

## Role of Animated vs Oral Mother Goose Songs in Language Acquisition of Pre-School Kids

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**Abstract:** *The study is an attempt to explore the difference between the impact of oral mother goose songs (OMGS) and animated mother goose songs (AMGS) in language acquisition of pre-school kids. Two focus groups of fifteen mothers of pre-school kids in each are formed. Mothers of the focus group (oral) were advised to sing OMGS for their kids and mothers of the focus group (animated) were asked to show AMGS to their kids. The study concludes that role of OMGS is negative and AMGS is positive in terms of creating phonological awareness. OMGS and AMGS can both play a positive role in enriching the vocabulary of pre-school kids if screen time is limited, and parental monitoring is ensured. However, the role of OMGS is positive, and AMGS is negative in enhancing the speaking skills of pre-school kids.*

**Key Words:** Oral Mother Goose Songs, Animated Mother Goose Songs, Language Acquisition, Phonological Awareness, Vocabulary, Speaking Skills

### Introduction

Mother goose songs are an integral part of childhood memories. They have preserved and transferred many cultural norms and values from generation to generation. They are a part of every culture where they reflect traditions, history, values and customs of people ([Sorensen, 1995, para. 1, 3](#)). They are full of sequencing, numbers, games, team-based activities, vocabularies related to different academic, i.e., mathematical and scientific concepts etc. They are so diverse in terms of their content that they carry humor, rhythm, movement, dancing, social skills and even problem-solving skills too (Jho, as cited in Jorgensen, para. 4).

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Mother goose songs have a long history of oral traditions, but in the twenty-first century, they are re-invented through digital media. They have not lost their importance even in modern times; however, this re-invention has helped them in making them more attractive, entertaining and amusing. Our new generation is overwhelmingly fascinated by an exposition of new media; therefore, it has become really important to explore how the impact of centuries-old mother goose songs has varied after the incorporation of new media technology in them ([Tambawala, 2013](#)).

Especially mother goose songs play an important role in language acquisition and speech development of pre-school kids. The kids who listen to these songs are always better in terms of their auditory skills because they can discriminate between sounds, pitch, tone, volume and rhythm etc. Therefore, these songs are considered to be the best choice for the development of language because when children recite these songs, they tend to develop their comprehension skills that are a foundation for learning of every language ([Lisa, n.d., para. 8](#)).

Learning of language is an ongoing process, and throughout our lives, we keep on learning new words. However, this process is rapid during the first few years of children's lives because, at an early stage, they start understanding words, describing them with their own symbols and gradually understanding the structure of the language of their daily use. Therefore, when a song is listened by a kid for multiple times, it is retained in his memory because of this repetition ultimately nourishing his listening and speaking skills ([Stacy, 2016](#)). Language of these songs is very colorful and amusing that gives children unlimited exposure to the vocabulary of their daily life experiences ([Reilly & Ward, 2003, p. 18](#)). This is a form of informal or extra learning which is meaningful and holistic in the sense that it provides an alternative of formal learning to kids ([DeCastro, 2000, p. 3](#)).

Many of the latest companies working on children literature have recognized the potential of these songs in the social, moral, emotional and cognitive development of pre-school kids. These companies have started producing their animations which are available on YouTube, social networking sites, i.e., Facebook, Twitter etc. and mobile apps. Although it is a very challenging job to keep up with the pace of dynamically evolving digital media industry, still it has enabled many kids' animations to reach a global audience. The animations of mother goose songs have proven themselves tremendously rewarding because of the overwhelming response from the audience. Not only children but parents and caregivers are also very happy with these animations because of their learning and entertainment value ((Jho, as cited in Jorgensen, para. 8).

This shift in the medium of mother goose songs from oral to digital has provoked the interest of researchers to explore whether this digitalization and visualization of mother goose songs has transformed the nature of the impact on children or it has remained same. This paper is also an attempt to find out the difference between the impact of oral and animated mother goose songs in language acquisition of pre-school kids.

