motivated;
- they are being interested in the activity;
- they are seeing a result which gives them a feeling of achievement (so display their work); and
- they are being involved in activities which are relevant to them (so use their interest, experiences, background and environment).

Bear in mind also that young learners are easily discouraged and lose interest if the task is too difficult. Ensure that the task you set are within their ability. Moreover, everyone has a specific intelligence (or a few specific intelligences) that defines how he or she learns best. This means that in order to reach all the young learners in a classroom, different learning methods must be made available to them. The multiple intelligences according to Howard Gardner are³:

- **Linguistic intelligence:** enjoyment of and facility with reading, poetry and all things literacy and linguistic;
- **Logical-mathematical intelligence:** enjoyment of and facility with math

and science, games of strategy and any basic logic-based pursuit;

- **Musical intelligence:** enjoyment of and facility with music-listening, playing and perhaps composing.
- **Bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence:** enjoyment of and facility with activities that involve touch and movement, dance, sport and other practical activities;
- **Spatial/visual intelligence:** enjoyment of and facility with images, drawing, construction games and tactile puzzles such as jigsaw;
- **Interpersonal intelligence:** enjoyment of and facility with other people, communication, leadership and the ability to empathise;
- **Intrapersonal intelligence:** enjoyment of and facility with self-motivation, no dependence on others, awareness of one's own feelings more than those of others-often seen as shyness;
- **Naturalistics:** enjoyment of and facility with the natural world, with ability in recognising patterns and classification;
- **Existential:** enjoyment of and facility with asking and examining questions about life, death and ultimate realities.

By using games and other activities in your classroom, you'll be able to create a class period that explores various intelligences and reaches a variety of young learners instead of just the linguistic learners.

³ Alan Pritchard, *Ways of Learning* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 34.

However, young learners have a great capacity for acquiring language through exposure to language, e.g., looking and listening. As well as through formal teaching. Your job is to provide opportunities for both. You can use a small amount of language which you have not systematically taught. The young learners acquire the meaning through your repetition and the context you use it in.

Listening in The Classroom

Listening teaching practice has been changed recently, in the early days of English language teaching, listening chiefly served as a means of introducing new grammar through model dialogues. The lesson format used by many teachers in those early days was a relatively rigid one (see Table 1). Some features of this early lesson format are:

- *The three stages.* The lesson provided for a preliminary stage when the teachers prepared learners for the listening exercise and for a final stage during which the listening experience was reviewed. During **pre-listening**, teachers traditionally presented the new items of vocabulary (which later it is considered to take times which is much better spent for listening) that learners were about to encounter in the recording. In **post-listening**, they checked the answers to comprehend questions and explored the language of the recording.
- *Listening at two levels.* A procedure developed whereby learners are first asked to listen to the recording generally, in order to gain some idea as to who the speakers are and what they are speaking about. The kinds of question that the teacher might ask at this stage is extremely general: *who are the people? What are they talking about? How are they feeling: happy? dissappointed? angry?.* Then hopefully, during the second and subsequent plays, the listeners, now familiar with the more general content of the text. Next, they are expected to be able to listen for detail and respond to more focused questions. This central part of the listening exercise was traditionally referred to as **intensive listening**.
- *Multiple play.* The format embraced the notion that the listeners might benefit from several plays of the listening passage during intensive listening. The thinking at the time (with it emphasized of form rather than meaning) was that repeated listening enabled the teacher to focus by degrees on the language of the recording and habituated the learner on the rythms and intonation patterns of the target language.

Table 1. Early format for listening lesson⁴

<p>Pre-listening Pre-teach vocabulary 'to ensure maximum understanding'</p> <p>Listening Extensive listening followed by general questions on context intensive listening followed by detailed comprehension questions</p> <p>Post-Listening Teach any new vocabulary Analyse language (why did the speaker use the Present Perfect here?) Paused play. Students listen and repeat.</p>
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These three characteristics have proved remarkably robust and continue to feature in present –day practice. The overall format of 'pre-listening –listening -post listening' has formed the basis for many accounts of listening methodology⁵, though there are serious questions to be addressed about the 'narrowing in'⁶. The lessons start with general notions and focuses on more detail as the learner becomes increasingly familiar with the text.

