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English as a Medium of Communication for Children with Hearing Impairment in the Context of National Education Policy 2020: A Thematic Review

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Abstract

Communication is a fundamental aspect of human interaction and educational development. For children with hearing impairment, communication plays a crucial role in language acquisition, social participation, academic achievement, and personal development. In the contemporary educational context, English has emerged as an important medium of communication and learning across educational institutions, professional sectors, and global platforms. However, children with hearing impairment often face challenges in acquiring English language skills because traditional teaching methods are largely based on auditory learning and verbal communication. The present thematic article explores the significance of English as a medium of communication for children with hearing impairment within the framework of the National Education Policy (NEP 2020). The article discusses communication barriers, inclusive educational practices, the role of assistive technologies, teacher preparedness, and policy perspectives related to English language learning among children with hearing impairment. It further highlights the importance of inclusive pedagogy, sign language support, visual learning resources, and accessible educational environments in promoting effective communication skills. The article emphasizes that inclusive and equitable educational opportunities can help children with hearing impairment develop confidence, academic competence, and social participation. The discussion contributes to the broader discourse on inclusive education and language learning in India.

Keywords: *Hearing Impairment, English Language Learning, Communication, Inclusive Education, NEP 2020, Sign Language, Assistive Technology*

1. INTRODUCTION

Language and communication are essential components of human life. They enable individuals to express thoughts, emotions, ideas, and experiences while also facilitating social interaction and educational growth. Communication plays a particularly important role in the educational development of children because learning largely occurs through interaction, instruction, and exchange of ideas. Among various languages used in educational and professional settings, English has gained global significance and is widely recognized as an international language of communication. In India, English serves as an important language in education, administration, science, technology, and employment sectors. It is often considered a gateway to higher education and professional opportunities. Educational institutions introduce English from the early stages of schooling, and students are expected to develop proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension skills. However, acquiring English language skills can be particularly challenging for children with hearing impairment because hearing ability is closely associated with speech and language development. Hearing impairment affects an individual's ability to receive and interpret auditory information. Children with hearing impairment may experience difficulties in speech perception, pronunciation, listening comprehension, and oral communication. These challenges often influence their language development, classroom participation, academic achievement, and social interaction. Since traditional methods of teaching English rely heavily on auditory instruction and spoken communication, learners with hearing impairment may not receive equal opportunities to develop effective communication skills. Children with hearing impairment often depend on alternative modes of communication such as sign language, lip-reading, gestures, visual cues, written communication, and assistive technologies. While these methods support communication, educational systems sometimes fail to provide adequate inclusive support and accessible learning environments. Lack of trained teachers, insufficient use of sign language, limited access to assistive devices, and absence of accessible learning materials continue to create barriers in English language learning.

The concept of inclusive education has gained considerable attention in recent years. Inclusive education emphasizes equal educational opportunities

for all learners irrespective of disability, gender, social background, or economic condition. It promotes participation, accessibility, and learner-centered teaching practices. In India, educational policies have increasingly focused on the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream educational settings. The National Education Policy 2020 represents a significant step towards promoting inclusive and equitable education in India. The policy highlights the importance of providing quality education to all learners, including children with disabilities. NEP 2020 emphasizes accessibility, multilingualism, flexibility in learning, teacher training, use of technology, and inclusive classroom practices. The policy recognizes the importance of Indian Sign Language and encourages educational institutions to adopt inclusive strategies that support learners with hearing impairment. Within the context of NEP 2020, English language learning becomes an important area of discussion because communication skills are closely connected with educational success and social participation. Children with hearing impairment require accessible communication methods and inclusive instructional practices to develop English language proficiency. Visual teaching methods, captioned educational resources, assistive technologies, sign language interpretation, and learner-centered pedagogies can significantly improve communication and learning experiences.

This thematic article examines English as a medium of communication for children with hearing impairment in the context of NEP 2020. It discusses the educational significance of English, communication barriers faced by learners with hearing impairment, the role of inclusive educational practices, and the importance of supportive learning environments. The article also explores the responsibilities of teachers, institutions, policymakers, and society in ensuring meaningful communication opportunities for children with hearing impairment.

