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**Using "Rhyming Centered Instruction" for Developing
EFL Phonological Awareness Skills Among First Year
Primary Stage Pupils**

إعداد

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to investigate the effectiveness of a rhyming centered instruction in developing EFL phonological awareness skills among first year primary stage pupils. The design of the research is pre-post, control group. The sample of the research consisted of thirty-eight pupils enrolled in first year at El-Nahas Primary school, Qalubia Governorate. The sample was divided into a control group that consisted of twenty pupils (N=20) and an experimental group that consisted of eighteen pupils (N=18). The experimental group pupils were taught using a rhyming centered instruction program, while the control group did not receive any training. The instrument of the research included an EFL phonological awareness test prepared by the researcher. The test was applied to the sample of the research before and after implementing the program. Results of the research revealed that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the control group pupils and those of the experimental group pupils in the post assessment of EFL phonological awareness skills in favor of the experimental group. Therefore, the EFL phonological awareness skills of the sample were developed as a result of teaching through rhyming centered instruction. This confirms that rhyming centered instruction is effective in developing the EFL phonological awareness skills among first year primary stage pupils. It was recommended that rhyming centered instruction can be used in developing other language skills such as writing and listening among students at the different educational stages.

Keywords: rhyming centered instruction- Phonological Awareness Skills

Introduction

Early childhood is a critical period for literacy development. Emergent literacy skills are an important part of children's early language development and are influenced long before children start formal instruction .According to the National Reading Panel (2006) reading proficiency involves five main skills or abilities: phonological awareness, an explicit awareness of the sound structure of language; phonics awareness, understanding the link between sounds in a language with a given symbol or letter in that language; fluency, or recognizing common words automatically (sight words) and phrasing words meaningfully;

vocabulary, knowing the meaning of the words one reads; and comprehension, knowing the meaning of the words in context, to tie together ideas, information and prior knowledge.

The terms phonological awareness and phonemic awareness are used interchangeably .Phonological awareness represents a range of manipulation and detection skills across different sizes of sound pieces. Phonemic awareness, however, specifically refers to the ability to manipulate and detect the smallest sound pieces in words (the phonemes). It refers to the ability to manipulate the phonemic structure of an utterance independently from its meaning. It is the awareness that words are composed of smaller units, that alliteration is when words begin with the same sound segment, and that rhyming is caused by words ending with the same sound segment. Therefore, it refers to the auditory task of identifying, distinguishing between, and working with an utterance at the level of larger units such as words, and syllables, or at the level of smaller units, such as phonemes. Phonemic awareness is an advanced stage of phonological awareness, defined as the ability to recognize that a spoken word consists of a sequence of phonemes. It is the capacity to isolate word segments, such as syllables, onset, rhymes and phonemes (Baciu, 2010, Phillips and Lonigan, 2008).

Consequently, Richards (2007) indicated that it is necessary to distinguish between phonemic awareness and phonological awareness. Phonemic awareness is an understanding of spoken language. Phonological awareness entails understanding of spoken language and involves tasks such as rhyming words; comparing initial sounds; determining the number of phonemes in a word; identifying two sections in a compound word and separating syllables. Phonemic awareness includes tasks of individual phonemes or within words such as blending, deleting, substituting and moving.

Therefore, it can be concluded that phonemic awareness is the understanding or insight that a word is made up of a series of discrete sounds (phonemes). This awareness includes the ability to pick out and manipulate sounds in spoken words. PA is an umbrella term that includes phonemic awareness, or awareness of words at the phoneme (sound) level. It also includes an awareness of word units larger than the phoneme. Therefore, PA includes: words within sentences; rhyming units within words; beginning and ending sounds within words and phonemes, or sounds, within words (phonemic awareness).Phonological awareness (PA)

refers to the ability to manipulate the phonemic structure of an utterance independently from its meaning. It is the awareness that words are composed of smaller units, that alliteration is when words begin with the same sound segment and that rhyming is caused by words ending with the same sound segment (Buckstein, 2010, Richards, 2004, Tibi, 2005).

Young children are demonstrating PA when they begin to develop an awareness of the various sound units of speech as separate from their meaning .PA is often described as encompassing a continuum of skills, ranging from such basic skills as rhyming and alliteration to more complex skills such as identifying and manipulating phonemes, which are the individual sound units of a word. PA is measured at the beginning of kindergarten as one of the two best predictors of how well children will learn to read during their first two years of school, along with letter knowledge (Bolduc and Lefebvre ,2012,Stephen and Schmitz, 2011).

PA is the skill that is most directly linked with literacy development in the preschool years and early elementary school years. According to Roth and Baden (2001), rhyming and alliteration are two early developing PA skills in typically developing children. They represent the child's sensitivity to the understanding that speech is comprised of a sequence of individual units. Children who begin school with the ability to recognize and produce rhymes are more likely to become successful readers than children who do not have this level of awareness. Children demonstrate PA through knowledge of the syllabic structure of words (the ability to segment words into syllables), onset/rime (the ability to perform alliteration and rhyming activities), and the phonemic structure of words, often referred to as phonemic awareness (the ability to segment words into phonemes). Children enter kindergarten with the ability to manipulate phonemes and identify letters, they progress at a faster pace in learning to read (Hismanoglu,2012, Reynolds, Callihan and Browning, 2003, Yang, 2009).

Degéland Schwarzer (2011) and Walker (2003) indicated that PA is an awareness of phonemes or sounds that are represented by letters of the alphabet. It is the components of sounds and words. Students learn by identifying letters, then putting sounds to them and then blending into words. They know sounds blended to form words. It describes the ability to analyze and manipulate language on two levels. On the word level, PA refers to the ability to manipulate and analyze larger phonological units (e.g., rhyming and blending words). On the phonemic level, phonological

ability refers to the ability to analyze and manipulate the individual sound units (phonemes) within a word.

