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Barriers to Developing Listening and Speaking Skills at the Secondary Level: A Study in the Context of Dhaka City, Bangladesh

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the barriers to listening and speaking skills in secondary education in Dhaka City. Listening and speaking skills are essential components of effective communication and play a vital role in academic and professional success. However, students often encounter various obstacles that impede the development and mastery of these skills. Understanding these barriers is crucial for educators, policymakers, and researchers to design strategies to enhance listening and speaking proficiency among secondary-level students. A mixed-method approach was employed to achieve the research objectives. Firstly, an extensive literature review was conducted to identify the existing theoretical frameworks, concepts, and empirical studies related to listening and speaking skill barriers. This review formed the foundation for constructing a research questionnaire and interview protocol. The study sample consisted of secondary school students from different educational institutions in Dhaka City. The questionnaire collected quantitative data on students' perceptions of listening and speaking skill barriers, encompassing factors such as classroom environment, instructional practices, student motivation, and linguistic challenges. Additionally, interviews were conducted with teachers to gather qualitative insights into their perspectives on the barriers and potential solutions. The findings revealed several significant barriers to listening and speaking skills in secondary education, including inadequate

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classroom infrastructure, limited opportunities for interactive communication, ineffective teaching methods, lack of motivation, and language proficiency issues. Furthermore, the research identified potential strategies to address these barriers, such as creating supportive classroom environments, promoting active participation, integrating speaking and listening activities, and fostering student motivation. Teachers can benefit from the findings by adapting instructional strategies to create interactive and communicative learning environments, and addressing student-specific challenges, and promoting oral proficiency. By identifying these barriers and suggesting potential solutions, it offers valuable guidance for educators, policymakers, and researchers to enhance listening and speaking skill instruction, fostering effective communication and academic achievement among secondary school students.

Keywords: *Barrier, curriculum, Dhaka city, listening, secondary level, speaking*

1. Introduction

English serves as a widely used language for communication across different linguistic communities, commonly referred to as a lingua franca. In Bangladesh, it is mandated that English will be taught as a mandatory subject at the secondary level. In order to effectively instruct a language, it is imperative to incorporate four essential skills. The four essential language skills encompassed in language learning are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The majority of students primarily receive instruction in reading and writing skills, with limited opportunities to develop their listening and speaking abilities. The objective of this study is to identify the primary obstacles encountered in the development of listening and speaking abilities. In Bangladesh, the educational curriculum places a significant emphasis on the development of reading and writing abilities. Consequently, a substantial number of students rely heavily on their proficiency in reading comprehension and writing composition (Matin, 2012, p. 239). Additionally, teachers tend to avoid incorporating listening and speaking activities into their lessons due to factors such as large class sizes or a lack of sufficient materials. Hence, it can be observed that both listening and speaking abilities have assumed a secondary role within the context of Bangladesh. Currently, there is a significant focus within our education system on enhancing students' proficiency in English communication.

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Education planners at the secondary level tend to allocate less importance to the development of speaking and listening skills, despite the fact that these two modalities are widely recognized as fundamental forms of communication. Simultaneously, educational institutions and curricula fail to offer students ample opportunities for enhancing these aforementioned skills. The educational materials provided by the educational board consist of various chapters and exercises designed to enhance learners' skills. However, it has been observed that these resources may not fully meet the needs of the learners. Both students and teachers commonly prioritize the completion of the syllabus over the enhancement of their skills. Moreover, due to the prevailing circumstances in which students find themselves, they are deprived of the chance to engage in English communication. Effective communication requires accurate listening. Failure to listen attentively can hinder one's ability to effectively communicate. Listening is widely recognized as a crucial skill in the realm of language acquisition and pedagogy. In order to optimize one's proficiency in listening and speaking, it is imperative to dedicate considerable effort towards enhancing one's vocabulary, mastering correct pronunciation, and acquiring a solid grasp of linguistic structures.

2. Literature Review

Proficiency is never achieved by honing only two abilities, namely reading and writing. Any student who wants to be an expert in the English language, particularly in communication, must be equally adept in all four areas. While Hymes (as reported in Abedin, Majlish, & Akter, 2009) said that the goal of language training is "communicative competence". This idea makes it clear that four skills are equally crucial for teaching and learning languages. The pupils need to be in a setting where both the instructor and learner speak the same language. English is the means of communication in the classroom and is also the target language. But this circumstance does not exist in Bangladesh.

According to Rixon (quoted in Abedin, Majlish, and Akter, 2009), acquiring English as a second language should emphasize attentiveness. He asserts that various skills are interdependent when listening. There is a distinction between hearing and attention in ordinary life. Hearing is merely the recognition of stimuli, as in "I'm sorry, I didn't hear exactly what you said." Listening

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entails paying some degree of conscious attention to the message that is being communicated, as when one states, “Are you listening to me?” This distinction is beneficial when considering the various abilities; a pupil uses to comprehend spoken English. He also demonstrates how native speakers’ pronunciation of English can pose difficulties for students in terms of recognition and, consequently, comprehension. There are four primary causes of listening difficulties: the weak relationship between English sounds and their spelling in the written language, changes in sounds when they occur in rapid and connected speech, the rhythm pattern of English speech, and different ways of pronouncing the same sound.

According to Harmer, “One skill cannot be performed without the other.” People cannot communicate in a conversation if they do not listen well, and they rarely write without reading” (52). Speaking is commonly regarded as one of the most essential productive abilities. As suggested by McDonough and Shaw (1993, p.152), “as a skill that enables us to produce utterances, when truly communicatively, speaking is desire and purpose-driven,” i.e., we want to communicate something to achieve a specific goal.

The ability to communicate a language fluently indicates proficiency in that language. A person can write without proper knowledge of grammar and sentence structure; they can read without proper pronunciation; and they can listen without proper listening skills; however, speaking ability is dependent on the total knowledge of a language (vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, listening, and so on.). One not only communicates but also listens during interactions. If one uses improper English, one fails to communicate effectively and receives immediate feedback regarding this failure. It is an essential component of daily interaction. The first impression of a person’s language ability is based on his or her ability to communicate fluently and thoroughly.

According to Brown and Yule (as cited in Kabir, 2014), language serves two functions: information transfer (transactional function) and sustaining social relationships (interactional function). Interactional spoken language is characterized by topic changes and brief turns rather than precision and clarity. In contrast to interactional language, which is “listener-oriented,” transactional language is “message-oriented” (11-16). Additionally, oral English is essential for

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developing reading and writing abilities. It means when one reads and writes, one relies on one's oral language knowledge.

Penny (1984, p. 30) acknowledged the significance of listening in the English language classroom because it is vital to the development of learners' perception and comprehension skills and serves as a foundation for classroom study and discussion. English education in Bangladesh has experienced numerous ups and downs. During the British era, the purpose of mastering English was to create a subordinate class. They were only instructed in English reading and writing. Gradually, however, the circumstance has shifted, and thus the emphasis on teaching and acquiring English has also shifted. In 1998-1999, the Communicative Approach or CLT was implemented in Bangladesh in order to enable students to speak English in real-world situations.

However, this innovation was not well received by our English instructors. Selim and Tasneem (as cited in Kabir, 2014) criticize these ELT instructors by stating, "When CLT arrived in Bangladesh, traditional English teachers opposed it vehemently because they were not prepared for something new"(7). The teachers rarely felt the need to teach spoken and listening skills, as they were quite successful without focusing on these two crucial aspects of language acquisition.

In Bangladesh, English for Today or EFT remains the primary source for teaching English. As the book's inspiration, EFT is an excellent resource for teaching and learning spoken English, thereby fostering students' communicative competence. According to Kabir (2014), Billah has tallied and categorized the EFT books' English teachings. He discovered that the number of listening comprehension lessons in the EFT book for sixth grade is eight out of 106, ten out of eighty, eleven out of seventy-five, and twenty-two out of one hundred and ninety. The results indicate that the number of listening lessons is insufficient compared to the total number of lessons. However, the scenario is distinct when spoken. For instance, there are 80 speaking-focused courses in sixth grade, 74 in seventh grade, 69 in eighth grade EFT, and 63 in ninth grade. This indicates that these EFT books are the primary focus of the speaking skill.

3. Theoretical framework

American sociolinguist Dell Hymes coined the term "communicative competence" to contradict Noam Chomsky's linguistic competence and performance paradigm. Communicative competence

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in CLT is a linguistic term that alludes to a learner's capacity to form and use correct utterances in the target language.

The CLT methodology originated with linguists such as Dell Hymes and Michael Halliday, who viewed language primarily as a means of communication. Numerous researchers have contributed to the theory and practice of CLT's development. Communicative language instruction (CLT) encompasses four fundamental abilities. This includes hearing, speaking, reading, and writing. All of these skills are essential for the development of the English language. However, the point is that not all talents are taught equally in secondary school. The testing system, curriculum, and instructional methodology all place exclusive emphasis on reading and writing. The two most important abilities, hearing and communicating, are not assessed. The listening and speaking skills adhere to a number of theories and methods, such as Krashen, Behaviorist theory, Mentalist theory, Innatist theory, Grammar Translation methods, Audio Lingual method, and so on. By introducing the concept of comprehensible input, Krashen integrates listening-based methods. According to Krashen and Terrell (1983), the acquisition is only possible when individuals can comprehend messages in the target language.

4. Methodology

To conduct the research, random data sources must be identified and collected, then categorized, analyzed, interpreted, and presented in a systematic manner. This study relies heavily on primary data. Six institutions within the city of Dhaka have provided the primary data.

4.1. Section of the Study Area

In order to conduct the research, six institutions from the Dhaka metropolitan area have been chosen. Two of these six are government institutions, while the remaining four are private. These institutions are Government Laboratory High School Dhaka, Government High School Tejgaon, Kurmitola High School, Adamjee Cantonment Public School, Barna Mala Adarsha High School, and BAF Shaheen School.

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4.2. Population (Respondents) of the Study

The respondents of this study include secondary school students and instructors in the Dhaka metropolitan region. Random sampling is used to choose a sample from a population.

4.3. Determination of the sampling size

For the purposes of this study, 88 samples are randomly selected from instructors and students. The sample consists of both teachers and students. Six schools are used to choose 70 students and 18 teachers.

4.4. Data Collection

Two sets of questionnaires, one for instructors and the other for students, are used to capture information from multiple sources. The questionnaire was administered to secondary school instructors and pupils in the Dhaka metropolitan area in order to collect data for this study. The query was of the closed-ended variety, in which students had the option to select an answer. And interviews are conducted with only English instructors.

4.5. Sources of Data

For this research, primary and secondary data sources are used to better comprehend the topic at hand and to meet the study's goals.

4.6. Primary Data Collection

Primary data are the major source for this research. Here, primary data were gathered via a questionnaire. A total of six schools in the Dhaka metropolitan region have provided data. Two of these six institutions are government schools, while the other four are not. This poll was carried out in November 2022.

4.7. Secondary Data Collection

For the fundamental and pertinent information of the research, secondary data were gathered with the aid of several books, reports, articles, papers, journals, and other published publications linked to speaking and listening abilities.

4.8. Questionnaire Preparation

Primary data from sources is collected using a standardized questionnaire. Teachers and students

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get two questionnaires.

4.9. Data Processing

After the necessary survey, data has been gathered, and the following two steps are taken to analyze the study's findings: assembling and editing data.

4.10. Data Compilation

The information has been organized, categorized, and then methodically compiled in accordance with the goals.

