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Phonological decoding and reading comprehension in deaf children

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Many deaf children receive intensive intervention to help them acquire spoken language. This can facilitate the development of phonological skills, which may later contribute to successful phonological decoding as children learn to read. However, underlying language delay can remain a concern and while children may decode successfully, they may not comprehend what they read. This study sought to examine if there was a gap between phonological decoding and reading comprehension among a sample of deaf children attending mainstream schools in Ireland. Forty deaf children aged 7-13 were tested using two separate reading assessments that were selected to measure the skills of phonological decoding and reading comprehension. In spite of the fact that most DHH children were, on average, reading within the normal range compared with their hearing peers, there was a distinct gap between decoding and comprehension skills among the sample. Furthermore, while decoding and comprehension skills correlated strongly and significantly for younger children in this sample, this relationship disappeared with older children.