

**THE IMPACT OF SIGN LANGUAGE
EXPOSURE AND USE IN DEAF CHILDREN'S
ACQUISITION OF VOCABULARY**

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**FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS
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ABSTRACT

This research studies the expressive and receptive skills of four Deaf children with the aim of investigating how different linguistic environment, such as the amount of input and practice, will affect their sign language acquisition. The study was conducted through observations of the subjects in the formal learning activity sessions and their regular activities in three different settings: home, church and shopping mall. Interviews were conducted with each of the subjects' parents to gather background information regarding the linguistic input the subjects have acquired as well as the way the subjects communicate with their parents and the people around them. During the observation period in the learning activities, the subjects' expressive and receptive levels in sign language through their responses to the Early Intervention Programme (EIP) worker were videotaped, and later transcribed orthographically for further analysis. Analyses show that the subjects are capable in expressing sign language vocabulary based on the amount of input the subjects had acquired from their parents and practiced. This is in line with Watson, Watson and Wilson (1999)'s recommendation that sufficient input and practice is important in acquiring language. The handshapes that the subjects formed and are able to recall reflect the time and effort the subjects have taken to practice the sign vocabularies in communicating with the people around them. This study hopes to pave the way to greater initiative and interest in sign language related research in Malaysia, especially in the field of sign language acquisition that affects all Deaf people.

ABSTRAK

Penyelidikan ini mengkaji kemahiran ekspresif dan reseptif empat orang kanak-kanak Pekak sebagai subjek utama kajian ini dengan tujuan untuk menyiasat bagaimana persekitaran linguistik yang berbeza, seperti jumlah input dan amalan, mempengaruhi pemerolehan bahasa isyarat mereka. Kajian ini telah dijalankan melalui pemerhatian ke atas subjek dalam aktiviti/sesi pembelajaran yang formal dan aktiviti harian mereka di tiga tempat yang berbeza; rumah, gereja dan pusat membeli-belah. Sesi temubual telah dijalankan dengan setiap ibu bapa subjek untuk mengumpul maklumat latarbelakang mengenai input linguistik yang subjek telah perolehi serta cara subjek berkomunikasi dengan ibu bapa dan orang di sekeliling mereka. Dalam tempoh pemerhatian aktiviti pembelajaran, tahap ekspresif dan reseptif subjek dalam bahasa isyarat melalui respon mereka kepada pekerja Program Intervensi Awal (EIP) telah dirakamkan dengan video, kemudian ditranskripsi dalam bentuk tulisan untuk analisis selanjutnya. Analisis menunjukkan bahawa subjek mampu menghasilkan kosakata bahasa isyarat berdasarkan jumlah input linguistik yang telah mereka perolehi daripada ibu bapa mereka dan melalui latihan/amalan subjek. Penemuan ini adalah selaras dengan cadangan Watson, Watson dan Wilson (1999) yang menyarankan kepentingan input dan latihan dalam pemerolehan bahasa. Bentuk tangan yang dihasilkan dan diingat kembali oleh subjek membayangkan masa dan usaha yang telah mereka curahkan dalam latihan dan komunikasi bersama orang di sekeliling mereka. Kajian ini diharapkan dapat membuka jalan untuk inisiatif yang lebih tinggi dalam penyelidikan berkaitan bahasa isyarat di Malaysia, terutama dalam bidang pemerolehan bahasa isyarat yang melibatkan semua orang Pekak.

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