Therefore, with explicit phonological instruction from a kindergarten teacher, children are provided with a reading skill that can help them to become effective readers. It is the broader construct for knowing speech sounds, rhyming and alliteration and includes phonemic awareness .PA activities can be incorporated in the classroom in a variety of ways. They should be fun, play-based, and age/child appropriate, such as songs, chants and word-sound games are geared toward developing and heightening children's sensitivity to the sound structure of language. Word play, nursery rhymes and storybooks are an ideal way to increase PA .There are several sub skills, associated with PA: phoneme deletion; phoneme segmentation; phoneme categorization; syllabic awareness; rhyme awareness; sound blending; rhyme ; word awareness ; syllable awareness and phonemic awareness (Dahmer,2010;Lathroum,2011; Phelps,2003; Robinson,2010, Solari, 2006).

Explicit instruction calls for the teacher to gain student's attention, present new material, reinforce correct response, provide feedback to students on their progress and increase the amount of time that students spend actively engaged in learning course content. Its objective is to develop skills and help students to master a body of knowledge .Some children following explicit rhyming instruction are able to generate and identify rhyming words. By age 4, children demonstrate awareness of rhyme and alliteration without too much difficulty. At age 5, even before learning to read, children can adequately perform rhyming oddity tasks- wherein they must choose the non-rhyming word out from a group of four spoken words .Rhyming skills are measured by the ability to perform tasks such as: rhyme oddity tasks, where the child must select the word that does not rhyme with the other three words spoken; rhyme matching tasks, where the child must decide which picture rhymes with the stimulus picture presented; and rhyme production tasks, where the child must state a word that rhymes with the stimulus word spoken by the examiner (Burden and Byrd , 2013,Reynolds et al., 2003).

There are many reasons for PA instruction beginning in preschool. First, phonological sensitivity originates in the preschool period and predicts it in kindergarten and first grade. Second, research into the phonological sensitivity of this age group shows they are developmentally ready to be taught PA skills. Thus, there is a substantial increase in

phonological sensitivity ages of four to six (Burden and Byrd,2013,Callaghan and Madelaine,2012, Lathroum ,2011).

Accordingly , explicit instruction is defined as instruction that does not leave anything to chance and does not make assumptions about skills and knowledge that children will acquire on their own. Rhyming centered instruction has been emphasized in early childhood education. The most useful spelling patterns for beginning readers are rhymes, also known as word families or common phonograms. Readers who can perceive a rhyme in one word they decode can then apply that knowledge to other words with the identical spelling pattern. Rhyming is a form of PA based on the onset and rhyme units of sound (Pannell,2012,SaygÖ,2010).

Consequently, rhyming centered instruction is an excellent entry to PA because it directs children's attention to similarities and differences in the sounds of words. Rhymes are words and phrases that have a memorable rhythm and end in the same sound to add a musical effect. Rhyming centered instruction contains activities where the children are invited to attend and play with rhymes in many different ways. They are asked to listen to rhyming stories to recite rhyming songs, to use meaning to help anticipate specific rhyming words as they listen and generate rhymes on their own. Thus, sensitivity to rhyme is essential form of PA (Abdellah, 2002)

Thus, Gromko (2005) clarified that teachers who used music in their classrooms, along with rhymes, chants and song lyrics, helped kindergarten children develop better PA skills. Kindergarten children exposed to music made greater gains in the development of phonemic segmentation fluency than kindergarten children not exposed to music. Using music to teach letter names and sounds to children is a practice that has been around for many years. Simple tunes, chants and rhymes can help a child retain information.

Children may master rhyming before alliteration tasks because during rhyming tasks only the sound at the beginning of the word changes, whereas during alliteration tasks both the vowel and ending sounds change. Once children have an awareness of syllables and their subunits, they develop the ability to segment the syllables. This skill seemingly develops relatively close to those of rhyming and alliteration, and children should be able to break down the syllable by 4 years of age (Callihan,2003).

Early childhood classroom teachers believe in the power of music to engage children. Singing songs and learning to rhyme help build PA, especially being able to recognize, generate rhyming words and move sounds around to create new words. Music can empower students with a real world communicative advantage. The relation between music and language is clarified through Suggestopedia .The technique uses music with the goal to relax the student, which is believed to be an essential element for the learning process to take place. Moreover, music produces a state of mind that makes the brain relaxed. In fact music provides an entire brain stimulation and activates subconscious resources all necessary for acquisition and greater retention of vocabulary and language structures. The idea behind using music is apparently to relax students' defenses and open up their minds to the language (Engh, 2013, Horn, 2007,Salcedo,2010,Tares, 2010).

Therefore, developing a child's PA is an important part of developing a reader. Young children's ability to identify rhyme units is a component of PA. Thus, children benefit from direct instruction on rhyme recognition paired with fun activities that target this skill. Recognition of rhyme is one of the first ways that a child demonstrates PA. It helps the children begin to understand the rhyming instruction. Rhyming is a basic step in recognizing the smaller components of words and facilitates reading.

Context of the Problem

The present research intends to investigate how pupils can benefit from learning a foreign language when rhyming centered instruction is added to the curriculum. Shifting the focus of teaching method from spoken or read texts to a musically based material would provide students with the opportunity to practice foreign language production through entertaining songs. Introducing songs in the classroom may aid in the retention of texts, while producing an internal mental repetition that may stimulate language acquisition (Salcedo,2010).

In primary stage, the classroom teacher should have good understanding of students' phonological awareness knowledge to help in planning to address the needs of all learners. Many pupils come to primary stage with good awareness of how words can be divided into syllables, how to recognize and make words rhyme, and how to pick out individual sounds in words. For them, the general classroom instruction

focuses on PA and oral language development. Sometimes they are unaware that words consist of sounds. PA activities help pupils learn to distinguish individual sounds, or phonemes, within words. Many primary stage pupils experienced difficulty-segmenting words into syllables. They face problems in blending sounds versus isolating sounds, the degree of consciousness (e.g., recognition versus explicit identification of sound units). A student may have problems with PA such as ; he\she does not correctly complete blending activities; for example, put together sounds /d/ /o/ /g/ to make the word dog. He \ she does not correctly complete phoneme substitution activities; for example, change the /m/ in mat to /h/ in order to make hat. He\ she has difficulty with rhyming.

