

Parent Communication with Hearing-Impaired Students

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Abstract

Sign language is widely used by the deaf community or individuals with hearing impairment. Students with hearing impairment are also individuals who practice sign language to communicate. Hearing impairment students face communication barriers with their parents due to limitations in the use of sign language. The Epstein model is used as a guideline because it benefits hearing impairment students, parents, schools, and the community by improving academic performance, fostering good relationships, and raising awareness among parents and the community. The research instrument is a questionnaire aimed at obtaining quantitative data. Descriptive analysis is used to obtain mean values, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages. The findings of the study show that the skill level and frequency of parents using sign language are at a moderate level. Continuous efforts are needed for parents to use sign language at an excellent level for the future of special education needs students with hearing impairments.

Keywords: Education, Sign Language, Hearing Impairment, Communication, Parents

Introduction

The World Federation of the Deaf estimates that there are 70 million deaf people worldwide (Osugi et al., 2023) and there are 200 different sign languages (Manning et al., 2022). Sign language is widely used by the deaf or those who have hearing impairments. Students with special educational needs with Hearing Impairments (HI) also use sign language to communicate. Sign language is a method of communication used by individuals with severe hearing problems (Abushaira, 2023). It is also recognized as a form of nonverbal communication (Stanescu & Tasente, 2021).

The majority of students with HI are born into hearing families, and their parents do not know sign language (Pontecorvo et al., 2023). They also communicate with family members, friends, and teachers through sign language. Nevertheless, they encounter challenges in communicating with family members, particularly parents. The struggles parents face in communicating with their children pose a hurdle in effectively conveying information (Nancy,

2016). Parents need to consistently communicate with their children, particularly those with HI. Siti Hasnah (2013) explains that parents are the closest individuals to their children for interaction. Children with HI continuously require guidance and parental involvement in daily activities. According to the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, the significant success of students can be enhanced through parental involvement and cooperation in activities as outlined in the plan (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012).

Simultaneously, parents need to select an appropriate approach to maintain ongoing interaction, whether through sign language or total communication. For parents exclusively using sign language to communicate with their children, it's crucial to master the language proficiently to effectively convey information. Stanescu & Tasente (2021) emphasize the importance of communication for students with HI as it encompasses emotional engagement. HI students often experience disappointment and frustration when unable to express themselves or comprehend others' interactions (Nancy, 2016).

Students with HI encounter various challenges, including issues related to both development and academics. Low (2015) elucidates that the cognitive, intellectual, emotional, social, and behavioral growth of HI children are often hampered by communication obstacles they frequently face. Additionally, HI students also confront a deficiency in language input due to their inability to access language like their peers, thereby hindering their language acquisition and other developmental aspects (cognitive, socio-emotional skills, school readiness, and academic performance) (Hall et al., 2019). Research on psychopathological development suggests that HI children are more prone to experiencing emotional, behavioral, and social difficulties compared to their typical counterparts (Sealy et al., 2023).

Parents of students with HI who have typical parents often receive less attention. Parental attention is crucial and involves interaction, sharing emotions, and conversing on various topics (Beatrijs et al., 2019). Parents also encounter difficulties in gaining attention while communicating with their children to convey information (Lieberman et al., 2022). Constraints in delivering and receiving attention persist for parents who are less proficient in using sign language. Therefore, the aim of this study is to determine and identify the level of parental communication using sign language with HI children.

Literature Review

Based on this study, it was found that only two out of six mothers were proficient in using sign language to communicate with their children. Parents also expressed concerns about the late recognition of their children's hearing issues, leading to language mastery difficulties. These challenges arise from parents having less communication with their HI children compared to parents of typically hearing children. Ardzulyna (2013) elucidates that parents recognize the challenges of learning sign language to communicate effectively with their HI children.

Parents of students with HI also encounter challenges in mastering sign language to communicate with their children at home (Henner et al., 2016; Knoors & Marschark, 2012). This difficulty arises because sign language serves as a second language for parents, necessitating their acquisition of it (Snoddon, 2015). This struggle impacts not only parents but also persists and has adverse effects on the children. These negative effects manifest as issues with formal language proficiency among children and the correct utilization of sign

codes in school settings. Parents who have limited proficiency in using sign language tend to resort to informal communication at home. HI students often do not receive adequate explanations and information due to communication barriers (Low, 2015; Mohd Rosman, 2012).

HI students encounter greater difficulties in peer relationships and have fewer friendships compared to their hearing counterparts (Terlektsi et al., 2020; Von Hohendorff et al., 2013). Sign language, not universally understood or used, presents a barrier to interaction. These children face difficulties engaging with those around them, including family members, if they cannot effectively master sign language. Lederberg et al., (2013) note that environmental factors also impact sign language acquisition. Lieberman et al., (2022) suggest that children with HI often learn sign language later because their parents lack experience in its use. Similarly, Batten et al., (2013) argue that children with hearing impairments born into hearing families typically experience language delays due to inadequate communication methods. Henner et al., (2016) observe that the lasting effects of delayed language acquisition persist into adulthood for individuals with hearing impairments.

Communication involves the exchange of information among individuals. This research is grounded in Wilbur Schramm's Communication Theory, which has been recognized since 1954. It's a systematic approach aimed at effectively transmitting information, encompassing encoding, translation, and decoding of received signal codes (Nuryanto, 2011; Natashadora, 2013). According to Koptseva et al., (2015), this theory describes the process of information exchange through human interaction. Moreover, it aligns with the communication elements of HI students, which emphasize two-way communication using sign language. These elements encompass manual aspects like hand gestures, while non-manual aspects involve body parts such as the head, torso, and face (Abdullah, 2014).

