

# A Rhyme a Week: Early Emergent Literacy Skills in Pre-K Children Attending Head Start

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## Abstract

The researchers, speech-language pathology graduate students, conducted an experimental study to explore the effectiveness of early literacy intervention for nursery rhyme awareness and rhyme awareness in pre-kindergarten (PK) children attending a local Head Start facility. The Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener-PK was administered (PALS- PK) prior to and following a six-week intervention. In comparing initial and final scores, the researchers found insignificant results in nursery rhyme and significant results in rhyme awareness scores following the intervention.

## Introduction

“Research has consistently shown that children who enter school behind their peers in emergent literacy skills are unlikely to catch up and may fall further behind over time” (Moyle et. al., 2013, p. 668). Additionally, previous research studies have found, “performance in rhyme tasks is a predictor of the later success in reading” (Grofcikova et al., 2021).

- The development of reading abilities is constructed by many factors. One of those is word recognition, and within component of word recognition is phonological awareness.
- Phonological awareness is an umbrella term that consists of multiple factors including word awareness, syllable awareness, onset-rime, and rhyme awareness.
- Rhyme awareness is one of the first skills to develop at 3-4 years of age. Children entering school are expected to have a foundation of phonological skills, one of those being rhyme awareness.

## Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of early literacy intervention on rhyme awareness in PK children from low-socioeconomic status (low-SES) backgrounds.

## Materials & Methods

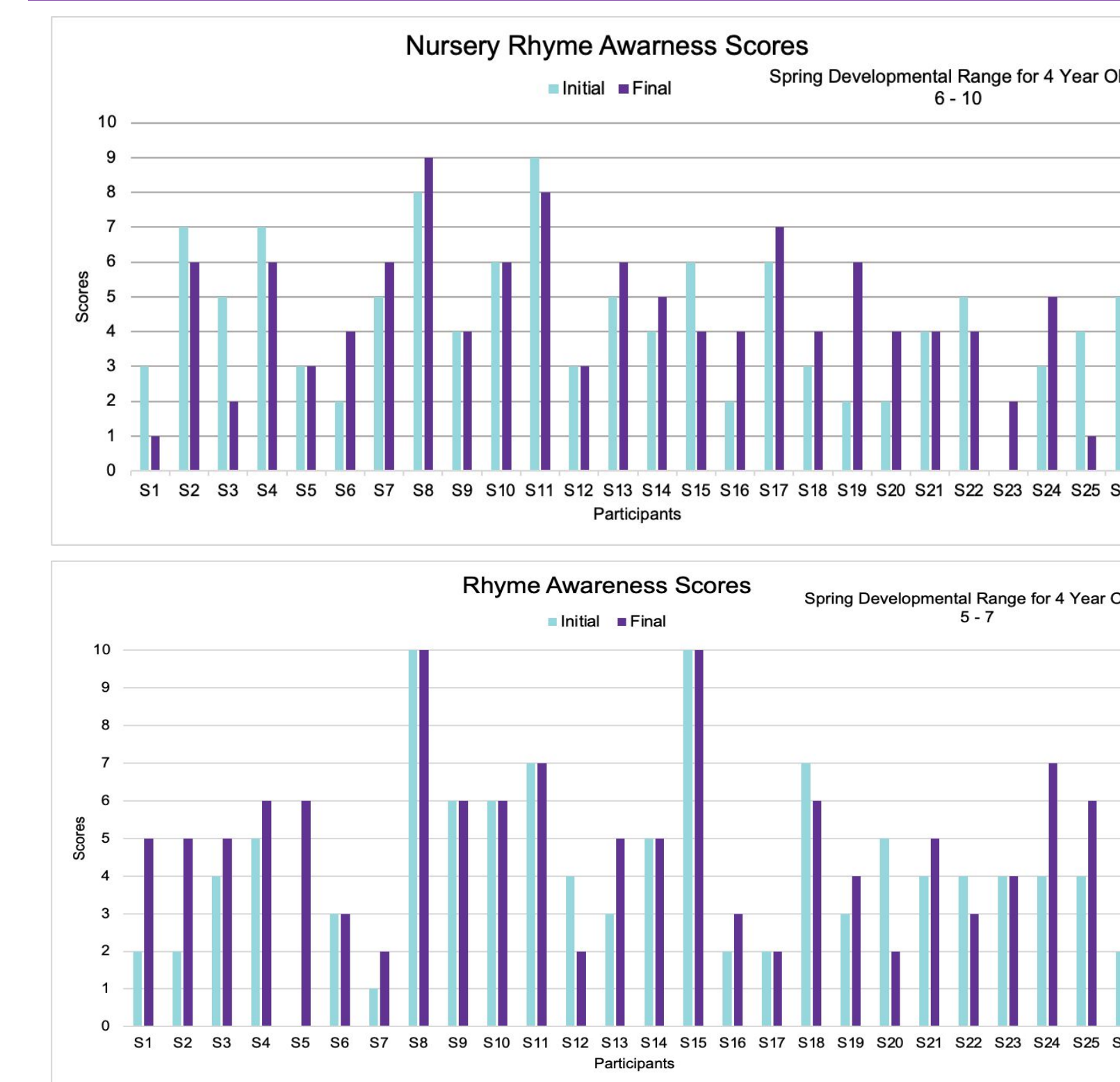
- Consent was obtained from the parents of each student prior to the study.
- All assenting students, with no underlying diagnoses, were administered the Rhyme Awareness and Nursery Rhyme Awareness subtests of the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening Pre-Kindergarten (PALS-PK), assent was gained from each student.
- All students in the PK classrooms at the local Head Start continued their participation in “Big Group” between pre- and post-test measures one time per week for 50-minute sessions.
  - “Big Group” is an early intervention program provided once per week at the local Head Start by the graduate speech-language pathology students at Stephen F. Austin State University as part of their curriculum.
  - “Big Group” includes a shared nursery rhyme, storybook reading, and individual language intervention stations.
- The speech-language pathology graduate students provided rhyme intervention during “Big Group” as one of the individual language intervention stations, which are seven minutes in duration, for six weeks following pre-test.
  - During the intervention station, all children learned rhyme awareness skills such as: understanding what rhyming means, identifying words that rhyme, and identifying words that do not rhyme.