4.11. Data Editing

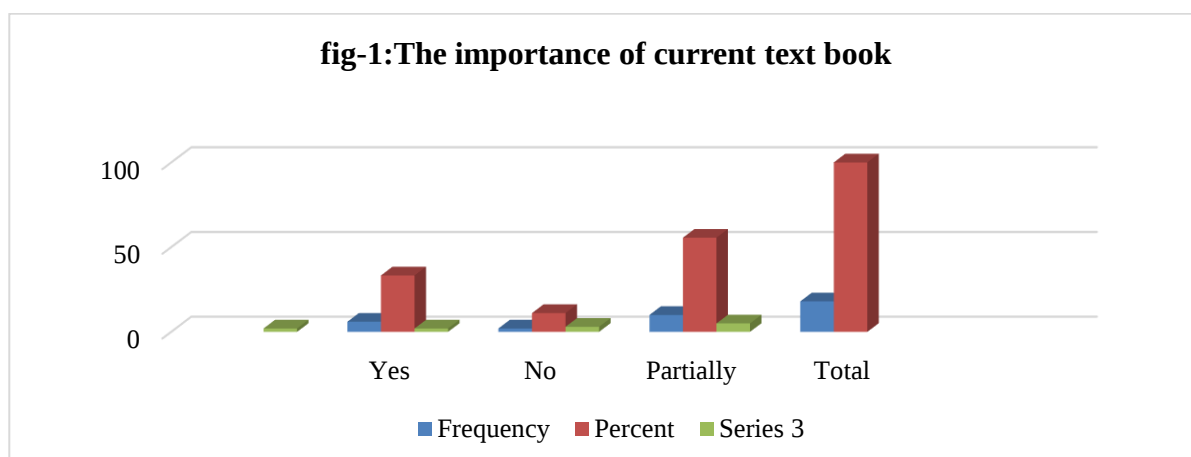
The collected primary data have been edited to remove any errors and omissions. The collected data have also been meticulously implied and categorized for a more effective analysis.

4.12. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Various planning and statistical tools and techniques have been utilized to explain, interpret, and analyze the collated data. SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science), Microsoft Word, and Excel are utilized to process the data. According to the study's objective and hypothesis, the collected data have been interpreted and analyzed. The analysis is displayed in a variety of column charts.

4.12.1. Survey Questions (for Instructors)

1. The importance of current text book



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According to Figure 1, 33.3% of respondents believe that the present English textbook is useful for students' listening and speaking abilities, 11.1% believe that the textbook is not helpful, and 55.6% think that the textbook is only moderately helpful.

2. The chances of open conversation for the students

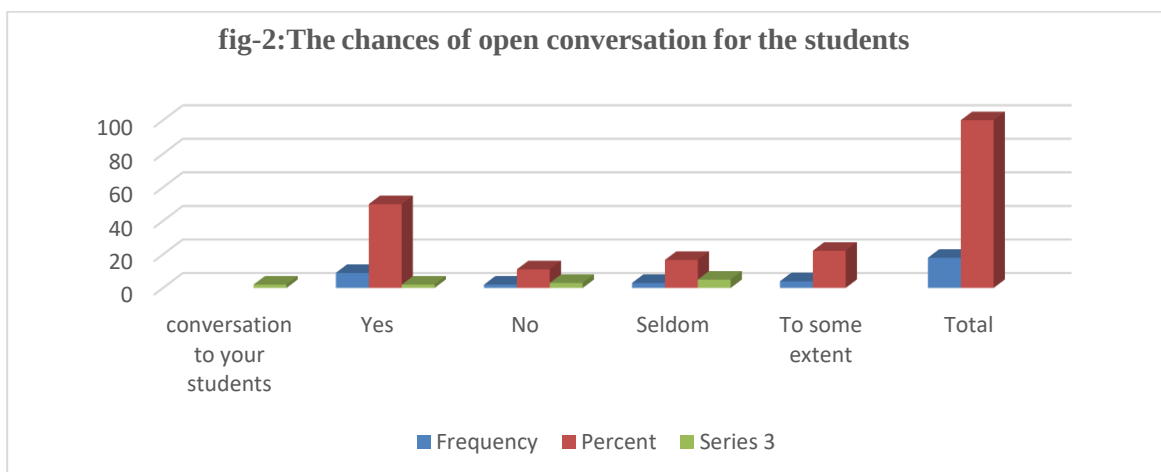
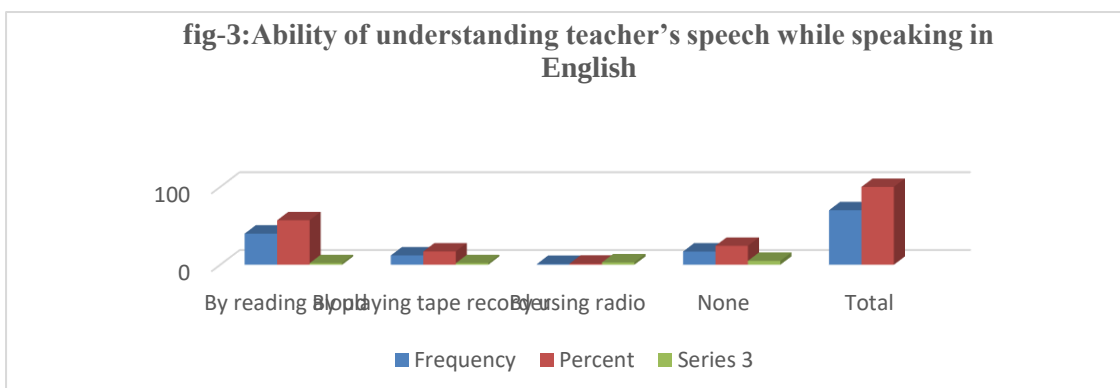


Figure 2 demonstrates that 50% of teachers provide their students with the opportunity for free discussion. On the other side, 16.7% of instructors seldom allow their students the opportunity for free discussion, while 11.1% of teachers do not give chances for open conversation to their students. Finally, 22.2% of teachers think that they must contribute in some way. This is fairly satisfactory, but it needs more attention since students are constantly given the possibility to engage in open discussion, which will boost their speaking ability and confidence.

3. Ability of understanding teacher's speech while speaking in English



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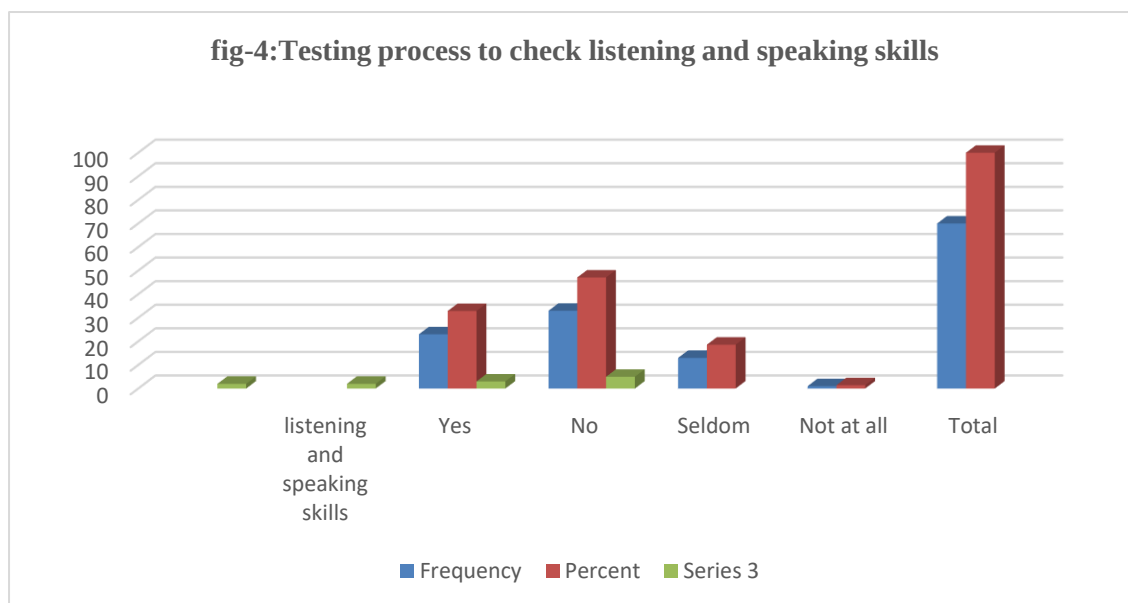
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According to the data presented in the Figure 3, it is evident that a majority of learners, specifically 57.1%, reported that their teachers employ the method of reading aloud to teach listening skills. Additionally, 17.1% of learners indicated that teachers utilize tape recorders as a means of teaching listening skills, while a mere 1.4% of learners reported the use of radio for this purpose. Furthermore, a significant proportion of learners, amounting to 24.3%, stated that their teachers do not employ any specific method to teach listening skills. A majority of students express dissatisfaction with their teachers' reliance on oral reading as a method for teaching listening skills, arguing that it is an inadequate approach. It is recommended that contemporary instructional tools be employed for the purpose of imparting this particular skill.

4. Testing process to check listening and speaking skills



According to the figure 4, 32.9% of students say that their teachers administer tests to evaluate their speaking and listening abilities; 47.1% of students say that their teachers do not administer any tests to evaluate these abilities; 18.6% of students say that their teachers only occasionally administer tests to evaluate these abilities; and 1.4% of students say that their teachers do not administer any tests to evaluate these abilities. The fact that just 32.9% of teachers take these skills tests is alarming, but it is insufficient for improving these skills. Teachers should set up

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assessments for students to assess their speaking and listening abilities so that they can improve.

5. Equipment for teaching listening skill

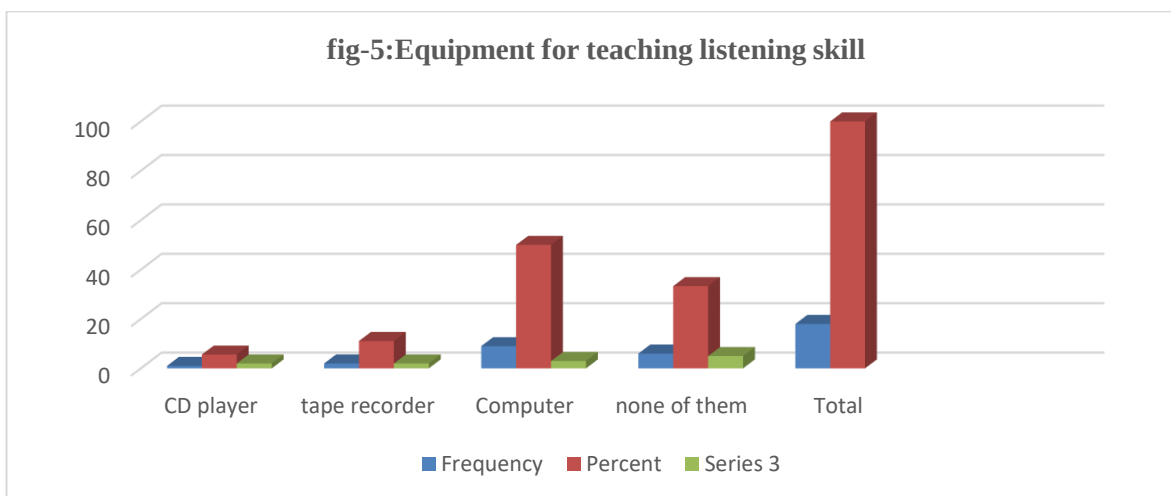
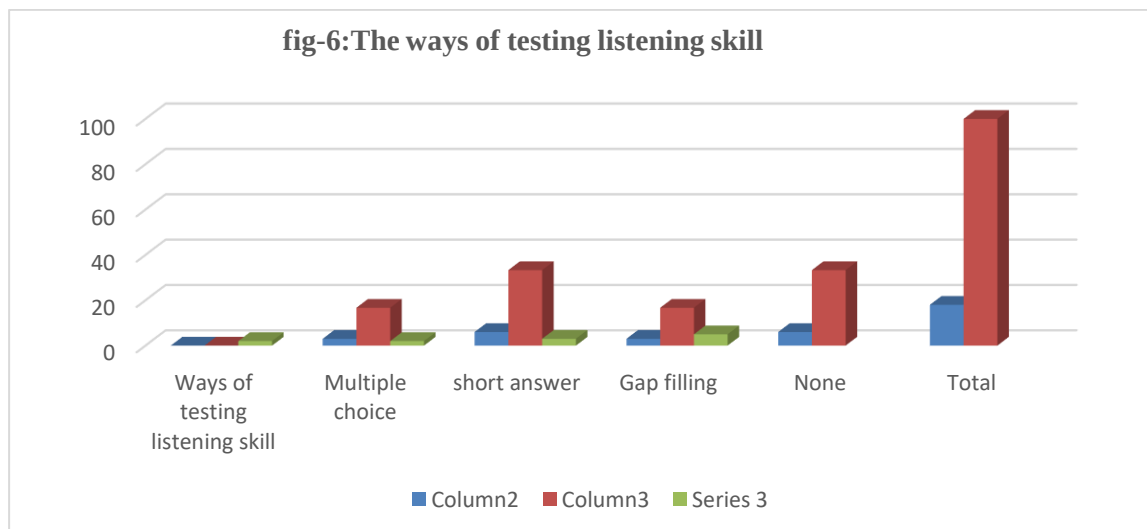


