



## PEDAGOGICAL INTERVENTIONS FOR ESL LEARNERS WITH COMMUNICATION DISORDERS AT PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL IN GOA, INDIA

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### Abstract:

A learner with communication disorders often finds it overly taxing and stressful to learn in a mainstream classroom environment. Anxiety, stress, nervousness, and phobias of social interactions, often, have a firm hold over learners struggling with communication disorders. Hence, it is of paramount importance to accommodate and nourish diverse learners, particularly those who require extra care and attention, as well as modifications in existing teaching methods to overcome impediments that obstruct their successful learning. The undertaken study aims to investigate pedagogical interventions for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners with communication disorders in select educational institutions at the primary school level in Goa, India. The study incorporates data from a fieldwork that involved visiting mainstream schools and special education institutes in South Goa, whereby qualitative interviews were conducted with mainstream English teachers, special educators, and speech therapists to gain insights and perspectives from eminent proponents of ELT and ESL pedagogy.

**Keywords:** communication disorders, ESL, ELT, communication therapy

### 1. Introduction

*"We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value, no matter what their color." (Angelou, 7)*

Navigating an ocean based only on the position of stars and without any other aids and modern technology is nothing less than a nightmare for a sailor. Similarly,

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comprehending and following language instructions given by the English teacher for a learner with a communication disorder becomes a nightmare and an unattainable task. A typical classroom at the primary level consists of diverse learners with equally diverse learning needs. The conventional pedagogical method of “one size fits all” acts as a hindrance, preventing professional educators from acknowledging diverse learner needs and tailoring instructions to cater to them. A neurodiverse learner, particularly a pupil with a communication disorder, is at a high risk of lagging behind his/her peers in coping with the syllabus, activities, and assessment designed for a mainstream English language classroom.

It has been observed by the professionals that a learner with communication disorders often finds it overly taxing and stressful to learn in a mainstream classroom environment where his/her peers do not exhibit any difficulty in learning, thus affecting the self-esteem and motivation of the learner. Anxiety, stress, nervousness, and phobias of social interactions often have a firm hold over learners struggling with communication disorders, as the conventional ELT classrooms lack the instructional materials, tools, and techniques to accommodate neurodiverse language learners. Additionally, these learners are further pressured to cope and be on par with their peers without addressing their difficulties, thus nipping the bud even before it blooms.

It is important to note that the needs and objectives of learning are different for learners with communication disorders. Their needs are met with the drafting of an Individualised Education Plan (IEP), where the emphasis is on individual learner requirements, and consequently, instruction, assessment, and activities are modified as per the needs of the learners to suit their pace and learning style. Creating an inclusive environment in a neurotypical ELT classroom to facilitate the learning of neurodiverse learners is the need of the hour. However, it is important to create awareness as well as to bring about a change in the attitudes of the mainstream education stakeholders to facilitate diversity in the classroom.

Hence, it is of paramount importance to accommodate and nourish diverse learners, particularly those who require extra care and attention, as well as modifications in existing teaching methods to overcome impediments that obstruct their successful learning.

This study investigates the problems faced by learners with communication disorders and what it entails, assessment or screening criteria for students with communication disorders, interventions and strategies that facilitate ELT for learners with communication disorders.

## **2. Context of the Study**

The undertaken study aimed to investigate pedagogical interventions for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners with communication disorders. The study was a part of the researchers’ bigger project titled “Pedagogy Shift in English Language Teaching at the Pre-primary and Primary School”, which primarily aimed at discerning the pedagogy

shift in English Language Teaching (ELT) in the Goan educational institutions for a Master's thesis. It facilitated an inquiry into the English pedagogy shift, explored ELT interventions for learners with communication disorders, and examined the impact of technological advancements on evolving trends in ELT. This was achieved by engaging in fieldwork that involved visiting mainstream schools and special education institutes, whereby qualitative interviews were conducted with mainstream English teachers, special educators, and speech therapists to gain insights and perspectives from the eminent proponents of ELT and ESL pedagogy.

