Educational Experiences of Students with Hearing Impairment Studying in Special Education Institutions across Punjab

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**ARTICLE DETAILS**

**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose:** This qualitative research looks into the nuanced educational experiences of students with hearing impairment within special education institutions across the nine divisions of Punjab.  

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** This research employed a qualitative study design with a focus on thematic analysis. The study population consisted of students with hearing impairment, and a purposive sample of 36 participants was selected for in-depth interviews.  

**Findings:** Through in-depth interviews with 36 participants, we unearthed prevailing circumstances revealing a landscape characterized by traditional teaching approaches, limited use of technology, and disparities between special education centers and schools. Elementary-level students encounter greater challenges, as secondary-level students prepare for board exams, driving heightened teacher scrutiny. Likewise, students studying in special education centres face greater challenges than in schools.  

**Implications/Originality/Value:** These findings underscore the need for a more inclusive and technologically enriched educational framework, accompanied by personalized support services. By addressing these disparities and providing tailored education, we can empower students with hearing impairment to thrive academically and holistically.

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**Introduction**

Students with hearing impairment represent a marginalized and often underserved group within the educational system. Their unique learning needs and challenges necessitate focused attention to ensure equitable access to quality education. The educational experiences of students with hearing impairment
represent a critical dimension of inclusive education efforts. This study delves into the distinctive context of special education institutions in Punjab, where students with hearing impairment seek access to quality learning environments. Understanding their experiences is pivotal in shaping educational strategies that ensure equity and inclusivity. So, this problem statement stems from the imperative to address the educational disparities faced by students with hearing impairment, contribute to quality education efforts, and offer practical insights for improving their learning experiences in special education institutions within the Punjab region.

**Literature Review**

Globally, individuals with disabilities are acknowledged as a vulnerable demographic. Disability is characterized by impairments in body structure or function, limitations in activities, and restrictions in participation (WHO & World Bank, 2011). One such silent disability is hearing impairment, considered the most prevalent sensory disability worldwide and a growing concern (Olusanya, 2007). In Pakistan, the issue of hearing loss among children is significant, with approximately 4.7% of the population experiencing hearing impairment, particularly pronounced among children (WHO, 2021). For children, hearing loss hinders speech and language development, limiting their educational and vocational prospects (Daud et al., 2010). In adulthood, it can lead to isolation, stigmatization, psychiatric distress, and restricted career options (Olusanya et al., 2014). Fortunately, much of the hearing impairment is treatable or avoidable (Mulwafu et al., 2016).

Quality and equitable education are central to the development of human resources (Idris et al., 2012). However, achieving quality education remains a persistent challenge (McLaughlin et al., 2016; Motala & Carel, 2019; Valiandes, 2015). Education empowers individuals with hearing impairment to lead independent lives, beginning with foundational skills and knowledge acquisition (Kyere, 2009; Oduro, 2000).

Academic progression relies on students' performance, yet students with hearing impairment (SHIs) face multiple challenges that hinder their academic success (Marschark et al., 2001; Szymanski et al., 2013). Challenges stem from various sources, including SHIs themselves, parents, society, and educational institutions (Agyire-Tettey et al., 2017). Health issues, reading habits, unrealistic expectations, and limited parental involvement contribute negatively to their academic performance. Institutional barriers, such as ineffective teaching methods, inadequate materials, and rigid syllabi, further hinder SHIs' academic success.

Research indicates that the academic achievement of deaf and hard-of-hearing students is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including individual characteristics, family environments, and educational experiences (Marschark et al., 2015). Encouraging the education of hearing-impaired students can generate benefits for both individuals and society (Garramiola-Bilbao & Rodríguez-Álvarez, 2016). It fosters early integration, positively impacting family and social dynamics while representing a valuable investment in human capital for society.

Despite the recognition of the challenges faced by students with hearing impairment in accessing quality education, there exists a gap in understanding the nuanced experiences of these students within the specific context of special education institutions in Punjab, Pakistan. This study seeks to bridge this gap by delving into the unique learning journeys of students with hearing impairment, shedding light on the barriers they encounter and the potential opportunities for enhancing their educational experiences.

**Research Objectives**

To investigate the learning experiences of students with hearing impairment in special education institutions across nine divisions of Punjab.

To identify the educational support systems and strategies employed in special education institutions to facilitate the learning of students with hearing impairment.
To understand the challenges and barriers faced by students with hearing impairment in accessing and participating in the educational process.

**Research Questions**
What are the unique learning experiences of students with hearing impairment in special education institutions in different divisions of Punjab?
How do special education institutions cater to the educational needs of students with hearing impairment, including the strategies and support systems in place?
What are the primary challenges and barriers encountered by students with hearing impairment in these institutions, and how do they navigate them?

**Methodology**

**Research Design:** The research design for this study is qualitative in nature, as it aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the learning experiences of students with hearing impairment in special education institutions across nine divisions of Punjab. Qualitative research is well-suited for exploring the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals in their natural context.

**Sampling:** Purposive sampling was used to select 36 students with hearing impairment studying at elementary and secondary school level from nine divisions of Punjab, with two students each from special education schools and centers in each division. This method allows for a diverse representation of experiences.