Thus, pupils need PA training in phonics instruction to be effective. For example, phonics instruction that begins by asking a child what sound the words sit, sand, and sock have in common will not make sense to a child who has difficulty discriminating sounds in words, cannot segment sounds within words, or does not understand what is meant by the term sound. Pupils must be able to discriminate /s/ in the words (sit, sand, and sock before it makes sense to them that the letter s stands for this sound in these words. They have problems recognizing the sound of the letters and difficulty connecting the sound to a letter. They also have problems recognizing words that rhyme or words that begin with the same sound.

Primary stage pupils can show their PA in several ways such as recognizing which words begin with the same letter, for example, "mop and "mom"; isolating parts of the word, particularly the beginning and ending sounds; blending individual sounds to create and say words; breaking words into individual sounds; rhyming words, for example, "cat" and "hat"; being able to omit a letter and still say a word or sound, for example, "if you remove the "b" from "ball" you would have "all" or changing a letter in a word to create a new word, for example, changing the "c" in "cat" to an "h" to create "hat".

To document the problem, the researcher conducted a pilot study on a sample of first year primary school pupils (thirty children). The pilot study consisted of an EFL phonological awareness test (PAT). The test included five questions in order to assess the EFL PA skills among pupils (sound word discrimination ; blending ;segmentation ; rhyming skills and phoneme awareness).The results of the test revealed that pupils are accustomed to paying attention to meanings in speech, not to phonemes. Separate phonemes are difficult to distinguish because speech is

continuous with phonemes folded together. Thus, there is a lack of EFL PA skills among the children .They cannot group words with similar and dissimilar sounds (mat, mug, sun) ; blend and split syllables (f_oot); blend sounds into words (m_a_n); segment a word as a sequence of sounds (e.g., fish is made up of three phonemes,/f/, /i/,/sh/) and detect and manipulate sounds within words (change r in run to s).They are also unable to segment words and syllables into constituent sound units .Also, they have difficulties recognizing words that rhyme or producing words that rhyme. They cannot hear the beginning sound in a word.

Statement of the problem

In spite the importance of EFL PA skills, there is a lack in them among first year primary school pupils. Thus, the present research aims at examining the effectiveness of using rhyming centered instruction in developing EFL phonological awareness skills among first year primary school pupils.

Questions of the Research

1. What are the features of rhyming centered instruction that can be used to improve EFL first year primary stage pupils' phonological awareness skills?
2. How far is rhyming centered instruction effective in developing EFL first year primary stage pupils' phonological awareness skills?

Review of Related Studies

PA has been identified as one of the most important predictors of reading success that should be addressed in preschool and kindergarten. Children who had difficulty with PA tasks such as blending, segmenting, and manipulating sounds remained in the bottom quarter of their class in reading four years later. Accordingly, PA skills predict early reading abilities. It is extremely important to educators because of its strong and positive correlation with reading development. It begins to develop during the preschool and early elementary years and, therefore, is a crucial component of formal and intentional instruction that needs to be addressed in order to prevent reading difficulties among children as they progress through their educational years .Thus, a number of studies have investigated the variables of this study as follows:-

Reynolds, Callihan and Browning (2003) confirmed that PA is a strong predictor of success in learning to read. Rhyming ability is an early developing component of PA. Therefore, it is believed that strengthened early rhyming ability might facilitate the acquisition of reading. Thus, they conducted a study that examined the effect of the explicit teaching of rhymes on improving the children's ability to identify and produce rhyming words between a pretest and a posttest. Results showed that the rhyming abilities of children who received explicit instruction improved significantly more than did the rhyming abilities of children who did not receive this instruction.

Moritz(2007) clarified that PA is related to rhythm, if all aspects of rhythm could be demonstrated to be related to PA, then many different kinds of age-appropriate musical rhythm activities might be beneficial, for example, clapping out the sequence of sounds in a simple song (i.e., matching a rhythm pattern).Beat production was significantly correlated to a composite measure of PA representing four tasks: sound oddity (identifying the odd word in a set of three words wherein two share a phoneme); blending phonemes (blending two or more phonemes into a word); blending onset and rime (blending the first phoneme and the balance of the word into a word), and phoneme elision (deleting a phoneme from various parts of a word to make a new word).

Chen (2008) conducted a study to evaluate the effects of explicit phonics instruction on PA to arouse students' awareness of letter sound knowledge and PA skills such as blending and segmenting. The results of the study confirmed the effectiveness of explicit phonics instruction in developing students' phonological awareness skills.

In addition, Yeh and Connell(2008) clarified the effectiveness of rhyming instruction in developing PA among kindergarten children. The sample of the study consisted of 128 children. They were randomly assigned to three approaches for augmenting early literacy instruction: (a) instruction in phoneme segmentation, blending, and letter–sound relationships, (b) rhyming instruction and (c) vocabulary instruction. The phoneme segmentation approach was more effective in promoting phoneme segmentation skill. Existing research suggests that phoneme segmentation skill is a better predictor of early progress in learning to read than rhyming skill or vocabulary knowledge. Thus, the results suggest that instruction emphasizing phoneme segmentation is not only more likely to promote phoneme segmentation skill, but also more likely to

promote future reading ability than rhyming or vocabulary activities, even for highly disadvantaged children as young as 4 years old. Children learn to discriminate between words that differ by a single phoneme. Children in this study were exposed to instruction in rhyming activities for teaching PA. Children in this group were also asked to provide words with the same initial consonant.

Buckstein (2010) explored the relationship between rhyming ability and PA skills/reading ability, by examining the effect of explicit rhyming instruction on those skill sets. It is hypothesized that explicit rhyming instruction, provided concurrently with the standard classroom curriculum PA instruction, will cause a significant improvement in rhyming skills and possibly reading skills, but will not significantly improve the other PA skills assessed. A total of 18 typically developing, kindergarten-age children participated in this study. They were randomly assigned to either an Experimental Group (EG)(N=9) or a Control Group (CG) (N=9). They were each pretested using 7 subtests from the Phonological Awareness Test. Following pretesting, EG children were provided with 7 sessions of explicit rhyming instruction. Following instruction; all children were post-tested, again using the PAT. The results of this study indicate that explicit rhyming instruction can improve early reading abilities and therefore support this study's hypothesis that rhyming instruction will have little effect on PA skills but may have a unique relationship with reading. These results add further support to the growing body of evidence that maintains that rhyming ability plays a foundational role in reading success.