The key findings highlighted the shift from the conventional methods of ESL pedagogy that focused on rote learning, rigid drills, and practice, learning grammar rules and sentence structures in isolation, to contemporary methods of ESL that emphasize learning-by-doing, the play-way method of learning, using phonics to introduce young minds to language, and multisensory language learning. A plethora of interventions used to accommodate learners with communication disorders were also explored during the study. The onus was not on mastering abstract grammar rules but rather on developing communicative competence, which would be beneficial to the learners in the long run, as language learning would not be limited to just the four walls of the classroom. Technology, too, played a crucial role in advancing and facilitating ELT and ESL pedagogy; the powerful impact of AI (artificial intelligence) in English language learning and teaching bears testimony to this fact.

### **3. Research Methodology for the Proposed Study**

In a study that focused on second language pedagogical interventions for learners with communication disorders, it was necessary to work closely with ESL educators who cater to these learners. Qualitative interviews were conducted through fieldwork to gain an in-depth understanding of the techniques and strategies used. A questionnaire was designed specifically for this purpose, with relevant questions intended to gauge developments, methods, modifications, and the role of technology in assisting ESL learners with communication disorders. The researchers approached two mainstream schools and five special educational institutions to conduct interviews with special educators and speech therapists who either work in resource rooms of mainstream schools or are part of the staff of special schools. The interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis as well as in groups with the interviewees. Additionally, two special educators working with an NGO, *Caritas Centre South Goa*, were interviewed over the phone. A total of eighteen responses were recorded and critically analysed to comprehend the nature and impact of the remedial interventions in helping learners overcome or, to a certain extent, control their struggle with communication disorders. Hence, a total of seventeen schools were visited, where the researchers interacted with fifty-seven interviewees.

The inputs have been analysed to gain a deeper understanding of screening and identification tools used, and how various interventions in ELT can assist students with

communication disorders. The strategies, approaches, techniques, and teaching aids used by special educators and speech therapists have been analysed to determine how the diverse needs of learners with communication disorders are catered to.

### 3.1 Limitations of the Research

- The study is limited to primary educational institutions in South Goa.
- Interviews were restricted to special educators and speech therapists; thus, excluding opinions and perspectives of students and parents in the study.
- This study focuses on the following speech disorders: stuttering, cluttering, and articulation disorders; and language disorders: receptive, expressive, and mixed receptive-expressive language disorders.
- Interventions used at the high school level are not explored in this study.

## 4. Literature Review

In '*Language Learning and Communication Disorders in Children*' (1969), Gertrud Wyatt extensively speaks about the prominent communication disorders evident in children from the age of three, including the factors that trigger them. She highlights the role a mother plays as the speech model during the developmental years of a child and how certain environmental factors can prove detrimental to the growth of a child. She provides an in-depth explanation of stuttering and how it can hinder the social and academic progress of a child. She provides ample case studies to support her claims. She also mentions a few strategies and interventions that are adopted to help learners with communication disorders.

Ella Hutt, in her phenomenal book '*Teaching Language-Disordered Children: A Structured Curriculum*' (1986), highlights the importance of acknowledging and accommodating learners with language disorders. The author enumerates that learners with communication disorders find it extremely challenging if the instructions and classroom activities are not suitably adapted for their engagement. She examines the effectiveness of play therapy, music therapy, and speech therapy in assisting learners with speech disorders. This book also underlines the need for the involvement of the parents, guardians, and caretakers in the learner's growth. She also elucidates the significant role that educational drama plays in facilitating the holistic development of learners.

The book '*Educating Exceptional Children*' (2020) by Samuel A. Kirk, James J. Gallagher, and Mary Ruth Coleman offers an extensive examination of language and speech difficulties experienced by children with communication disorders. The authors also highlight various alternative ELT approaches and interventions used to help learners with diverse learning needs. This seminal work also brings to the forefront issues that often get neglected or are clubbed under general terms such as dyslexia, receptive-expressive language disorders, stuttering, and cluttering (Kirk *et al.*, 57). It provides a thorough overview of best practices in special ELT education by citing case studies and

real-life examples collected from psychologists, speech therapists, and speech-language pathologists. Thus, allowing special ELT educators to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and classroom practices.