Epstein's Model identifies six categories of involvement: parenting, communication, volunteering, home learning, decision-making, and community collaboration (Nurhayati, 2021; Epstein et al., 2002). This model serves as a framework, benefiting HI students, parents, schools, and the community by enhancing academic performance, fostering positive relationships, and increasing parental and community engagement. It promotes cooperation among various stakeholders, resulting in favorable outcomes (Nancy, 2016). HI students greatly relies on support and a conducive environment to enhance their learning. In addition to parenting support and skills, they also require assistive listening devices, suitable services tailored for HI students, and home learning opportunities (Zarina, 2018).

Methodology

The research design utilizes a quantitative approach, employing a survey instrument. Data collection aims to determine the proficiency level of parental communication using sign language with HI students. This study adopts purposive sampling. As described by Chua (2021), purposive sampling involves selecting a group of subjects with specific characteristics as research respondents. The study includes 50 respondents, comprising parents of HI students in Kuala Lumpur. The survey employs a five-point Likert scale for scoring and consists of 20 items related to parental sign language proficiency and frequency of communication with their children.

Result and Discussion

The findings of this research indicate that parents of children with HI possess a moderate proficiency in sign language skills. An average mean of 3.02 represents a medium level. Within

this category, the highest mean score is 3.66 for item a6, indicating that parents know their child's name. Conversely, the lowest mean score is 2.16 for item a3, which pertains to parents' ability to sign in Kod Tangan Bahasa Melayu (KTBM), Malaysian Sign Language, American Sign Language (ASL), and Sign Exact English (SEE).

The highest finding for the moderate level indicates that parents know the sign language code for their child's name, followed by their ability to signal letters A to Z and numbers 1 to 10. However, the results show that at the moderate level, parents are less knowledgeable about the sign language codes for the names of teachers and their child's friends in items six (a6), seven (a7), and eight (a8). Ideally, parents should have a high level of proficiency in knowing the sign language codes for their child's name, teachers, and friends, rather than just a moderate level. It is crucial for parents to accurately understand these codes to facilitate clear communication related to school information. If parents have limited proficiency in sign language, the information conveyed by the HI child's cannot be well understood. This is evident as the minimum score values for directions given by parents to the child using sign language, as well as the responses received from the child, are also at a moderate level.

Item four (a4) and five (a5) pertain to the sign language codes for the alphabet A to Z and numbers 0 to 10. Mastering the alphabet and numbers is fundamental for parents. However, the study findings indicate that parents can only sign the alphabet A to Z and numbers 0 to 10 at a basic level. Items one (a1) and two (a2) concern parents' ability to communicate with the child using sign language and their proficiency in understanding sign language well. Meanwhile, items nine (a9) and ten (a10) relate to parents' ability to give instructions to the child using sign language and the responses received from the child when parents use sign language. The lowest moderate finding, item three (a3), shows that parents can sign using specific sign languages such as Kod Tangan Bahasa Melayu (KTBM), Malaysian Sign Language, American Sign Language (ASL), and Sign Exact English (SEE). Parents of the child with special needs should ideally understand and be proficient in giving instructions using sign language at a higher level rather than just a moderate level. The ability of parents to use sign language is crucial and impacts the life of the child with special needs significantly.

Suggestion to improve is The Ministry of Education and Bahagian Pendidikan Khas need to provide sign language books such as Kod Tangan Bahasa Melayu (KTBM), Malaysian Sign Language, American Sign Language (ASL), Sign Exact English (SEE), and other relevant sign language books. These books can serve as guides and references for parents, HI children, and family members. In addition to books, The Ministry of Education and Bahagian Pendidikan Khas should also develop suitable sign language modules for parents. Furthermore, drastic measures need to be taken to encourage parents to use sign language more frequently with their HI children. The parties involved can conduct home visits to provide monitoring and guidance to parents.

Table 1
The Proficiency Level of Parents in Sign Language.

No.	Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
a1.	Parents / guardians can signal well	2.76	0.92	Moderate
a2.	Parents / guardians are proficient in understanding their child's sign language	2.92	0.83	Moderate
a3.	Parents / guardians can sign using the correct signs. (KTBM/ BIM /ASL / SEE)	2.16	0.98	Low
a4.	Parents / guardians are able to correctly sign the alphabet from A to Z.	3.56	1.09	Moderate
a5.	Parents / guardians are able to correctly sign the alphabet from 0 to 10.	3.54	1.15	Moderate
a6.	Parents / guardians are familiar with their child's name sign code.	3.66	1.26	Moderate
a7.	Parents / guardians are knowledgeable about the sign language codes for their child's teachers' names	2.64	1.06	Moderate
a8.	Parents / guardians are knowledgeable about the sign language codes for their child's friends' names	2.56	1.16	Moderate
a9.	Parents / guardians can give instructions to their child using sign language.	3.06	1.06	Moderate
a10.	Anak memberi respon apabila ibu bapa / penjaga berisyarat	3.38	0.92	Moderate
	Minimum average	3.02		Moderate

Conslussion

The proficiency level of parental sign language communication HI children indicates a moderate level. The frequency of parental sign language usage with HI children also demonstrates a moderate level. Findings from this study, obtained from the questionnaire, indicate that parents of HI children have yet to master sign language adequately to communicate effectively with their children. Napier et al. (2007) ; Yoshinaga-Itano et al., (2020) emphasize the importance of parents learning sign language to interact with HI children, even though it may be challenging to learn. Parents need to; enhance their proficiency in sign language to communicate more effectively for the future well-being of their children.

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