

# Application of Homemade Percussion Instruments into Nursery Rhymes in Music Activities for Preschool Children: A Case of Can Tho City: Southern Vietnam

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## ABSTRACT

As recycled materials have increased inexorably in recent years, using daily waste products to make homemade percussion instruments has emerged as a topic of interest in music education. This article details six homemade percussion instruments (including a small drum, coconut shell, two shaking instruments, castanets, and claves) and how to use them in children's songs, especially nursery rhymes that originated in Southern Vietnam. An experiment using these instruments in music activities for preschool children in Can Tho City was conducted with feasible outcomes and positive feedback.

**Keywords:** Homemade percussion instruments, nursery rhymes, preschool children, folk music, Can Tho City

## INTRODUCTION

The 9th Conference of the Party Central Committee (term XI) passed Resolution No. 33-NQ/TW dated June 9, 2014 on building and developing Vietnamese culture and people to meet the nation's sustainable development requirements, accordingly this Resolution aims at: "*Building a comprehensively developed Vietnamese culture and people, aiming for truth – goodness – beauty, imbued with the national spirit and humanity, democracy and science. Culture truly becomes the solid spiritual foundation of society, an important internal strength to ensure sustainable development and firmly protect the Fatherland for the goal of wealthy people, strong country, democracy and civilized*"[13]. This resolution calls for strengthening art education and improving the capacity of the populace, particularly the youth and teenagers, to perceive aesthetics, while also promoting the role of literature and art in fostering the human soul and emotions. Preschool and high school music curricula must also shift in order to achieve Resolution 33, becoming more in line with current cultural themes and simultaneously fostering a sense of national identity. Numerous studies have been conducted on nursery rhymes across the world. Some of the most well-known ones include those by Kenney (2005) such as *Nursery Rhymes: A Foundation for Learning*, in which this study presents the origins of applied music in kindergarten education for preschool children; Cardany (2013) with the study *Nursery rhymes in music and language literacy*. This study has contributed to analyzing the value of nursery rhymes in children's language development through teaching music and language in preschool; Pourkalthor and Tavakoli (2017) *Nursery rhymes and language learning: Issues and pedagogical implications*, accordingly this study focuses on explaining the effectiveness of rhymes in music for preschool children on language development and broaden understanding of life around children; Additionally, nursery rhymes are a popular study subject in many other nations, including Egypt (Aziz and

Partners, 2010), *Childhood apraxia of speech and multiple phonological disorders in Cairo-Egyptian Arabic speaking children: Language, speech, and oro-motor differences*. Accordingly, this research is practical as the authors conducted a practical survey on 30 preschool children aged 4 to 6 years old, divided into 3 groups of research subjects: Multi-phonological disorder group; Have aphasia; Children develop normal language in communication. The research results contribute to reflecting the causes of language disorders in preschool children and the application of music in adjusting and improving children's language; China (Nathan, 2001) *Clicks in a Chinese nursery rhyme*, this research article analyzes the performance of local Chinese nursery rhymes and music using nasal sounds, and at the same time compares the method of using nasal sounds in Chinese dialect nursery rhyme music different localities of China; England (Halliwell-Phillipps, 2023) *The nursery rhymes of England*, this is a specific study in England, in which the content focuses on researching the education of children in the early stages of life through ancient Scandinavian kindergarten literature. This is important in preserving the traditional values of English literature, while also contributing to reflecting the influence of nursery rhymes on children's intellectual development. Canada (Galway, 2010) *From nursery rhymes to nationhood: children's literature and the construction of Canadian identity*. Accordingly, the author identifies children's literature as both an entertainment tool and an educational method for Canadian children. The core content of children's literature refers to the value of traditional nationalism that contributes to building a unified and developed Canada as it is today. In particular, *From Nursery Rhymes to Nationhood* includes research from many works of children's literature written in English between 1867 and 1911, reflecting national unity and identity as well as the influence of literature America and England for Canadian children's writers.

Many authors in Vietnam have written about nursery rhymes in a variety of works. For example, Do Thi Minh Chinh (2005) *From nursery rhymes to nursery rhymes for children in today's schools* discusses nursery rhyme songs for children. This is a scientific research by the author with the purpose of understanding the basic characteristics of ancient Vietnamese rhymes. On that basis, the study conducted a survey on the inheritance and promotion of nursery rhymes in composing songs for children in need and the current status of popularizing nursery rhymes in some preschools and primary schools in Tay Ho district, Hanoi city. The research results contribute to reflecting the existence and development of nursery rhymes with differences between the central and suburban areas of Hanoi city. At the same time, the research also reflects the value and significance of applying nursery rhymes in comprehensive education for children.

