

The Impact of American Sign Language on Early Cognitive Development

Abstract

Exposure to language during prenatal and early post-natal advancement is crucial to cognitive and emotional development. Deaf newborns who are born to hearing parents are deprived of language exposure during these vital months, simply because the parents have not had prior exposure to American Sign Language (ASL) and are unable to introduce even the most elemental signs. Despite the strong campaign to push for awareness of the developmental advantages of ASL on early development, previous studies have been unable to establish credible evidence that fully supports the benefits of exposing all children to the signed language. This is because those studies focused only on Baby Sign Language (BSL), rather than ASL, and how it impacts early development. Although BSL consists of both deictic gestures and symbolic gestures, it does not consist of the same intricate language system as ASL. However, it is an acceptable tool for hearing parents to expose their infants to fundamental signs. I conducted a summer research study to evaluate the effects of ASL, rather than BSL, on early child development. I explored the previous inconclusive results, and why those results were inconclusive by introducing ASL to seven infants, ranging from eight to fourteen months old. ASL language acquisition of each infant was analyzed against standard developmental milestones, and the results indicated a correlation between early ASL acquisition and accelerated early development. I focus exclusively on Deaf Children (DC) who are born to Hearing Parents (HP).

Keywords: American Sign Language, Baby Sign Language, deaf, cognitive development