Harper (2011) clarified that PA is an important precursor in learning to read. This awareness of phonemes fosters a child's ability to hear and blend sounds and spell phonetically. Thus, he conducted a quantitative study that assessed pre -K children's nursery rhyme knowledge and PA literacy, provided PA training with an experimental group of children and investigated the effects of explicit nursery rhyme instruction on participants' phonemic skill. These data reveal that children exposed to the intervention consisting of explicit nursery rhyme instruction significantly outperformed children in the control group on rhyme awareness. Results of this research suggest that knowledge of nursery rhymes enhances children's PA and sensitivity to individual phonemes and rhyme and stimulates phonemic skill development.

Schmitz (2011) investigated the effectiveness of the Road to the Code phonological awareness program in the development of at-risk, kindergarten students' phonological awareness and early reading skills. Six kindergarten students were identified as experiencing difficulty in the area of phonological awareness and were divided into three groups. This study included three phases: a baseline phase, during which no instruction in the Road to the Code program was provided; an intervention phase, during which the Road to the Code program was implemented; and a maintenance phase. Student's reading progress was monitored using standardized measures from the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and experimenter-developed measures. Program effectiveness was evaluated through a multiple baseline across participants design. Results indicated that participation in the Road to the Code program resulted in an increase in the students' phonological awareness skills and that these gains maintained following the completion of the program. Additionally, students demonstrated the ability to generalize learned skills to progress monitoring measures containing novel content.

Moritz, et al. (2013) clarified the links between early rhythm skills, musical training and PA. They also investigated the links between kindergartners' music rhythm skills and their PA in kindergarten and second grade; and an investigation of whether kindergartners who receive intensive musical training demonstrate more phonological skills than kindergartners who receive less. They compared phonological awareness sub skills of kindergartners in two schools: one with daily music lessons and the other with weekly lessons. The phonological awareness sub skills of the groups were equal at the beginning of the year, but, at the end of the year, the children who received intensive musical training showed disproportionate improvement in rhyming skills and greater ability to perform phoneme segmentation tasks, in comparison to those who had received less musical training. The children in the musical training intensive group also showed disproportionate improvement in their rhythm pattern production sub skills .Results indicated that rhythm skill was related to phonological segmentation skill at the beginning of kindergarten and that children who received more music training during kindergarten showed improvement in a wider range of PA skills at the end of kindergarten than children with less training. Further, kindergartners' rhythm ability was strongly related to their PA.

Therefore, young children need to understand that words are made up of discrete sounds. Music and song nurture PA such as alliteration, rhyme, and rhythm which help build auditory awareness skills, a necessary component of reading. This can be developed through experiences with listening to, memorizing and playing with sounds in songs and rhymes. Nurturing the elementary classroom environment with meaningful music activities may help aid young children in developing skills necessary for success. The use of music in the foreign language classroom offers an approach to enhance students' awareness of another culture, and also can aid in the practice of communication skills (Seeman, 2008; Lee, 2009; Tares, 2010; Yang, 2011; Yuliana, 2003).

Music plays a predominant role in the part of learning. Singing songs rhythmically with actions could help children pronounce words. Therefore, with phonological processing skills, musical processing skills involve mental operations that help identify, compare, distinguish and reproduce pitch, duration, intensity and timbre of a variety of sound stimuli. Songs provide a way for beginning students to repeatedly hear the native pronunciation in a natural occurrence until they are comfortable enough to produce speech. In the case of songs, students would hear the correct sounds rather than their own strong non-native pronunciation that is heard when they read. Cognitively, songs have been linked to the development of automaticity in students, which is the ability to know what to say and be able to say it without pausing. Teachers can take advantage of music to facilitate language acquisition. Accordingly, music and language processing centers are directly connected and situated near each other in the human brain which processes music and language grammar similarly (Jonathan and Lefebvre, 2012, Kumar, 2009, Salcedo, 2010).

According to foreign language students, learning English through songs is both interesting and educational. Songs can help students to learn language in a natural and pleasant way. Some students complain that it is easy for students to learn new songs and remember rhyme, rhythm and chants. Using songs as tools for teaching a foreign language has many benefits. They are able to change the mood in the class and with the smoothing effect of music to provide a comfortable class environment. Besides, utilizing songs in class environment amuses students, helps them feel relaxed and get rid of their negative attitudes towards a foreign language. Songs help motivate the learners as they provide a pleasant

atmosphere. The students are encouraged to be actively involved in the learning process by making use of their musical knowledge. In this way songs help students to develop confidence for language learning. Thus, songs are the effective tool to practice pronunciation for EFL learners (Yang, 2011).

Keskin (2011) conducted a study to clarify using songs as audio materials in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. Songs are one of the instruments, which provide students with the information related to target culture. In foreign language teaching, activities which are created by using songs contribute to the development of language skills from grammar to pronunciation. Therefore, these activities can be carried out in all classes ranging from very basic levels to advanced ones. The use of activities has positive effects on students within their language learning process and helps them to be encouraged toward foreign language.

Kramer (2001) and Sevik (2012:11) clarified the advantages of using songs as they are regarded as the most effective way of teaching listening comprehension to young learners; they are regarded as one of the mostly-enjoyed activities and one the most effective language learning strategies and a good means for age-related language learning and accelerate memorization; provide a variety of comprehensible input, safe and natural classroom and a source of culturally-related elements.

Pullen and Justice (2003) provided examples of explicit instruction relating to rhyme and syllable awareness added to nursery rhymes. Accordingly, adding an explicit element to an engaging, meaningful and enjoyable activity such as reciting nursery rhymes would better aid the phonological development of preschoolers who are more at risk of developing reading and writing in elementary school. English-speaking children's knowledge of nursery rhymes at the age of three can predict rhyme awareness at the age of four. In turn, this could predict phonemic awareness, as well as reading and spelling performance at the age of five.