Leng Thi Lan (2020) *Nursery rhymes for ethnic minority children in current life*. The author's research focuses on analyzing folk rhymes and games for children of ethnic minorities in the Northern mountainous regions, the Central – Central Highlands and the Southern Delta. The research is carried out in two forms: survey form and combining games with rhymes. The research results have reflected the diversity, richness and similarities of nursery rhymes between regions. At the same time, the research also raises the issue of preserving and promoting the value of traditional Vietnamese folk songs and music through educational activities for children. Le Thi Thuan (2011) *Class of words referring to animals and plants in Vietnamese nursery rhymes*. Through this doctoral thesis, the author has clearly analyzed the position of nursery rhymes as an important component of Vietnamese folk poetry. This genre of folk literature has an important meaning in national life. because of the purity and innocence of the content and the language, which is close, easy to remember, and suitable for people's lives. This study contributes to the linguistic analysis of nursery rhymes to help children recognize these phenomena, increase awareness of the surrounding social and natural environment, and educate about love of nature and homeland, of compassion, of fellow-citizens, of family affection.

Based on the research results of authors in Vietnam and internationally, the article focuses on researching the use of homemade percussion instruments in musical activities in preschools using Southern nursery rhymes. In January 2024, an experiment was done in Can Tho to verify authenticity and enhance these handcrafted percussion instruments.

## METHODOLOGY

This research is conducted using a theoretical-practical approach. Specifically, research methods are concentrated on two primary categories of methodology:

- Group of theoretical research methods: analysis, synthesis, generalization of scientific works (monographs, reference materials, scientific topics at all levels, theses, articles, etc.) on the subject of Vietnamese nursery rhymes. Furthermore, it conducts content research on music applications for Can Tho University's student training program.
- The category of practical research methods includes: practical survey methods at preschools to gain a deeper understanding of the study object in order to demonstrate and support the findings of research on the existing situation. Research methods on items such as handmade musical instrument sets and apply the findings to actual preschool instruction.

## RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### General introduction to nursery rhymes

In the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Vietnam 2 B* (published in 2005), nursery rhymes or children's songs are described as rhymes that often have no apparent meaning and are just meant to help kids practice speaking. These songs typically consist of four-word phrases. Sometimes a sentence has only one thought, rather than a series of related ideas that are connected solely by rhyme, to help children grasp the world around them or to make observations about people and social life. Rhymes that are amusing, funny, witty, simple to remember, and appropriate for children's psychology include:

Cá đờ mồ hôi.	Fish that sweat
Là con cá liệt.	It is a paralyzed fish
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Cá rụng hết răng.	Fish lost all its teeth
Là con cá móm	It is an underbite fish

Since ancient times, nursery rhymes have been a part of our people's cultural practices. These are some songs that are popular, from family children's games to children's gatherings in the village. Nursery rhymes are a type of rustic folk song that has been passed down orally from generation to generation by children of all ages. They can be the lullabies of mothers holding their babies on hot summer afternoons, the rhyming songs of children mowing grass or herding buffaloes, or the rhymes of children playing games like hide-and-seek, bamboo jacks, or dragon-snake on moonlit nights. (Liem. N. T. M., (2014). *Vietnamese traditional music for university students majoring in music*. Musical Publishing House. pp.106).

Nursery rhymes are oral songs that children in infancy and early childhood sing to themselves, according to Loan. N. T., and colleagues (1997). *Vietnamese children's nursery rhymes and games*. Culture and Arts Publishing House. They are folk compositions by an unidentified composer. These kinds of rhymes later inspired some people to write poems with the author's name for young kids to sing; these works are also called nursery rhymes by researchers. Nursery rhymes are among the most significant folk cultural practices, according to Thanh. T. N., (2007). *Notes on culture and music*. Hanoi: Cultural and Information Publishing House. pp. 368, as they constitute the "first cultural strokes" of the national culture inscribed on

young children’s innocent hearts. Furthermore, proverbs and traditional folk music like lullabies, chanties, rhymes, ly[1], etc. are also the sources of nursery rhymes. Nursery rhymes are songs sung by rural youngsters and handed down by word of mouth.

