

Hearing loss and educational outcomes

Students who are Deaf or hard of hearing can experience a range of difficulties at school that can impact their educational outcomes. When starting school students who are Deaf or hard of hearing may not have age appropriate language, and for those attending mainstream schooling, this language delay means many begin school already behind their peers (Marschark, et. al, 2010).

With schools often working from an auditory/speech-based system, students who are Deaf or hard of hearing can experience difficulties engaging in the school curriculum and demonstrating their understanding of content. This also impacts their ability to learn and can contribute to low levels of literacy (Geers, 2006).

Issues that may affect students who are Deaf or hard of hearing's academic performance at school

Sound identification

Students who are Deaf or hard of hearing's inability to hear certain sounds impacts on their spelling, reading and/or phonemic awareness skill development. For example, understanding plurals, possessives, ordinals, verb-noun agreement and the subtle nuances of speech can be difficult because they are not able to hear quieter and higher pitched sounds.

Cognitive load

Students who are Deaf or hard of hearing have an increased cognitive load in the classroom compared to their typically hearing peers including lip reading, listening to the teacher speak through their personal FM system, ignoring any background noise, looking at the board, processing new information and writing notes – all of which impact the ability to follow instructions, pay attention and take notes.

Social rules and nuances

Students who are Deaf or hard of hearing can easily miss out on incidental learning of social rules and may not be aware of the range and subtleties of verbal and non-verbal language and behaviour. This may lead to misconceptions and confusion for students who are Deaf or hard of hearing when relating to peers, especially when the direction of play changes quickly. Misunderstandings can lead to frustration and impatience (Risser Lytle, 2016).

Background knowledge/vocabulary

The existing language delay experienced by students who are Deaf or hard of hearing is often due to limited listening experiences and vocabulary. This can impact their ability to learn and understand new concepts, challenging vocabulary, multiple meaning and idiomatic language.

Listening effort and fatigue

The increased cognitive load for students who are Deaf or hard of hearing requires substantial listening effort which often results in fatigue. This fatigue makes following conversations, particularly long ones, and remembering/recalling information and instructions challenging.

Daily aspects of the school environment and classroom activities that typically hearing students may not find difficult, can be challenging for students who are Deaf or hard of hearing. These include:

- Listening to PA announcements
- Accessing audio sources
- Group/partner work
- Interactive lessons
- Class discussions
- Sports/gym
- Excursions
- Recess/lunch breaks

Adapted from <https://successforkidswithhearingloss.com/for-professionals/impact-of-hearing-loss-child/>

Additional factors impacting educational outcomes of students who are Deaf or hard of hearing

Connectedness to school community

Students who are Deaf or hard of hearing may not feel as connected to their school community as their typically hearing peers, particularly those who attend mainstream schools. This can impact their learning and educational outcomes. Students who are Deaf or hard of hearing have been identified as displaying higher levels of withdrawn behaviour and lower levels of pro-social behaviour compared to their typically hearing peers. This may impact on their feelings of belonging in the school and wider community, creating a disconnect from other students (Wauters & Knoors, 2008). In turn, this may also lead to peer victimisation, school absences, and an increased disconnect from the school.

Teacher-student relationship

The quality of teacher-student relationships among students who are Deaf or hard of hearing is highly dependent on the student's level of hearing loss, communication development level and teacher awareness of the hearing loss condition (Stevenson et al., 2010). Teachers may consider the behaviour of a student who is Deaf or hard of hearing to be disruptive if they are unaware or if the teacher has a limited understanding of the student's level of communication development (Stevenson et al., 2010). These factors affect the teacher-student relationship and subsequently the student's education experience (Farmer et al., 2011). Schools that have an inclusive and positive climate have a higher sense of student belonging, which positively influences teacher-student relationships (Johnson, 2009; Nipedal et al., 2010).

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