During the years, the listening teaching practice has been changing (the components are shown in Table 2). In the **pre-listening activities**, we

teach only *critical words*. Words that without which the listening material cannot be understood. In one listening material there should be very few such critical items- at most, four or five, we also *establish context* to prepare them listening the material but we cannot give them too many context because it will make them less need to listen to the listening material to find the answer because they already guess the answer from the context. The next is *creating motivation* can be done by telling the students the purpose of the listening activities, and write down the title of the listening material on the whiteboard. Furthermore, we can also ask the students to predict what will happen in the listening material and prove it later. And see how you can create a good mental set of your students toward the listening material.

During the listening activities, we can give our students *pre-set questions* in the second play of the listening material to make the students know in advance what they are listening for. Then the teacher allows learner time to write up their answer, and then checks them with the class as a whole. And to help them raising their confidence you can ask them to compare their answer in pair first before they submit it.

In the post listening activities, in the second or more play we can pause the listening material and practice briefly about any *functional language*. we can also ask the students guess the meaning of an *inferring vocabulary* by

⁴ John Field, *Listening in the Language Classroom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 14.

⁵ Ibid., p. 15

⁶ General Context → Factual Detail
→Linguistic Analysis

pausing and writing the critical words on the white board and ask them to guess the meaning through the context. Then, before you give them the *final play* where you played the listening material while your students have the transcript you can *paused play* the listening material to help your students 'chewing' the material well.

Table 2. Current format for a listening lesson⁷

<p>Pre listening Establish context Create motivation for listening Pre teach only critical vocabulary</p> <p>Extensive listening General questions on context and attitude of speakers</p> <p>Intensive listening Pre set questions Intensive listening Checking answer to questions</p> <p>Post listening (optional) Functional language in listening passage Learners infer the meaning of unknown words from the sentences in which they appear Final play; learner looks at transcript.</p>

Unfortunately, those old and new version of listening activities cannot be simply implemented to a very young learner, who have a little basic of English still. When we use those format, seems that they will get confused and bored.

The listening format above is worked for learner who already has a quite good ability in English. When we teach listening to young learners we should teach them differently correlated with the young learners characteristics and linguistic ability.

Listening Activities for Young Learners

As a teacher of young learner, we know that when we talk about language teaching, we cannot separately teach the four language skill one another. We should teach them integratively. But, this article only discusses about the listening skill because listening is the basic language skill acquire by the young learners before they begin to speak, to read even to write. However, students always think it is difficult to listen well. To foster the students' listening comprehension skills and prepare them as active listeners in language learning is a big challenge.

We realize that, when we are listening you cannot go back and re-read something you did not understand, because once something has been said, then it will disappear. So, when we teach and speak to young learner we have to speak clearly and repeatedly. You also need several pauses when you teach them.

⁷ Field, *Listening*, p. 17

According to Kasbollah⁸ listening is the skill that children acquire first. Some listening activities will make our young learners move about, or do something or sit down quietly.

Teaching listening to young learners needs several different activities that suited their characteristics. According to Scott and Yterberg⁹ there are some activities that can make the young learners up, move about, create movement and noise. As well as make them calm down, concentrate on what is in front of them and a peaceful atmosphere. Those activities are (see Table 3 on the last page):

In '**listen and do**' activities, we can give a two way communication by giving them a genuine *instruction* in English that can make them move about and do physical activities. Since, young learners love to move a lot. You can ask them to *sit down, come here and erase the white board*, and other normal classroom instruction. or even ask them to do such crazy things – *hop on your left foot five times, count up to ten and then walk to the blackboard and back. Etc.* Find out that the young learner understand the instruction if they do the instruction. The young learners can also learn each other from these activities.

⁸ Kasihani Kasbollah, *Teaching English to Young Learner*, (Malang: FPBS Universitas Negeri Malang, 1999), p. 5

⁹ Scott and Ytreberg, *Teaching English*, pp. 22-31.

You can also ask them *to put up their hand* whenever they hear some words or sounds. *Mime stories* can also help the Young learners to understand the stories while they are listening to the stories. Because they have to mime/act out the stories together with the teacher, so it is more playful for the young learners. Other thing you can do in the listen and do activities is *drawing/coloring*. Young learners is so fond of drawing so you can use it for listening activities. Tells your students a simple description or story or describe a story or pictures you have in the white board. Here are another example of those activities:

Activities 1. **Describing and drawing picture**

Find several interesting simple pictures from the magazine or the internet then, describe it to the students. Ask the students to draw a picture based the teachers description. Do it slowly and check your students drawing. In a higher level you can ask your students to do it in pair. One students describe the picture and the other draw the picture. These activity is also good for speaking.
Teacher :There is a square table in the picture. It is in the middle of the picture
Students: Is it here (showing his drawing)

Teacher: Yes... well a little further down

Students: Is it like this

Teacher: No...not quite, the leg is too long.

