The Effects of Dr. Seuss's Books on Elementary School Students'

Phonological Awareness and Reading Attitudes

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of Dr. Seuss's books on elementary school students' phonological awareness and reading attitudes, using both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data was collected from the phonological awareness tests and the reading attitude survey, while the qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews with students and teaching journals. Paired-sample t tests were employed to analyze 115 participating students' pretest and posttest scores. The results reveal that the twelve-week read aloud activities and phonological awareness instruction were found to have statistically significant effects in all the six parts of the phonological awareness test: rhyme awareness, beginning sound awareness, final sound awareness, phoneme blending, phoneme segmentation, and phonemic manipulation. The results of the survey on the students' English reading attitudes, however, did not show significant improvement. Based on the data from interviews, most of the students liked to read aloud or to be read aloud Dr. Seuss's books. The findings of this study proved the value of the utilization of Dr. Seuss's beginner reader books in phonological awareness instruction, where the phonological awareness skills could be developed and enhanced in a reading context and through a series of organized and research-based activities.

Keywords: Dr. Seuss's books, phonological awareness, reading attitudes

蘇斯博士繪本對國小學童聲韻覺識

與閱讀態度之影響

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摘要

　　本研究旨在探討使用蘇斯博士繪本提昇國小學童聲韻覺識與英語閱讀態度之成效。以桃園市近郊某國小 115 名三年級學童為研究對象，每週在老師引導下學童朗讀蘇斯博士繪本及進行聲韻教學活動。十二週後進行量化與質化資料分析，根據聲韻覺識能力前測與後測結果顯示，六種聲韻覺識能力 (韻腳覺識、字首音覺識、字尾音覺識、音素結合、音素分解、音素操作) 的提升達顯著效果，而從學童答對題數前後測百分比之對照分析，音素操作的進步最為明顯；閱讀態度問卷前後測結果顯示學童的英文閱讀態度則未達顯著差異。此外，根據與學童的訪談資料分析，多數學童因插圖和情節有趣而喜歡閱讀或聆聽老師朗讀蘇斯博士繪本。本研究結果肯定蘇斯博士繪本可以在實施朗讀活動及進行聲韻教學活動時，用於發展和加強學童的聲韻覺識能力。

關鍵詞：蘇斯博士繪本、聲韻覺識、閱讀態度

I. Introduction

In Taiwan, the Ministry of Education proclaimed the Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum Guidelines, and English instruction has been included in elementary school curriculum since 2001 (MOE, 1998). Since then, Taiwanese students started to receive English instruction from the fifth grade in elementary school stage. According to the Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum Guidelines, lessons of phonics (knowledge of letters and sounds) to develop students' phonological awareness are compulsory in elementary school English instruction, and some of the competence indicators for elementary school English subject are related to phonics. For example, students should be able to discriminate English consonant sounds and vowel sounds, as stated by the competence indicator 1-1-2; students should acquire the ability to apply phonics in reading aloud and spelling, as stated by the competence indicator 5-1-6 (Ministry of Education, 1998). However, as mentioned by Trehearne (2003), even though most elementary school students learn phonics in their textbooks, many of them still have difficulty using this knowledge as they read and spell. In other words, those students may have knowledge of letters and sounds to some extent, but they lack the ability to manipulate them at different levels, which usually leads to spelling mistakes when they are writing. For example, "cap" is sometimes misspelled as "cup" or "cop", while "tub" misspelled as "tud." This phenomenon shows the necessity to help students become more aware of smaller sound units in a word and knowledge of phonemes.

Owing to the reason mentioned above, some local governments in Taiwan set out their policies to tackle the problem. For instance, in 2011, the Education Bureau of Taoyuan County Government [EBTCG] launched a policy that all students in Taoyuan County where the present study was conducted should begin to learn English in the first grade of the elementary school stage. They required the first and second graders to take English courses once a week, and twice a week from their third grade. In light of numerous findings and many empirical research studies that phonological awareness has great impact on children's language development, the revised curriculum guidelines of Taoyuan County thus request students to acquire the knowledge of phonological awareness during the elementary school stage.

Phonological awareness is a strong predictor of a child's success in learning to read ; stimulation of phonological awareness will be most useful as part of the reading curriculum (Cramer, 2006) when teachers use picture storybooks which contain onset-rime words for children to practice in order to enhance their phonological awareness. Reading aloud storybooks to children could be one of the most important steps towards making a child a good reader (Burke, 1997). Specialists in reading (Beck & Juel, 1995; Flett & Conderman, 2002; Trehearne, 2003; Cramer, 2006) recommended Dr. Seuss's books as reading materials for beginning readers because Dr. Seuss's beginning reader books were not only written with short and controlled words, but they were also involved in rhyme elements which provide

children with opportunities to practice through combining and separating sounds.

In general, considerable attention has been paid to research issues related to vocabulary gain, teaching strategies, and positive attitude caused by using children's books in English classes; however, investigation on the effects of children's books such as Dr. Seuss's collection on phonological awareness is comparably an area where less work has been done. Therefore, the present study intended to explore whether phonological awareness instruction and read-aloud activities by means of Dr. Seuss's books help promote students' phonological awareness as well as their reading attitudes. The research questions to be explored in this study are as follows:

1. Are Dr. Seuss's books effective in developing elementary school students' phonological awareness?

2. Are Dr. Seuss's books effective in improving elementary school students' reading attitudes?

3. What do elementary school students think of Dr. Seuss's books?

II. Review of the Literature

Phonological awareness is a component of emergent literacy (Cramer, 2006). Generally speaking, phonological awareness is an understanding that the spoken language is made of words, and words consist of syllables, rhymes, and sounds (Trehearne, 2003). As Cramer (2006) stated, it is the ability to be aware of, think about, and manipulate the sounds of any sizes in one's spoken language; once children are aware of these sounds, they can break sentences apart into words, words into syllables, or words into phonemes. Powell and Aram (2008) indicated that once children apply the idea of chunking in spelling, it is easier for them to apply the strategy to reading.

Phonological awareness has been emphasized in the discussion of early literacy research, and the concept of phonological awareness usually mixes with phonemic awareness. That is, a large body of literature including phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and other related notions has been discussed under the broad term of phonological awareness. As Yopp and Yopp (2000) pointed out, phonemic awareness is a subset of phonological awareness, referring to sensitivity to and control over the phonemes.