In her online article *'English Language Learners with Special Needs: Effective Instructional Strategies'* (2016), Alba Ortiz examines various factors that inhibit learners with communication disorders from overcoming their language and speech obstacles in a mainstream English classroom, including English educators' inability to identify such learners. She further states that language disorders severely affect learners' attention span, memory, and vocabulary and thus can impair a learner's ability to read, write, and speak. She mentions approaches and learner-friendly strategies such as peer teaching, individualised instructions, short and simple instructions, and, most importantly, early interventions for learners struggling to comprehend or express themselves in an attempt to create an inclusive classroom environment.

*'English Language Learners with Special Needs: Identification, Assessment, and Instruction'* (2002), an online article edited by Artiles and Alba, focuses on the challenges faced in catering to English language learners with special needs and underlines the importance of early interventions in helping learners overcome their language struggles. It also notes that English teachers should primarily focus on engaging learners in effective pedagogy, ensuring every individual learner feels included. The book also sheds insights into current trends and the future of special education, with a special mention of parental involvement in curriculum planning. The editors conclude by pointing out how cultural, linguistic, social, and academic barriers should be tackled to create an inclusive ELT pedagogy to meet the diverse needs of the English language learners with special needs. While existing literature, including books, articles, and scholarly research, extensively documents modifications and interventions in ELT pedagogy for students with communication disorders, there is a notable gap regarding specific pedagogical interventions in ELT at the pre-primary and primary levels within South Goan educational institutions. Consequently, this research is valuable for both ELT educators and collective awareness, providing insights into the pedagogical interventions employed in the Goan educational context.

## **8. Decoding Communication Disorders**

Communication constitutes an integral component of human beings. The title of being social animals revolves around the ability of humans to communicate and interact with one another. Language facilitates communication, though the functions of communication vary as per the needs and demands of the individuals, be it to fulfill their individual or social requirements, to pass on information, express their views, ideas, feelings, and understanding, or to simply communicate with other social beings. However, impediments in communication can hamper the individual from satiating his/her needs, often resulting in stress, anxiety, and frustration. Hence, it is crucial to

understand what communication disorders are to help learners struggling with language.

Gertrud L. Wyatt, in her phenomenal book, *'Language Learning and Communication Disorders in Children'* (1969) defines communication disorders as "a group of conditions involving problems with receiving, processing, sending, and comprehending various forms of information and communication" (Wyatt, 1969). A communication disorder can manifest in the initial stages of a child's development or can be due to a medical condition that can hamper the later stages of life. It can be a stand-alone condition or co-occur with other developmental disorders (Wyatt, 1969). Thus, communication disorders affect an individual's effective utilisation of language to communicate verbally or non-verbally.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) categorises communication disorders into four groups: speech disorder, language disorder, hearing disorder, and Central Auditory Processing Disorder (CAPD). However, this study will elaborately look into speech and language disorders only as during the interviews conducted, the special educators and speech therapists were of the view that the aforementioned two types of communication disorders were more evident in the learners as they often were either stand-alone problems or co-occurred in learners with Dyslexia, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Intellectual Disability (ID) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Speech Disorders encountered by the speech therapists in South-Goan educational institutes included stuttering, cluttering, and articulation disorder. These disorders affect an individual's clarity, fluency, rhythm, and flow of speech. Language disorders diagnosed by the special educators included receptive language disorder, expressive language disorder, and sometimes mixed receptive-expressive language disorder. Language disorders mainly affected phonology and morphology and caused problems with using the proper syntax of the language, as well as using context-specific language. Speech therapists are of the view that learners with speech disorders are not likely to have language disorders, as they have already acquired the language but face difficulty in its production; however, there are chances of learners with language disorders also having speech disorders.

## **6. Speech Disorders: From the Lens of Speech Therapists**

### **6.1 Stuttering**

Stuttering, also known as stammering, is characterized as the repetitive and prolonged production of sounds, syllables, or phrases by an individual in addition to unintended silent pauses and mid-word pauses, thus affecting the production and the flow of speech (Hutt, 57). Wyatt discusses Development Stuttering as a subtype of stuttering in her book, *'Language Learning and Communication Disorders in Children'* (1969). She links it to neurodevelopmental brain disorder and emphasizes that it is more evident in young learners. Wyatt also attributes factors such as family history, distance anxiety from the mother, as well as the pressure to cope with unexpected sudden changes in the

environment, as likely to initiate stuttering in children. She also identifies acquired stuttering, which develops because of illness or injury to the brain.