Figure 1:  
Super Duper Rhyming Tubs



- At the conclusion of the six weeks intervention period, a post-test was administered to all those who participated in the pre-test.
- The speech-language pathology students compared the pre- and post-test scores to explore the effectiveness of early literacy intervention on rhyme in PreK children.

## Findings



### Nursery Rhyme Awareness

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare pre-test and post-test scores in nursery rhyme awareness following a six-week intervention. There was not a significant difference in the scores for pre-test scores ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = 2.10$ ) and post-test scores ( $M = 4.58$ ,  $SD = 1.96$ );  $p = 0.490$ . These results suggest the “Rhyme a Week” exposure was not effective in increasing awareness of nursery rhymes.

### Rhyme Awareness

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare initial scores in rhyme awareness and final scores. There was a significant difference in the scores for initial ( $M = 4.19$ ,  $SD = 2.43$ ) and final ( $M = 4.92$ ,  $SD = 2.17$ ) conditions;  $p = 0.047$ . These results suggest the “Rhyme a Week” intervention was effective in improving the PreK students scores.

## Discussion

Initial and final scores in nursery rhyme awareness revealed an insignificant result in scores, while rhyme awareness demonstrated a significant result in scores. The number of students who were within the developmental range for nursery rhyme awareness increased by two, and rhyme awareness increased by seven. However, when examining students’ individual scores, there were inconsistencies in their personal increase in scores across the two subtests. Some of the students scored either below or exactly the same as their initial score. The study did come with limitations, including a change in the the initial number of participants due to student absences when screeners were administered. In addition, there was inconsistent attendance to “Big Group” due to school holidays, school closure, and student absences.

## Conclusions

- Nursery Rhyme - The results of this study indicate exposure to nursery rhymes during “Big Group” did not demonstrate significance. However, two PK students’ final scores were within the developmental range when they were not in the initial.
- Rhyme - The results of this study indicate the intervention for rhyme awareness in the individual stations during “Big Group” demonstrated significance. PK students scored higher on the final screener than they did on the initial.

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