Nursery rhymes are a socially engaging, playful, and developmentally appropriate way for young children to hear, identify, manipulate and experiment with the sounds of language. Integrating nursery rhymes and chants into the early childhood curriculum contributes to a linguistically rich environment in which young children are exposed to the rich vocabulary, syntactic complexity, and decontextualized language contained within the English language. Combining activities in which

language is intentionally explored, manipulated and experimented within the context of nursery rhymes enhances children's PA, sensitivity to rhyme and phonemes and may stimulate phonemic skill development. Furthermore, as children develop sensitivity to individual phonemes, build their awareness of sound patterns of language and combine phonemes leading them to recognize new words in written texts, their reading ability improves. Rhyming is one of the first PA skills to develop. It may be the entry point for PA development. Young children become sensitive to rhyme at an early age and they are able to detect rhyme (Haper, 2011, Paulson, 2004).

Hypotheses of the Study

Based on the related studies and research questions, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- 1. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean score of the control group pupils and those of the experimental group pupils in the post administration of overall EFL phonological awareness skills in favor of experimental group.**
- 2. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean score of the control group pupils and those of the experimental group pupils in the post administration of EFL phonological awareness sub-skills in favor of experimental group.**
- 3. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean score of the experimental group pupils in overall EFL phonological awareness skills on the pre-and post- administration of the EFL phonological awareness skills test in favor of the post- administration.**
- 4. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean score of the experimental group pupils in EFL phonological awareness sub-skills on the pre-and post- administration of the EFL phonological awareness skills test in favor of the post- administration.**

Methodology

A.Participants

The participants of the study were Thirty-eight first year primary stage pupils from at El-Nahas Primary School, Qalubia Governorate, Egypt. They were taken from Al-Nahas primary school from Qalubia Governorate, Egypt. Among the 40 pupils, 18 were assigned as an experimental group and 20 were assigned as a control group.

B.Design

The design of the present research is the pre- post control group design. The researcher used two groups: an experimental group and a control group. Both groups were tested before and after conducting the experiment. This design is used when the researchers want to study cause and effect relationships between two or more variables through the active manipulation of the independent variable and through assigning randomly subjects into two equivalent groups: the control group and the experimental group.

C. Instrument of the Research

In order to fulfill the purposes of the study, the following instrument was designed.

The EFL Phonological Awareness Skills Test

The EFL PA skills test was prepared by the researcher to develop the EFL PA skills (See Appendix B). The test measures the participants' EFL PA skills (See Appendix A).The test consisted of five sections (14) questions. It was applied to the participants of the study (the experimental group and the control group) to assess their EFL PA skills before and after applying the program, as follows:-

- **Section One (sound word discrimination):** In this part of the test, the researcher aims at measuring the students' sound /word discrimination skills .This section is divided into three parts, in the first part the kindergarten children are given some pictures and words and are asked to identify whether the words or the sounds are the same or different. In part two, children are given some questions.

Each question includes four words (one of these words is different). They are asked to identify which word is different (odd one out). In part three, children are given some single phonemes and are asked to identify the different phoneme.

- **Section Two (Blending Skills):** In this part of the test, the researcher aims at measuring the students' blending skills .This section is divided into three parts, in the first part the kindergarten children are given some words and are asked to orally blend onset – rimes and their responses are recorded then analyzed by the researcher. In part two, children are given words that consist of two syllables and are asked to orally blend these syllables to form the word and their responses are recorded. In part three, children are asked to orally blend 2 or 3 phonemes into one word.
- **Section Three (Segmentation Skills):** In this part of the test, the researcher aims at measuring the students' segmentation skills .This section is divided into two parts, in the first part the kindergarten children are given some words and are required to identify the first sound in a word. In part two, children are asked to identify the final phoneme of the words that are given to them. All responses are recorded and then analyzed by the researcher.
- **Section Four (Rhyming Skills):** In this part of the test, the researcher aims at measuring the students' rhyming skills .This section is divided into two parts, the first part involves first, a rhyme-identification task, requiring the child to discriminate between pairs of words that rhyme and pairs of words that do not. In part, two, a rhyme production task, requiring the child to generate a word that rhyme with the word provided by the researcher.
- **Section Five (Phoneme Skills):** In this part of the test, the researcher aims at measuring the students' phoneme skills .In this section , children are asked to learn to recognize individual sounds in a word ; recognize the same sounds in different words; recognize a word, in a set of three that has an odd sound; listen to a sequence of separately spoken sounds and then combine the sounds to form a word; break a word into separate sounds and count how many sounds they hear ; recognize the word that remains when a phoneme is removed ; make a new word by adding a phoneme to an existing word and substitute one phoneme for another to make a new word.

Determining the Validity of the Research Instrument

The EFL phonological awareness skills test was submitted to a jury of EFL experts (see appendix C) , they were asked to determine the validity of the instrument in terms of clear instructions , items and the questions' suitability for the pupils' level. . They indicated that the tests instructions were clear and the passages were suitable for pupils' levels and background knowledge. Therefore, the test was a valid measure of phonological awareness skills (Face Validity).To ensure the content validity of the test, it was developed in the light of a systematic and accurate of literature and previous studies. This accurate and systematic review determined the general form of the test, its form of questions and how they should be corrected. Therefore, the content of the test was representative of the skills that were intended to be measured. Thus, the test was valid and had a content validity.

Determining the Reliability of the Research Instrument

The reliability of the instrument was measured by using the test-retest method. The instrument was administered to a group of first year primary stage pupils participated in the study from Al-Nahas primary school from Qalubia Governorate, Egypt. Then, it was administered to the same group again after two weeks. The Pearson correlation between the two administrations was (0.88) at the 0.01 level. Therefore, the instrument was reliable.

The Program Based on Rhyming Centered Instruction

The purpose of the program is to develop EFL PA skills for kindergarten children and provide them with some theoretical knowledge about the EFL PA skills. (For the program, see Appendix D). It aimed at achieving the following objectives:-

Developing children's ability to identify the sounds\ words that are the same and different.

Helping children to identify the difference between single phonemes.

Helping children to blend onset-rimes orally.

Developing children's ability to blend two phonemes into one word orally.

Developing children's ability to identify the initial and the final sound in any word.