2. UNDERSTANDING HEARING IMPAIRMENT AND COMMUNICATION

Hearing impairment refers to partial or complete loss of hearing that affects an individual's ability to perceive sound. It may range from mild to profound hearing loss and can occur due to congenital, medical, genetic, or environmental factors. The severity of hearing impairment influences communication, speech development, language acquisition, and social interaction.

Communication is one of the most affected areas in the lives of children with hearing impairment. Since spoken language is primarily acquired through auditory exposure, limited hearing can create difficulties in understanding speech sounds, vocabulary, sentence structure, and pronunciation. These challenges often influence academic learning and classroom participation. Children with hearing impairment may use different modes of communication depending on their educational background, level of hearing loss, and available support systems. Common communication methods include sign language, lip-reading or speech reading, gestures and facial expressions, written communication, oral communication, use of hearing aids or cochlear implants and assistive communication technologies. The communication experiences of children with hearing impairment vary widely. Some learners may communicate effectively through sign language, while others may prefer oral communication or bilingual approaches. Therefore, educational systems must adopt flexible and inclusive communication practices that address diverse learner needs.

3. IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH AS A MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION

English has become one of the most influential languages in the modern world. It is widely used in higher education, international communication, business, technology, science, media, and digital platforms. In India, English is often associated with academic advancement, social mobility, and professional success. For children with hearing impairment, learning English is important for different areas.

Academic Development - English is frequently used as a medium of instruction in schools, colleges, and universities. Students are expected to read textbooks, complete assignments, participate in examinations, and access digital educational resources in English. Proficiency in English can therefore support academic achievement and educational participation.

Communication and Social Participation - English communication skills enable learners to interact with a wider community beyond local or regional language boundaries. Effective communication helps children with hearing impairment develop confidence, social relationships, and self-expression.

Employment Opportunities - In many professional sectors, English proficiency is considered essential for employment and career growth. Children with hearing impairment who acquire communication skills in English may gain better opportunities for higher education and employment.

Digital and Technological Access - Most digital learning resources, educational applications, and online platforms use English language content. Understanding English allows learners with hearing impairment to benefit from technological and educational advancements. Despite these benefits, many learners with hearing impairment continue to face barriers in developing English communication skills due to inaccessible teaching methods and inadequate educational support.

Communication Barriers in English Language Learning - Children with hearing impairment encounter several barriers while learning English as a medium of communication. These barriers may arise from educational, linguistic, technological, social, and institutional factors.

Limited Auditory Input - English language learning often depends on listening and speaking activities. Learners with hearing impairment may face difficulty understanding spoken language, pronunciation patterns, and classroom instructions because of reduced auditory access.

Inadequate Inclusive Teaching Methods - Traditional teaching approaches generally focus on oral instruction and lecture-based learning. Such methods may not effectively support learners who depend on visual communication.

Lack of Sign Language Support - In many educational settings, teachers are not trained in sign language communication. This creates communication gaps between teachers and learners, affecting classroom participation and comprehension.

Limited Access to Accessible Learning Materials - Children with hearing impairment may not receive captioned videos, visual learning materials, simplified instructional resources, or assistive technological support necessary for effective learning.

Communication Anxiety and Low Confidence - Difficulties in communication may reduce learners' confidence and participation in classroom activities, group discussions, and social interactions.

Teacher Preparation and Awareness - Many teachers receive limited training regarding inclusive

pedagogy and communication strategies for children with hearing impairment. Lack of awareness may affect classroom inclusion and learner engagement.

4. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND NEP 2020

The National Education Policy 2020 highlights the importance of inclusive and equitable education for all learners, including children with disabilities. The policy emphasizes that every learner should receive equal opportunities to participate and succeed in education. NEP 2020 recognizes the educational needs of children with disabilities and encourages educational institutions to create accessible learning environments. The policy promotes Inclusive classroom practices, use of assistive technologies, teacher training in inclusive education, flexible curriculum and assessment methods, access to quality educational resources, development and promotion of Indian Sign Language, barrier-free educational environments. The policy also emphasizes multilingualism and communication accessibility. By encouraging inclusive pedagogy and technological integration, NEP 2020 provides opportunities for improving English language learning among children with hearing impairment. Educational institutions are expected to ensure that learners with disabilities receive suitable accommodations and support systems. Inclusive education should focus not only on physical access to classrooms but also on meaningful participation, communication, and academic engagement.