A review of the literature showed that it is important to provide instruction in phonological awareness for English beginners. For example, Trehearne (2003) noted that although the focus of phonological awareness is initially on oral language play, it can be a connection between sound and print. Classroom teachers should be in the position to capitalize on children's natural propensity to experiment with sounds in their language (Yopp, 1995). Especially for young children at risk with reading problems, appropriate intervention can be administered to them before they actually struggle with learning to read (Anthony &

Francis, 2005). Schuele and Boudreau (2008) have introduced the sequence of phonological awareness instruction and intervention as Figure 1 presented (Adopted from Schuele & Boudreau, 2008, p. 6):
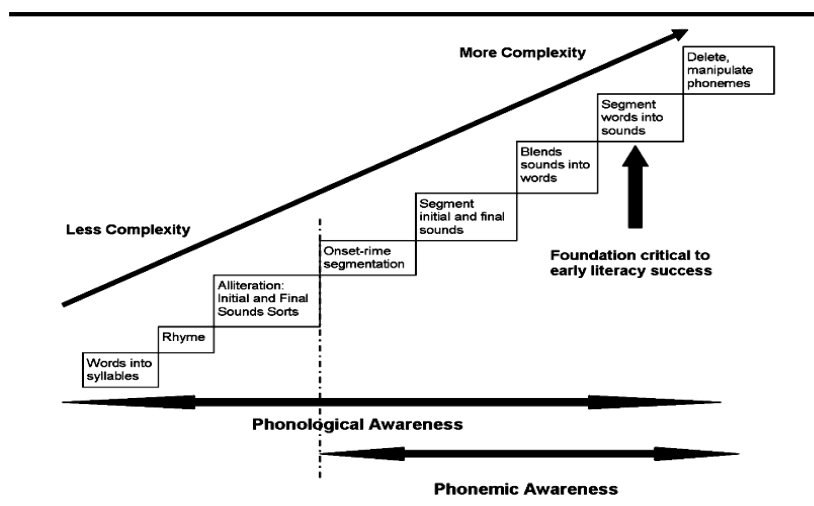

Figure 1 Sequence of phonological awareness instruction and intervention

In Figure 1, at the simplest level, the phonological awareness occurs when one has the ability to attend to and make judgments about the general sound structure of language (Schuele & Boudreau, 2008). Phonological awareness tasks include dividing words into syllables, identifying and generating rhymes, and matching words with the same beginning sound. At more complex levels, it requires the ability to isolate and manipulate individual sounds or phonemes.

While many activities have been recommended (Flett & Conderman, 2002) to help promote students' phonological awareness, Yopp (1995) indicated that reading aloud children's books is one of the natural and spontaneous ways in which attention is often turned to language itself by means of word play in stories, songs, and games. As Morrison and Wlodarcyzk (2009) noted, read-aloud activities are instructional practice in which teachers, parents, and caregivers read texts aloud to children. Through the interaction, the text is comprehended with the use of scaffolding (Militante, 2006). That is, the adult readers may add information, examples, and clarifications that support children in the construction of meanings (Kindle, 2010). To increase children's contact with print during read-aloud activities, adults are suggested to direct children to focus on specific parts of a book: the meaning of the print, the organization of the book and print, the letters, and the words (Piasta, Justice, McGinty, & Kaderavek, 2012).

Since read aloud can be an effective way to promote children's phonological awareness, careful selection of books for a read-aloud activity is important. To experiment with sounds in a target language, Yopp (1995) proposed some criterion for selection. First, the books have to

contain the element of playing with language, so that children can be encouraged to shift their focus from message to the language; second, the vocabulary and storyline should be appropriate for children's age; last, the books have to easily lead themselves to further language play (Yopp, 1995).

When it comes to the use of children's books for early literacy, many researchers and practitioners (e.g. Beck & Juel, 1995; Flett & Conderman, 2002; Trehearne, 2003; Cramer, 2006) especially recommended Dr. Seuss's books as reading materials for beginning readers. More specifically, in the domain of beginning reader books, Dr. Seuss's books are frequently taken as a good example by experts (Matulka, 2008; Travers & Travers, 2008). In Dr. Seuss's beginning reader books, texts were written in rhyme style. For example, in *Hop on Pop* (1963), Dr. Seuss wrote "*Pup up / Brown down / Pup is down / Where is brown? There is Brown! Mr. Brown is out of town*"; in *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish* (1960), "*My hat is old. My teeth are old. I have a bird. I like to hold. My shoe is off. My foot is cold.* " In these books, proper amount of words were used to compose the texts. These words are easy to be decoded and sounded out, and some of them are of high-frequency in order to add ease for students to read.

In America, on the day March 2nd every year, people hold activities to celebrate Dr. Seuss's birthday. Today, Seuss's name is synonymous with learning to read (Lambert, 2006). Beginning reader books had not been so much fun for children till Dr. Seuss's *The Cat in the Hat* (1957) was published. According to Nel (2007), Seuss once concluded that children were not learning to read because traditional beginning reader books were often boring. Thus, in order to provide a better beginning reader book, Dr. Seuss wrote *The Cat in the Hat* and used no more than 236 different words in this book, which became the first type of book for children known as "beginning" or "easy" readers. His publisher, Random House, then launched a series of beginner books (Matulka, 2008). In 2004, the American Library Association (ALA) even established the Theodor Seuss Geisel Award. This award is to recognize a good key role in the emergence of the beginning reader books as a new category of children's books (Lambert, 2006). Today, Dr. Seuss's books continue to be read by contemporary children all over the world, and they were even filmed as movies. As Korbeck (2003) noted, Dr. Seuss is not just any author or illustrator, but the one deserving a major celebration. In brief, Dr. Seuss has earned a remarkable role in the field of children's book.

In the last decades, there has been a wave of interest in the relationships between phonological awareness and language skills. For example, phonological awareness and reading have been found highly correlated. A chronicle study in America conducted by Hogan, Catt, and Little (2005) revealed that phonological awareness influenced reading initially, but once reading was underway, the process of learning to read would reversely influence phonological awareness. Another example, as observed by Cheng, Li, and Kirby (2012), English phonological awareness was a significant predictor of English listening comprehension for Chinese students in an English-immersion environment. They found that,

by Grade four, students who had developed the awareness learned spelling and phonological decoding more easily than students who had not. As these studies indicated, phonological awareness is essential for language skills and can be reinforced through the process of learning.

Some studies conducted in Taiwan relate to ways in terms of increasing students' phonological awareness. For example, many researchers (e.g. Kuo, 2011; Chou, 2012) have examined the phonics lessons in Taiwan's textbooks. The insufficiency of practice with regard to phonics and phonological awareness in exercises was discovered. A recent study on the design of phonics teaching in English textbooks, Chou (2012) indicated that exercises of phonics in Taiwan's textbooks are distinct compared to other exercises. In those textbooks, there are not enough exercises concerning phonological awareness as well as syllable and stress for students to practice and review what they have learned. Therefore, some teachers and researchers have looked for other materials or instructional strategies to help students learn phonics or enhance their phonological awareness. Other materials for instruction such as nursery rhymes (Wu, 2007) and decodable books (Chiou, 2009) have been used and proven to have positive effects on phonological awareness. Other studies applied various phonics instructional strategies, such as onset-rime focused phonics (Yang, 2009) and phonics highlighting (Chi, 2012) to improve students' phonological awareness.

In addition, research on the effects of reading aloud English books has been mounting for years. Hsu (2007) studied the impact of picture storybooks being read aloud, and the results showed that picture storybook read-aloud has a positive impact on word recognition and reading comprehension for both high and low English achievers. Huang (2008) investigated the effects of reading aloud English picture books on elementary school students and concluded that students held positive attitude toward the effectiveness of reading aloud on vocabulary development, reading comprehension enhancement and interest increase. Another study had similar findings. Tsai (2010) pointed out that reading aloud predictable books has a positive impact both on word recognition and learning attitudes. In terms of measures of reading comprehension and read-aloud, Sun (2012) also claimed that interactive read-aloud can significantly enhance students' language proficiency better than merely reading aloud without interaction. Moreover, a study conducted by Li (2013) indicated that instruction on phonological awareness is one of the popular strategies used by teachers during picture book interactive reading aloud activities.