After the students finishing their drawing, you can show them the original picture so that they can compare them.

Student: Oh the legs table are too long

Teacher: I have told you so, but you did not change it.

(See Fig. 1.1 and Fig. 1.2 on the last page)

Activities 2. **Can you actions**

Use this activities for teaching "Can you...?" "Yes, I can" "No, I can't". These actions are fun: wiggle, dance, run quickly, hop, skip, do a star jump, do a handstand, touch your toes, cross your eyes, snap your fingers, whistle, sing. E.g. Ask a Student "Can you cross your eyes?". If the Students replies "Yes, I can" then say "Ok, go!" and the Student does the action. If the Student says "No, I can't" say "Too bad. Ok, can you (wiggle)?".

Activities 3. **Simon says**

A good review for body parts ("Simon says touch your knees" then all the students should touch their knees). You could change Simon to your name to avoid confusion. When teacher says a sentence without the word "Simon" (e.g. "Touch your knees") then students shouldn't follow that instruction. If a student makes a mistake s/he has to sit out until the next round.

Activities 4. **Do as I say, not as I do**

A 'Simon says' game with a difference. First practice Simon Says with the Students so that they

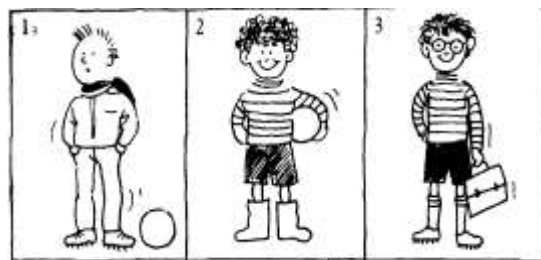
understand the game and body parts. I find it works just as well omitting the 'Simon says'. Now tell them to do as you say, not as you do, and repeat playing the game - only this time, when you say 'touch your knees' etc, touch your ears instead, or any other part of your body. This is a good way to see who is listening to you correctly and who is just copying your movements. Students find this game much more fun than the original.

Listening for Information is activities that we can use to check the students comprehension or to give new information. Here are some variations of listening activities that a teacher can use in their language.

Activities 1. **Identifying exercises**

We can have many version of this activities. But this is one of an identifying exercises:

'Has anyone seen this boy? He has dark hair and big ears. He is wearing rubber boots and carrying a football. He has a striped jersey and short trousers. Put a cross by the right picture'.



(Source: Scott and Yerberg.)

Fig. 2 Identifying exercise

Activities 2. Listen for the mistake

Use any pictures from any sources. Let your students to observe while they are listening to your description. While reading the description you can make mistake and ask the students to show the mistake. (See Fig. 3 on the last page)

Activities 3. Putting thing in order

Give your students a series of pictures randomly and ask them to arrange the pictures in order, based on the story they heard. (See Fig. 4 on the last page)

Activities 4. Listen and color

Give your students the picture of the monster, and you can read out the sentences to your students. This activity is to improve listening and following directions, as well as review of few shapes and color. (See Fig. 5 on the last page)

For a higher level students, you can ask them to draw or color a more complicated picture.

Activities 6. Filling in missing information

In this activities the teacher provides a text of a story or a song or any other simple article. And played the full version on a tape or simply read it out. Then, the students should fill in any missing words or informatons in the story/song.

Listen and repeat activities give the students chance to get a feel for

the language. The sounds, the stress, and the intonation. You can also combine the activities with movement or object to help them understand the meaning. Here are some **listen and repeat activities** that we can use in a language classroom:

Activity 1. Rhymes

All young learners love rhymes and they like to repeat it again and again. Rhymes are repetitive, they have natural rhythim and they have an element of fun, of playing with the language. You can adapt from any rhymes that already existed in many English sources or you can create your own rhymes depending on the theme that you are going to teach. The two rhymes below are examples of rhymes for young learners.