Figure 5 demonstrates that computers are used by 50.0% of teachers to teach listening skills, a CD player is used by 5.6% of teachers to teach listening skills, tape recorders are used by 11.1% of teachers to teach listening skills, and there is no equipment used by 33.3% of teachers to teach listening skills. Despite the fact that 50% of instructors use computers to teach listening skills, there is not a multimedia projector or an adequate sound system.

6. The ways of testing listening skill



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Figure 6 demonstrates that 16.7% of instructors evaluate students' listening skills using multiple choice, 33.3% of teachers test students' listening skills using short answers, 16.7% of teachers test students' listening skills using gap filling, and 33.3% of teachers assess students' listening skills using no testing system at all.

7. The scope of getting training

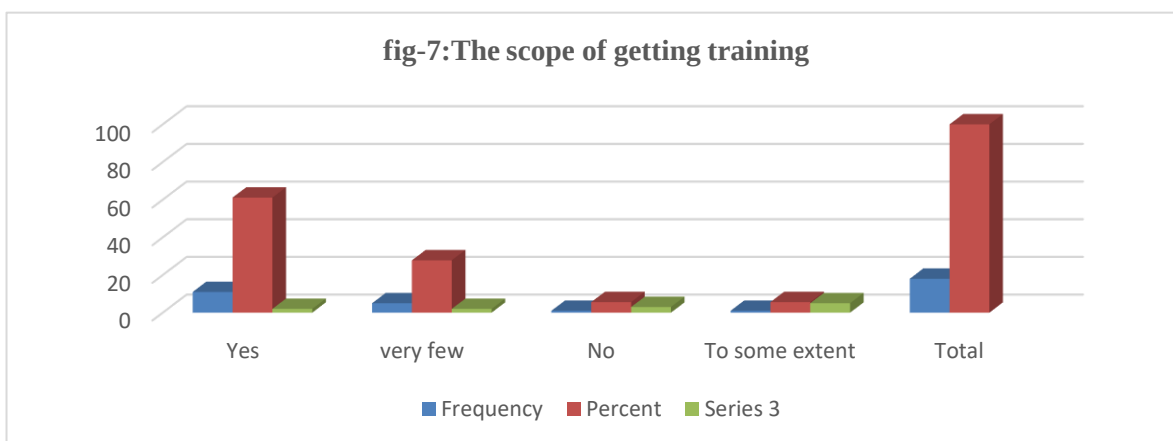
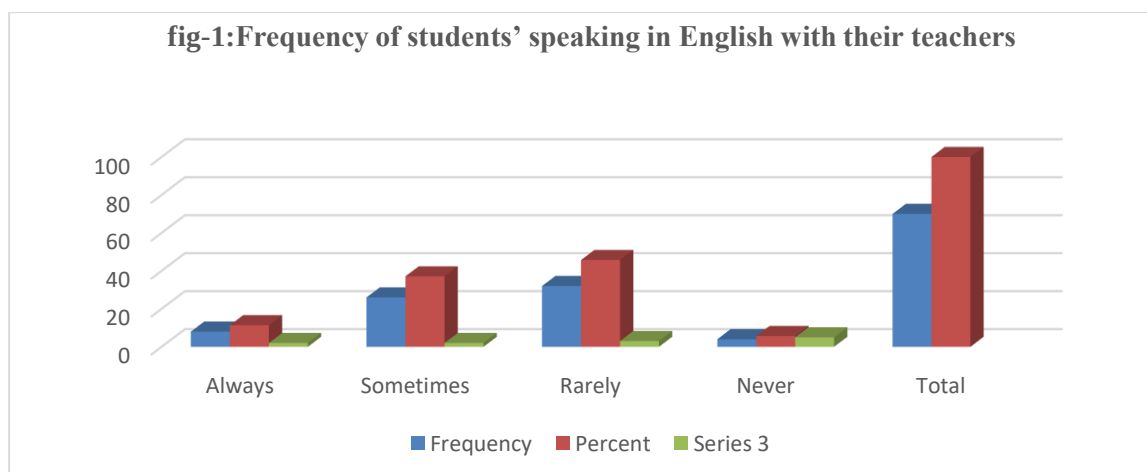


Figure 7 indicates that 61.1% of teachers believe they have adequate opportunity to pursue education, 27.8% believe they have very little opportunity, 5.6% believe they have no opportunity, and 5.6% believe that there should be more opportunity to pursue education.

4.12.2. Survey Questions (for Learners)

1. Information about the students of secondary level



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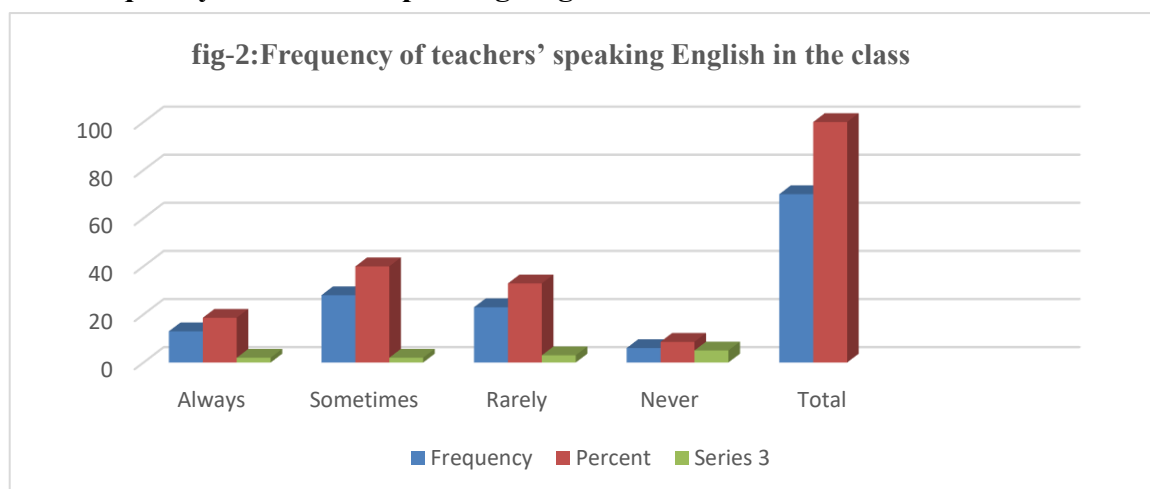
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The data presented in figure 1 indicates that a total of 11.4% of students consistently communicate in English with their teachers. Additionally, 37.1% of students occasionally engage in English conversations with their teachers. Conversely, a significant proportion of students, specifically 45.7%, rarely utilize English when communicating with their teachers. Lastly, a small percentage of students, namely 5.7%, never engage in English conversations with their teachers. It is highly unsatisfactory that only a small number of students are proficient in English, despite the expectation that a majority of students would possess English language skills.

2. Frequency of teachers' speaking English in the class



According to the data presented in the figure 2, it is evident that a significant proportion of students, specifically 18.6%, reported that their teachers consistently utilize the English language during classroom instruction. Additionally, 40.0% of students indicated that their teachers occasionally employ English in the classroom, while 32.9% of students reported that their teachers rarely utilize English during instructional sessions. A smaller percentage, specifically 8.6% of students, stated that their teachers never speak in English during class. It is advisable for individuals to consistently communicate in the English language, while occasionally expressing their thoughts and opinions in alternative languages. It is advisable for individuals to allocate additional time to engage in English conversation. The data is visually represented using a column chart.

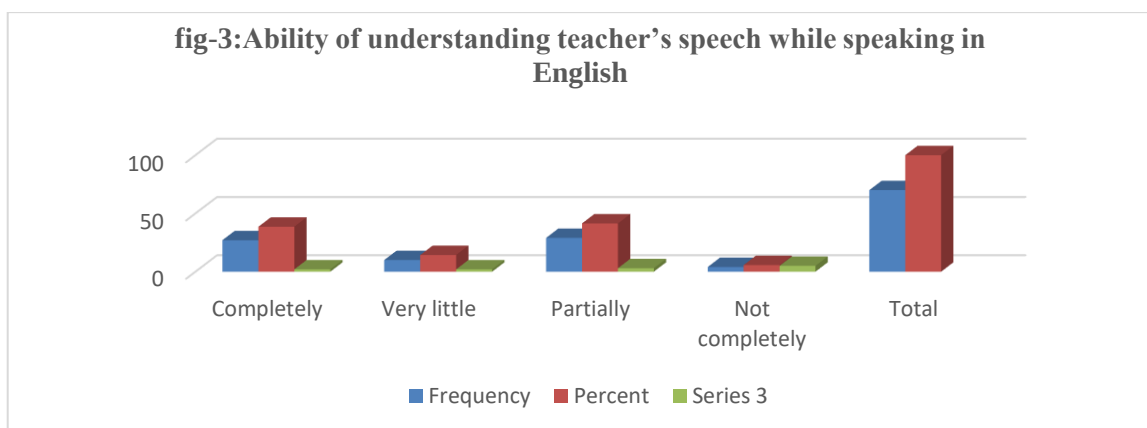
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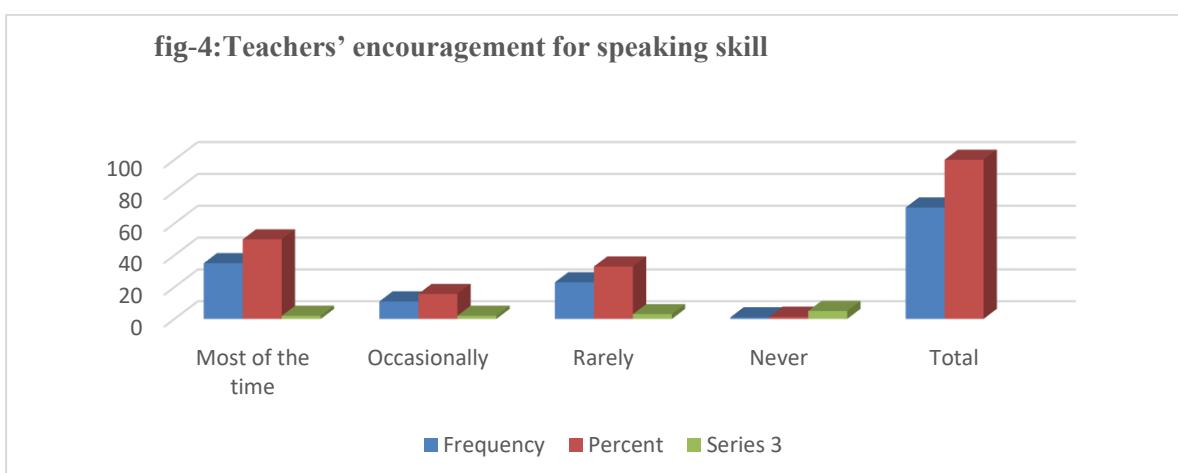
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3. Ability of understanding teacher's speech while speaking in English



According to the data presented in the figure 3, it can be observed that 38.6% of learners possess a comprehensive understanding of their teacher's speech when speaking in English. Conversely, 14.3% of learners have a limited understanding of their teacher's speech in this context. Additionally, 41.4% of learners demonstrate a partial understanding of their teacher's speech while speaking in English, while 5.7% of learners do not possess a complete understanding of their teacher's speech in this language. The data is visually represented using a column chart. A mere 41.4% of students possess a partial comprehension of their teachers' English speech, despite the expectation that a majority of students would have a complete understanding. Consequently, it is imperative for teachers to prioritize the development of these linguistic abilities.