## Objectives of the Study

Following are the objectives of this study:

- 1) To evaluate AMGS and OMGS in creating awareness about phonics among pre-school kids
- 2) To find out the differences between the nature of the impact of OMGS and AMGS in enriching the vocabulary of pre-school kids
- 3) To understand the difference in the role of AMGS and OMGS in improving speaking skills of pre-school kids

## **Research Questions**

On the basis of above-mentioned objectives, few research questions are made which will be answered by the methods of this study. These research questions are as follows:

**RQ1:** How the impact of AMGS is different from OMGS in creating awareness about phonics?

**RQ2:** How does AMGS differ from OMGS in enriching the vocabulary of pre-school kids?

**RQ3:** What is the difference between AMGS differ and OMGS in grooming speaking skills?

## **Methodology**

The study is qualitative in which two focus groups of mothers of pre-school kids are made, i.e., focus group (oral) and focus group (animations) with each having fifteen participants. Pre-school kids selected for this study are two to four year of age and keeping in mind their tender age, their mothers are requested to stay with them throughout the time of focus group sessions. Mothers are selected by snowball sampling to ensure homogeneity of participants in order to avoid intervening factors. Mothers were trained by the researchers and mother is Focus group (oral) were asked to sing OMGS for their children by themselves whereas mothers in Focus group (animated) were asked to show the AMGS to their kids for the period of three months. Researchers kept on conducting focus group sessions until they reach saturation stage where no new theme was coming from the participants. Data gathered by the focus group sessions were analyzed by thematic analysis. Data was coded in relevant themes that emerged from the previous literature and also during the sessions. Following are the themes developed after focus group sessions:

- 1) Awareness of phonics
- 2) Vocabulary
- 3) Speaking Skills

## **Analyzing Focus Group Data**

As mentioned earlier, a thematic analysis of the data gathered from focus group discussions is conducted in order to answer the proposed research questions and reach a conclusion. The themes that emerged from the data are discussed one by one in detail:

### **Awareness of Phonics**

Most of the mothers in a focus group (sessions) reported that they sing OMGS for their kids

unintentionally with no motive for improvement in their language or comprehension skills. Their only purpose is to soothe their baby and put him to sleep because usually these songs are sung by mothers at bedtimes. However, for this study when mothers were asked to repeatedly sing OMGS for their children and later on their opinion was recorded to understand whether kids develop a basic familiarity with sounds of words or not, their response was a bit confusing because most of them actually did not have an idea about phonemes and phonological awareness. Researchers had to guide them a lot about how children learn to recognize and make sense of sounds which they hear in their surroundings. The purpose of creating phonological awareness is to make children more active and efficient with language ([Catholic Education Melbourne, 2017, p. 2](#)). After clearing their idea about phonics when they were asked to share their opinion, they reported:

“We do not see any visible difference in their recognition of sounds when we observe their linguistic competencies after repeating any OMGS again and again over a period of time. Children do try to speak the words which they listen from us. However, their understanding of sounds is a bit confusing because probably while singing, we do alter the sounds a bit or do not pronounce the words in their natural sounds.”

This is so because while speaking words usually run together, and younger children cannot understand the composition of words from the stream of speech (The Centre for Effective Reading Instructions, n.d., para. 1). However, comparatively better results are reported by mothers who started singing OMGS at different times of active daily routines. They reported:

“Although the focus of the kids is on playing and entertainment but when we sing for them, we do have a hidden intention of involving them into play based learning because the basic purpose of signing English language OMGS is to make kids familiar with this language. We do feel that our kids try to utter few of the words with us by recognizing their sounds; however, this attempt is overshadowed by their desire to play and have fun while listening to these songs.”

This makes phonic awareness a bit more difficult because children are not in a mood of understanding and pronunciation of words varies from speaker to speaker. Variations exist in the style of mothers who are singing these songs for their children. Although these variations don't affect the meaning of lyrics; however, they may alter the actual sound of the word ([Adams, Foorman, Lundberg & Beeler, n.d., para. 11](#))

Contrarily, the mothers of the focus group (animated) sessions reported a very positive impact of AMGS on their kids by claiming:

“Children are showing brilliant improvement in terms of understanding of phonics by listening to AMGS. They enjoy watching phonics songs and repeat them again and again.”