The definitions given above can be summarized as follows: Nursery rhymes are rhyming folk songs and sayings for children, often related to games. Nursery rhymes frequently have simple melodies and rhythms, as well as simple words that talk about people, animals, natural events, daily life, etc.

### Southern nursery rhymes and games

Since the South is a new territory, it has inherited the cultural achievements of the country, particularly Thuan Quang culture, which was once a part of Dang Trong culture until the South Central area was divided from Dang Ngoai by the Gianh River. This explains why Central culture has left such an impression on this area, and children’s folk games, whether or not they have “rhyming” songs to go along with them, also reflect that. Nevertheless, later, due to more convenient North-South exchanges, whether via books, newspapers, mass media, or the immigration of a sizable Northern population (1954 and after 1975). Living in different places has added to the South’s vast collection of folk games.

Nursery rhymes also have variations due to the unique nuances of each locality, which are best demonstrated by the form of linguistic expression (dialect). The substance of rhymes is occasionally adjusted to adapt to and fit the living creatures and the local landscape. However, nursery rhymes are always consistent in their essence (play) and intended audience (children). Southern rhymes are derived from national common rhymes, with just minor modifications, as previously noted. Example of the nursery rhyme “Sawing Wood”:

The South	The North
Kéo cưa kéo kít	Kéo cưa lờ xẻ
Làm ít ăn nhiều	Ông thợ nào khỏe
Đụng đầu ngủ đó	Thì ăn cơm vua
Nữ lấy mất cưa	Ông thợ nào thua
Lấy gì mà kéo	Thì về bú mẹ
Sawing, sawing wood	Sawing, sawing wood
Work less, eat more	Only the strongest could
A sleepyhead anywhere	Return home to a royal feast
If the saw is stolen	But the loser will
What will you use to saw	Return home to Mother’s milk

According to Trang. H. N., (editor). (2019). *Traditional nursery rhymes and games*. Culture and Arts Publishing House. Thai Nguyen University of Education), in the South there are many versions of nursery rhymes, such as the song “Tap tam vong”[2]:

<b>Original</b>	<b>Southern version</b>
Tập tầm vông	Tập tầm vông
Tay không tay có	Tay nào không?
Tập tầm vó	Tay nào có?
Tay có tay không?	Tập tầm vó
	Tay nào có?
	Tay nào không?
Boom-Bah-Bah-Boom	Boom-Bah-Bah-Boom
An empty hand and an filled hand	Which hand has nothing?
Bah-Bah-Boom-Bah	Which hand has thing?
Which hand has the thing, and which is empty?	Bah-Bah-Boom-Bah
	Which hand has thing?
	Which hand has nothing?

In reality, the “sister” style of “Tap tam vông” is widely popular from North to South. The kind of “Tap tam vông” may have first emulated the sound of the Tam Vong/Tam Vinh drum (as it is called in Nghe Tinh). This is arguably the nursery rhyme that has the most variations. Here are a few variants collected from the South:

<b>Variant 1</b>	<b>Variant 2</b>
Chị có chồng	Chị có chồng
Em ở vá	Em ở vá
Chị ăn cá	(...)
Em mút xương	Chị ăn chè
Chị nằm giường	Em liếm bát
Em nằm đất	Chị ca hát
Chị ăn mật	Em vỗ tay
Em liếm ve	Chị ăn mỳ
Chị ăn chè	Em xách bị...

Em liếm bát	
Chị ăn kẹo	
Em ăn cơm	
Chị ở lò gốm	
Em ở Bến Thành	
Chị trồng hành	
Em trồng họ...	
You have a husband	
I'm not married	
You eat fish	
I chew bones	You have a husband
You sleep in bed	I'm not married
I sleep on the floor	(...)
You eat honey	You eat sweet soup
I lick the jar	I lick the bowl
You eat sweet soup	You sing
I lick the bowl	I applaud
You eat candy	You go begging
I eat green rice	I carry the bag
You live at the pottery kiln	
I live in Ben Thanh	
You grow shallots	
I grow chives	

In general, Southern folk songs originated from the North and were modified and incorporated into local culture to create many variations. The melody and rhythm remain mostly unchanged from the original, but the lyrics have evolved significantly. In particular, Southern rhymes are quite suitable for locally made musical instruments.



## Homemade percussion instrument

Numerous studies conducted worldwide have referenced homemade musical instruments, including those by Wise man (2010) and Jansen van Vuuren (2018). Making percussion instruments out of repurposed materials, as demonstrated by Sa'diyah and Zaidah's work, is a current trend (2023).