In short, the aforementioned research studies pointed out that phonological awareness is crucial for students to build the foundation of phonics knowledge and this knowledge is key to success for English learning. In addition, reading aloud picture books can provide supportive contexts and is highly recommended as one of the effective strategies used in the phonological awareness instruction. Therefore, read-aloud was interwoven with phonological awareness activities to develop students' phonological awareness in the current study.

III. Method

1. Research Site, Participants, Instructor, and Teaching Materials

The school where this study was conducted is located in an urban area near Taoyuan Airport and there were 30 classes in this 57-year-old school. The instructor in the study was the researcher herself. The researcher had seven-year English teaching experiences and had been teaching English in the elementary school, the study site, for three years. The participants in this study included 115 third graders in five classes taught by the same English teacher, namely, the researcher. The total number of students in each class ranged from twenty-two to twenty-four. These participants had learned English for more than two years in school since they were third graders. Students in this school mainly came from families of agricultural business or airport service jobs. Quite a few parents sent their children to after-school classes nearby in the school district, which showed the parents' concern of children's grades. There were three English teachers in this school, and the English courses were taught from grade one to six due to Taoyuan County Government's policy which extended English courses to the first graders since 2011. As a result, the first and second graders had one English period every week, and in this study, the participating students who were in the third grade had two English periods per week.

Three of the Dr. Seuss' books, *Hop on Pop* (1963), *Green Eggs and Ham* (1960), and *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish* (1960), were used as teaching materials in this study. These books were selected due to the inclusion of easy vocabulary as well as rhymes. They also cater to students' desire for playing with language and are suitable for participants' current English competence. Each of the selected books was read aloud in English class for four weeks, in which phonological awareness activities were incorporated. All the pages of the books were scanned and presented through an overhead projector for every student to read aloud with the instructor.

2. Procedures of the Study

Procedures in this study revolved around read-aloud and the phonological awareness activities, which were carried out by the researcher for 10-15 minutes in each English period twice a week. In every period, read-aloud and phonological awareness instruction focusing on different tasks adopted from Schuele and Boudreau (2008) were undertaken. The instructor provided phonological awareness activities as an extension of the read-alouds. As Table 1 shows, the participants read aloud *Hop on Pop (1963)* in English class accompanied with phonological awareness activities. After the students read aloud the assigned pages with the teacher, phonological activities were carried out in a specific sequence suggested by Schuele and Boudreau. The following presents one example of activities for the first two weeks:

Table 1 Instructional syllabus of the book Hop on Pop (Seuss, 1963)

Week	Content	Focus rimes in Dr. Seuss's books	Activities
1	p.1~ p.20	up, all, ay, ight, ee	1. Talk about the cover and the author. 2. Whole class read aloud the text with the teacher. 3. Groups read aloud the text. 4. Syllables: Count syllables of words.
2	p.21~ p.36	ed, at, ad, ing, alk	1. Whole class read aloud the text with the teacher. 2. Groups read aloud the text. 3. Syllable: Count syllables by clapping hands. 4. Rhyme: Do the given two words rhyme?

The words and sounds used for the phonological awareness instruction were mostly chosen from Dr. Seuss's three beginning reader books mentioned above. For example, when the students read the words in *Hop on Pop* (1963), they were asked to count the syllables by clapping their hands. When they read "*We see a bee / Now we see three…*" in *Hop on Pop* (1963), they were expected to tell the sameness, the rime ee, in the three words *see*, *bee*, and *tree*. In *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish* (1960): "*Oh, dear! / I can't not hear / Will you please come over near?* " students were guided to combine the rime *ear* with other consonants to create different words like *tear* and *gear*. This process of using Dr. Seuss's books to develop students' phonological awareness seemed to correspond with what Yopp and Yopp (2000) pointed out that phonemic awareness would be more meaningful to be developed in the reading context rather than out of context.

In this study, the students also practiced segmenting some of the words they had read in Dr. Seuss' books. The teacher said a word, and asked the students to say the word at a very slow speed. For example, the word *ham* was said as [h…æ…m] in a prolonged manner, which might not be easy for some students. The teacher, therefore, used an alligator figure as a metaphor for a CVC word. As illustrated by Figure 2, when the alligator which was cut into three parts was put next to one another, students knew that they were expected to say the phonemes together as a whole word; when the three parts of the alligator were separated, with some space between one another, they knew that they had to say the phonemes one by one. Through a concrete figure as a metaphor for CVC words as Figure 2 below, students could understand how to manipulate the phonemes more easily.
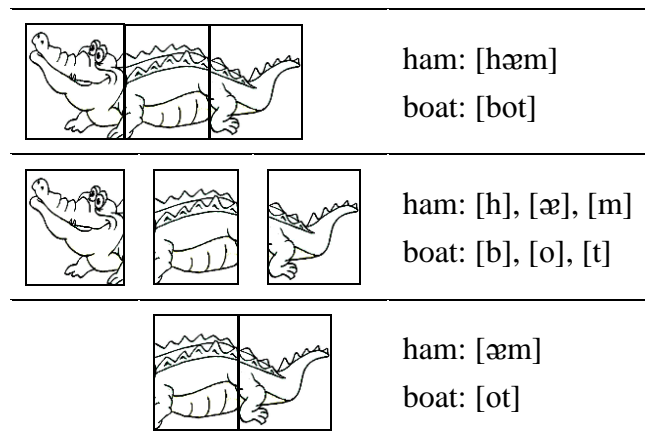
| | ham: [hæm] |
| | boat: [bot] |

| | ham: [h], [æ], [m] |
| | boat: [b], [o], [t] |

| | ham: [æm] |
| | boat: [ot] |

Figure 2 Teaching aid for playing with phonemes (alligator figure)

3. Instruments

A phonological awareness test was used to collect and analyze data regarding the changes in students' phonological awareness. The phonological awareness test consisted of six parts based on the sequence of phonological awareness instruction (rhyme oddity task, beginning sound oddity task, final sound oddity task, phoneme blending, segmentation task, phoneme manipulation) proposed by Schuele and Boudreau (2008). The words for the phonological awareness test were chosen from the rhymes in Dr. Seuss's books being read and practiced during the phonological awareness instruction.

The other instrument was a four-point Likert scale English reading attitude survey. It was adapted from Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) designed by McKenna, Kear, and Ellsworth (1995), which was administered to all participants and used to examine participants' reading attitude changes in this study. All of the items were translated to Chinese and some items have been adapted as to fit the situation in this study.

All the participants took the pre-test and the survey of reading attitudes in order to explore their original levels in terms of phonological awareness and reading attitudes. A posttest and a post survey were administered after the twelve-week read-alouds and phonological awareness instruction. The students' pre-test and post-test scores were compared and analyzed, using SPSS 21, to determine whether there was significant difference regarding the students' phonological awareness and their reading attitudes. Moreover, semi-structured interviews with 15 students were conducted after the phonological awareness instruction and all of the selected books had been read aloud. Data from instructor's teaching journals were also collected to triangulate the results obtained from the aforementioned tests and survey.