They further asserted:

“Not only phonics song but all types of AMGS are actually helping them in phonological development because children learn a lot in fun. They do not feel that mothers are trying to teach them specifically something; instead, they learn through informal usage of AMGS which are

nowhere lagging behind commercial programs used by teachers for phonics and phoneme awareness in kindergartens and pre-schools.”

Actually, language and music have the same base, and they usually complement each other in terms of early learning ([McMullen & Saffran, 2004](#)). This is why many language learning programs for kids make use of melody, rhythm and musical speech ([Fernald, 1991](#)). Few of the mothers said:

“To avoid the problem of addiction, we usually stop the AMGS and try to interact with our kids. We do help them in understanding what is being communicated in the AMGS and how to pronounce the words in a better way by copying the pronunciation of singer. Although, kids resist parental involvement is very important in order to ensure a positive impact. Our main objective is to improve pre-reading and speaking skills of our children, and we are happy to be a part of this focus group that has provided us with an opportunity to improve English language competencies of our children.”

Although little research has been done to find out the relationship between music and language with the animations of MGS, this relationship is emerging as an important domain because language with rhythm actually contributes towards refining of pre-reading skills ([Maclean, Bryant, & Bradley, 1987](#)).

## **Vocabulary**

Mothers of the pre-school kids who were given oral treatment discussed that they usually sing MGS for their kids while putting them to their bed because they are considered to be the best tool of putting children to ease in an irritable mood. Many of the mothers reported:

“When we rock the cradle of the baby or try to soothe them when the child is in bad temperament, we usually sing mother goose songs for them in a soft and harmonious voice. MGS have magical powers: they can calm a crying baby and also provide him/her with a compassionate feeling that he is with someone who cares a lot for him.”

Literature provides very strong evidence that by singing OMGS, the mother may handle the movements of her child with the rhythms, tone, softening, fastening or hardening of her voice. Moreover, the language of OMGS is very simple, fluent and easy to understand, and kids start understanding new words in a very short period of time ([Gunes & Gunes, 2012, p.317](#)). Mother of three years old boy reported:

“My son is very slow in learning new words. At the age of three, he was able to pronounce very few words like mama, baba, Allah etc. only. I consulted a speech therapist who asked me to do various speaking practices and exercises with him. Luckily, I got a chance to be a part of this focus group, and I started singing OMGS for him. To my surprise, he started uttering a few words in an attempt of singing his favourite OMGS with me. Although his pronunciation was not very clear, still his attempts were remarkable. I am glad that without any formal session of speech therapy, my son has started to speak many new words which he listened in OMGS.”

Hence, OMGS provides an opportunity to build a vocabulary of children by making them not only aware of the word but how to use it in a sentence making it easier for them to understand the complexity of language ([McGinty & Justice, 2010](#)). Mothers of younger kids that are more than two and less than three reported:

“Our kids are unable to speak words properly, but the good thing which we observed is that our kids try to symbolically or non-verbally express them. This is probably the result of alteration in gestures, body movements and variations in the tone of the mother while singing OMGS for their kids. This is a very positive sign of a child’s development that he is learning verbal as well as non-verbal language through OMGS.”

Therefore, it is found that listening to OMGS not only enhances communication skills but also polishes the use of these skills in a socially acceptable way. Kids learn the usage of symbolic language to express their concerns and also gain knowledge of the outer world from the way their mothers deliver MGS to them ([Mullen, 2017, p. 43](#)).

Skills to communicate needs and wants in socially appropriate ways

- Symbolic use of language
- Storytelling
- Age-appropriate knowledge about life and the world around

On the contrary, some very interesting and divergent viewpoints were reported by the mothers of the focus group (animated) sessions. One of the mothers reported:

“My son is around four years of age, but neither he listens, nor he responds to anyone, no matter, how loud anyone speaks to call him. I was extremely worried and consulted a doctor to get his auditory and speaking skills checked. Doctor asked me how much time he spends in front of the screen, and I told him that I am a working woman doing a nine to five office job. In my absence, my maid gives him a tablet on which AMGS is played, and he almost spends the whole day with this tablet. The doctor informed me that there is absolutely no issue with his listening or speaking. The only thing which is missing is the lack of human interaction. He advised me to take the tablet away and sing OMGS for him, and my son now tries to speak and respond to others.”