The interviewee speech therapists highlighted the fact that it is of paramount importance to take into consideration what kind of repetitive speech should be taken as symptomatic of stuttering and what kind occurs normally in a child's language repertoire. The onset of stuttering is characterized by the appearance of compulsive repetition of initial sounds and syllables, occurring at a stage of development when the child tries to express himself/herself in connected speech. These compulsive repetitions must be differentiated from developmental repetitions. For instance, a speech therapist during the interview gave an example of compulsive repetition as follows *"I I I wa wa want to to to dri dri dri drink wat wat water"*, pointing out that such repetitions do not serve as building blocks in the construction of larger sentences and cause frustration and anxiety in the child. If the disruption of speech continues, then the symptoms become more complex, and eventually, the syndrome of stuttering as a full-fledged speech disorder emerges in children. Early intervention is of great significance in helping learners with stuttering, as speech therapists are of the view that the earlier a child with stuttering is introduced to speech therapy, the better the chances of overcoming developmental stuttering.

## 6.2 Cluttering

Cluttering was initially considered as 'clumsiness in articulation' as there was a stereotypical perception of children with symptoms of cluttering to be fast talkers who ignored the language structures and norms (Wyatt, 233). Cluttering is marked by accelerated speech tempo, with a rapid rate of speaking; leading to irregular, unpredictable distortion and omission of sounds, it was also marked by erratic rhythm, repetition, and inappropriate syntax or grammar that made the language produced incomprehensible and seem disorganised. Cluttering results from neurological impairments and sometimes from genetics that affect the speed of speech. Clutterers also experience difficulties in reading, writing, articulation, sentence building, storytelling, and spelling. Cluttering often co-exists with stuttering and can co-occur with ASD and ADHD.

It is attributed to unusual sentence stress and structures, along with the haphazard organisation of thoughts in both oral and written forms, with frequent topic shifting. The speech therapist shared an example of a sentence uttered by a learner with cluttering, *"I need to go to uhh.... I am thirsty and... there was bread and butter in the tiffin, I wanted chips but mama refused to give!"*. In speaking, the cluttering children frequently use filler words such as 'like' or 'uh', and repeated syllables and words. Another symptom observed among clutterers by the interviewee speech therapists was the deletion of syllables and often combining phrases to create a prolonged sentence uttered in the same tone and rhythm, for instance, *"I will go home and watch television!"*. Early intervention and speech therapy can help clutterers deal with their condition.

### 6.3 Articulation Disorder

As children learn to speak, it is a common phenomenon to see them struggling to produce certain sounds or to pronounce a word until the age of four or five. A learner with articulation disorder experiences as well as exhibits difficulty in learning and producing specific speech sounds at the phonetic level. Hence, it makes it difficult to comprehend what the child is saying. It is also known as '*Pronunciation Disorder*', '*Articulation Delay*', or '*Functional Speech Delay*'. A learner with such a disorder has no problem with the motor functions of his/her articulators; lips, tongue, teeth, lungs, jaw, velum, palate, or the alveolar ridge, but rather finds it difficult to produce sounds in the accepted typical manner. Speech therapists attribute brain injury, hearing impairment, and hereditary and physical injuries affecting nerves involved in speech to be the causes of articulation disorder in some cases.

Some articulation disorder behaviours observed by the speech therapists included frequent addition, distortion, or swapping of certain sounds; for instance, the /w/ sound was often used for the /r/ sound. The omission was a common characteristic observed among learners with articulation disorder as they often omitted certain sounds from the words, the speech therapist gave an example that she had encountered, a learner had asked her "Doo-oo-ee-my-mas?", she struggled to decode it and upon asking the learner to draw what he wanted she understood that the question was "Did you see my mask?".