IV. Results and Discussion

1. Overall Results of the Pretest and Posttest

The aim of the study was to examine students' phonological awareness and English reading attitude change after reading aloud Dr. Seuss's books and receiving phonological awareness instruction. As presented in Table 2, after the twelve-week read aloud activities and phonological awareness instruction, the results showed that the mean of the total score increased more than 14 points, from 29.28 to 43.71. The results of the posttest revealed that students' overall phonological awareness improved significantly ($t=-16.982$, p < .001):

Table 2 Paired-sample t test on students' phonological awareness

	Total score	*M*	*N*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Pretest	50	29.28	115	12.288	-16.982	.000*
Posttest	50	43.71	115	5.638		

*P<0.001

A possible explanation for the improvement the students made on their overall phonological awareness is that the twelve-week read aloud and phonological awareness instruction might have strengthened the students' ability to notice and identify sounds in different positions in words and manipulate sounds within words. During the instruction, the phonological awareness was explicitly taught following the sequence of previously mentioned phonological awareness instruction and intervention proposed by Schuele and Boudreau (2008).

2. Percentage of Correctness for the Six Abilities in Phonological Awareness Test

Figure 3 as shown below depicts the overall percentage of correctness for the six abilities in the phonological awareness pretest and the posttest:
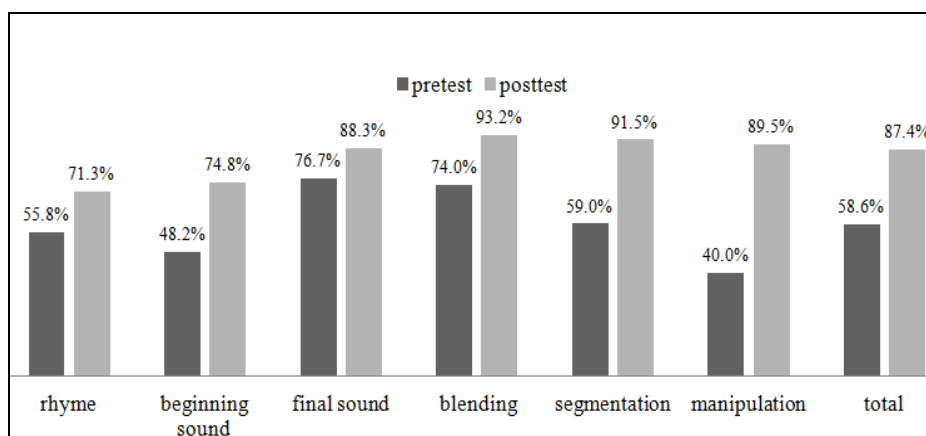

Figure 3 Percentage of correctness for the six abilities of phonological awareness

As presented in Figure 3, the participants made the largest improvement in the part of manipulating phonemes, which was 40% correct in the pretest and turned into 89.5% correctness in the posttest, indicating that students had the most difficulty in manipulating

phonemes at the initial stage; however, big progress was achieved after receiving this instruction. The part of detecting final sounds, which was from 76.7% correctness in the pretest to 88.3% in the posttest, showed the least improvement in this study, implying that students had the least difficulty in detecting final sounds task than other tasks. According to the complexity in the sequence of phonological awareness instruction (Schuele and Boudreau, 2008), the phonological awareness skills are hierarchically complex in the process of development, which means the level of difficulty of these skills from rhyme to manipulation were getting higher and higher for the students. That is, the students who could not detect the rhyme, beginning sound, final sound or blend the given phonemes into words usually had difficulty in segmenting a word into distinct phonemes, let alone manipulating the assigned phonemes. Therefore, the instruction to enhance students' phonological awareness in this study started with noticing sounds in words, then gradually moved forward to blending, segmenting, deleting phonemes in the spoken language.

In the following section below, the individual percentage of correctness for the six abilities is given respectively and will be discussed in the next section for more details:

(1) Rhyme awareness. The rhyme oddity test required students to circle a picture representing one word that did not rhyme with the other three pictures representing other three words after they had listened to a set of four words (see Appendix A and B). The percentage of correctness for the rhyme oddity task in the pretest and the posttest were presented in the following Figure. The correctness of the five items (from A1 to A5) in rhyme oddity test all increased in the posttest.
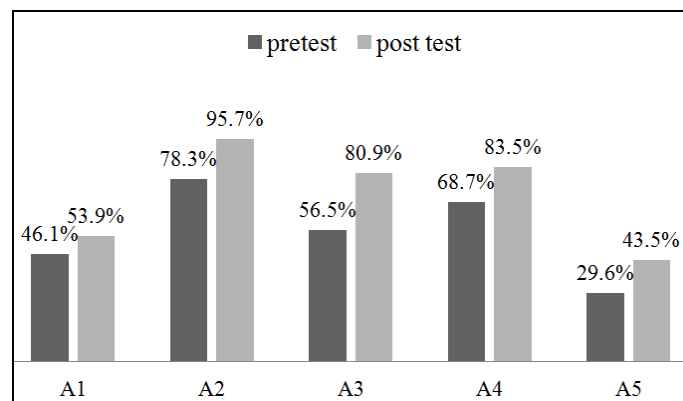

Figure 4 Percentage of correctness for the rhyme oddity task

(2) Beginning sound awareness. The second part of the phonological awareness test was the beginning sound oddity task (see Appendix B -- Phonological Awareness Test Script) and the students were asked to discriminate a picture that had a different initial sound from the other three after listening to four words. Figure 5 as shown below gives the percentage of correctness for the beginning sound oddity task in the pretest and the posttest. The students made progress on all the items of this task in the posttest, from B1 to B5.
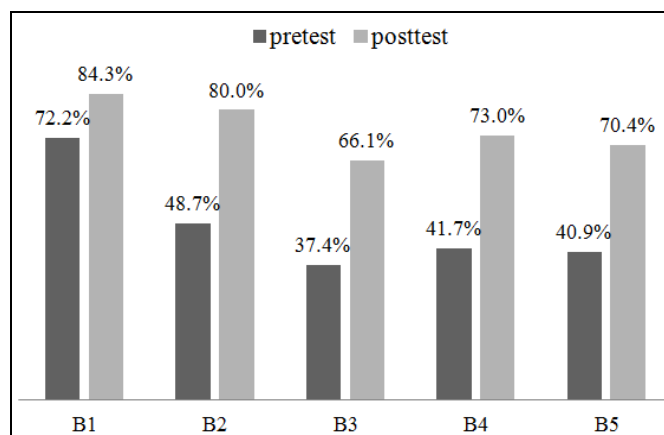
Figure 5 Percentage of correctness for the beginning sound oddity task

(3) Final sound awareness. The final sound oddity task was the third part of the phonological awareness test. In the same way, each item of this part was comprised of four pictures representing four words in the test. The students were required to recognize the word and circle its representing picture which had a different ending sound from the other three words after they had heard a set of four words. The percentage of correctness for the final sound oddity task in the pretest and the posttest was depicted in Figure 6. The students made progress, more or less, on all the items of the beginning sound oddity task in the posttest, from C1 to C5.
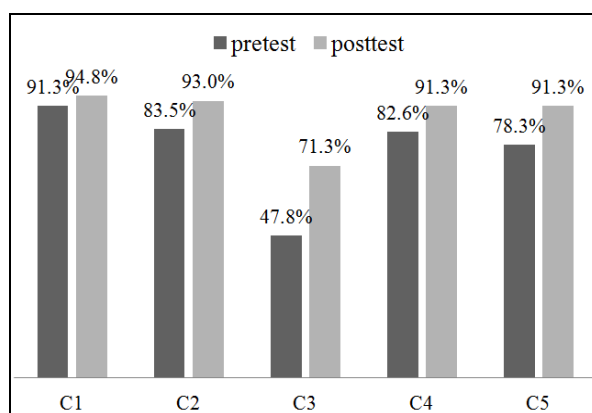