4. Teachers' encouragement for speaking skill



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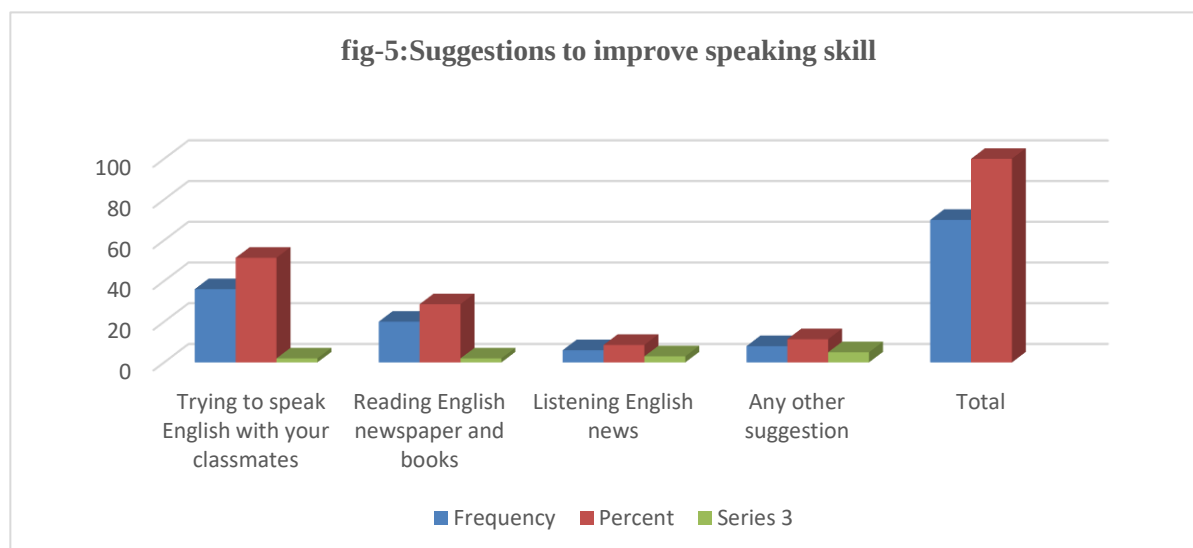
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According to the data presented in the figure 4, it is evident that 50% of the students surveyed reported that their teachers consistently encourage them to communicate in English. Additionally, 15.7% of the students indicated that their teachers occasionally provide encouragement in this regard, while 32.9% stated that their teachers rarely offer such encouragement. A small proportion of students, specifically 1.4%, reported that their teachers never encourage them to speak English.

5. Suggestions to improve speaking skill



According to the data presented in figure 5, it can be observed that a majority of students, specifically 51.4%, express a preference for engaging in English conversations with their classmates. Additionally, a significant proportion of students, approximately 28.6%, indicate a preference for enhancing their English skills through reading English newspapers and books. A smaller percentage of students, specifically 8.6%, suggest improving their English proficiency by actively listening to English news. Lastly, 11.4% of students express a preference for alternative methods such as participating in debates or engaging in open conversations to enhance their English language abilities. It is recommended that educators afford students the opportunity to engage in English conversation with their peers as a means of enhancing their oral proficiency.

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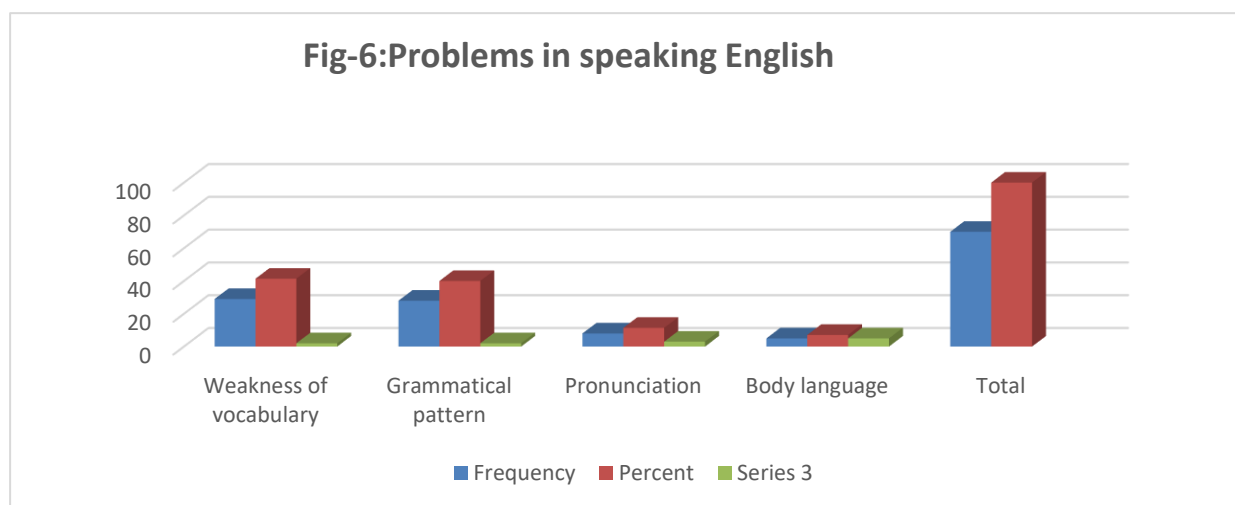


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6. Problems in speaking English



It is clear from the statistics in figure 6, it is evident that a significant proportion of students encounter challenges in various aspects of English speaking. Specifically, 41.4% of students struggle with vocabulary limitations, while 40.0% face difficulties with grammar patterns. Pronunciation poses a challenge for 11.4% of students, and 7.1% find body language to be problematic when speaking English. This data suggests that all of the students have become accustomed to these issues. These are the primary challenges associated with spoken English.

5. Findings of the study

The major findings are presented below through the analysis and interpretation of the collected data:

- The majority of schools employ a combination of Bangla and English as the primary language of instruction. However, teachers employ solely the Bangla language.
- The existing textbook for English language instruction is not entirely flawless and therefore requires some degree of improvement.
- One of the most significant challenges associated with listening and speaking skills pertains to the deficiency in vocabulary proficiency. A considerable number of students

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face the constraint of limited vocabulary, which hinders their ability to articulate themselves effectively in English. Consequently, they encounter difficulties in expressing themselves accurately and experience confusion when attempting to employ appropriate words.

- The findings also indicate that students face challenges in comprehending and expressing ideas effectively through listening and speaking, primarily attributed to deficiencies in fundamental grammatical patterns and pronunciation skills.
- In the classroom, the focus is primarily on the development and refinement of two fundamental skills, namely reading and writing. Due to the exclusion of listening and speaking skills from the examination criteria, students and teachers tend to neglect these particular skills.
- One of the key issues is a lack of teaching resources. The right tools are not available to teach and test the listening skills.

6. Recommendations

This section of the study provides insights into potential recommendations that may offer an effective approach to addressing the challenges faced by Bangladeshi students in relation to English listening and speaking.

- Education professionals should not only include English spoken lessons in textbooks, but they should also emphasize the importance of practical application in the classroom.
- One potential solution to emphasize the importance of English language practice in the classroom is to allocate a portion of the examination marks to a speaking test. According to interviews conducted with certain teachers, it is argued that there should be a minimum allocation of 20 marks for the assessment of speaking and listening skills in both academic and public examinations.
- During classroom instruction, it is recommended that teachers utilize English as the primary

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medium of instruction and engage students in a variety of language tasks and activities, either in groups or pairs. This approach aims to facilitate English language acquisition through consistent practice of skills.

- English teachers should receive comprehensive training in order to effectively teach the English language.
- Teachers should provide learners sufficient of chances to practice speaking and listening in the classroom environment.
- It is recommended that teachers predominantly utilize the English language both inside and outside of the classroom.
- English is not the first language of people of Bangladesh, it is essential to foster motivation in order to successfully teach the language. Therefore, it is the responsibility of all educators to actively promote a setting that supports and encourages students in learning the English language.
- In order to effectively accomplish any task, it is imperative for individuals to possess a clear understanding of the underlying objectives. It is imperative for educators to effectively communicate the purpose of developing listening skills to their students during the process of listening.
- The inclusion of listening and speaking skills in examinations is recommended, and it is imperative for the government to take appropriate measures to assess students' listening skills.
- The existing curriculum needs to be changed to provide more courses, resources and lessons to enhance the speaking and listening practice opportunities.

7. Scope and limitations

This study focuses on the impediments to effective listening and speaking skills at the secondary level in the Dhaka metropolitan area, but due to time constraints, data are collected from only six institutions. The only skills considered are listening and speaking, leaving writing and reading out of the equation. The purpose of this research is to identify the areas where teachers and students

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struggle with listening and speaking skills. Although a great deal of research has been conducted on language acquisition, very little has been done in this area.

8. Conclusion

The study has endeavored to identify the challenges encountered by teachers and students in the development of listening and speaking skills. Based on the aforementioned findings and discussions, it can be argued that there is a certain degree of negligence towards the development of listening and speaking skills in the secondary education system of Bangladesh. Classroom practice is considered to be an effective method for teaching listening and speaking skills. Engaging in regular listening and speaking activities within the classroom setting can effectively enhance students' self-assurance, consequently aiding them in overcoming various obstacles they may encounter. The primary objective of students in language learning remains focused on attaining a favorable score rather than acquiring proficiency in the language. The main barriers for the development of listening and speaking skills include inadequate access to appropriate materials, the absence of a language lab, a lack of awareness among guardians regarding the importance of these skills, and a general indifference towards teaching these skills. Due to the absence of assessment measures for these two skills, educators tend to place less emphasis on their cultivation. Furthermore, the lack of interest among students in engaging in speaking and listening activities can be attributed to the absence of an encouraging environment. The inclusion of listening and speaking activities within the national curriculum and textbook is recommended, with the suggestion of incorporating mandatory assessments for these skills.

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Life Style, Lingo, Focus and Future of Gen Z: the Generation of Social Media

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Abstract:

Social media is an imperative requirement in the contemporary world. It connects us to any part of planet in an instant. Previous studies show social media to have drastic effects on mental health, even though it has revolutionized advertising and employment opportunities. Young people are more likely to be victim to it. This research paper investigates the impact of social media on the lives of Generation Z or Gen Z. It uses descriptive research method to focus on the multiple aspects of the lives of Gen Z that are affected by social media and seeks to speculate about their future.

