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**THE EFFECT OF  
OTITIS MEDIA WITH EFFUSION (OME)  
ON EMERGING LITERACY**

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## ABSTRACT

Otitis Media with Effusion (OME), commonly referred to as glue ear, is one of the most common illnesses of early childhood. It is difficult to detect as OME is frequently symptom free and usually clears spontaneously. It can be detected by tympanometry, a simple painless non-intrusive test, which can be easily performed by trained operators. In New Zealand all children have this hearing test on school entry. Research has shown links between OME and educational underachievement, possibly due to the intermittent deafness which accompanies this condition. As OME mostly occurs during early childhood, a time when the basis of language is being established, it may cause delays in learning which will not be seen until later in life.

This research was designed to examine the possible effect of OME on emerging literacy in 120 children from a large urban area of New Zealand. The aural history of the children was established from a questionnaire and the results of the hearing tests on school entry. Measures of their reading ability were obtained from their scores on the Diagnostic Reading Survey. This survey, usually referred to as the six year old net test, is taken by most children in New Zealand. The childrens' scores on the reading test were examined to see if there was any correlation between these and evidence of OME.

Although no conclusive proof was found that children with OME were reading at a lower age than their peers, statistically significant differences were found between the scores of the Dictation section of the test. The Dictation section is designed to measure how well children are distinguishing and recording individual sounds in words. The findings suggest that OME affects auditory discrimination so that incorrect symbols are ascribed to sounds. This effect will hinder a child when learning to read and may cause delays in other aspects of learning.

No evidence of increased incidence of OME amongst Maori or Pacific Island students was found, however, the number of these students in the sample was very small. Maori and Pacific Island students however did have significantly lower scores than their peers in all aspects of the reading test.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
LIST OF TABLES	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON THE LINKS BETWEEN LEARNING AND OTITIS MEDIA WITH EFFUSION (OME)	3
HYPOTHESES	7
THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HEARING AND OME	9
THE ANATOMY OF THE EAR	9
THE MECHANISM OF HEARING	10
WHAT IS OME?	10
What are the Signs and Symptoms of Otitis Media with Effusion?	13
THE INCIDENCE OF OME	13
THE SITUATION IN NEW ZEALAND WITH REGARD TO OME	14
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HEARING AND SPEECH	16
THE NORMAL DEVELOPMENT OF SPEECH	16
THE EFFECTS OF HEARING IMPAIRMENT ON DEVELOPING SPEECH	16
THE EFFECT OF OME ON HEARING AND SPEECH	18
THE EMERGENCE OF LITERACY	19
HOW DO CHILDREN LEARN TO READ?	19
THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF OME ON EMERGING LITERACY	21

METHOD	23
SAMPLE SELECTION	23
Schools	23
Subjects	23
PROCEDURE	26
INSTRUMENTATION	28
Hearing	28
1. Audiometry	29
2. Tympanometry	30
Reading Test	31
1. Running Record	31
2. Letter Identification	32
3. Concepts about Print (CAP)	32
4. Word Test	32
5. Word Vocabulary	32
6. Dictation	32
Questionnaire	33
RESULTS	34
EAR INFECTIONS	35
Number of Infections	35
Age of Onset of Infections	35
Age of Last Infection	36
Family History	37
DIAGNOSTIC READING SURVEY	38
Reading Levels	38
Sight Word Score	39
Vocabulary Scores	40
Dictation Scores	41
COMPARISON OF DIAGNOSTIC READING SURVEY RESULTS AND EAR STATUS	42
Ear Function Tests with Reading Level	42
Number of Infections compared to Reading Levels	42
The effects of wearing grommets	46
COMPARISON OF DIAGNOSTIC READING SURVEY RESULTS, EAR FUNCTION TESTS AND NUMBER OF INFECTIONS	48
Reading Level	48
Word Sight Test	48
Vocabulary Test	48
Dictation Test	49
THE EFFECT OF ETHNICITY	52
DISCUSSION	54
LIMITATIONS	57
CONCLUSION	59

APPENDIX ONE	61
Letter to Parents	62
Consent Form	64
Questionnaire	65
Letter to school principal	67
APPENDIX TWO	69
Stanine Scores for Diagnostic Reading Survey	70
APPENDIX THREE	71
Record Sheets for Diagnostic Reading Survey	72
APPENDIX FOUR	78
Reading Book Scale	79
APPENDIX FIVE	80
Word List for Sight Word Section of Diagnostic Reading Survey	81
Text For Dictation Section of Diagnostic Reading Survey	82
BIBLIOGRAPHY	83



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	The Anatomy of the Ear	9
Figure 2	Comparison of Ethnicity of Population and Sample	25
Figure 3	An Example of an Audiogram	29
Figure 4	Tympanogram of Normal Ear	30
Figure 5	Tympanograms of Abnormal Ears	30
Figure 6	Reading Levels as determined by Diagnostic Reading Survey (n=120)	38
Figure 7	Sight Word Score as determined by Diagnostic Reading Survey (n=120)	39
Figure 8	Vocabulary Score as determined by Diagnostic Reading Survey (n=120)	40
Figure 9	Dictation Score as determined by Diagnostic Reading Survey (n=120)	41
Figure 10	Reading Level compared to Ear Function Tests (n=120)	42
Figure 11	Reading Levels of Students without infections. (n=43)	43
Figure 12	Reading Level of Students with Ten or Less Infections. (n=59)	43
Figure 13	Reading levels of Students with more than Ten Infections (n=18)	44

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1 Sample Population identified by Ethnic Group and Sex	24
Table 2 Total Urban Population under study identified by Ethnic Group and Sex	24
Table 3 Results of Hearing Test at Age Five	34
Table 4 Results of Tympanometry Test at Age Five	34
Table 5 Members of Students' Families with History of Ear Infections	37
Table 6 History of Students with Grommets (n=10)	45
Table 7 Summary of Data on Ear Function Tests, Number of Infections and Reading Survey	47
Table 8 Results for Whole Group and Sample Group	47
Table 9 Results for Maori Students (n=12)	50
Table 10 Results for Pacific Island Students (n=7)	51
Table 11 Group minus Maori and Pacific Island Students (n=101)	51