

**The oral language development of deaf children in a sign  
bilingualism and co-enrollment program**

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**Purpose:**

To explore the oral language development of Cantonese-speaking children with hearing impairment enrolled in a sign bilingualism and co-enrolment program in Hong Kong and to compare the oral language development of students enrolled in the bilingualism and co-enrolment program and those in other mainstreaming schools.

**Method:**

A total of 14 children with hearing impairment, enrolled in the sign bilingualism and co-enrolment program in Hong Kong, were included. The oral language performances of these children were assessed with the Hong Kong Cantonese Oral Language Assessment Scale (HKCOLAS) at two time points. The two time points differed about 3 years (+/- 0.5 years). The scores over time were compared using a repeated measures ANOVA test. The language abilities of 12 of these children were further selected to be compared with 16 children with hearing impairment in other mainstreaming schools. The comparison was made by using a repeated measures ANCOVA test, after controlling the degree of hearing loss and speech perception ability.

**Results:**

The results showed that students in the sign bilingualism and co-enrolment program in Hong Kong showed improvement in oral language in general. Improvement was noted in five out of six subtests, including Cantonese grammar, textual comprehension, word definition, lexical-semantic relationship and story retell. The improvement in textual comprehension was statistically significant.

For the comparison with children with hearing impairment in other mainstreaming schools, it was found that students in the sign bilingualism and co-enrolment program developed oral language at a faster rate than those in other mainstream schools in the overall oral language performance. The faster development rate by students in the sign bilingualism and co-enrolment program was found in four out of six subtests, including Cantonese grammar, textual comprehension, lexical-semantic relationship and story retell.

## The 2014 Symposium on Sign Bilingualism and Deaf Education

### **Conclusion:**

Children with hearing impairment enrolled in a sign bilingual co-enrollment educational program showed positive oral language growth over time in general. Moreover, their rate of oral language development is faster than that by the students in other mainstream schools. Hence, exposures to sign language do not seem to hinder the positive oral language growth in children with hearing impairment.