The findings spotlight the commodification of a generation, a shift in semantics and an unstable future as social media continues to become more and more involved in the lives of Gen Z. There is an anxiety about the future social media landscape and the ethical considerations it might force into discussion. The paper contributes to the growing body of research involving Gen Z and social media.

Key words: Social media, Gen Z, lifestyle, lingo, focus, future

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Introduction:

The primary factor that makes Gen Z different from their predecessors is that they grew up with the internet. As previous generations were born before the 21st century, this generation recorded a shift in the cultural and linguistic landscape. Social media has been snowballing and has formed an integral part of their lives, shaping their lifestyle, language and methods of communication. Having unlimited access to information and unprecedented opportunity for connectivity has shaped the generation in a way that cannot be comprehended by other generations. This brings to question Generation Z's perspectives of the world as they will now head onto higher education and employment. Therefore, it is crucial to determine the focus of Gen Z and in which direction they are headed in the future. This will help track and predict future trends in education, business, employment, marketing etc. The study of Generation Z is a work in progress. To unravel what makes this generation unique, an in-depth understanding of their beliefs, characteristics and behavioural patterns is paramount.

Generation Z on social media emulates strong desires for fame when they see their friends or popular figures make highly visual content about their life, leading them to form body image issues and low self-confidence. Having been compelled to integrate technology in their lives from a young age, Gen Z's daily activities are shaped by social media. Generation Z has also adopted a definitive language set adopted from social media that they use in their daily conversations. The future of Gen Z is expected to be challenging as the advent of artificial intelligence will probably bring significant changes in workforce dynamics.

Review of Related Literature:

McLean (2024) argues in the paper '*Collective Memory and the Pandemic Emergence of Generation Z*' that besides being digital natives, Gen Z are also "digital innate" as they were introduced to social media during their valuable formative years.

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Online trolling and online harassment has been a cause of primary concern. Soares, Gruz, Jacobson & Hodson (2023) ran a survey '*To troll or not to troll: Young adults' antisocial behaviour on social media.*' to test the associations between online disinhibition, motivations for cyber-aggression, self-esteem, and empathy and the probability of being a perpetrator of online anti-social behaviour. The survey showed connections between appetite for recreation and reward and being a perpetrator of online harassment, proving that young people exhibit this behaviour merely for fun and social approval.

Yousaf, Adil, Hamza, Ghayas, Niazi, & Khan (2021) conducted a descriptive cross-sectional study '*Relationship between Attachment styles and Social Media addiction among young adults: Mediating role of self-esteem*' to observe the mediating role of self-esteem between attachment styles and social media addiction. It revealed that among young adults, insecure attachment style affected self-esteem negatively and social media addiction positively. Therefore, social media is being used to bring temporary relief when an individual is anxious or stressed. It could also mean that young people with low self-esteem feel confident while using social networking. In this aspect, young girls seem to be more vulnerable than boys.

Besides that, Generation Z has been using social media as a medium to launch their career in their quest for gaining a source of income. According to Vitelar (2019), in '*Like me: Generation Z and the use of social media for personal branding.*' building a personal brand has become an urgent tool that helps Generation Z achieve success regardless of their status. Social media branding enables them to create a firm online identity that assists them at the beginning of their career. This brings up a question regarding the real importance of social media in the lives of Gen Z and how it can open new doors and opportunities.

A survey on '*Teens, social media & technology 2018*' conducted by Anderson and Jjiang (2018) reveals that there is no clear consensus among teenagers regarding the ultimate impact of social media despite its overwhelming presence in their lives. According to them, the

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positive sides mostly included connecting with friends/family and broader access to information, while the negative aspects included bullying, spreading of rumours and forming an unrealistic expectation of others and their own lives.

In the simplest terms, social media can be defined as digital interactive technologies which people use to connect. PrakashYadav and Rai (2017) in '*The Generation Z and their social media usage: A review and a research outline.*' talks about how social media platforms like Facebook, Whatsapp, Tumblr, Instagram, Twitter (now renamed "X") contributes to image formation, identification and maintenance. Young people's characters are formed through what they post about themselves online and how their friends react and analyse it. The young generation seems to have an inherent "desire for popularity" that results in a vast majority of their time being spent online where too much information about their personal lives are showcased.

Seemiller and Grace (2016) in their book '*Generation Z goes to college*' states that to other generations, Gen Z could be perceived as if they are from a foreign land. It could be judgemental attitudes, lack of understanding and stereotyping that prevents older generations from understanding this new culture. Gen Z has had their entire life shaped by the internet and social media, aptly earning them the title of digital natives, the Net Generation or iGeneration. While the millenials or Generation Y had one device for communication, another for playing games and yet another for playing music, Gen Z did this all with one singular device. Consequently, they know little else other than a smartphone and the ever-alive world of social media.

Furthermore, several findings point out the link between social media usage and body image issues among young people. Fardouly & Vartanian (2016) '*Social Media and Body Image Concerns: Current Research and Future Directions*' observe that constant interaction

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with highly visual content posted by other people on social media is directly linked to a strong need to achieve the unrealistic “ideal body.”

Brown and Tiggemann (2016) conducted a survey ‘*Attractive celebrity and peer images on Instagram: Effect on women's mood and body image*’ which showed that being exposed to attractive celebrity and peer images increased body dissatisfaction and negative mood among young women.

Day to day communication in the context of Generation Z has taken a rather curious turn too. Miller (2016) wrote the book *Social Media in an English Village*. In a chapter titled ‘The Social Media Landscape’ he says that a major part of conversation among people when they meet face-to-face, regardless of gender, is actually about what is on the screens of their phones. The social media algorithm thus regulates conversation, picking out topics of discussions, generating discourses and formulating opinions regarding trends.

Klein (2013) in “*Why Don't I Look Like Her? The Impact of Social Media on Female Body Image*” criticizes how social media advertising has had detrimental consequences on college-aged women and their eating habits, sometimes leading them to develop eating disorders.

A study conducted by Chóliz (2012) on ‘*Mobile-phone addiction in adolescence: The Test of Mobile Phone Dependence (TMD)*’ notes that girls had a greater dependence on smartphones than boys. Adolescent girls also were more prone to use their smartphones during unsatisfactory moods than boys.

According to an analysis by Haas, Takayoshi, Carr, Hudson and Pollock (2011), in ‘*Young People's Everyday Literacies: The Language Features of Instant Messaging*’ almost all written conversations among Gen Z are constituted of paralinguistic information. They argue that multiple features of Instant Messaging on social media like emoticons, “emojis”, internet slang,

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and gifs all function paralinguistically to help the receiver interpret the message. The social media platforms have become a place where the new generation “live” in.

From the review of literature, it is clear that no comprehensive research has been conducted to analyse and understand the lifestyle, language, focus and future of Gen Z, the generation of social media altogether.

Hence the **title** of the paper is: ***Life Style, Lingo, Focus and Future of Gen Z, the Generation of Social Media***

Research Objectives:

This research paper aims to decode the lifestyle of Gen Z, find out the lingo used by Gen Z, interrogate the focus and deduce the future of Gen Z by closely examining their activities in online interactive spaces. It further seeks to analyse how Social media can influence Gen Z's choices regarding their body, mental health, family, partner and career. Above all, this paper seeks to contribute to understanding Gen Z itself, decrypt their thinking process and their habits, as influenced by social media apps.

Research Methodology:

This study enlists a descriptive research design to discuss the lives of Generation Z as impacted by social media and predict the future in front of them. Descriptive research design enables an observation and examination of existing data to help reach the objectives of this paper.

Data sources:

This research has utilized the method of secondary data collection. A variety of sources including text books, newspaper articles, academic journals, magazines and associated

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websites were used to gather secondary data for the study. This helped in uncovering trends and patterns related to the behavior of Generation Z in the context of social media.

Secondary data:

The data collection process consisted of a systematic review of literature published between the years 2011 and 2024. Studies that were credible and relevant to the topic were identified and surveyed. A comprehensive document study was carried out. No primary data was collected.

Lifestyle of Gen Z:

Generation Z's interaction with the world is largely influenced by social media in all aspects. Doom scrolling and engaging in online discussions cause depressive moods in young people, especially adolescent girls. As studies have previously shown, Generation Z engages in online arguments for enjoyment and social approval. It indicates the emergence of a state of mind among the generation that needs a constant source of attention. A loop is created where young people use social media consistently, argue with people online, receive attention during arguments and receives enjoyment in the process.

In previous generation, advertisements appeared in the newspapers and on radio programs. With the advent of social media, the advertisement is almost constant. Each product is also catered to a different set of people. For example, companies or brands on Instagram, Tiktok and X search for popular accounts whose "brand" aligns with the product they are trying to sell. A model might collaborate with a clothing brand while a cook may collaborate with a ceramics company or kitchen appliances. This leads to an overflow of products which influences Gen Z to over consume. Influencers begin to sell their seemingly perfect lifestyle online and create a mind-set that compels Gen Z to curate their own lives by imitation. It makes

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the average young adult who does not have an “instagrammable” life excluded from society/community to an extent. This is essentially a commercial exploitation of the weaknesses of the general public.

Generation Z often fails to consider life beyond pictures and advertisements. Everything in the online world is an advertisement. A Forbes article reports that the Stanley cup which flooded Tiktok feeds at the beginning of 2023 recorded a massive boost in annual sales from \$75 million a year to \$750 million a year. (Collins, 2024)

Look no further than one of the most popular movies released in the last decade. Barbie directed by Greta Gerwig and released in July, 2023 made a box office \$1.446 billion. In an attempt to imitate the Mattel doll, people started going to the theatres fully decked in pink. As the trend skyrocketed, almost every company or brand hopped on the train to promote their own products. You could find Barbie inspired shoes, Barbie inspired hairbrushes, skin products and a Barbie inspired cutlery set. The Barbie movie gradually left theatres and at one point, it was no longer viable branding to sell a product. So, the trend was just repackaged. Generation Z began to adopt a style which they began to label as “coquette”. Inspired by the Victorian age fashion and mainly the French queen Marie Antoinette, the trend involved making and selling products that were pink and had ribbons on them. Gen Z began to upload visual media of themselves in pink apparel and using commodities labelled as “coquette”. Social media thus manufactures not just trends, but complete lifestyles to be delivered in a package at the doors of Generation Z. A problem is created by the industry using the medium of social media and then, a solution to the problem is presented.

A vast majority of social media trends are catered towards women. Interestingly, these trends are also catered to a specific type of women: thin, attractive and invariably white. This established standard of lifestyle induces women of colour to adopt extreme measures,

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constantly striving for an unrealistic “perfect” image. The alarming increase in eating disorders in recent years is to be noted here.

As Gen Z attain voting age and venture into positions of power, the nature of political propagation begins to take a different approach. Political parties lean into Generation Z trends to make them feel closer to the organizations they are to vote for.

These observations prove that Generation Z is easily influenced. Generation Z has formed a core identity that consists of living with social media, conformity to accepted ideals and recurring attention.

Lingo of Gen Z:

Before the appearance of a proper language, humans communicated nonverbally. Conversation mainly involved body language and sounds. A medium of communication gradually propelled humans to civilization. Before Gen Z, communication used to be primarily face-to-face. There were handwritten letters that were delivered by human beings from one end of the world to another. With the discovery of the internet and social media, communication has been revolutionized. It now stretches across various social media platforms, changing the quality and quantity of interaction people have among themselves.