Improving children's ability to identify and produce rhyming words.

The program based on rhyming centered instruction consisted of sixteen sessions, the first two sessions of which were devoted to the introduction of the program to the sample of the study. The remaining sessions were instructional sessions through which the EFL PA skills were presented to the study sample. The program lasted seven weeks. The researcher used PowerPoint presentation, printed handouts, the video clips, and pictures in implementing the program. It was conducted by the researcher with the experimental group for seven weeks with 60 minute sessions every a week. A variety of fun, play-based phonological activities were used with the class that incorporated the spectrum of PA skills (e.g., rhyming, sound matching, sound isolation, sound blending, sound addition or substitution, and sound/syllable segmentation). The goal of each activity was to heighten the children's awareness of sounds in spoken language. The children participated by singing, listening, answering questions, and following directions.

The following is a list of the PA activities addressed during training:

- 1. Sound Matching/Sound Identification**
- 2. Rhyming Activities**
- 3. Sound Addition or Substitution Activities**
- 4. Sound Blending Activities**
- 5. Sound Segmentation Activities**

Guidelines of the program

- Building a rapport between the researcher and children.**
- Providing non-threatening atmosphere.**
- Encouraging interaction between the children and the researcher and between the children themselves.**
- Encouraging children's participation in the activities and tasks.**
- The rhyming tasks chosen are appropriate for the overall age and linguistic level of the children involved.**

- Using pictures and videos to help children develop their phonological awareness.

Procedures of the Study

Pretesting

The EFL PA skills of each pupil were assessed using an EFL Phonological awareness test (PAT). The PAT is a standardized test, designed to assess a variety of PA skills among primary stage pupils. In order to make sure that both groups are almost equivalent in the EFL PA skills, the EFL PAT was administered to both groups before implementing the program. The pre-test was used to determine the student's mastery level of the EFL PA skills. "T" test was used to compare the results of the two groups which proved to be equal. The means, standard deviation and "t" value of both groups were computed.

Table (1): "t" test between the control group and the experimental group in the pre-test of the Overall EFL phonological awareness skills

Skills	Group	N	Mean	S. D.	"T" value	Df	Sig.
Overall EFL Phonological Awareness Skills	Exerimental	18	2.3899	.8498	.523	36	N. S.
	Control	20	2.2500	.7864			

Table (1) indicates that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of both groups on the overall EFL PA skills pre-test, where "t" value is (.523), which is not significant at (0.01) level of significance. This means that both groups are equivalent in EFL PA skills.

Table (2) : "t" test between the control group and the experimental group in the pre-test of the EFL Phonological Awareness Sub-Skills

Skills	Group	N	Mean	S. D.	"T" value	Df	Sig.
Sound Word Discrimination Skills	Experimental	18	2.5556	0.6863	0.372	36	N. S.
	Control	20	2.4500	1.0416			
Blending Skills	Experimental	18	2.3889	0.8498	1.595	36	N. S.
	Control	20	2.000	0.6489			
Segmentation Skills	Experimental	18	2.444	0.7838	0.498	36	N. S.
	Control	20	2.300	0.9787			
Rhyming Skills	Experimental	18	1.333	0.4851	1.353	36	N. S.
	Control	20	1.0500	0.7592			
Phoneme Skills	Experimental	18	12.778	2.9814	2.095	36	N. S.
	Control	20	11.000	2.1275			

Table (2) indicates that there is no significant differences between the mean scores of both groups on the EFL PA sub- skills pre-test, where "t" value for sound word discrimination skills is (0.372); blending skills is (1.595); segmentation skills is (0.498) , rhyming skills is (1.353) and phoneme skills is (2.095) which is not significant at (0.01) level of significance. This means that the two groups are equivalent in their EFL PA sub-skills.

Consequently, both groups were proved to be equivalent in their EFL PA skills and sub-skills. The suggested program was applied on the experimental group. It lasted for ten weeks in which each session lasted one hour. After finishing the treatment an immediate post-test was applied on the study sample to investigate the effectiveness of the suggested program.

Findings of the Study

The findings of the present study are presented in the light of the hypotheses of the study using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings are stated as follows:-

Findings of Hypothesis (1)

The first hypothesis states "there is a statistically significant difference between the means scores of the control group pupils and experimental group pupils in the post administration of overall EFL phonological awareness skills in favor of experimental group".

Table (3) presents the students' mean scores, standard deviations, t - value and level of significance of the experimental and control group in the post administration of the EFL phonological awareness skills.

Table (3): t' test between the control group and the experimental group in the post-test of the EFL Phonological Awareness skills

Skills	Group	N	Mean	S. D.	"T" value	Df	Sig.
Overall EFL Phonological Awareness Skills	Experimental	18	51.779	1.7675	38.792	36	0.01
	Control	20	22.850	2.6808			

Table (3) shows that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the overall EFL PA skills, where "t-value" is (38.792) which is significant at the (0.01) level of significance .Thus, the first hypothesis was supported.

Findings of Hypothesis (2)

The first hypothesis states "there is a statistically significant difference between the means scores of the control group pupils and experimental group pupils in the post administration of overall EFL phonological awareness sub-skills in favor of experimental group".

The second hypothesis has the following sub-hypotheses

- There is a statistically significant difference between the means scores of the control group and experimental group in the post administration of sound word discrimination skills in favor of experimental group.
- There is a statistically significant difference between the means scores of the control group and experimental group in the post administration of blending skills in favor of experimental group.
- There is a statistically significant difference between the means scores of the control group and experimental group in the post administration of segmentation skills in favor of experimental group.

- There is a statistically significant difference between the means scores of the control group and experimental group in the post administration of rhyming skills in favor of experimental group.
- There is a statistically significant difference between the means scores of the control group and experimental group in the post administration of phoneme skills in favor of experimental group.

Table (4) presents the students' mean scores, standard deviations, t - value and level of significance of the experimental and control group in the post assessment of the EFL PA sub- skills.