**Data Collection:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected students. Interviews were held face-to-face and via video calls, with translation into sign language when necessary. Field experts validated the interview questions to ensure cultural and linguistic appropriateness.

**Data Analysis:** Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns in the interview responses. This qualitative approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the students' experiences.

**Ethical Considerations:** Ethical approval was obtained to conduct the research, and informed consent was obtained from all participants or their guardians. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the research process.

**Data Validation:** Field experts were involved in validating the research process and interpreting the data, enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

**Demographic Information of the Participants:** Total Number of Students with Hearing Impairment was 36.

**Gender Distribution**
Girls: 16 (44.4%)
Boys: 20 (55.6%)

**Educational Settings**
Students from Special Education Schools: 18 (50.0%)
Students from Special Education Centers: 18 (50.0%)

**School Level**
Elementary School Level: 18 (50.0%)
Secondary School Level: 18 (50.0%)

**Degree of Hearing Impairment**
Severe Hearing Loss: 12 (33.3%)
Moderate to Severe Hearing Loss: 5 (13.9%)
Profound Hearing Loss: 19 (52.8%)

**Usage of Hearing Aids**
Students Using Hearing Aids: 13 (36.1%)
Girls with Hearing Aids: 8 (61.5%)
Boys with Hearing Aids: 5 (38.5%)

**Type of Hearing Loss**
Congenital Hearing Loss: 33 (91.7%)
Acquired Hearing Loss: 3 (8.3%)
Pre-lingual Acquired Hearing Loss: 2 (66.7%)
Post-lingual Acquired Hearing Loss: 1 (33.3%)

**Speech Development**
No Developed Speech: 19 (52.8%)
Specific Word Level Speech: 14 (38.9%)
Specific Sentence Making (with effort): 3 (8.3%)

**Findings and Discussion**
Based on the finding’s themes were derived reflect the key issues and challenges faced by students with hearing impairment in special education institutions:

1. **Traditional Teaching Methods and Limited Use of Audio/Visual Aids** (Kanwal & Bashir, 2022)
   Students in special education institutions primarily receive instruction through traditional methods, such as lectures and copying from the whiteboard or textbooks. This traditional approach may not fully cater to their unique learning needs, potentially hindering their comprehension and engagement. The infrequent use of audio/visual aids limits students’ exposure to visual and auditory learning experiences, which can be vital for individuals with hearing impairment in enhancing their understanding of concepts.

2. **Insufficient Teacher Engagement** (Lohman, 2006; Abbasi et al., 2020)
   The sporadic checking of homework and classwork by teachers can lead to a lack of accountability and reduced motivation among students. It may also hinder the development of their academic skills. The situation where students are asked to teach or check the work of their peers, often in junior grades, is a reflection of resource constraints and an inappropriate student-teacher ratio. This situation compromises both the quality of instruction and the students’ own learning experiences. Teachers being preoccupied with other duties may lead to limited interaction and instructional time for students with hearing impairment, further exacerbating their educational challenges.

3. **Shallow Instruction and Limited Student Participation** (Kanwal & Bashir, 2022; Inayat & Ali, 2020)
   Teachers providing only an overview of topics without delving into details may hinder students' deeper understanding of subjects and critical thinking skills. Infrequent and random student participation may result in missed opportunities for students with hearing impairment to engage actively in the learning process and express their thoughts and questions effectively.

   The focus on copy and board work as a compliance measure rather than a means of genuine learning may leave students with hearing impairment feeling disconnected from the educational content.

4. **Neglect of Alternate Teaching and Assessment Methods** (Browder et al., 2003; Ali et al., 2023)
   The reluctance to embrace alternative teaching and assessment methods may limit the diversity of learning experiences for students with hearing impairment and hinder their ability to grasp concepts through varied approaches.

   The superficial use of total communication methods and sign language signifies a missed opportunity for fostering effective communication and engagement between teachers and students.

5. **Lack of Inclusivity and Differentiated Instruction** (Tomblin et al., 2014; Farooq & Iftikhar, 2015)
   The limited promotion of group work and assignments may deprive students with hearing impairment of opportunities for collaborative learning, teamwork, and the development of social skills.
Teachers overlook the use of assistive listening devices demonstrates a lack of awareness or accommodation for the specific needs of these students, potentially inhibiting their access to instructional content.

6. Limited Technological Integration and Mixed Teacher Engagement (Lidström & Hemmingsson, 2014)
The absence of technology integration in teaching deprives students with hearing impairment of valuable tools that could enhance their learning experience.

Teachers’ engagement in non-educational activities such as chatting or mobile use during class time sends a message of indifference and sets an unfavorable example for students.

7. Challenges in Infrastructure and Examination Integrity (Bashir et al., 2023; Iqbal et al., 2021)
While the overall classroom environment is deemed satisfactory, the scarcity of functional labs impacts the practical and hands-on learning opportunities for students with hearing impairment.

The use of cheating materials in exams highlights concerns about examination integrity and underscores the need for proactive measures to address this issue.