Figure 6 Percentage of correctness for the final sound oddity task

(4) Phoneme blending ability. The fourth part of the phonological awareness test is phoneme blending when students were demanded to combine three separated phonemes they heard and then say the word as a whole. The percentage of correctness for the phoneme blending in the pretest and the posttest were presented in Figure 7. The correctness of the five items (from D1 to D5) all increased in the posttest.
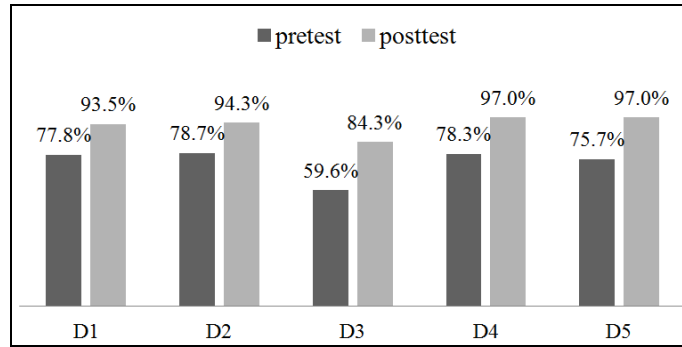
Figure 7 Percentage of correctness for the phoneme blending

(5) Phoneme segmentation ability. The students were required to say each phoneme separately after they had heard a CVC word such as wet, top, in the fifth part of the phonological awareness test. The percentage of correctness for the phoneme segmentation task in the pretest and the posttest were presented in Figure 8. The correctness of the five items (from E1 to E5) in this part all increased greatly in the posttest.
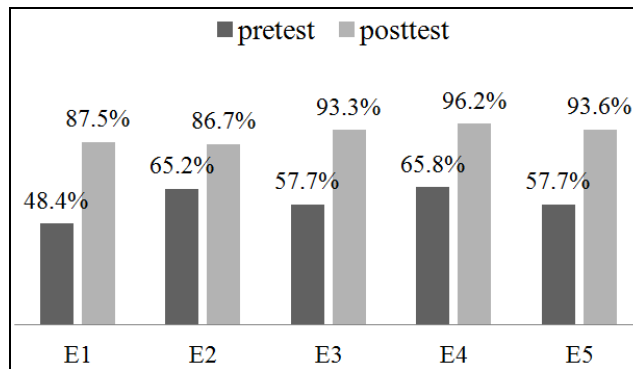

Figure 8 Percentage of correctness for the phoneme segmentation

(6) Phonemic manipulation ability. In this part, the students were asked to say words they had heard without the beginning sounds. Figure 9 shows the percentage of correctness for the phoneme manipulation task in the pretest and the posttest. The results show that, compared to other tasks, the students made the largest improvements on all items (from F1 to F5).
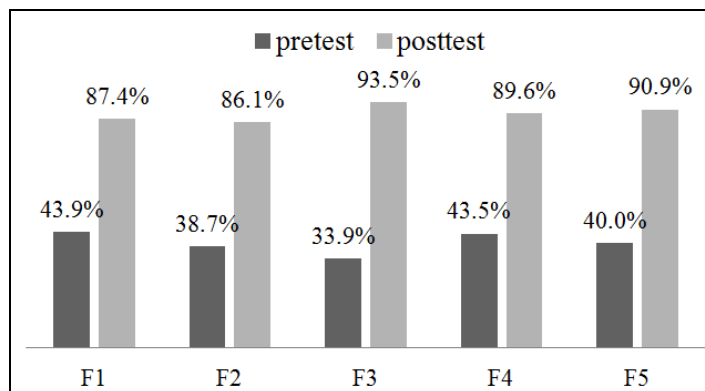

Figure 9 Percentage of correctness for the phonemic manipulation

3. Discussion of the Results

The results from the phonological awareness pre- and post test indicate that the read aloud activities and the phonological awareness instruction had significant effects on the participating students' phonological awareness including rhyme awareness, beginning sound awareness, final sound awareness, phoneme blending, phoneme segmentation, and phonemic manipulation.

For more discussion about the first task, the results show that the participating students made progress on all the items of the beginning sound oddity task in the posttest. More specifically, among all the items, the students made the biggest progress in item A3 (from 56% to 80% correctness) which contains four words: grain, brain, train, and pray. Moreover, the students reached the highest percentage of correctness both in the pretest (78.3%) and the posttest (95.7%) in item A2. This item contained four words *coat*, *soap*, *goat*, and *note*. Students had to circle the correct answer *soap* [op] that did not rhyme with the other three words that contain the rime [ot]. However, the item A5 had the lowest percentage of correctness both in the pretest (29.6%) and the posttest (43.5%) containing the words *top*, *lip*, *hop*, and *mop*, with rimes [ɑp] and [ɪp] respectively. This results revealed that in the task of discriminating rimes, the set of words *coat*, *soap*, *goat*, and *note* which contain different ending phonemes [t] and [p] might be easier for the students than those of another set of words *top*, *lip*, *hop*, and *mop* which contain middle vowel phonemes [ɑ] and [ɪ].

A possible explanation for the results is that the participating students' first language is Chinese, a language full of vowel-ending words, in which a consonant and a vowel as CV are usually combined to make a sound of one Chinese character. The target language, English, on the other hand, consists of many consonant-ending words, like VC, CVC or CVCC. In this study, when the students were told to detect the different rimes in each set of CVC words, some of them might unconsciously consider the words as CV-C, instead of C-VC. In other words, the words *top*, *lip*, *hop*, and *mop* in the item A5, probably were regarded as [tɑ-p], [lɪ-p], [hɑ-p] and [mɑ-p], all of which had the same ending sound [p], which caused difficulty for the students to choose the word *lip* correctly. This assumption suggests that English teachers could provide some minimal pairs of words with different middle vowel sounds for students to practice, such as *sock/sack*, *big/bag*, etc.

Take the second task as another example. The students made progress on all the items of the beginning sound oddity task in the posttest, both in the pretest and the posttest. The item B1 had the highest percentage of correctness, with 91% and 94.8% respectively. The item B1 composed of four pictures which represent the words *pen*, *spoon*, *pot*, and *park*, while the item B3 containing four pictures which refer to the words *bridge*, *jeep*, *juice*, and *jog* obtained the lowest percentage of correctness. Based on the results, it seemed that the students were less familiar with the phoneme [ʤ] and the blend [br] than the phoneme [p] and the blend [sp]. This finding may be explained by the frequency of words appearing in Dr. Seuss's books. The number of beginning words with [p] sound and [sp] sound was relatively more than that of [ʤ]

sound and [br] sound beginning words. The [p] sound beginning words like *Pat*, *Pop*, and *Pup* appeared in *Hop on POP* (1963) several times, giving the students more chances to familiarize themselves with these sounds. The [sp] sound beginning words might be perceived as [s] sound beginning words by the students and there were many words that begin with the sound [s], like the words *say*, *see*, *some*, and *so* in the book *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish* (1960). Compared to [p] and [s] sound beginning words, there are relatively fewer [dʒ] sound beginning words in the books. For example, the word *jump*, a [dʒ] sound beginning word, occurred only once in *Hop on POP* (1963). It is also worth noting that the number of [dʒ] sound beginning words is also less than that of [p] and [s] sound beginning words in the list of 1200 basic vocabulary published by the Education Bureau, Taoyuan City government (EBTCG, 2010). This outcome implies that frequency of words affects students' performance.