The article suggests the following procedure for creating handcrafted musical instruments in order to maintain this trend:

- Step 1: Analyze the instrument structure
- Step 2: Select appropriate materials
- Step 3: Design a homemade musical instrument
- Step 4: Test the instrument.

If the results are good, go to step 5. Store and use.

If the results aren't good, return to step 2.

The study team created six instruments using a homemade musical instrument design method, which are as follows:



Figure 1. Small drum



Figure 2. Coconut shell



Figure 3. Plastic shaker instrument



Figure 4. Claves



Figure 5. Wooden shaker instrument



Figure 6. Recycled material castanet

Small drum: (Figure 1) is created from a milk box with the bottom cut off, with plastic pieces covering both ends and parachute string stretched across the two sides. Drumsticks can be bamboo chopsticks.

Coconut shell: (Figure 2) is constructed of dried coconut. After using the coconut's water and meat, people discard the coconut shell.

Shaking instrument: (Figure 3) are made from plastic cups used to sell take-away coffee or sugar cane juice, as well as they are pierced with present wrapping strings via the punch in the top of a plastic soft drink bottle.

Claves: (Figure 4) are made from two thin wooden sticks left over by the carpenter. Attach a soft drink bottle cap to the top of two wooden sticks. When they are tapped together, they will create a funny sound.

Shaking instrument: (Figure 5) is constructed from pruned tree branches with a soft drink bottle cap punched in the middle and threaded through a parachute rope, then tied it to two tree branches. When shaken, it will make an interesting sound.

Castanet: (Figure 6) use a piece of cardboard from discarded boxes, attach a soft drink bottle cap to both ends with glue, then fold it in half. Use two fingers to gently tap it to make a sound.

Through these homemade musical instruments, many practical values have been brought to life:

*Firstly*, these musical instruments are reused products from materials that have been discarded in life, thereby contributing to environmental protection and saving costs on purchasing teaching aids.

*Second*, these musical instruments contribute to improving teaching tools, thereby creating important motivation for the creativity and innovation of teaching tools, teaching methods and creating learning motivation for students.

*Third*, these homemade musical instruments contribute to restoring, preserving and promoting traditional musical values and types of folk literature of Vietnam. On that basis, educate about awareness of the nation's cultural identity and educate for comprehensive development of Vietnamese children.

*Finally*, these homemade musical instruments are popular in the use of music forms from traditional to modern, in many different educational environments.

## **Experimenting with homemade percussion instruments in music activities for preschool children**

### *Suggestions for using homemade percussion instruments in nursery rhymes*

We have conducted research and experimentation along with recommendations on the combination of the accompaniment of percussion instruments (homemade musical instruments) suited to the situation with nursery rhymes for kids to sing and talk that aren't yet associated with games. This adds more color, enhances the melody, and may be seen as a method of "playing" music for children. We would like to suggest three easy, fundamental, and appropriate typing ways for kids to go along with the nursery rhymes: Tap to the beat and rhythm combined with homemade musical instruments.

In nursery rhymes, tapping according to rhythm and tapping according to beat overlap because the rhyme is expressed in the form of a 1-beat rhythm. Tapping according to rhythm and tapping according to beat will have the same type of tapping: tapping evenly at the beginning of the beats (also tapping evenly at the beginning of the rhythm). Tapping according to rhythm entails tapping in accordance with each rhythmic sound pattern specified in the section "Rhythm in nursery rhymes", or, in other words, children will tap all the words when singing (tap each word while singing).



**Figure 7: Rhythm and beat tapping pattern 1**

**Figure 8: Rhythm and beat tapping pattern 2**

Figure 7. Rhythm and beat tapping pattern 1      Figure 8. Rhythm and beat tapping pattern 2

In the song *Tap tam vong*, use the drum (Figure 1) to tap the beat arrow to create a sense of rhythm and regularity, as well as the claves (Figure 4) and shaking instruments (Figure 4) to tap where the arrows suggest the tempo to create a lively and fun atmosphere. *Tap tam vong* is a folk song and also a Vietnamese folk game that is very popular among children and has existed for a long time. Accordingly, players use a small ring, usually made from plastic or wood, and try to keep it in the air by throwing and using techniques such as holding it in the palm of their hand, then play. Ask the remaining players to guess what the object is. During the performance, there is a combination of two activities: singing the song *Tap tam vong* and performing hand movements. The goal of the game is to help children improve their hand skills, develop thinking and language.