This was a very problematic point reported by the mother,, but this is absolutely true that devices cannot replace the channel of human interaction and face to face communication. If a kid keeps on watching AMGS on a device, he will miss many new things which he may learn by interacting with his peers, friends and family. Human beings are in need of other human beings for even learning a language because he may pronounce words brilliantly by watching AMGS, but he will not be able to comprehend or decode the meaning of that word. This is something which a child learns by interacting with adults ([Hirsh-Pasek, Schlesinger, Golinkoff & Care, 2018, para. 1-2](#)). Mothers have reported some other sort of observations too:

“English is not our mother language, but our kids are starting pronouncing words of English in a much-groomed accent. However, the problem arises when they refuse to leave their gadgets anytime and starts avoiding their friends.”

This is a very common problem reported by people that usage of latest technologies is actually creating disruptions in ongoing social situations and desired social interaction is lacking whenever required ([Olsson, Jarusriboonchai, Woznaik, Paasovaara, Vaananen & Lucero, 2020, p. 30](#)). Few of the mothers said that their kids are more focused on visualization and fantasy rather than language. They argued:

“Our kids are mesmerized by the colorful and vibrant animated characters moving on the screen, and the linguistic benefit that we want to observe is not commendable. We feel AMGS are not actually contributing towards the enrichment of vocabulary because the attention of kids is diverted from words towards animations.”

Therefore, mothers’ arguments endorsed that AMGS have an immense potential of engaging children for so long because of their colourful visualization. It is expected that children may learn and comprehend better when the lyrics are accompanied by visuals ([Wang, 2020](#)), but probably children may get absorbed in the animations ignoring the words and lyrics of AMGS.

## **Speaking Skills**

The overall purpose of language acquisition is not to merely enrich the vocabulary but to improve decoding ability and understanding of language too. Moreover, the purpose of this whole activity was to actually evaluate how the overall speaking skills of children are being improved by their exposure to this century’s old genre of children literature. Mother of the focus group (oral) reported that their kids are making attempts to speak and utter words. They try to interact with others in their own way inspired by the songs they listen to. They said:

“Our kids are becoming confident because the OMGS time is actually the mother-child time. The presence of mother gives confidence to the child, and it actually nourishes and grooms his/her personality because the child feels that the mother’s exclusive attention is for him/her this time.”

One of the mothers said:

My two and half year’s old daughter comes and drags me towards the bed to lay with her and recite MGS. She actually demands “sunaen monkey” (Please sing the poem “five little monkeys” for me). She is getting familiar with the names of different animals, fruits and flowers which she listens in OMGS. I am always there to tell her about these animals, and I usually take her to zoo, village or farmhouse to show her those living creatures about which she hears from me through these OMGS”

Here it is important to mention that every child has his own pace of understanding and learning, but parental involvement may boost his self-confidence because parents may help them in understanding and speaking the words correctly ([Building your child’s confidence with songs](#),

[2018](#)). Another important factor is that as mathematics is by practice, language is by speaking. When MGS is sung by mothers, they try to interact with their kids, and this mother-child interaction contributes towards polishing of speaking skills of children.

When the mothers of the focus group (animated) were asked about their experience with the speaking skills of children, their response was not that positive. They were quite depressed that their kids avoid interaction with their fellows and family. Mothers reported:

“We feel that our children may be getting familiar with a new language, understanding its sentence construction, learning phonics and sounds of words and increasing their vocabulary. However, this is only helpful if our children interact with others, but they do not like to play physical games, go to garden and swing with friends or to be a part of any team-based activity. The sole purpose of their life is to sit in front of their gadget and listen to AMGS repeatedly, over and over again.”

They further asserted:

“Kids are unable to understand the importance of interacting with the social world and fellow human beings. We are afraid they will become under confident individuals in future who are unable to recognize their preferences and choices in their lives.”