As for task four and task five, phoneme blending and phoneme segmentation, it seems that students had least difficulty in these two parts and the posttest reached above 90% correctness in most of the items. Take item D4 in task four containing phonemes [h], [ɑ], and [p] for instance, these sounds could be related to the phonetic symbols ㄏ, ㄚ, and ㄆ that shared similar places and manners of articulation in spoken Chinese, indicating that the students' prior knowledge of their L1 may assist them in blending English phonemes. Despite high percentage of correctness in the posttest in task five, one or two phonemes still caused confusion for Taiwanese students. For example, the word *rat* in item E1 and the word *wet* in item E2 were harder for students to articulate, as the sound [r] required the tongue to curve, and the sound [w] required lips to be round. During the phoneme segmentation task, quite a number of students said the word *rat* as [r]-[ɑ]-[t], the word wet as [w]-[ɑ]-[t], replacing the middle phoneme [æ] with [ɑ].

In general, the percentage of correctness for the final sound oddity task in 5 items all improved, more or less, in the posttest. The students obtained the highest percentage of correctness on the item C1 containing the words *rose*, *buzz*, *jazz*, and *zip* in both of the pretest (91.3%) and the posttest (94.8%). However, the item C3 consisting of the words *nail*, *pan*, *sun*, and *tin* had the lowest percentage of correctness of all the items both in the pretest and the posttest, which led to the possibility that the phonemes [n] and [l] as the ending sounds are toughest for the students to recognize. A possible explanation for this finding is that, for the item C3, the ending sound [n] and [l] are both alveolar consonants articulated with the tip of the tongue against or close to the superior alveolar ridge, which makes the two sounds alike to some degree. For the item C1, the ending sound [z] is an alveolar consonant, while [p] is a bilabial consonant which is articulated with both lips, so the students were able to recognize the difference. Based on the result, we can infer that when learners are asked to discriminate ending sounds of English words, the ending sounds with the same place of articulation might require more attention of the learners because they are more likely to get confused.

It is worth noting that the students' percentage of correctness for phonemic manipulation was among 33.9% and 43.9% in the pretest indicating that, compared to other tasks, this

might be the most difficult task for students before the instruction. During the pretest, for example, when students were asked to say a word they had heard without the beginning sound, some of them dropped both of the initial and the second phoneme, and only pronounced the last phoneme. Some of the students even slightly shook their head and gave up trying. In the pretest, the lowest percentage of correctness (33.9%) was the item F3 where the word *dish* was given and the students were expected to say [ɪʃ] without the initial sound [d]. However, many students gave the sound [ʃ] instead of [ɪʃ] in this item. A possible reason that accounts for the outcome might be attributed in part to students' native tongue, Chinese, which was mentioned earlier, a language composed of many vowel ending words (e.g. ㄅㄚ-- 子音ㄅ, 母音ㄚ). When these students heard the word *dish* and combined the first two sounds of *dish* as [dɪ], a vowel ending sound, they probably regarded [dɪ] as one phoneme, which caused them to drop [dɪ] sound when they were asked to delete the initial sound of the word *dish*.

Fortunately, after the phonological awareness instruction, the students made great improvement in item F3 (dish) with 93.5% correctness, which was also the highest one in the posttest. Other items in this part all greatly improved: in the pretest with percentage of correctness ranged from 33.9% to 43.9%, while in the posttest with percentage of correctness ranged from 86.1% to 90.9%. This dramatic progress might result from the abundant audio stimuli through reading aloud and phoneme manipulation practice through the phonological awareness instruction where students' awareness of the smallest unit of sounds, phonemes, was raised.

4. English Reading Attitudes

The students' English reading attitudes survey used in this study was a four-point Likert scale. There were fifteen questions which contained four different facial expressions (see Appendix C). The students' pretest scores and posttest scores were analyzed through paired-sample *t* tests with SPSS21 statistical software package. Table 3 provides the results of paired-sample *t* test on students' English reading attitudes.

Table 3 Paired-sample t test on students' English reading attitudes

	Total score	*M*	*N*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Pretest	60	41.33	115	13.299	-1.358	.177
Posttest	60	42.68	115	12.350		

*p<.05

As the table above presents, after the twelve-week read aloud activities and phonological awareness instruction, the results showed that the mean of the total scores slightly increased, from 41.33 to 42.68. However the results of paired-sample *t* test on the posttest suggested that students' overall English reading attitudes did not improve significantly (*t*=-1.358, p = .177). The results of the students' English reading attitudes survey in this study might not agree with

Barnyak (2011) suggested that reading aloud could help communicate positive attitudes regarding literacy learning with children. There are some possible reasons for this failure. One of the reasons may partially lie in the fact that reading aloud in this study was conducted only in English classes for merely a short amount of time: ten to fifteen minutes a time, twice a week. The limited time might not be sufficient for teachers to enhance students' attitudes toward reading English books. Another explanation for the finding was probably due to the genre of the adopted teaching materials, Dr. Seuss' books. Since children's interests vary, Dr. Seuss's books may not be able to cater to every child's need and interest. Last, it was likely that Dr. Seuss' books did not please all of the EFL students as they did with native speakers. That is, Dr. Seuss's books are full of sound and language play and lack story plot; some EFL students might not comprehend well "the games of sounds" due to their limited English proficiency.

5. Students' Thoughts about Dr. Seuss's Books

Despite the fact that the students' overall English reading attitudes did not improve significantly after the instruction and activities, most of the students who were interviewed expressed positively on reading Dr. Seuss's books. The following section presents students' perspective from the interviews:

(1) Reasons that students like Dr. Seuss's books

There are many reasons students like Dr. Seuss's books which are stated below:

Annie: "I like them all. Because they are funny." 「我都喜歡。因為都很有趣。」

Sun: "I like them because they are special. They are different from the textbooks." 「我喜歡，因為很特別，和課本不一樣。」

Kiki: "They are interesting and I like to read story books." 「它們很有趣，而且我喜歡看故事書。」

Peter: "I like them because there are many animals in the books." 「我喜歡，因為書裡有許多動物。」

Claire: "I like *Hop on Pop*. Because the story is interesting and it is easy. It is funny to see the bear sit on the cat." 「我喜歡 *Hop on Pop*，因為故事有趣也比較簡單。那個熊要坐在貓上，很好笑。」

Crystal: "I like *Green Eggs and Ham*. This story is interesting. The main character doesn't want to eat the eggs, but Sam always makes him eat the eggs. This scene is funny." 「我喜歡 *Green Eggs and Ham*。故事很有趣。就是主角不想吃蛋，可是他一直要主角吃。這樣很好笑。」

Anna: "I think the author is so creative that he can create many kinds of animals." 「我覺得作者很有創意，想出這麼多種動物。」

Christy: "I like them. Because there are tongue twisters in the books. They are playful." 「我喜歡啊。因為好像在繞口令，好好笑。」

Billy: "The fish can drive a car! Awesome!"「魚會開車耶！太強了！」

Allen: "His hairstyle is cool!"「那頭髮好帥！」

(2) Reasons that students dislike Dr. Seuss's books

On the contrary, a couple of students said that they were not in favor of Dr. Seuss's books they read. Their reasons were stated below:

Jack: "I don't like the books because they are not interesting and I can't understand." 「我覺得不喜歡，因為無聊，看不懂。」

Coco: "I don't like them because there are so many English words to read." 「不喜歡，因為好多英文字要看。」

Janet: "I don't like the books because I don't know what the story is about." 「不喜歡，因為不知道那故事在幹嘛。」

Ashley: "The illustration is boring. I think that the author should have used more colors, so the pictures would look prettier." 「圖案好無聊。我覺得作者應該用多一點顏色，會比較好看。」

(3) Differences between textbooks and Dr. Seuss's books: Dr. Seuss's books are more challenging than textbooks

Some students told the researcher that they thought Dr. Seuss's books were a little bit difficult for them to read. Their statements are as the following:

Nick: "Textbooks are too easy. Dr. Seuss's books are a little difficult." 「課本太簡單了。Dr. Seuss 的書有一點難。」

Chrystal: "*Hop on Pop* contains tongue twisters and it's …challenging." 「*Hop on Pop* 裡面有繞口令，有點…挑戰。)

Ashley: "I like the textbook better because it is easy to learn. There are many words I don't know in Seuss's books." 「我比較喜歡課本，因為課本比較簡單。Dr. Seuss 的書有很多字我都不會。」

Coco: "Sometimes I could not catch up with where the teacher was, and I would look at my classmate next to me." 「我有時候不知道老師讀到哪，我就會看隔壁的。」

Jack: "I think they are very difficult because I have to combine the sounds together. I can't do that." 「我覺得很難，因為要拼音，我不會。」

Billy: "I just like to browse the pictures because I can't read English." 「我只喜歡看圖案，因為看不懂英文。」

Janet: "They are the same as the English textbooks because both of them are written in English." 「和課本一樣啊！因為都是英文。」

(4) Students believed that Dr. Seuss's books are helpful

Kiki: "I have known the words in the textbooks, but there are many words I don't know in Seuss's book. I can learn something new in Seuss's books." 「課本裡的字我都會了，可是 Dr. Seuss 的書有些字我不會，我可以學到不一樣的字。」

Crystal: "I think these books help. Most of the words in Seuss's books are easy. However,

when they appear together in the same sentence, I can't read fluently." 「我覺得有幫助。Dr. Seuss 的書很多字都很簡單，可是它們一起在句子，就會唸得不順。」

Jennifer: "Yes, it helps me to read aloud English stories."「想要，因為可以幫助朗讀英文故事。」

Nick: "Because it helps me learn vocabulary."「因為可以幫助學英文單字。」

Peter: "Yes. Because Dr. Seuss is creative. We may become creative when we read Seuss's books."「要，因為 Dr. Seuss 很有創意，讀他的書，我們也可以變得跟他一樣。」

Christy: "Yes, because textbook is boring. This one is more interesting." 「要，因為課本很無聊，這比較好看。」

Dick: "Can we read more pages? I don't want to go back to the textbook."「老師，可以繼續唸嗎？不要上課本。」

Terry: "Is that all we read? Go on, teacher." 「只唸到這裡喔？再繼續唸啦，老師。」

(5) Some students had no ideas or preferred other activities

Jack: "I don't know. Yes and no are okay."「不知道，都可以。」

Janet: "No, I would rather play games, like writing words on the blackboard."「不想，我比較想要玩遊戲。像上去黑板寫字那種。」

6. Reflections on the interviews

Based on the interviews, some students believed that Dr. Seuss books are helpful for them, who thought that new words in the books were somehow challenging but could make their English better. On the other hand, some students were not familiar with letter sounds and phonics knowledge, which resulted in obstacles to English reading and might cause negative reading attitudes. This finding revealed the importance of helping some English low-achieving students build phonemic awareness. The interviews also show that some students would like to read aloud more Dr. Seuss's books with their class. These students had positive attitudes toward reading and usually read aloud confidently with the teacher, who probably had gained a sense of achievement in reading. In contrast, for the students who did not want to read other Dr. Seuss books, they preferred doing other activities rather than reading aloud, probably because it took much effort for them to sound out letters and blend sounds into words. These students were usually not enthusiastic about learning English, who need more teachers' scaffolding and encouragement in order to learn better.

In a nutshell, based on the interviews, those who liked Dr. Seuss's books were due to appealing illustrations and interesting plots which made them different from English textbooks, while those who did not like Dr. Seuss's books were mostly due to their limited English proficiency. The interview results also indicated that Dr. Seuss's books were more appealing to the students than the textbook. For the majority of the students, through reading aloud Dr. Seuss' books, along with the phonological awareness instruction, the students were exposed to rich input of English sounds and words. This exposure, to some extent, helped the students improve their phonological awareness, which is a key component of emergent literacy.

V. Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study mentioned above lead to a number of implications:

1. Teachers need to develop students' phonological awareness through implementing phonological awareness instruction and intervention.   For some English low-achievers, lack of phonological awareness could be one of the main reasons for their language learning difficulty. For example, given the word *bat*, children without the knowledge of phonological awareness may fail to blend the string of sounds together and read it. This study confirms that phonological awareness skills can be developed and enhanced through a series of organized activities such as rhyme oddity task, beginning sound oddity task, final sound oddity task, phoneme blending, segmenting sounds into phonemes, and phonemic manipulation. Therefore, teachers are recommended to develop students' six abilities of phonological awareness in a systematic way through explicit phonological awareness instruction.

2. Materials for reading aloud to improve students' phonological awareness should be selected carefully.   When beginning English learners read aloud a text, with their limited vocabulary and their immature decoding skills, it might take much time and effort for them to sound out letters, combine sounds into words, and comprehend its meaning. Therefore, materials for reading aloud should cater to learners' need and should be a little above their current language proficiency. Controlled vocabulary, short sentences, easy contexts could lower beginning learners' anxiety as they learn to read. Repeated rimes in a reading text not only provide opportunity for readers to experience the language sounds in English, but they can inspire readers' interests in reading.

3. Teachers should help students enjoy reading aloud to cultivate their positive reading attitudes.   Reading aloud can be an interaction between students and teachers in a way that information, examples, and clarifications are added to support learners in meaning construction. When reading aloud activities are carried out, teachers should exploit positive communication skills to encourage students' active involvement. For example, when reading, teachers can point to a specific sentence in a book by asking "What does the girl say?" or "Let's read this paragraph aloud." to draw students' attention to the print; teachers can also remind students "Let's point to each word when we read it." to help them become aware of the match between spoken words and written words. Those simple actions can help children recognize words quickly during reading aloud a book with an adult.

4. Teachers should leave a couple of minutes in class each time for students to read aloud or to be read aloud.   Once students learned phonics in their textbooks, teachers could provide other reading materials such as beginning reader books or materials that fit students' language ability. to help students polish their decoding skills, sound out letters, and combine letters into sounds. Sufficient exposure to a target language is important for learners to receive input and obtain their phonics knowledge, especially for EFL learners. In addition to English

textbooks, teachers could create a literacy rich learning environment that gives students abundant of chances to practice a new language they are learning.

5. More storybooks customized for EFL learners should be written and published. Since many children's storybooks have been written by native speakers, some humorous elements, plots, and slangs in the stories may be easily understood by native speakers, but not by EFL learners. Thus, to tailor EFL students' needs, stories with meaningful phonics activities should be included in supplementary materials to help learners refine their phonetic skills and strengthen their phonological awareness.