With the song “Bac kim thang”, use the coconut shell (Figure 2) to tap regularly where the arrows indicate the beat, as well as using the shaking instrument (Figure 5) and the castanet (Figure 6) to tap on the rhythm arrows in order to create a more intense, vibrant, and cheerful feeling. This is a folk song familiar to the childhood of many young Vietnamese people, passed down from generation to generation. With a pleasant melody and simple words, not too complicated, many children know this song by heart and sing it all day long, especially during times of fun and frolic. This game is played by children in their free time, playing and singing songs at the same time. How to organize the game: a small group of 4 to 5 children hold hands together and then spread out into a circle, the left foot is the pivot, the right foot is clubbed together in the middle of the circle. Children will sing and rotate. Whoever falls first will lose. Depending on their creativity, children can upgrade the game into many different styles, but the original is still the cross-legged game, in which the more you play this game, the more fun it will be.

It is evident from the above illustration that the frequency of percussion beats (x) in beat tapping is greater, sparser, and more spaced-out than in rhythmic tapping. Because of this, tapping in time with the beat will provide a more intense, vibrant, and happy experience. Knowing this definition will make it easier for teachers to select the tapping method that best suits the goal and educational requirements.

As a type of children’s spoken and sung music, nursery rhymes are most likely best suited for usage with self-resonant percussion instruments because they fulfill the following requirements: they are flexible, easy to use, have a strong rhythmic effect, and have high rhythm-maintaining capabilities.

**Experiment with nursery rhymes in musical activities for preschool children**

The research used the nursery rhymes “Tap tam vong” and “Bac kim thang”[3] in music classes for nine preschool children in Can Tho City in January 2024. Six homemade percussion instruments were utilized in this experiment (Figures 1–6).



Figure 9. Some pictures of experimenting with homemade percussion instruments and performing nursery rhymes for preschool children in Can Tho City

During the experiment, the research team observed a number of aspects: the majority of preschool children had interesting observations and enthusiastic discoveries with homemade musical instruments. When the teacher performs these musical instruments, the students listen attentively and enthusiastically perform under the teacher's guidance. As for teachers, most teachers are very interested in homemade musical instruments and they expressed their desire to receive support and guidance in making these types of musical instruments for regular application music teaching activities for children every day in preschool.

### **Overall observation**

#### **Advantages of homemade percussion instruments in musical activities for preschool children**

Experiments show that homemade percussion instruments have the following advantages:

- It's straightforward and simple to create;
- It protects the environment by utilizing recycled materials;
- It's simple to employ while performing songs for preschool children;
- In terms of teaching, these musical instruments are highly safe and encourage preschool children to play and learn;
- From an equipment perspective, these musical instruments save a significant amount of money for the school while still ensuring enough equipment.

#### **Limitations and areas for improvement of homemade percussion instruments**

- Because homemade musical instruments are handmade, the aesthetic aspect is not really attractive.
- Since there are still not many handmade percussion instruments available, research must be done to create new instruments using various recycled materials in order to improve music learning and performance.
- The percussion instrument (Figure 6) is composed of cardboard, is unstable, and is not stable with repeated use. Thus, it is necessary to do research on and produce this percussion instrument from other, more durable materials like plastic, wood, etc.

## CONCLUSION

This article features six handmade percussion instruments as well as an experiment in music activities for preschoolers. The first findings indicate that these handcrafted percussion instruments are well suited for usage in musical activities, particularly nursery rhymes for preschool children.

In future studies, these homemade percussion instruments can be utilized in music activities in elementary, middle, and high schools. In addition, not only rhymes, these homemade percussion instruments can also be used to perform folk songs, children's songs, etc. From another perspective, homemade percussion instruments also demonstrate the trend of using recycled materials in daily life, in accordance with the present orientation of environmental protection and combating climate change.

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## FOOTNOTE

[1] Ly is one of the Vietnamese folk music genres and is especially popular in the Central and Southern regions.

[2] Tap tam vong, a Vietnamese nursery rhyme popular from North to South, is imitated by the sound of the Tam Vong/Tam Vinh drum (called in Nghe An), which means rice drum.

[3] *Bac kim thang* is a Vietnamese nursery rhyme from the Southwest area, with the term kim thang referring to an isosceles triangular ladder.