

ABSTRACT

Factors in Language Performance of Hearing-Impaired Students in Jamaica

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This study sought to establish the relationship between the language performance of hearing-impaired children in Jamaica and certain cognitive and environmental variables. It further attempted to identify any significant differences between residential and non-residential students, and factors within the school types that could be related to language performance.

The sample comprised 16 profoundly deaf students 11½ - 13½ years old, from 2 residential and 2 non-residential schools in Jamaica. The students were all congenitally deaf, and had at least five years of schooling.

Both language comprehension and production abilities were tested by means of the Test of Syntactic Abilities and written language samples. The Hiskey Nebraska Test of Learning Aptitude, the Group Embedded Figures Test, the Circles Test and Memory for Sentences were administered to obtain cognitive data on intellectual ability, learning style, creativity, and memory. Data

relating to environmental variables were collected via parent interviews, teacher questionnaires, and lesson observations.

The results revealed a high positive correlation between language performance and both intellectual ability ($p < 0.01$) and cognitive style ($p < 0.01$). Non-residential students consistently performed higher than residential students on cognitive and language variables with probability levels either significant or approaching significance at the $p < 0.05$ level. The experiential approach to teaching was identified as having a direct relationship to the students' performance.

The findings point to three major implications for language learning/teaching:-

- (1) Teachers need to be cognizant of the individual learning styles of students, and apply flexibility in their own teaching styles accordingly.
- (2) For maximum language development, the experiential/conversational approach to language teaching should take precedence over, and precede, linguistic focus.
- (3) It is essential that extra effort be made to create meaningful experiences for students in residential settings in order to enhance their language learning and simultaneously develop their cognitive abilities.