Learners also often add extra sounds to the words, swap the initial sound of the words, or pronounce a single syllable instead of two. For example, the speech therapist noticed a learner uttering only "bay" instead of the complete word "baby". Substitution is another common phenomenon prevalent among learners with an articulation disorder, for instance, the speech therapist gave an example of a child who substituted /v/ for /l/ such as "vook" for "look", "vast" for "last" and "vet" for "let". Despite all the mentioned symptoms of articulation disorder, it is important to remember that it is completely involuntary and not under the control of children with this disorder to avoid mistakes. Early intervention and speech therapy can be beneficial for learners to recover from articulation disorder; if it's not treated, then the disorder will be carried into adulthood.

## 7. Investigating Language Disorders: Perspectives of Special Educators

### 7.1 Receptive Language Disorder

Receptive language disorder is a label given to identify those learners who have crossed the threshold of five years and yet struggle in comprehending, decoding, processing, and following what is being communicated to them, either in oral or written language. They find it extremely challenging to connect words with their corresponding meaning and thus do not have an idea about what is being communicated to them. Learners in such situations often end up responding to the incoming messages in ways that do not make any sense to the sender of the message. Learners with receptive language disorder also experience difficulties in organising their thoughts either in the written or verbal form; thus, this factor also prevents them from understanding and giving an apt response to



what is being said or asked of them. There are no known specific causes of this disorder; however, it can result from ASD, complications during pregnancy and birth, genetics, or brain injury.

The special educators and speech therapists interviewed shared some examples of the symptoms observed among learners with receptive language disorder. They were of the view that often these learners seem not to be paying attention and listening to what is being discussed in the classroom, because when asked questions, they either gave a blank stare or kept quiet. As a result of this, the teacher often felt disrespected. However, the real problem was that they struggled to understand what was being said and explained by the teacher. Autistic learners with receptive language disorder also exhibit difficulties in following instructions, directions, complex goal-oriented sentences, and being part of social interactions; hence, they always seem to be shy or withdrawn. Children with this disorder often have limited vocabulary, ask for repetitions, and have a high chance of misinterpreting and misunderstanding jokes or what is being said to them. Early diagnosis and intervention can be of great help to learners with this language disorder.

## **7.2 Expressive Language Disorder**

One of the major components of any language is expression, be it oral or verbal. Expressive skills include those with the production of language to express one's ideas, opinions, feelings, thoughts, and viewpoints through speech, writing, and gestures. Learners with expressive language disorder struggle to express themselves through the language structures, both in verbal and nonverbal forms. There is no single known cause; however, various factors like ASD, learning disorders such as Dyslexia, ADHD, Aphasia, brain injury, as well as genetics can serve as breeding grounds for this disorder.

The common signs of expressive language disorder observed among learners by the speech therapists and special educators included challenges in talking and making others, particularly their peers, understand them, using language in a logical sequence, specifically in activities such as storytelling. Students with this disorder also face great difficulty in correctly using tenses, prepositions, adverbs, and adjectives, as well as the proper syntax of the language. The special educators also pointed out that there was no natural flow of speech, because of which they're dreading social interactions. They often use wrong pronouns, such as addressing a girl as "he" or "him", and they also use wrong words in the sentences or confuse the meaning of words.

Learners with expressive language disorder also exhibited selective mutism, as special educators are of the view that they seek recourse to it as a defense mechanism to avoid feeling humiliated because of their inability to respond appropriately. Another characteristic of this disorder is the usage of short sentences and frequent use of filler words in both written and spoken language because of limited vocabulary. Acquiring and using new vocabulary seems to be a herculean task for these learners. Early intervention can help learners with expressive language disorder overcome it to a certain extent.

### **7.3 Mixed Receptive-Expressive Language Disorder**

Reception and expression are important for any individual to communicate as well as be a part of society. However, there is a segment of the population that experiences such an intimidating world of mixed receptive-expressive language disorder. As the name implies, mixed receptive-expressive language disorder affects both receptive and expressive skills of communication. It acts as an impediment to comprehending as well as conveying one's ideas, feelings, and opinions. Thus, it is characterized as a developmental language disorder with marked difficulty in both understanding a message and expressing oneself through the medium of language.