"London Bridge is broken down"

*London Bridge is broken down,
Broken down, broken down
London Bridge is broken down my fair
lady.*

*Wood and clay will washed away,
Wash away, wash away,
Wood and clay will wash away,
My fair lady.*

"Jack and Jill" by Mother Goose

*Jack and Jill
went up the hill
to fetch a pail of water.*

Jack fell down

*and broke his crown
and Jill came tumbling after.*

*Up Jack got
and home did trot
as fast as he could caper.*

*Wend to bed
and plastered his head
with vinegar and brown paper.
(Source: www.speakaboos.com)*

Activity 2. **Songs.**

Teaching young learners using song is not only making them interested to the process but also it can help them exposed to English grammar and vocabulary as well as increasing their motivation. You can give the song accompanied by the visual media or movement like dancing or miming. Song also helps the children to read and write. Here are some activities you can do in a classroom:

- Children could predict or guess words from a song through the pictures or gestures you made.
- Students could try to guess missing words in a gapped song. (Give the students songs sheet with some missing words to guess).
- Children could try to put the jumbled lines of a song in order
- Children could try to correct 'misheard' words during listening
- Children can tick pictures of what is included in the song (give the students pictures of vocabularies used in the songs)

- Students could be asked to order or sequence pictures or words as they listen the song. (See Fig. 6 on the last page)

Listening to stories activities can be one of the routines that allow our students to form their own inner pictures of certain things. The variations of this activity can be in the form of *reading story, telling story, and creating story.*

Telling stories is different from reading stories. In telling stories you don't have a book with you. While reading a story, you read the story aloud from a book. In telling stories the teacher can change the story and he/she can also adapt the language to the level of the pupils.

In Indonesian traditional stories such as 'Sang Kancil' or 'Timun Mas' can also be translated into English.

To tell the story successfully, you need to do this:

- Prepare yourself an outline of the story
- Practice telling the story out loud
- Use expression, mime and gestures
- Keep eye contact with the students
- Don't rush it, enjoy it.

Telling stories or reading stories to your students can help them in developing their listening skills as well as the other language skills. In addition, the choosing of a good story can also help you to teach them many moral value valuable for their future life.

Another exciting form of story telling which you can do from a very early stage is to create stories with the

students, so that you tell their story. For example; 'once upon a time'- you must accept the first answer that comes, no censoring allowed. 'okay. Once upon a time in.....?' Egg. .. said the students. Okay ..' once upon a time in a town called egg.... there was.....?' and so on. In this activities the teacher and the students can create the ending of their own story, perhaps the story will rather unconventional and sound unusual, but it is not the point. Making up stories with the children at all stages can help them to put their thoughts into words and gives them a starting point for their own writing.

Conclusion

The listening activities, such as 'listen and do', 'listen and repeat', 'listening for information' and also 'listening to stories', mentioned above are only a few of tremendous activities in teaching listening for young learners. They are still many other examples of interesting listening activities created by the teachers around the world. Or maybe the one created by you?. Who knows. But one thing for sure, that, may those activities can inspire all of us to give a better teaching for the young learners. Cause in a matter of fact, it is our job to introduce as many different voices and sounds into the young learners classroom. and remember that

young learners need to hear many varieties of language. The more they hear, the better they will be able to speak, to read and to write.

Bear in mind also that all young learners will achieve these listening stages, but at different ages, you may will find some young learners can do some things which other young learners cannot. These differences are not due to lack of ability but to a different rate of development. Therefore it is all the more necessary to treat young learners as individuals. You must make your own judgements about whether a particular activity is suitable for your young learners or not. .

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- Scott and Ytreberg, *Teaching English*.

Table 3: Listening activities for young learners

Listen & Do Activities	Listening For Information	Listen & Repeat Activities	Listening Stories	Independent Listening
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Instruction ✓ Moving about ✓ Put up your hand ✓ Mime stories ✓ Drawing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ identifying exercises ✓ listen for mistake ✓ putting things in order ✓ questionnaire ✓ listen and color ✓ filling in missing information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ rhymes ✓ song ✓ exercise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Telling stories ✓ Creating stories ✓ Reading stories 	

