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## Deaf Individuals' Bilingual Abilities: American Sign Language Proficiency, Reading Skills, and Family Characteristics

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### ABSTRACT

The current study investigated the bilingual abilities of 55 Deaf individuals, examining both American Sign Language (ASL) competency and English reading skills. Results revealed a positive relationship between ASL competency and English skills, with highly competent signers scoring higher on a measure of reading comprehension. Additionally, family characteristics (e.g., parental education level, family hearing status) were entered into the analysis to ascertain their effect on Deaf individuals' bilingual abilities. The findings support the theory that competency in ASL may serve as a bridge to the acquisition of English print. Moreover, the findings provide support for the critical period hypothesis for first language acquisition and its later impact on other cognitive and academic skills.

### KEYWORDS

Deaf, American Sign Language, Reading, Bilingual, Family

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