The interviewee speech therapists and special educators, from their observations, gave examples of the symptoms observed in learners with mixed receptive-expressive language disorder. The common observation was that learners have limited speech and expressive skills compared to their peers of their age. Another prominent symptom included the inability of these learners to give appropriate answers even to simple questions about their likes, dislikes, hobbies, family, etc. These learners also exhibit difficulties in following or giving instructions, formulating well-structured sentences, or making proper use of grammar. In such a scenario, special educators and speech therapists play a significant role in helping learners keep their condition under control and enjoy language learning in a stress-free and non-judgmental environment.

## **8. Screening and Identification of Communication Disorders**

Just as any physical ailment needs to be diagnosed to get it treated and cured so that an individual feels at ease, similarly, it is of immense significance to assess and identify communication disorders in young learners so that they can be remediated and improved. There are various tests to identify and diagnose the same; however, a refinement of methods for the identification and diagnosis of children in need of modified educational programs, particularly in language learning, is of paramount importance. Assessment also plays an important role in selecting appropriate and effective teaching methods and strategies for a particular student. Without proper examination, children with various symptoms of communication disorders may be given derogatory labels such as 'lazy', 'emotionally disturbed', 'mentally retarded', or classified under general terms as 'dyslexic' or 'autistic', irrespective of their condition and its severity.

The special education institutes in South Goa admit students who have been screened and diagnosed with either language or learning disorders by medical professionals in institutions such as the Institute of Psychiatry and Behaviour (IPHB), Hospicio - South Goa District Hospital or *Sethu*, a charitable trust for child development and family guidance. The detailed report procured from these institutions after formal assessment makes it easier for the child as well as the parents to seek further guidance. However, the formal diagnostic tests administered are psycho-educational in nature as the criteria for determining the disorders, whether learning or language, is based on the relationship between intelligence (IQ) and achievements in education.

The speech therapists and special educators participating in this study mentioned a couple of checklists that helped them in assessment at the institutional level. The administration of these checklists is important to identify the needs of the learners to craft suitable intervention remedies for their difficulties. For instance, the Receptive-Expressive Emergent Language (REEL) test is a standard checklist tool used by special educators and speech therapists to gauge the language abilities, particularly of learners with special language needs. It helps the administrators of the test to gain valuable insights into the receptive and expressive language development of the learner. It focuses as well as provides a comprehensive evaluation of how vocabulary, semantics, and syntax of the language as used by the learner in both comprehending and conveying oneself. Hence, it gives impetus to the speech therapists and special educators to tailor instructions and activities suitable for these learners.

The interviews also revealed that even though standard checklists are useful in most of the scenarios, they're not helpful in certain circumstances, particularly if the learners have severe comorbid symptoms of delayed language development, defective articulation, and behaviour disorders. In such situations, special educational institutions have formulated institution and child-specific checklists and other baseline assessment tests. However, the interviewees refrained from sharing details about these checklists/tests to maintain confidentiality. Nonetheless, they shared that these child-specific tests, were crafted using the information drawn from several sources such as the developmental history of the child from his/her parents, pediatrician, siblings, peers, and previous educators.

Irrespective of whether the standard checklists or child-specific assessment tools were used to screen and diagnose communication disorders in the learners, all the special educators, as well as speech therapists emphasized the fact that these tests should be administered by a medical specialist, a professional speech therapist or a certified Speech-Language Pathologist. The consensus opinion was that superficial testing by inadequately trained personnel would be detrimental to the child and should be avoided to the greatest extent possible.

## **9. An Analysis of Remedial Intervention to Tackle Communication Disorders**

Just as the diagnosis of any physical ailment is followed by its treatment, the next pivotal step after the diagnosis of communication disorders in young learners is the implementation of intervention strategies to remediate and immerse the learners in a meaningful language learning environment. Thus, intervention along with special care and attention to communication disorders is likely to make language learning less chaotic, frustrating, fearful, and humiliating. Scholarly research in special education has documented the importance of early intervention. However, researchers are of the view that late intervention is better than none, but nothing matches the wonders of early and appropriate intervention. The interviewee speech therapists and special educators

recounted their remedial intervention strategies and amusing anecdotes that testified to the effects of these pivotal strategies.