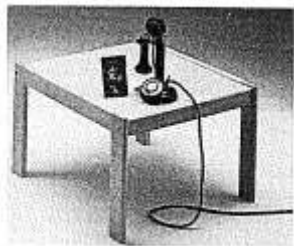


Fig. 1.1 The original picture

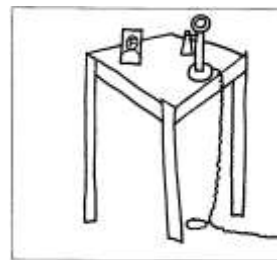
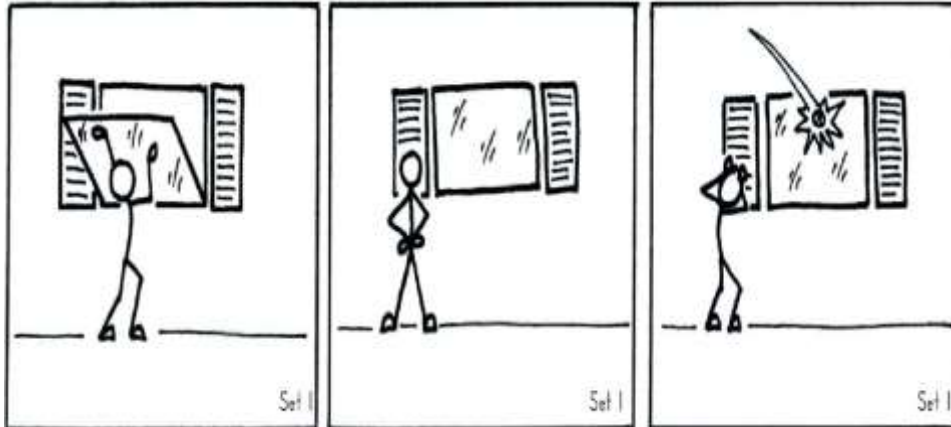
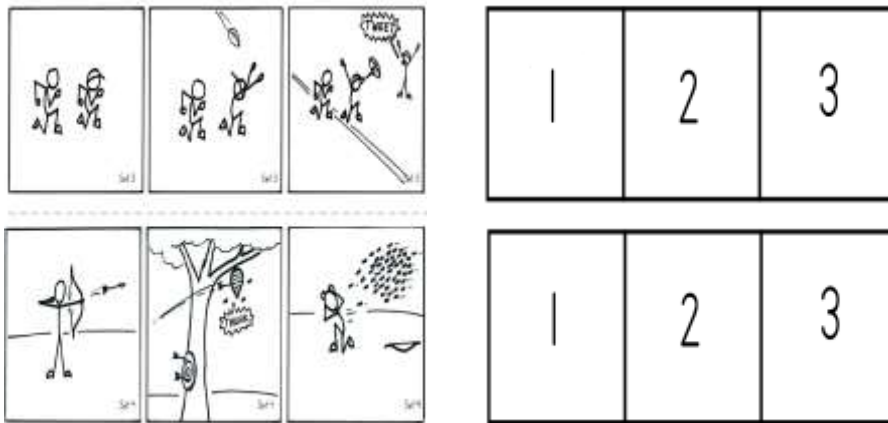


Fig.1.2 Students' drawing



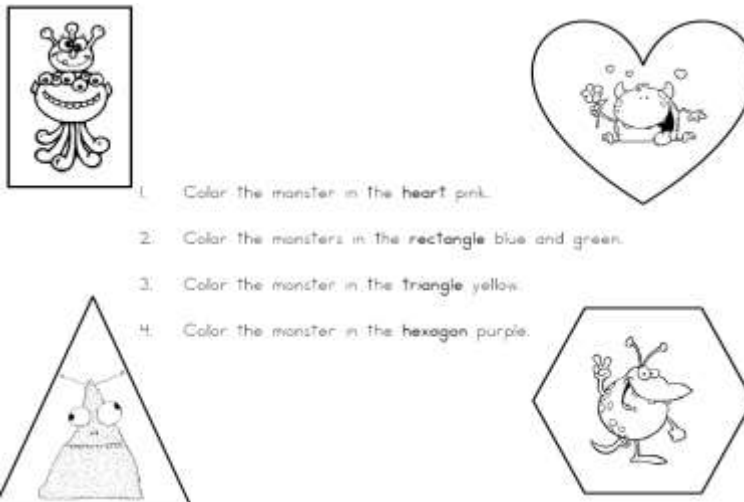
(Source: www.abcteach.com)

Fig. 3



(Source: www.abcteach.com)

Fig. 4



(Source: www.1plus1plus1equals1.com)

Fig. 5

Old Macdonald's Farm



(Source: www.britishcouncil.com)

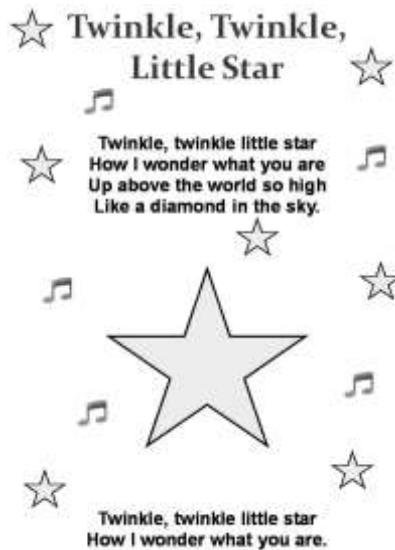


Fig. 6