The problem is at the end of parents too because children quickly learn to use and control mobile apps. The parent-child interaction that was a key feature of oral traditions of mother goose songs is now lacking because of parental neglect and children’s more pro-efficiency with latest technologies. Therefore, the selection and control have shifted from parent to child that is creating many problems in the social development of pre-school kids ([Brooks, 2016](#)). Moreover, mothers also reported:

“There is absolutely no problem with the content of AMGS. It is of high educational value, and quality of the animations is also very exceptional. However, in terms of building self-confidence and grooming language speaking and communication skills, their role is very disappointing because until and unless a child will not speak to his fellow beings, he will not learn to express himself/herself in a proper manner.”

Parental involvement or the role of caregiver is very important for the sake of making this activity engaging and to avoid the children becoming more passive. These songs may only contribute towards linguistic competencies and other developmental domains of children if parents sit with them and point out new and interesting words. Parents should encourage the usage of those words and appreciate their kids whenever they will use any word from AMGS to build a strong foundation of language ([Park, 2019, para. 8](#))

The oral language also builds vocabulary ([McGinty & Justice, 2010](#)); when children know a word, they will more easily decode it in print materials like books. Language play thus offers great aural opportunities for children to learn the meaning of words as well as the sounds with which they are constructed. Consider the complexity of sounds and words in this seemingly simple rhyme

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## **Conclusion**

Finally concluding the discussion, it is argued that mother goose songs have not lost their importance yet and this re-invention has actually helped them in surviving in this era when the channel of oral traditions of storytelling is almost replaced by mobile phones apps, social media channels and digital games. In terms of language acquisition, the role of oral mother goose songs is not appreciated by mothers in creating phonological awareness among kids. Many of the mothers denied their role in making younger kids familiar with the sounds of words. However, the role of animated mother goose songs is found to be comparatively better in terms of helping pre-school kids with phonics and phonemes.

Moreover, the role of OMGS and AMGS is found to be very crucial in terms of enriching vocabulary of children. Mothers strongly endorsed that kids learn new words by either listening to MGS from their mothers or by watching them on screens. Especially, if mothers are singing these songs for them, they learn to decode the words from the variation and ups and downs of the tone of the mother. Somehow, the role of animations is a bit ambiguous because they have changed the focus from words to visuals; still, kids learn new words and able to retain them in their memory in they watch these songs multiple times.

Lastly, the role of OMGS in improving communication skills is really appreciated by mothers because it improves parent-child interaction and builds the self-confidence of pre-school kids. Kids learn to express them by feeling intimacy with the person singing these songs for them. The role of AMGS is quite problematic in refining communication skills because kids are at the receptive end. They are becoming passive because they do not interact with the device, and the spell of AMGS is not letting them interact with their fellow beings.

## **Recommendations**

On the basis of the above conclusion, the following are the recommendations suggested by researchers:

- 1) Kids must not be left alone in front of the screen. Parental involvement is found to be a very important and determining factor, especially if they want to ensure the positive impact

of AMGS. Leaving the kids unattended in front of AMGS may damage their physical and social development proving parental negligence criminal.

- 2) There is a need to limit the screen time of the children. Parents must restrict their AMGS watching to a period of one to two hours daily.
- 3) There must be some rule soft watching AMGS, i.e., no screens at the dinner table or leaving the gadgets at evening time to go to ground and play with peers.

### **Limitations of Research**

Following are the limitations of this research work:

- 1) Researchers have selected mothers of pre-school kids belonging to the same social status, educational background and family environment to ensure homogeneity of groups. Kids of broken families or joint families are ignored deliberately to avoid intervening factors. It is assumed that the role of these songs may vary from rural to urban communities, lower to upper class and educated to uneducated families. For future researchers, it is highly recommended to explore other societal groups how they are being affected by this transformation of OMGS.
- 2) Language acquisition is a long-term process that cannot be measured within a period of a few months. There is a need to conduct some long-term studies in order to find the role of mother goose songs (oral or animated) in the language development of pre-school kids.

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