

## Signed Language Phonological Awareness: Building Deaf Children's Vocabulary in Signed and Written Language

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**Abstract :** The goal of this project was to develop a visually-based, signed language phonological awareness training program and to pilot the intervention with signing deaf children (ages 6 -10 years/ grades 1 - 4) who were beginning readers to assess the effects of systematic explicit American Sign Language (ASL) phonological instruction on both ASL vocabulary and English print vocabulary learning. Growing evidence that signing learners utilize visually-based signed language phonological knowledge (homologous to the sound-based phonological level of spoken language processing) when reading underscore the critical need for further research on the innovation of reading instructional practices for visual language learners. Multiple single-case studies using a multiple probe design across content (i.e., sign and print targets incorporating specific ASL phonological parameters – handshapes) was implemented to examine if a functional relationship existed between instruction and acquisition of these skills. The results indicated that for all cases, representing a variety of language abilities, the visually-based phonological teaching approach was exceptionally powerful in helping children to build their sign and print vocabularies. Although intervention/teaching studies have been essential in testing hypotheses about spoken language phonological processes supporting non-deaf children's reading development, there are no parallel intervention/teaching studies exploring hypotheses about signed language phonological processes in supporting deaf children's reading development. This study begins to provide the needed evidence to pursue innovative teaching strategies that incorporate the strengths of visual learners.

**Keywords :** American sign language phonological awareness, dual language strategies, vocabulary learning, word reading

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