Table (4): t'' test between the control group and the experimental group in the post-test of the EFL Phonological Awareness Sub-Skills

Skills	Group	N	Mean	S. D.	"T" value	Df	Sig.
Sound Word Discrimination Skills	Experimental	18	11.55 5	1.822	14.600	36	0.01
	Control	20	3.850	1.424			
Blending Skills	Experimental	18	6.278	0.733	15.054	36	0.01
	Control	20	2.300	0.895			
Segmentation Skills	Experimental	18	6.611 1	0.916 4	13.196	36	0.01
	Control	20	3.350 0	0.587			
Rhyming Skills	Experimental	18	3.833	0.383	15.735	36	0.01
	Control	20	1.500	0.513			
Phoneme Skills	Experimental	18	22.27 8	1.637 9	18.310	36	0.01
	Control	20	12.30 0	1.719 8			

Thus, table (4) indicated that the experimental group was much better than their counterparts in EFL PA sub-skills (sound word discrimination skills, blending skills, segmentation skills and rhyming skills) where "t" value is (14.600) for sound word discrimination, (15.054) for blending skills, (13.196) segmentation skills, (15.735) for rhyming skills, (18.310) for phoneme skills which is significant at the (0.01) level of significance. Therefore, the second hypothesis was confirmed.

Findings of Hypothesis (3)

The third hypothesis states "there is a statistically significant difference between the means scores of the pre and post administration of the experimental group pupils in overall EFL phonological awareness skill in favor of post administration ".Table (5) presents the students' mean scores, standard deviations, t -value and level of significance of the pre and post administration of the overall EFL PA skills.

Table (5): "t" test between in the pre and post administration of the experimental group in the EFL phonological awareness skills

Skills	Measurement	N	Mean	S. D.	"T" value	Df	Sig.
Overall EFL Phonological Awareness Skills	pre	18	25.333	1.9704	51.576	17	0.01
	post	18	51.779	1.7675			

Table (5) indicated that the experimental group surpassed the control group in the overall phonological awareness skills where "t-value" is (51.576) which is significant at the (0.01) level of significance .Thus, the third hypothesis was supported.

Findings of Hypothesis (4)

The fourth hypothesis states that "there is a statistically significant difference between the means scores of the pre and post assessment of the experimental group in EFL phonological awareness sub- skills in favor of post administration ".

The fourth hypothesis has the following sub-hypotheses

- "There is a statistically significant difference between the means scores of the pre and post administration of the experimental group in sound word discrimination skills in favor of post administration ".
- "There is a statistically significant difference between the means scores of the pre and post administration of the experimental group in blending skills in favor of post administration ".
- "There is a statistically significant difference between the means scores of the pre and post administration of the experimental group in segmentation skills in favor of post administration ".
- "There is a statistically significant difference between the means scores of the pre and post administration of the experimental group in rhyming skills in favor of post administration ".

- "There is a statistically significant difference between the means scores of the pre and post administration of the experimental group in phoneme skills in favor of post administration " .

Table (6) presents the students' mean scores, standard deviations, t - value and level of significance of the pre and post administration of the test for experimental group children in EFL phonological awareness sub-skill .

Table (6): "t" test between the pre and post administration of the experimental group in EFL phonological awareness sub- skills

Skills	Measurement	N	Mean	S. D.	"T" value	Df	Sig.
Sound Word Discrimination Skills	Pre	18	3.1667	0.618	32.069	17	0.01
	Post	18	12.444	1.097			
Blending Skills	Pre	18	2.9444	0.639	13.383	17	0.01
	Post	18	6.5556	1.0416			
Segmentation Skills	Pre	18	3.2222	0.943	10.125	17	0.01
	Post	18	6.6111	0.916			
Rhyming Skills	Pre	18	1.3333	0.4850	17.610	17	0.01
	Post	18	3.8889	0.3234			
Phoneme Skills	Pre	18	15.722	15.722	16.833	17	0.01
	Post	18	22.3889	22.389			

Thus, table (6) indicated that the experimental group improved their phonological awareness sub-skills considerably (sound word discrimination skills, blending skills, segmentation skills and rhyming skills) where "t" value is (32.069) for sound word discrimination,(13.383)for blending skills , (10.125)segmentation skills , (17.610) for rhyming skills,(16.833) for phoneme skills , which is significant at the level of significance. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis was confirmed.

Discussion of the Results

The main purpose of this study is to develop EFL PA skills among primary stage pupils through using a program based on rhyming centered instruction. The suggested program included a variety of tasks and activities for helping pupils to develop their EFL PA skills. The results of the study showed that the program proved to be statistically and educationally significant in developing children's EFL PA skills. This

result is consistent with the results of previous studies such as; Callihan (2003) ;Richards(2007) ;Chen(2008) ;YEH & CONNELL2008) ;Buckstein (2010) ; Bolduc and Lefebvre (2012) ; Jonathan and Lefebvre (2012).

Consequently, after implementing the program, the first year primary stage pupils' EFL PA skills were improved. They become able to: identify the sounds\ words that are the same and different; identify the difference between single phonemes; blend onset-rimes orally; identify the initial and final sound in any word; identify and produce the rhyming words. These improvements can be related to the use of the program, as it contained various activities and tasks that help children to develop their EFL PA skills effectively. They become able to discriminate between sound and word through engaging in activities. Also, the researcher uses interesting and motivating flash cards and pictures to help them achieving their aims. Also, children become able to blend the onset-rime and phonemes orally. They identify the initial and final sound in the words through providing them with pictures and videos. Then, the researcher uses the nursery rhymes and pictures to help the children to recognize and producing rhyming words. Therefore, they become successful in rhyming detection tasks.

In addition, the experimental group pupils showed more improvements in their EFL PA sub-skills. .This proved and supported the second hypothesis statistically. This result may be due to the activities used in the suggested program such as; pair work, group work, team work, nursery rhymes and songs. These activities helped children to improve their EFL PA sub-skills .The researcher first models these activities in front of the children by using PowerPoint presentation, video tapes and CDs that helped them to practice it later (direct explanation and modeling). Then, she divided the students into pairs and groups and began to practice the previous activities with the guidance of the researcher (guided practice).