The ability to communicate effectively is a basic skill in any workplace or everyday setting. Communication clarifies doubts, omits misinformation and ultimately, gets a job done or solves a problem. It also builds and maintains relationships, both personal and professional. Communication in the contemporary world has evolved with the emergence of technology. Social media has become a main component of communication among young people. It renders distance inconsequential and communication occurs instantly, from anywhere in the world. A global connection is maintained in Generation Z at all times. The Covid-19 pandemic

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demonstrated the importance of social media in the field of communication. Having restricted to their homes, Gen Z used social media and technology to meet their needs.

Most written conversations feature paralinguistic information that acts as clues to convey its meaning to the person at the receiving end. Conversations among Gen Z, without exceptions, include emojis, emoticons, gifs and social media slang. Conversation among Generation Z is characterized by a specific set of lingo. This lingo of Gen Z is constantly evolving and fast paced. Typically, a certain word or term appears in a subculture on social media, young people begin to use it and it spreads like wildfire in the collective dominant culture.

With some exceptions, these words and terms usually remain in trend for a limited amount of time. Gradually, the words make their way into the daily real life conversations of Gen Z. Social media gives rise to new terminologies as well as they give new meanings to already existing words. Often, Gen Z speaks in acronyms and pop culture references incomprehensible to older generations. Their general language has evolved following the principle of conveying a lot while actually saying little. For example “adorkable” refers to someone who is a combination of adorable and awkward. The word “cringe” was used as a verb, meaning “to crouch”, but social media has started using it as an adjective which means to shrink out of embarrassment or distaste. Instead of saying an individual has a correct opinion; the word “based” is used. The word mediocre has been shortened to “mid”. An unknown, uninteresting person may be called an NPC. Originally meaning “non-player characters” i.e. characters not controlled by the user in video games, it has adopted a completely new meaning. When something is considered impressive by Gen Z, they call it “Fire!”

Therefore, existing vocabulary is impacted to keep up with cotemporary trends on social media. When Gen Z lingo gets firmly cemented in a culture, it often gets adopted into dictionaries. The Merriam-Webster dictionary and the Oxford English Dictionary have both added several words that had their origins on Tiktok. On its website, Merriam Webster says “*Signs of a*

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healthy language include words being created, words being borrowed from other languages, and new meanings being given to existing words. Based on our most recent research, we are pleased to inform you that English is very (very!) healthy.” (Merriam-Webster, 2024)

It is therefore not unnatural to assume that Gen Z lingo will soon make its way into formal language. As words assume updated meanings in the context of Generation Z, the established language of communication may fully be replaced in some years. Social media algorithm will regulate conversation in the real world and even add to it in.

Focus of Gen Z:

Gen Z's academic life have steered towards the practical aspect of learning rather than theory. There are a huge number of dropouts every year. It brings to question the objectives that Gen Z aims to achieve. The integration of social media and personal life has resulted in a shift in the zeitgeist. Social media makes young people discover new prospects for employment. As Gen Z grew up during a global recession, they try to prepare for jobs at a comparatively early age, striving to develop a set of skills and enhance their chances of employment.

A major hindrance to this comes from social media. Maintaining their outward appearance has consumed a major part of the time of Gen Z. They hyper scrutinize the flaws in their outward appearance, leading them to use an excessive number of products in hopes of omitting their flaws. Everything in the life of Gen Z is a social media trend. There is an ever present tendency to follow what is popular. Unknowingly, commodification takes a centre stage in the lives of Gen Z. With a huge chunk of their time spent on physical appearance, personal development is undoubtedly hindered. Individual growth takes a backstage. The maintenance of one's body image is prioritized more than their physical or mental health. Personal development practically becomes equivalent to what is trending at a particular time on social media. The learning mindset of an individual has massively declined. The attention

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span of Gen Z has been dwindling at an alarming rate, leading all forms of visual media to become shorter in length.

The dichotomy of a highly competitive job market and the existence of social media to distract Gen Z from it often leave them aimless. Disillusioned by the rat race, Gen Z suffers from depression, anxiety and a fear of failure more than their previous generations. Instead of pursuing their dreams, most of the Gen Z opts for jobs that will bring in a greater amount of money even if that means dropping out of school or college.

Future of Gen Z:

Gen Z is set to inherit a future that will integrate social media into all aspects of their life. Social media has become not just a recreational tool but a persistent companion. It often assumes the role of a teacher. The young people are interacting with people of different cultures and backgrounds, leading them to get educated on issues that concern minority groups. Awareness among young people has increased. They are more inclined to take part in politics and campaigns for human rights. Social media is the primary source of news for Gen Z. Instead of flipping the newspaper every morning at breakfast, scrolling social media automatically keeps them updated on recent happenings.

Social media has begun to be integrated in the fields of education and employment. Jobs like social media marketing, content creator and social media influencer are taken up by many Gen Z individuals as they provide a steady income. Building a personal brand has become crucial in the current job market. An individual brand creates an online identity which companies pick up according to their needs. A rigid social media presence can open up highly lucrative opportunities for Gen Z. It is not doubted that as time passes, social media will be more and more involved in education and job sectors.

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Generation Z exhibits less self-esteem as compared to their previous generations. High screen times shorten the amount of sleep they get and consequently reduce their attention span. The constant notifications from social media applications are distracting to the average young adult. If Gen Z does not spend time on social media, they suffer from a fear of missing out. There are feelings of uneasiness and jitter among them when they cannot check social media consistently. This leads to procrastination and anxiety. This can hinder their future prospects.

Gen Z will face economic challenges in the future days. With the popularity of artificial intelligence, a lot of job positions have begun to get invalid. Old job positions are also evolving to accommodate the Gen Z young adult. The thin line between social media use and social media addiction predicts a major challenge that Gen Z has to face: maximizing output while integrating social media and technology in their working lives.

At the same time, Gen Z will also be the pioneers of development. Instant exchange of ideas and information among people from a myriad of cultures and backgrounds will propel them to collaborate faster. Development of technology will undoubtedly be swift by the hands of this generation.

Conclusion:

Social media being a main aspect of communication has created a fast-paced and ceaselessly evolving culture, which regulates conversation among Gen Z. It may be hard to keep up with the changes in vocabulary and this secludes Gen Z from people of previous generations as well as other people who might not be active on social media. Presently, Social Media is a constant companion to Gen Z and is making an impact in forming a social consciousness. Gen Z is more inclined to take part in campaigns for human rights. Gen Z has upcoming economic challenges they must face as they strive to figure out a formula which maintains the balance between social

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media and working life. Social media will doubtlessly aid Gen Z in collaborating faster as the days go by, revolutionizing development.

Young women fall prey to idealistic ideals of beauty that is advertised on social media. Young women of colour strive for a perfect image and go to dangerous lengths to achieve it. This is essentially a commercial exploitation of the weaknesses of the general public. The learning mindset has dwindled. Young people no longer have interest in learning for knowledge gain. For many, completing a voluminous novel may seem unrealistic and herculean task. Attention span has also taken a fall due to long hours of exposure to social media. Often, Gen Z finds that they are unsure of what they want to do in the future. They struggle to find evidence of a purpose or a plan and as a result, becomes subject to depression. . Gen Z's low self-esteem, diminishing confidence and low attention span form a barrier for them. It's important to find whether there is stratification in Gen Z as to keeping pace with current trends with respect to money involved. They seem to remain oblivious of the real life struggles faced by many in rural India and urban working class.

The invention of Artificial Intelligence raises questions regarding the present Gen Z and the upcoming Gen Alpha. Apprehension arises regarding what extent AI combined with technology will impact the physical and mental attributes of these upcoming generations. The possibility of sustainable development planning is set to reach new heights. Either they will find a way to cooperate and collaborate with AI while keeping it in check or it will become a capitalist weapon rendering millions jobless. However, it is to be speculated as to the possible changes in Gen Z characteristics as they step into their middle and old age and how these characteristics will differ from previous and next generations. The future is clouded, ethics enter into the equation and the possible long-term effects of social media and AI on the cultural, social, technical, economic, political, and environmental aspects of the world are uncertain.

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EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY ON PROJECT NANHI KALI

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Abstract:

Education is a critical driver of women's empowerment, fostering societal progress and sustainable development. Despite advancements, significant challenges remain in India, especially in rural and marginalized communities. Project Nanhi Kali, initiated in 1996 by Anand Mahindra under the K.C. Mahindra Education Trust, addresses these challenges by empowering underprivileged girls through quality education. The program ensures that girls from grades 1 to 10 receive academic support, life skills training, and resources such as personalized learning tools, school supplies, and hygiene products. With over 2.3 lakh girls benefited, Project Nanhi Kali emphasizes critical areas like financial literacy, digital skills, and leadership through sports, aligning with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) like Quality Education (SDG 4), Gender Equality (SDG 5), and Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3). The program's innovative initiatives prepare girls for both academic excellence and professional readiness, fostering a sense of confidence and independence. Success stories of beneficiaries, including students excelling in education and breaking societal barriers, underscore the transformative impact of this initiative. By bridging gender gaps in education and addressing societal norms, Project Nanhi Kali contributes to building a more equitable society. Its holistic approach exemplifies the potential of targeted educational programs in driving large-scale

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social change. This case study highlights the importance of such initiatives in ensuring every girl's right to education and an empowered future.

Keywords: Empowerment; Women; Education; Nanhi Kali.

Introduction

Education for women is crucial for societal development. Educated women help to build healthier families, stronger communities, and more sustainable economies. Education enables women to make rational choices, break the cycle of poverty, and enhance societal progress (Bhat, 2015). Despite its importance, women's education has historically been neglected, depriving women from the opportunity to learn and develop. For many years, women weren't allowed from pursuing formal education and were limited to traditional duties at home. Social reformers such as Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Raja Rammohan Roy, and Savitribai Phule played important roles in changing this narrative (Shetty & Hans, 2015). They pushed against established norms to encourage women's education, allowing females to attend school. Their efforts resulted in notable development, and women were eventually regarded as having the same right to learn and participate in society as men did. However, women's education in India continues to encounter huge obstacles (Saxena, 2017). According to the National Statistical Office (NSO), India's female literacy rate in 2021 was 70.3%, much lower than the male literacy rate of 84.7%. The difference expands even worse in rural and remote regions, where formal schooling is rare. Girls in these areas frequently drop out of education due to poverty, inadequate infrastructure, early marriage, or cultural beliefs (Katiyar, 2016). These problems make it difficult for the formal education system to reach all girls, particularly those in underprivileged communities. In such cases, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trusts, and foundations play a transforming role. These groups help to bridge the gap by reaching out to faraway regions and giving girls and children with opportunities for education. They build schools, provide scholarships, and promote safe learning environments (Alagbela, 2021). Many

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trusts emphasize vocational training and skill development to ensure long-term empowerment. Their activities immediately contribute to increasing women's literacy rates and ensuring that they receive the education they deserve. Women's education is more than simply about equality, it is also important to accomplish global targets such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Gupta, 2014). SDG 4 prioritizes inclusive and equitable quality education, whereas SDG 5 focuses on gender equality. Women's empowerment through education has a direct impact in terms of poverty reduction, improved health outcomes, and the advancement of sustainable development. Organizations and trusts working in this field not only influence individual lives, but also drive societal advancement and global development (Ashioya, 2016). India's journey toward universal women's education is not yet accomplished. While progress has been made, much more work is needed to remove the challenges that limit women's access to education. NGOs, trusts, and foundations are critical to resolving these problems, ensuring that no girl falls behind, and building a society in which every woman can reach her full potential through education (pillai & Joy, 2017).