VI. Conclusions

The current study was conducted to answer the research questions regarding the effects of Dr. Seuss's books on EFL elementary school students' phonological awareness and reading attitudes. For the overall results, based on the statistical data from pretest and posttest, after the teacher read aloud Dr. Seuss's books and implemented phonological awareness instruction twice a week for twelve weeks in English classes, the participating students significantly improved their phonological awareness. Their English reading attitudes, nonetheless, were not significantly different from those before the read aloud activities and phonological awareness instruction.

The results suggest that Taiwan EFL students' phonological awareness can be enhanced through a series of proper and organized activities. In this study, by listening to stories and reading along with the teacher, the participants developed their sensitivity to rhymes and sounds, which is consistent with the notion that developing a child's phonological awareness involves the perception of auditory input (Cramer, 2006). Furthermore, six abilities of phonological awareness including rhyme oddity task, beginning sound oddity task, final sound oddity task, phoneme blending, segmenting sounds into phonemes, and phonemic manipulation were explicitly taught in this study following the sequence of phonological awareness instruction and intervention proposed by Schuele and Boudreau (2008), which resulted in the students' improvement on their phonological awareness after the instruction. However, the results did not show statistical significance on the students' English reading attitudes after the instruction. Some possible reasons may contribute to the outcome. The fact that insufficient time was spent in reading the English storybooks may be ranked the most salient reason. This was probably due to the situation where many students in this study attended after-school classes during evenings on weekdays. A ten- to fifteen-minute read aloud activities twice a week carried out in English classes could hardly changed the students' reading attitudes. Another reason might be that these students preferred to play computer games and surf the Internet when staying home rather than read English books. Their reading habits formed from childhood have not yet been developed during such a short period of time. Spending more time in reading aloud activities in English classes and using more strategies to encourage students to engage in English reading have become a critical issue in the field of

English instruction for elementary school students.

Two limitations worth noting in this study are, first, the students' percentage of correctness for phonemic manipulation was the lowest before the instruction, caused possibly by the students' unfamiliarity with this task itself at the beginning. They made dramatic progress either when they get familiar with the task (the practice effect), or they may acquire more knowledge of phonemic awareness after 12-week practice, which could be an issue to explore further. Another limitation worth mentioning is that both of the books and the explicit phonological instruction may have caused students' awareness improvement. Further investigation can be done to differentiate the effect of the books from that of the instruction.

Phonological awareness such as the awareness concerning syllables, rhymes, and individual sounds has long been considered essential and paramount in research when a child begins learning English as either second or foreign language and is a strong predictor of reading success. Despite the fact that no significant effects was found on students' reading attitudes after the read aloud activities and the twelve-week instruction, this study confirms that Dr. Seuss's beginner reader books had positive effects on EFL elementary school students' phonological awareness to some degree. The results of this study confirmed the value of the use of Dr. Seuss's beginner reader books or children's books containing rhymes in the implementation of phonological awareness instruction, where the phonological awareness skills can be developed and enhanced through a series of organized and research-based activities. Results of the present study could also be useful to other EFL teachers, who intend to probe into and plan reading aloud activities and phonological awareness instruction. It is hoped that this study can serve as a basis for further study in raising EFL learners' phonological awareness and reading attitudes.

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Appendix A
Phonological Awareness Test
聲韻覺識測驗

班級: _____ 姓名: _____ 座號： ____ 日期: ____

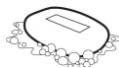**A. 押韻：** 聽一聽四個字，哪一個字<u>**沒有**</u>與其他字互相押韻？請圈出來。

範例 1:

範例 2:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

(註: 因篇幅關係僅提供縮小之測驗 A 圖題目，測驗 B、C 也為圖案圈選題)

D. 組合聲音： 聽完字母發音後，把發音依順序組合成一單字唸出來。

範例：1. t…e…d → ted

2. f…ee…t → feet

E. 拆解聲音： 聽完單字發音後，把發音依順序分開唸出來。

舉例: 1. dock→ d…o…ck

2. get → g…e…t

F. 去掉第一個音： 把單字第一個音去掉，唸出剩下的發音（韻腳）。

舉例: 1. sad→ ad

2. tall → all

Appendix B
Phonological Awareness Test Script

A. Rhyme oddity task

| example | 1. | mat | rat | hut | fat |
| | 2. | cat | sad | bad | dad |

test	1.	sit	night	bite	fight
	2.	coat	soap	goat	note
	3.	grain	brain	train	pray
	4.	feet	tear	hear	fear
	5.	top	lip	hop	mop

B. Beginning sound oddity task

| example | | cap | corn | key | desk |

test	1.	pen	spoon	pot	park
	2.	knife	phone	face	fence
	3.	bridge	jeep	juice	jog
	4.	meat	mail	comb	mud
	5.	wind	watch	walk	write

C. Final sound oddity task

| example | | mug | good | pig | bag |

test	1.	rose	Buzz	jazz	zip
	2.	tape	sleep	pants	soup
	3.	nail	pan	sun	tin
	4.	net	plant	seed	boot
	5.	fox	book	duck	cake

D. Phoneme blending

| example | 1. | t…e…d → ted |
| | 2. | f…ee…t → feet |

test	1.	s…a…m
	2.	g…e…t
	3.	w…i…ll
	4.	h…o…p

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5.   m…u…g

E. Segmentation

example   1.   dock→ d…o…ck

2.   get → g…e…t

test   1.   rat

2.   wet

3.   lip

4.   top

5.   nut

F. Phonemic Manipulation

example   1.   sad→ ad

2.   tall → all

test   1.   back

2.   set

3.   dish

4.   cop

5.   gut

Appendix C
英文閱讀態度量表

班級：_____ 姓名：_____ 日期：_____

小朋友，這份問卷調查不會影響學校成績，所以請你根據自己現在的情況回答，每一題有四個選項，選出最符合你答案的表情並圈○起來。注意每一題只選一個答案，謝謝你的合作。

※圖案說明：

😄-非常好　　😊-好　　😐-不太好　　🙁-非常不好

1. 如果在家因為樂趣而閱讀英文故事書，你的感受是什麼？

　　😄　　　　😊　　　　😐　　　　🙁

2. 如果你得到的禮物是英文故事書，你的感受是什麼？

3. 利用自己的空閒時間來閱讀英文故事書，你的感受是什麼？

4. 如果開始讀一本新的英文故事書，你的感受是什麼？

5. 如果閱讀英文故事書取代玩樂時間，你的感受是什麼？

6. 你對於去有賣英文書的書局的感受是什麼？

7. 閱讀不同種類的英文故事書，你的感受是什麼？

8. 如果老師問你關於閱讀英文的事情，你的感受是什麼？

9. 閱讀英文課本和寫習作，你的感受是什麼？

10. 從英文故事書學習，你的感受是什麼？

11. 如果有班級閱讀英文故事書時間，你的感受是什麼？

12. 上課時，如果讓你朗讀英文故事，你的感受是什麼？

13. 如果老師朗讀英文故事書給你聽，你的感受是什麼？

14. 如果考一段英文故事書的測驗，你的感受是什麼？

15. 每次從英語課本學習新的單字時，你的感受是什麼？