

## Symo-syl: A Meta-Phonological Intervention to Support Italian Pre-Schoolers' Emergent Literacy Skills

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**Abstract :** The adoption of the syllabic approach in preschool programmes could support and reinforce meta-phonological awareness and literacy skills in children. The introduction of a meta-phonological intervention in preschool could facilitate the transition to primary school, especially for children with learning fragilities. In the present contribution, we want to investigate the efficacy of "Simo-syl" intervention in enhancing emergent literacy skills in children (especially for reading). Simo-syl is a 12 weeks multimedia programme developed for children to improve their language and communication skills and later literacy development in preschool. During the intervention, Simo-syl, an invented character, leads children in a series of meta-phonological games. Forty-six Italian preschool children (i.e., the Simo-syl group) participated in the programme; seventeen preschool children (i.e., the control group) did not participate in the intervention. Children in the two groups were between 4;10 and 5;9 years. They were assessed on their vocabulary, morpho-syntactical, meta-phonological, phonological, and phono-articulatory skills twice: 1) at the beginning of the last year of the preschool through standardised paper-based assessment tools and 2) one week after the intervention. All children in the Simo-syl group took part in the meta-phonological programme based on the syllabic approach. The intervention lasted 12 weeks (three activities per week; week 1: activities focused on syllable blending and spelling and a first approach to the written code; weeks 2-11: activities focused on syllables recognition; week 12: activities focused on vowels recognition). Very few children (Simo-syl group = 21, control group = 9) were tested again (post-test) one week after the intervention. Before starting the intervention programme, the Simo-syl and the control groups had similar meta-phonological, phonological, lexical skills (all ps > .05). One week after the intervention, a significant difference emerged between the two groups in their meta-phonological skills (syllable blending, p = .029; syllable spelling, p = .032), in their vowel recognition ability (p = .032) and their word reading skills (p = .05). An ANOVA confirmed the effect of the group membership on the developmental growth for the word reading task (F (1,28) = 6.83, p = .014,  $\eta^2$  = .196). Taking part in the Simo-syl intervention has a positive effect on the ability to read in preschool children.

**Keywords :** intervention programme, literacy skills, meta-phonological skills, syllabic approach

**Conference Title :** ICLDD 2022 : International Conference on Language Development and Disorders

**Conference Location :** Venice, Italy

**Conference Dates :** April 14-15, 2022