8. Disparities in Academic Achievement and Opportunities (Vernon, 2005)
The perception of lower academic achievement among students with hearing impairment compared to their hearing peers and siblings may result in diminished self-esteem and motivation.

The disconnection between students' success in co-curricular and extracurricular activities and the lack of adequate resources and support for these endeavors raises questions about equity and inclusivity within the institution.

9. Lack of Support Services and Parental Involvement (Batool & Riaz, 2020)
The absence of speech and language therapy and psychological support within these institutions indicates a gap in meeting students' holistic needs.

The reliance on tutors and siblings for homework assistance reflects a lack of parental involvement and awareness about their children's specific learning requirements.

10. Limited Resource Mobilization and Motivation (Ghafoor et al., 2022)
The minimal efforts by administration and the community to provide or generate resources for student learning demonstrate a need for greater commitment to enhancing the educational environment.

Teachers' limited motivation and avoidance of value-added efforts may negatively impact their students' engagement and overall learning experience.

11. Infrequent Inter-School Events (Siperstein et al., 2017)
The rarity of academic events organized among schools reflects a missed opportunity for students with hearing impairment to showcase their talents and engage in healthy competition, and to promote the sense of inclusion.

Some students enjoy favoritism and positive relationships with teachers, while others feel neglected or marginalized. These disparities in teacher-student dynamics may influence students' confidence and motivation in the learning process.

13. Irregular Co-Curricular and Extracurricular Activities (Habib et al., 2011)
While co-curricular and extracurricular activities are planned, they occur irregularly, impacting students' access to holistic development opportunities.

Despite students' expressed happiness and achievements in these activities, the lack of proper resources and training hinders their full potential.

14. Limited Vocational Training Options and Practical Exposure (Hidayat et al., 2020; Alsadoon & Turkestani, 2020; Iftikhar et al., 2022)
Vocational training is offered but with limited options and often faces unavailability of teachers, limiting students' exposure to practical skills development.

Students do not have opportunities to gain real-world experience through internships or exposure to industries, which can be crucial for their future career prospects.

15. Restricted Academic Choices and Inadequate Staffing (Yaqien et al., 2018)
Students are guided toward limited academic fields, with discouragement from pursuing science-related subjects. This limitation in academic choices may hinder their future educational and career opportunities.
Institutions grapple with staff shortages, resulting in limited opportunities for team teaching and collaboration among paraprofessionals. This shortage can affect the quality of instruction and support available to students.

16. Inadequate Tutor Support (Mapepa & Magano, 2018)
Tutors, often unfamiliar with students’ learning needs, tend to replicate the same copy-based practices seen in the classroom, limiting the effectiveness of their support.

17. Limited Efforts for Reading Habits and Comprehension (Marschark et al., 2009)
There are no structured efforts to develop and enhance students' reading habits and comprehension skills, which are essential for academic success and lifelong learning.

Students at the elementary level, typically those in primary and lower secondary grades, face more pronounced challenges and issues in their educational experience. This suggests that the foundational years of education for students with hearing impairment are marked by substantial shortcomings and may not adequately prepare them for future academic pursuits.

Secondary-level students, on the other hand, are highlighted as facing somewhat better conditions. However, this is primarily because they are required to appear in board exams, which are critical assessments in the education system. Teachers at the secondary level take these exams seriously due to the accountability fear on bad results.

19. Disparities in Learning Environment (Farkas, 2003)
The situation is more challenging in special education centers compared to special education schools. The students in centers may face additional barriers and limitations compared to their counterparts in schools. This could be due to differences in resources, infrastructure, or teaching practices between the two types of institutions.

Conclusion
This study, centered on the educational experiences of students with hearing impairment in special education institutions across Punjab, has illuminated critical facets of their learning journey. Findings reveal a prevailing reliance on traditional teaching methods and a lack of emphasis on technological integration. Moreover, inconsistent teacher engagement, disparities between school levels, and variations between special education centers and schools have surfaced as noteworthy challenges. These observations underscore the imperative of addressing these disparities to provide an equitable educational experience for all students with hearing impairment.

Recommendations
Following recommendations aim to create a more inclusive, technologically advanced, and equitable educational environment for students with hearing impairment, fostering their holistic development and empowering them to achieve their full potential.

Promote Inclusive Pedagogies: Encourage the adoption of inclusive teaching methods that cater to the diverse needs of students with hearing impairment, emphasizing active participation and a multi-sensory learning approach.

Enhance Technological Integration: Foster the integration of technology gadgets into the learning process to facilitate accessibility and engagement, ensuring that both students and educators are proficient in their use.

Address Disparities: Implement measures to address the disparities in educational experiences between special education centers and schools, focusing on resource allocation, infrastructure improvement, and equitable teacher training.

Individualized Support Services: Establish personalized support services, including speech and language therapy, psychological counseling, and tutor training, to address the unique learning needs of each student with hearing impairment.

Encourage Career Diversity: Encourage students with hearing impairment to explore a wide range of
academic and vocational fields, including science-related subjects, to expand their future career opportunities and choices.

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