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## IMPROVED READING SKILLS FOR THE HEARING-IMPAIRED YOUNG ADULT

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### INTRODUCTION

The Residential Program for Speech and Hearing Impaired Young Adults, Northern Illinois University, offers pre-vocational services to young adults, ages sixteen to twenty-four.<sup>1</sup> The reading levels and improvement of reading levels as a result of the Program's curriculum, method of instruction and rehabilitative process over a four year period are reported in this study. Reading skills greatly influence the range of educational and vocational opportunities available to the young adult. The young adult seeking admission into most post secondary educational or vocational programs must possess a fifth grade level of reading ability or higher. The level of ability required to be successful in specific vocational areas may be higher.

In establishing realistic goals of reading levels and expectations in improvement of reading levels with the young population, a review of the literature relevant to this age range provided little information. Some direction was provided by Boatner, who reported that ninety-three percent of all pupils over 16 years of age and enrolled in schools for the deaf, thirty percent of these youths were functionally illiterate and only five percent achieved at a tenth grade or better level. Of the total population, sixty percent were reading at grade level 5.3 or below.<sup>2</sup> Numerous other reports have indicated that the reading and achievement levels of the deaf and hard of hearing students are not at a level that might be desired. The average gain in reading improvement, from ages ten to sixteen, is reported to be eight months. This is less than one year increase in reading skills during six years of traditional instruction.<sup>3</sup>

Hammermeister has reported that deaf adults who have been out of school 7 to 13 years increase their vocabulary after leaving high school.

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This appeared to be a result of social and vocational experiences. However, there does not appear to be an increased skill in paragraph meaning skill.<sup>4</sup>

Little experimental evidence exists to guide in the development of adequate instructional activities for hearing impaired young adults. It is obvious, however, after reviewing the reading levels of young adults who were no longer in secondary education and seeking rehabilitative services, that reading-language instruction is necessary if further vocational instruction is to take place. The Northern Illinois University Residential Program had provided traditional reading and language instruction separately. Upon evaluation of the results, it appeared necessary to develop instructional activities leading to an improved level of reading skill. The instruction provided was based on a combined approach of teaching reading and language as one curriculum. The method of instruction developed was based on the hypothesis that hearing impaired young adults could increase reading skills at a rate greater than has been previously indicated. The following study was implemented to evaluate the new reading language curriculum.

### **METHOD**

#### **Subjects**

Eighty hearing impaired students who had attended the Northern Illinois University Program and had completed a six week summer evaluation and nine month program consecutively were selected to serve as subjects. The subjects ranged in age from 16 to 22 years old, with 25 subjects being non-high school graduates and 55 subjects having graduated from high school.

#### **Procedure**

The eighty subjects were divided into two groups based upon the curriculum used during their period of enrollment. Subjects in Group I were provided reading and language instruction as two separate learning areas. Subjects in Group II were provided reading and language instruction as one integrated learning area. The two groups possessed comparable mental abilities, hearing loss and education. Their characteristics are presented in Table One.

The subject's reading levels were assessed by administering the Gates Reading Survey, Form M2, upon entrance into the Program. Upon completion of the curriculum, the subjects were administered the Gates Reading Survey, Form M3, as a post test. The M2 and M3 forms are comparable tests and suitable for test retest procedures with hearing

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**TABLE 1**  
**Intelligence, Hearing and Educational Levels of Group I and Group II**

Variables	G <sub>1</sub>	G <sub>2</sub>
WAIS Perf. I.Q.	99	102
Standard Deviation	12.3	10.4
3 Freq. Hearing Loss	89dB	89dB
Standard Deviation	16.9	24.9
Average Education	11.1	11.3
High School Graduates	27	28
Total Number	42	38

students.<sup>5</sup> However, it should be pointed out that there are no reading tests that have been developed for deaf students and that the above test may not be totally adequate.

Subjects in Group I received two hours of reading instruction and two hours of language instruction each week. These two subject areas were taught by different teachers. In total, 144 hours of classroom instruction were provided for Group I. Subjects in Group II received three hours of reading language instruction per week. In total, 108 hours of classroom instruction was provided for Group II. The same teacher provided the reading instruction for both groups. The results were analyzed by using the Computerized Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study do not represent the total hearing impaired population. The subjects represented were selected as a result of their demonstrated desire to enhance their vocational opportunities.

The instruction and curriculum used during the classroom activities of Group I were based on the traditional assumption that these areas are exclusive. The instruction and curriculum used during the classroom activities of Group II were based upon the assumption that language abilities and reading abilities are related. The classroom activities of both groups were also related to activities of daily living and knowledges necessary for independent living.

The subjects in both groups improved in reading ability. Group I made limited improvement in measurable ability. The reading levels of Group II were significantly different at the .05 level from the reading levels of Group I. The pretest and post test results are demonstrated in Table 2.

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**TABLE 2**  
**Pretest and Post-test Grade Level Results of Group I and Group II**

Reading Level	Group I			Group II		
	Pretest	Post-test	Change	Pretest	Post-test	Change
Vocab.	5.6	6.2	0.6	5.2	6.4	1.2
Std. Dev.	2.3	2.3	1.3	2.4	2.5	1.1
Comp.	5.7	6.0	0.3	5.0	6.0	1.0
Std. Dev.	2.0	2.4	1.1	2.4	2.7	1.4

Although, Group II received 25% less classroom instruction, they demonstrated an average increase in vocabulary skill of 1.2 years as compared to the increase of 0.6 years by Group I. Group II demonstrated an average increase in comprehension skill of 1 year as compared to the 0.3 years increase demonstrated by Group I.

Although no formal evaluation was carried out, the teachers indicated that the students level of interest and participation appeared to be higher when reading language skills were taught as one curriculum. This increased interest by the students was also demonstrated by a simultaneous increase in attendance.

**IMPLICATIONS**

The results of this study indicate that reading and language instruction might be taught as one unit for the hearing impaired young adult to facilitate development of vocabulary and comprehension skills. The young adult population is capable of improving its reading skills when motivation and materials presented are relevant to their needs. This is evidenced by the significant increases in vocabulary and comprehension as demonstrated by these subjects. Approaches used in teaching reading skills in elementary and secondary education may warrant experimental investigation to find if similar curriculum modifications are beneficial in classroom instruction. The increased level of comprehension demonstrated is also supportive of adult deaf education activities.

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