Background of the study

Education plays a pivotal role in empowering women, fostering gender equality, and contributing to sustainable development. In India, numerous governmental and non-governmental organizations have launched initiatives to address the challenges faced by women and girls, particularly from marginalized communities, in accessing quality education. These organizations focus on overcoming barriers such as illiteracy, high dropout rates, financial constraints, and socio-cultural obstacles that hinder women's educational progress. The Tata Trusts, established in 1892, have made significant contributions to promoting education in India. Through initiatives like the JN Tata Endowment, which began offering scholarships for higher studies abroad, the Trusts have expanded their efforts to provide holistic education for all, regardless of background. Their commitment to inclusive education has

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positively impacted thousands of students, equipping them with the necessary skills to contribute to society. The Sarthi Educational Trust, founded under the Indian Trusts Act of 1882, has played a critical role in improving educational opportunities, particularly in Uttar Pradesh and neighboring states. The Trust has developed educational institutions offering courses in engineering, science, technology, arts, humanities, and business management. With a student body of approximately 5,000, Sarthi ensures quality education, infrastructure, and facilities that contribute to the empowerment of women, especially in professional fields. Pratham, established in 1995, has become a leading organization in bridging gaps within the Indian education system. Through innovative, low-cost, and scalable programs, Pratham has impacted millions of children and school dropouts. The organization focuses on foundational education, with a strong emphasis on early childhood development, literacy, and numeracy, reaching underserved communities and ensuring that girls have the skills necessary to advance in their education and careers. The Birla Education Trust, founded in 1929 by Shri G. D. Birla, has established over 400 village schools and initiated free compulsory education programs in Pilani and Jaipur. By promoting academic excellence, safe learning environments, and inclusive education, the Trust has empowered girls to pursue higher education and break societal barriers. Sarthak, working for over 15 years, has focused on the inclusion of persons with disabilities (PwDs) through skill education and training programs. The organization has trained over 60,000 PwDs, with significant emphasis on young women with disabilities. Sarthak's initiatives in Early Intervention and Inclusive Education ensure that no individual, regardless of their challenges, is left behind in the journey of empowerment. The Reliance Foundation Schools, located in cities like Jamnagar, Surat, Vadodara, and Navi Mumbai, serve approximately 14,500 students annually. The schools provide a blend of academic excellence and holistic development, creating pathways for girls to excel academically and professionally. Their commitment to innovation and values-driven education has earned numerous national and international awards, further advancing the role of women in education. These

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organizations, through their various initiatives, have collectively benefited thousands of students, empowering women and girls across India. The efforts to promote education for women have led to significant progress, but challenges remain, particularly in rural and remote areas. This study examines the role of these organizations in addressing barriers to women's education and their impact on social empowerment.

Importance of women's education for sustainable development

Women's education is crucial for building a sustainable and equitable world. An educated woman contributes to her family, community, and society in ways that improves economic growth, social progress, and environmental conservation. Education empowers women to break barriers and drive change, making it a vital factor in achieving sustainable development.

1. Reduction of Poverty

Educated women are more likely to secure better jobs and earn higher incomes, which helps lift families and communities out of poverty and contributes to overall economic growth. This way, Goal 1 (No Poverty) and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) will be achieved.

2. Improved Health Outcomes

Women with education make informed choices about family planning, reducing maternal and child mortality rates. This leads to healthier families and lowers the strain on healthcare systems. This way, Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) will be achieved.

3. Gender Equality

Education helps bridge the gender gap by empowering women with knowledge and skills to participate equally in social, economic, and political spheres. This way, Goal 5 (Gender Equality) will be achieved.

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4. Environmental Sustainability

Educated women are more likely to adopt sustainable practices and advocate for environmental conservation, helping address issues like climate change and resource management. This way, Goal 13 (Climate Action) and Goal 15 (Life on Land) will be achieved.

5. Impact on Future Generations

Educated mothers are more likely to educate their children, ensuring better opportunities for the next generation and breaking the cycle of poverty. This way, Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) will be achieved.

6. Achievement of Global Goals

Women's education contributes directly to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 1 (No Poverty).

Role of trusts and NGO's in promoting Gender Equality in education

Trusts and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play an important role in improving gender equality in education by assisting girls and women in overcoming obstacles that hinders them from receiving a proper education. Many of these trusts serve in locations where girls face challenges such as poverty, early marriage, and cultural views that place a higher value on boys' education. They create awareness about the significance of educating females and provide assistance, such as scholarships, textbooks, and constructing schools in rural areas, so increasing access to education. These NGOs also work for gender-sensitive policies in schools, including policies and practices that promote equitable educational opportunities for both boys and girls. They strive to create secure and supportive learning environments in which all children, regardless of gender, feel encouraged to learn. Trusts and NGOs also fight social norms that hinder girls from attending school or continuing their education, frequently

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collaborating with local leaders to promote the importance of girls' education. Many trusts and NGOs undertake initiatives to empower girls, particularly in areas like as hands-on learning and vocational training, where women are traditionally underrepresented. These NGOs provide mentorship and training to assist females gain confidence and abilities, hence closing the gender gap in school and future employment possibilities. Trusts and NGOs play an important role in advancing gender equality in education. Through their efforts to provide resources, support equal opportunities, and encourage girls to pursue all types of learning, they help create a more equitable society.

Objective of the study

1. To critically analyze the impact of project 'Nanhi Kali' for empowering women through Education.

Overview and History of 'Nanhi Kali' project

In 1996, Anand Mahindra, the Chairman of Mahindra Group, started Project Nanhi Kali (which means 'a little bud') through the K.C. Mahindra Education Trust to help educate underprivileged girls in India. The project was created to address the growing population, low literacy rates among women, and the fact that fewer women were working. In many rural areas, problems like child marriage and child labor were also common. Anand Mahindra saw that many social problems, such as superstitions, dowry, and caste discrimination, were linked to girls not getting an education. He believed that if girls were educated, it would help the country's economy and also create a fairer and more equal society. The World Bank supports this idea, showing that countries lose a huge amount of money between \$15 trillion and \$30 trillion because girls don't get enough education. Educating girls helps them earn more money and live better lives, and it also reduces child marriage, improves health, and gives families better nutrition, which strengthens communities. Project Nanhi Kali is a sponsorship program

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where people and companies can support a girl's education for at least one year. The goal is to ensure that girls finish their education up to Grade 10, giving them better chances in the future and helping India grow as a country.

Objective of the project

- The objective of Nanhi Kali Project as written on the official website is '*Educating underprivileged girls in India*'.

Vision and Mission of 'Nanhi kali' project

The vision and mission of Project Nanhi Kali, by the Mahindra Foundation, is to give underprivileged girls in India the chance to receive quality education. The project aims to:

- **Empower girls:** Create a world where girls can overcome societal biases and feel strong and capable.
- **Support education:** Provide access to good education, including after-school classes and personalized learning tools.
- **Teach life skills:** Offer training in 21st-century skills, financial literacy, digital literacy, and other important life skills.
- **Promote physical education:** Provide physical activities to help girls improve fitness, leadership, and teamwork.
- **Build confidence:** Help girls feel confident and believe they deserve every opportunity in life.

Programs and initiatives of work

Over the years, Project Nanhi Kali has provided strong support to girls in government schools from Grades I to X. This support includes afterschool remedial classes and access to personalized, AI-powered learning software through digital tablets. Every girl gets a material

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kit each year, which includes essential school supplies and feminine hygiene products. The project also introduced special training programs to teach teenage girls life skills and digital skills. With the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 being implemented in schools, Project Nanhi Kali has adjusted to meet the changing education needs. The main goal of empowering girls and helping them grow into confident women has remained the same, but now the program also teaches girls in Grades 6 to 10 important 21st-century skills and sports leadership skills to prepare them for both today and the future.

1. **21st-century skill training:** Project Nanhi Kali helps girls learn skills like financial literacy, digital proficiency, critical thinking, and communication. This helps them smoothly move from school to higher education and their future careers.
2. **Sports leadership skills training:** The program also offers sports education for girls, giving them the chance to take part in fitness activities. This helps improve their health, build confidence, and develop leadership and teamwork skills.

Every year, the girls receive a Nanhi Kali Kit, which includes a bag, two t-shirts, a pair of shoes, socks, stationery, and supplies for feminine hygiene, ensuring they can attend school with dignity.

Achievements and success stories

1. **Madhurata Patel** is a bright 16-year-old girl living in a small rented room in Mumbai with her parents and younger siblings. Despite their financial struggles, the family stays supportive and close. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Madhurata's father faced job instability, but she stayed focused on her education, balancing virtual learning with household duties. Thanks to Project Nanhi Kali, she received academic support, excelling in her studies. Her hard work led her to be among the top 25 students in her

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class, making her family proud. Madhurata's story shows the power of education and determination in overcoming challenges.

2. **Gangamma**, born into an uneducated family with limited means, faced many challenges in her pursuit of education. Despite the hardships, she walked two hours daily to attend a better school, and after her father's death, her mother worked as a laborer to support her education. Gangamma joined Project Nanhi Kali, which provided essential school supplies and tutoring. After completing her studies, she faced financial difficulties but became a physical education trainer. Today, as a teacher, she supports young girls, believing that early education through Nanhi Kali is key to their success, and remains motivated by her mother's sacrifices.
3. **Ganga and Jamana**, twin sisters from a conservative village in Ratlam, grew up in a community that didn't value girls' education, believing it would lower their chances of marriage. After months of persuasion, their parents allowed them to join Project Nanhi Kali. Before joining, the girls struggled with disrupted education as they worked with their parents during seasonal migrations. Now, the sisters excel at school and sports, winning medals at the Toofaan games. They dream of becoming teachers to inspire other girls to overcome societal barriers. Their mother is grateful to Nanhi Kali for teaching them the importance of education.
4. **Chakali Anitha**, a determined student from Bijwar village, scored an impressive 95% in her Class X board exams, topping her Mandal. As a first-generation learner, Anitha faced many challenges, with illiterate parents who initially didn't see the value of education. However, after continuous support from Project Nanhi Kali, her parents recognized its importance. Despite household chores, Anitha used her time wisely at school and the Academic Support Centre. With hard work and dedication, she excelled, scoring perfect marks in subjects like Science, Social Studies, and Telugu. Anitha dreams of becoming an engineer and is grateful for the support from Project Nanhi Kali.

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5. **Y. Hemaleela**, a bright student from a modest background, scored an impressive 98% in her Class X exams at Government Girls HS Marredpally. Despite her family's financial struggles, with her father working as a watchman and her mother as a maid, Hemaleela excelled in academics and extracurricular activities. She actively participates in sports, winning prizes in Kabaddi and Kho Kho, and enjoys drawing, drama, and music. A Nanhi Kali for five years, Hemaleela credits her success to the academic support and special tuitions she received. She dreams of becoming a doctor and hopes to serve the underprivileged community.
 6. **Lankapalli Sandya Priyanka**, an alumna of Project Nanhi Kali, is now an Assistant Engineer in the Municipal Corporation. Coming from a middle-class family in Santhavalasa village, she was supported by her mother after losing her father in 2012. Sandya, a dedicated student, excelled in her studies despite challenges, earning awards and securing a spot in IIIT for B Tech in Civil Engineering. She overcame language barriers and worked hard to graduate. Grateful for Nanhi Kali's support, Sandya is now preparing for the civil service exams with aspirations of becoming an IAS officer.
 7. **Manara Khatoon**, a 12-year-old girl from a slum in Kolkata, lives with her family after losing her father. Her mother, who earns only Rs. 5000 a month, relies on Manara to care for her younger siblings. Struggling with household chores, Manara lost interest in her studies. However, after joining Project Nanhi Kali, she regained focus and saw a huge improvement in her grades, from 63% and 49% to 83% and 97%. Inspired by this progress, Manara's mother dreams of a brighter future for her. Manara is passionate about dance, and Project Nanhi Kali supports her dreams of becoming a professional dancer.

