Certain skills are predictors of reading ability in young children

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A new study in the journal Learning Disabilities Research & Practice reveals that differences found between pre-kindergarten reading-disabled children and their typically reading peers diminish in various measures by pre-first grade, with the exception of phonological awareness abilities.

Susan Lambrecht Smith, Kathleen A. Scott, Jenny Roberts, and John L. Locke assessed children's alphabetic knowledge, phonological awareness (known as the conscious sensitivity to the sound structure of language), and rapid naming skills at the beginning of kindergarten and again prior to first grade as a function of later reading outcomes.

Results show that prior to kindergarten, children with reading disabilities were distinguished from their typically developing reading counterparts by their performance on tasks of letter knowledge, phonological awareness, and rapid naming skills. However, between these groups, only differences in skills related to phonological awareness persisted beyond the kindergarten year.

Measures of phonological awareness distinguished the reading disabled group from the control group at Pre-K and Pre-1. These results are consistent with observations that phonological awareness is a strong predictor of reading disability in both children at general risk and genetic risk of reading difficulty.

"Our findings have implications not only for initial assessment and

identification, but also for how progress in early literacy skills is viewed," the authors conclude.

Source: Wiley-Blackwell