5. ROLE OF TEACHERS IN INCLUSIVE ENGLISH COMMUNICATION

Teachers play a significant role in promoting effective communication and inclusive learning experiences for children with hearing impairment. Positive teacher attitudes, inclusive classroom practices, and learner-centered instructional strategies can greatly influence students' confidence and academic performance. There are some important teaching practices where teachers play a vital role.

Use of Visual Aids - Visual learning materials such as pictures, charts, flashcards, PowerPoint presentations, and videos help learners understand concepts more effectively.

Sign Language Support - Knowledge of basic sign language can improve communication between teachers and students. Sign language interpretation can support classroom comprehension and participation.

Interactive Teaching Methods - Group activities, demonstrations, role-play, storytelling, and collaborative learning encourage participation and communication.

Simplified Language and Written Instructions - Teachers should provide clear written instructions and use simple language while explaining concepts.

Encouragement and Emotional Support - Supportive classroom environments motivate learners to participate actively and develop communication confidence. Teacher training programs should include components related to inclusive education, disability awareness, and communication strategies for learners with hearing impairment.

Role of Assistive Technology in Communication

- Technological advancements have significantly improved educational opportunities for children with hearing impairments. Assistive technologies support communication, comprehension, and classroom participation. There are some useful technologies, including: hearing aids, cochlear implants, speech-to-text applications, captioned educational videos, interactive learning software, digital dictionaries and translation tools, and online communication platforms. Technology can make English language learning more accessible by providing visual and text-based learning opportunities. Digital platforms also allow learners to access educational resources independently. However, accessibility to assistive technology remains unequal in many educational settings due to financial limitations, lack of infrastructure, and insufficient training.

Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Practices

- Although policies and educational reforms support inclusive education, several challenges continue to affect implementation.

Lack of Infrastructure - Many schools and colleges lack accessible classrooms, technological facilities, and inclusive learning materials.

Shortage of Trained Professionals - There is a shortage of teachers trained in special education, sign language, and inclusive instructional methods.

Limited Awareness - Societal misconceptions and lack of awareness regarding hearing impairment may affect inclusion and acceptance.

Inadequate Policy Implementation - Educational policies often face implementation gaps at institutional levels due to insufficient monitoring and resources.

Economic Barriers - Families from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may face difficulty accessing assistive devices and specialized educational support. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts from policymakers, educational institutions, teachers, parents, and society.

6. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following measures can help promote English communication skills among children with hearing impairment:

- Educational institutions should adopt inclusive and learner-centered teaching methods.
- Teachers should receive regular training in inclusive pedagogy and sign language communication.
- Schools and colleges should provide captioned videos, visual learning resources, and assistive technologies.
- Classroom communication should include visual explanations, written instructions, and interactive activities.
- Educational policies should ensure proper implementation of inclusive practices at all educational levels.
- Awareness programs should be organized to promote positive attitudes toward disability and inclusion.
- Parents should be actively involved in supporting communication and language learning at home.
- Technology-based learning resources should be made affordable and accessible.
- Research and innovation in inclusive English language teaching should be encouraged.
- Institutions should establish support services and counseling facilities for learners with disabilities.

7. CONCLUSION

English has become an important medium of communication in modern education and professional life. For children with hearing impairment, acquiring communication skills in English can contribute significantly to academic success, social participation, self-confidence, and employment opportunities. However, learners with hearing impairment continue to face communication barriers due to limited auditory

access, inadequate inclusive practices, lack of accessible resources, and insufficient institutional support. The National Education Policy 2020 provides a strong framework for promoting inclusive and equitable education in India. Its emphasis on accessibility, assistive technology, teacher training, and inclusive learning environments creates opportunities for improving communication and educational participation among children with hearing impairment. Inclusive education should focus not only on physical inclusion but also on meaningful communication, equal participation, and learner empowerment. Teachers, educational institutions, policymakers, parents, and society collectively share the responsibility of creating supportive and accessible learning environments. By adopting inclusive teaching methods, integrating assistive technologies, and promoting communication accessibility, educational systems can help children with hearing impairment become active participants in academic and social life. Ensuring equal opportunities for English language learning is essential for building an inclusive and equitable society where every learner can achieve personal and educational growth.

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