In addition, PA activities are oral. They are playful in nature and provide an engaging way for children to discriminate the sounds that make up words. For example, oral blending activities help children to hear how sounds are put together to make words. These activities will lead to decoding, in which children begin sounding out or blending words independently. Children who have difficulty orally blending words will have difficulty sounding out words while reading. The oral blending exercises begin with blending larger word parts, such as syllables, and progress to blending onsets and rimes and finally whole words sound by

sound. The earliest oral blending exercises use words that begin with continuous consonants such as s, m, l, f, r, and z. This makes it easier for children to hear the distinct sounds and more efficient to model the principle of oral blending, because all the sounds in the words can be “sung” together in a more natural manner. For example, the word sat can be stretched out and sung like this: sssaaat. Movements can also be added to help children note when the speaker goes from one sound to the next.

The oral segmentation exercises help pupils to separate words into sounds. These exercises begin with a focus on syllables, which are easier to distinguish than individual sounds. Segmentation exercises will lead to spelling, in which pupils begin segmenting words into their component sounds in order to write them. Pupils who have difficulty orally segmenting words will have difficulty breaking apart words to spell them. You can tell if pupils are developing the necessary segmentation skills when they begin asking questions such as “What stands for the /a/ sound in cat?” or “What stands for the /d/ sound in dog?”

After implementing the program, the EFL PA skills test was applied to the pupils again. The experimental group pupils scores in the test were improved greatly and this is obvious in performance. They become aware of sound word discrimination skills. Also, their blending, segmentation and rhyming skills are developed as a result of participating in the program. Moreover, their scores of the EFL PA skills improved significantly from pre-to post test. These developments can be due to the effect of the program based on rhyming centered instruction, which contained various activities and tasks that were designed to develop children's EFL PA skills. These results are consistent with the studies of Chen (2008) and Buckstein (2010).

Also, the EFL PA skills test was applied to the pupils again. The experimental group pupils scores in the test were improved greatly and this is obvious in performance. They began to identify whether the words or sounds are the same or different, such as cat\ cat= same , cat\ car= different. The researcher gave them some words and asked them to identify which word is different, they become able to perform this such as sun- fun- sun = fun is different. Also, they become able to show the difference between single phonemes such as which one is different? \s\ \s\ \k\= \k\. In addition , they become able to blend the onset-rimes orally such as : which word is this?m-ilk.They can orally blend syllables and phonemes, such as involved blending of different letters with the same

word family (e.g. b+an=ban) .The researcher introduced several activities to students to help them identify the initial and final sound isolation. Through using nursery rhymes and songs, kindergarten children become able recognize and produce rhyming words. In terms of PA instruction in the classroom, the children were given rhyming-centered games to play as a group, where the children had to generate a word that rhymed with a stimulus word or picture. They were also provided with word-family board games to play every session, in which they were given a word family rime and told to generate rhyming words that belonged to that word family. Moreover, their scores of the EFL PA skills improved significantly from pre to post test. These developments can be due to the effect of the suggested program based on rhyming centered instruction which contained various activities and tasks that were designed to develop children's EFL PA skills. These results are consistent with the studies of Richards (2007) and Buckstein (2010).

Conclusions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of a program based on rhyming centered instruction in developing EFL PA skills among first year primary stage pupils. It is an attempt to introduce some ideas about PA skills in an interesting and motivating way. Consequently, the results of the study indicated that the experimental group pupils performed better in the post assessment of the EFL PA skills test. Before implementing the program, there was a lack in the EFL PA skills among pupils. Therefore, there was a need for developing these skills among them. Thus, the researcher designed a program based on rhyming centered instruction that included various activities and tasks that aimed at developing the pupils' EFL PA skills and sub-skills.

During the implementation, the researcher used interesting and motivating tasks and activities that helped the children to be engaged and participate in an active way. The researcher encouraged children to participate in the classroom activities. The overall conclusion is that the rhyming centered instruction program is effective in developing EFL PA skills. Therefore, instruction in rhyming produced more rapid growth in EFL PA skills. One of the early signs of emerging sensitivity to the phonological structure of words is the ability to play rhyming games. In order to tell whether two words rhyme, the child must attend to the sounds in the words rather than to the meaning of the words. In addition, the

child must focus attention on only one part of a word rather than on the way it sounds as a whole. As children grow in awareness of the phonemes in words, they become able to judge whether words have the same first or last sounds with further development, they become able to isolate and pronounce the first, last, or middle sounds in words. At its highest levels of development, awareness of individual phonemes in words is evidenced by the ability to pronounce the sounds in multi-syllable words or to tell exactly how two words like task and tacks are different.

Therefore, primary stage pupils who have good PA skills are more than likely to become good readers in the following grades. PA program would help pupils progress from larger units of sound to smaller units of sound and children should be placed in a PA program according to their development level. The successful PA program would include making the link between letters and their sounds explicit and an emphasis on blending (analysis) and segmenting (synthesis) tasks.

In conclusion, the results of this study indicated that it is important for pupils to understand the relationship of rhyming instruction to PA as well as early reading skills. Pupils are motivated and confident in their PA skills through nursery rhymes. The teachers can move from rhyming songs to blending and segmenting a word in an onset and a rime and finally to fully blending and segmenting a word into phonemes. An increase in phonological sensitivity was observed by the children performing activities such as rhyming with the songs, identifying words that have same sounds and blending sounds together.

Recommendations of the Research

In the light of previous results, the following recommendations could be presented:

- Using pupils' literature to enhances the development of PA and narrative skills.**
- Training teachers of English language on using rhyming centered instruction based program while teaching English to their students in the early educational stages.**
- English language teacher should emphasize the development of the students' PA skills in the early educational stages to develop in the following stages.**

- Curriculum designers should make use of the rhyming centered instruction when designing English language courses.

Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the findings of the present study, the following implications for further research were suggested:-

- Investigating the effect of the rhyming centered instruction on English language learning among kindergarten children.
- Clarifying the influence of rhyming centered instruction on other language skills such as listening and reading acquisition .
- Investigating the effectiveness of rhyming centered instruction on developing students' attitudes towards studying English and reading awareness.
- Clarifying the effect of using other strategies on developing primary stage pupils' EFL phonological awareness skills.

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