The inspiring stories of the girls supported by Project Nanhi Kali highlight how education can truly change lives. Despite facing numerous challenges, these girls have displayed incredible strength, determination, and ambition, showing that with the right guidance and support, they

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can overcome any obstacle and reach their goals. Project Nanhi Kali has not just helped them academically but also encouraged them to become confident, skilled, and self-sufficient individuals. This program is paving the way for a brighter future for many girls, helping them break free from societal constraints and build lives full of opportunities. By receiving an education, they are shaping their own futures and contributing to the growth of their communities and country.

Number of stakeholders benefited

Till now project Nanhi Kali supported

- 2,31,692 girls in getting formal education.
- 1,71,162 girls got support through after school programme.
- 60,530 girls got support through Digital Skill and Life skill progarmme.

Conclusion

Project Nanhi Kali has made a profound impact on empowering underprivileged girls in India, helping them gain access to quality education and essential life skills. By providing personalized support through afterschool programs, digital skills training, and the distribution of material kits, the project has not only facilitated academic learning but also nurtured leadership, confidence, and health among the girls. With its holistic approach, Project Nanhi Kali has touched the lives of over 2.3 lakh girls, preparing them for a brighter future and breaking down societal barriers that often limit their opportunities. The initiative directly contributes to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through its focus on education, the project supports Goal 4 (Quality Education), ensuring that girls receive quality education and access to learning resources. The promotion of life skills, digital literacy, and financial independence addresses Goal 5 (Gender Equality), empowering girls to overcome societal biases and succeed in various sectors. The program's emphasis on physical education and

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leadership training advances Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being), helping the girls grow into strong, confident women. The long-term impact of Project Nanhi Kali not only empowers individuals but also contributes to creating a more equal, healthy, and sustainable society. As Project Nanhi Kali continues to uplift young girls, it is clear that each girl who receives education through this program carries with her the hope for a better tomorrow, one where her dreams are limitless, and her potential knows no bounds.

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EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN EDUCATION IN WEST BENGAL: CURRENT CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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Abstract

This paper presents a comprehensive analysis of equity and inclusion in the education system of West Bengal and India. It focuses on the enduring disparities and the role of policy measures in addressing them. The discussion begins with a clarification of the terms equity and inclusion within the educational sphere, emphasizing their significance in ensuring fairness and bringing marginalized communities into mainstream education. It further investigates the intra-state disparities in West Bengal, particularly highlighting the gap in educational access and quality between urban and rural regions and among different socio-economic and cultural groups. The scope is then extended to the national level, where West Bengal's scenario is compared with broader educational trends across India. The paper critically examines the impact of major national policies like the Right to Education Act, 2009 (RTE) and the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) in mitigating these disparities. It also assesses several state-led initiatives in West Bengal; such as Kanyashree Prakalpa, Sabooj Sathi, Student Credit Card Scheme, free textbooks and uniforms, and the mid-day meal program—evaluating their effectiveness and impact. By shedding light on persisting issues like ineffective implementation and socio-cultural hindrances, the study puts forward strategic recommendations. These are intended to guide policymakers, educators, and relevant stakeholders in building a more just, inclusive, and equitable educational landscape for all learners.

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Keywords: *Equity, Inclusion, Education, Policy Analysis, Kanyashree Prakalpa, Sabooj Sathi Scheme, Student Credit Card Scheme, Marginalized Communities.*

INTRODUCTION

Education is universally acknowledged as a fundamental human right and a critical catalyst for social and economic development. In India, despite significant progress, disparities in educational access and quality persist, especially affecting marginalized communities. This paper examines the state of equity and inclusion in education both within West Bengal and across India, assessing progress, identifying persistent challenges, and proposing strategies for improvement.

EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN EDUCATION: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Equity in education ensures that all individuals have access to high-quality education, irrespective of their socio-economic status, gender, disability, or ethnicity. It aims to level the playing field so that every student, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to succeed. Inclusion, conversely, refers to the integration of all students, particularly those from disadvantaged or marginalized groups, into mainstream educational systems. This framework is crucial for understanding educational disparities and the efficacy of policies designed to address them. Equity focuses on fairness and removing barriers, while inclusion emphasizes integrating diverse learners into an equitable system.

EDUCATIONAL DISPARITIES IN WEST BENGAL AND INDIA

West Bengal, like many regions in India, exhibits significant educational disparities rooted in various factors. Rural-urban divides, gender disparities, and socio-economic inequalities create substantial barriers to educational access and quality. Data reveals a stark contrast between urban and rural educational facilities. For instance, rural areas often suffer from inadequate infrastructure, fewer qualified teachers, and higher dropout rates compared to their urban

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counterparts. Gender disparities also persist, with girls, particularly in rural areas, facing greater obstacles to accessing and completing education. Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and economically disadvantaged communities encounter systemic barriers that affect their educational outcomes. Enrollment rates in schools show significant gaps, with marginalized groups experiencing lower attendance and higher dropout rates compared to their more privileged peers.

Urban centers generally boast better infrastructure, more qualified teachers, and a wider range of educational opportunities. Rural areas, in contrast, often struggle with inadequate school buildings, teacher shortages, limited access to technology, and lower enrollment rates, especially for girls and children from marginalized communities.

Children from Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and religious minorities frequently face systemic disadvantages. These can include poverty, lack of parental education, language barriers, and discrimination, all of which impact their access to and performance in education. Furthermore, geographical remoteness and traditional social norms can exacerbate these challenges for certain communities.

While enrollment rates for girls have improved, challenges persist, particularly in higher education and certain vocational streams. Early marriage, household responsibilities, and safety concerns can still lead to girls dropping out of school prematurely in some regions.

These disparities contribute to a cycle of disadvantage, perpetuating social and economic inequalities across generations.

NATIONAL TRENDS IN INDIA

Nationally, India faces similar challenges in achieving educational equity and inclusion. Despite various policy interventions, disparities in educational access remain pronounced. Data from the National Statistical Office (NSO) and other educational surveys highlight ongoing

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issues such as inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and socio-economic barriers. The education system grapples with uneven resource distribution across states and regions, which exacerbates disparities.

The gaps in educational outcomes between states can be attributed to variations in state-level implementation of policies and the effectiveness of local governance. For instance, states with higher levels of economic development often exhibit better educational indicators compared to less developed regions. Socio-economic barriers, including poverty and regional disparities, further contribute to unequal educational access and quality.

POLICY FRAMEWORKS AND THEIR IMPACT

1. *National Policies*

India has established several policies to promote equity and inclusion in education. The Right to Education Act (RTE), enacted in 2009, mandates free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14 years. The Act aims to address disparities by setting standards for schools and ensuring that marginalized children have access to education. Additionally, the National Policy on Education (NPE) outlines strategies to improve educational quality and inclusivity.

While these policies represent significant strides toward educational equity, their effectiveness varies. The RTE Act has had a positive impact on enrollment rates, but challenges remain in ensuring the quality of education and addressing issues such as inadequate infrastructure and teacher absenteeism. Similarly, the NPE has laid out a vision for educational improvement, but implementation gaps persist, particularly in underdeveloped regions.

2. *State-Level Initiatives in West Bengal*

West Bengal has implemented various initiatives to address educational disparities. Scholarship programs, mid-day meal schemes, and special provisions for marginalized groups

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have been introduced to improve access and retention. These initiatives aim to support disadvantaged students and reduce regional disparities.

Scholarship programs provide financial support to students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, helping to alleviate some of the barriers to education. Mid-day meal schemes are designed to improve school attendance and nutritional status among children. Special provisions for marginalized groups, including reserved seats and targeted interventions, aim to enhance educational opportunities for SC, ST, and other disadvantaged communities.

West Bengal has introduced several pioneering schemes aimed at promoting equity and inclusion in education, yielding notable outcomes:

1. **Kanyashree Prakalpa:** This conditional cash transfer scheme aims to prevent child marriage and promote girls' education. Kanyashree has been globally recognized for its success in increasing girls' enrollment in secondary and higher education, reducing school dropouts, and delaying the age of marriage in West Bengal.
2. **Sabooj Sathi Scheme:** This scheme provides bicycles to students (both boys and girls) in classes IX to XII to ease their commute to school, especially in rural areas. Sabooj Sathi has demonstrably improved school attendance and reduced dropout rates, particularly for students traveling long distances, thereby enhancing access to education.
3. **Student Credit Card Scheme:** Launched recently, this scheme provides collateral-free loans to students for higher education, including professional and doctoral courses. This initiative aims to reduce financial barriers to higher education, making it more accessible to students from economically weaker sections. Its long-term impact on enrollment in higher education and skill development is anticipated to be significant.

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4. **Free Textbooks and Free Uniforms:** These provisions aim to reduce the financial burden on families, encouraging enrollment and retention, particularly at the elementary level. These schemes have been effective in universalizing access to basic schooling and ensuring that children from poor families are not excluded due to financial constraints.
 5. **Mid-Day Meal Schemes:** Providing nutritious meals in schools has been a crucial intervention to address hunger and improve nutritional levels among students, which in turn positively impacts their attendance and concentration in class. The mid-day meal scheme has played a vital role in increasing enrollment, improving attendance, and combating malnutrition among school-going children across West Bengal.
 6. **Scholarship Programs:** Various scholarship programs cater to students from SC, ST, OBC, minority communities, and those with disabilities, providing financial assistance to pursue education at different levels. These scholarships help in mitigating the economic barriers that often prevent students from marginalized communities from accessing and continuing their education.

While these state-level initiatives have made significant strides, their long-term sustainability and the need for continuous evaluation and adaptation remain critical.

Despite these efforts, the effectiveness of these initiatives varies. Challenges such as inadequate funding, implementation issues, and socio-cultural barriers affect their impact. For example, while mid-day meal schemes have improved attendance rates, issues related to food quality and distribution remain. Similarly, scholarship programs may not fully address the diverse needs of marginalized students, such as those facing additional socio-economic barriers.

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CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Several challenges hinder progress toward educational equity and inclusion. Inadequate implementation of policies is a significant barrier, with discrepancies between policy intentions and ground-level realities. Resource constraints, including insufficient funding and infrastructure, further exacerbate educational disparities.

Socio-cultural barriers also play a crucial role. In many regions, traditional practices, gender biases, and social norms affect educational access and participation. For instance, girls may face additional hurdles in accessing education due to cultural attitudes or family responsibilities. Additionally, resistance to inclusive practices can impede efforts to integrate marginalized students into mainstream educational systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

To advance equity and inclusion in education, several recommendations are proposed:

1. ***Strengthening Policy Implementation:*** Ensuring effective implementation of existing policies is crucial. This involves addressing gaps in policy execution, improving monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and enhancing coordination between various stakeholders.
2. ***Increasing Investment in Education Infrastructure:*** Adequate investment in educational infrastructure, including schools, classrooms, and learning resources, is essential for improving access and quality. Prioritizing infrastructure development in underserved areas can help bridge regional disparities.
3. ***Improving Teacher Training:*** High-quality education depends on skilled teachers. Investing in teacher training and professional development can enhance teaching quality and address issues such as teacher shortages and absenteeism.

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4. **Addressing Socio-Cultural Barriers:** Interventions aimed at addressing socio-cultural barriers, including gender biases and traditional practices, are necessary. Community engagement and awareness programs can help challenge negative attitudes and promote inclusive educational practices.
5. **Enhancing Support Systems:** Providing additional support to marginalized students, such as counseling, mentorship, and academic assistance, can help address specific challenges and improve educational outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Equity and inclusion in education are fundamental for ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to succeed. While significant progress has been made in West Bengal and India, challenges remain. By addressing these challenges through targeted policies, increased investment, and inclusive practices, it is possible to create a more equitable educational landscape. The journey toward educational equity requires sustained effort and collaboration among policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to ensure that every student has the opportunity to thrive.

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