Sociolinguistic diversity refers to the range of linguistic practices and language varieties evident in a community or linguistic group. It encompasses regional dialects, sociolects, ethnic varieties, gender, and other forms of language use that deviate from standardized forms (Walt, 2008). The sociolinguistic diversity that constitutes the Goan society also plays an eminent role in influencing special educators and speech therapists to align the remedial interventions to suit the language needs of the learners. For instance, attention is paid to familiarise learners with communication disorders with the social context of the English language so that they can use the language appropriately in different situations. Hence, the focus is on tailoring interventions that emphasize language function over form, particularly developing communicative competence and awareness of different social contexts of language to avoid confusion.

As aforementioned, the established belief is that there is a close relationship between intelligence, as measured by standard I.Q. tests, and language skills. Hence, based on the I.Q. score, learners are grouped together irrespective of their physiological age and are trained in language skills with the help of remedial interventions. Though the learners of varied I.Q. levels are in the same class, each of them is likely to have different needs and a single or a combination of communication disorders. In such situations, speech therapists and special educators take recourse to Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to cater to the needs of individual learners while keeping in mind their disorders and learning abilities.

The first step of intervention is designing a learner-centric and child-specific curriculum. This is fulfilled by adapting functional academics to meet the individual needs of the learners in special education. Functional academics refer to the fundamental reading, writing, and numeracy skills that enable independent living. Since children with communication or other learning disabilities find it difficult to understand or pay attention to the minute details, they often require more time to grasp what is being taught as well as to transfer learning from one situation to another. Therefore, the interventional focus shifts to functional academics, whereby learners are acquainted with basic language skills that can be utilised for independent functioning at the individual as well as social level. Simplification and a flexible curriculum form the core of functional academics; every task or activity that facilitates language learning is divided into sub-tasks to make it as simple as possible.

The main goal of all remediators is to work towards the improvement of the quality of the children's understanding and use of spoken language. Communication therapy is a noteworthy method employed to help learners with speech disorders. Speech therapists share that any adult (parents or special educators) who can attune himself/herself to the child's level of communication may succeed in establishing a therapeutic relationship; this will, in turn, help the child to attempt and explore his/her verbal stimulation. The adult must respond to the clues given by the learner, by being alert to the learner's verbal and nonverbal messages and most importantly, by providing

corrective feedback to the learner. Thus, the helping adult has the double role of assisting the child in coping with his/her feelings of anxiety and aggression and, at the same time, communicating at a level that may be appropriate and comfortable for the child in verbal distress.

The crux of communication therapy rests on engaging the learners in simple communication patterns to lessen the child's linguistic load by using simple vocabulary, a slow rate of speech, and careful articulation. In this method, the learners are not corrected when they express their needs or wants, but rather during activities and games by using simple picture books, toys, crayons, and other interesting but not confusing means. The intervention sequence adheres to the fundamental stages in children's language learning, and thus, the child's training begins with labeling or naming of objects and pictures. This is followed by the expansion of phrases, word matching, and repetition of nursery rhymes. Finally, followed by simple reading or storytelling. Even the stories are crafted in such a manner that they deal with the immediate environment and with events evident in the lives of the learners, they are full of descriptive words, repetitive and funny sounds.

Corrective feedback, as aforementioned, refers to the phonetic, semantic, and grammatical feedback provided to a child with a speech disorder so that he/she can improve upon the multiple aspects of the language. Accurate sounds and the sequence of the sounds constitute the phonetic feedback. Acquiring names and meanings to convey objects, experiences, relationships, and any phenomenon forms semantic feedback. Grammatical feedback investigates the correct patterns of grammar and syntax of a given language. Speech therapists highlight the fact that adults should be mindful of whether the feedback provided is rewarding or punishing, continuous or discontinuous, and if it's appropriate or inappropriate in facilitating the learner's language development. However, in the case of students with severely defective articulation and stuttering, since their articulation is incomprehensible, therapists turn to play therapy using crayons, clay, and puppets to develop nonverbal communication.

Prompts also constitute a major component of special education as well as speech therapy, whether it be visual, auditory, physical, gestural, or verbal prompts, allowing learners with communication disorders to overcome hesitation as well as anxiety in attempting to learn or articulating any new information. Though initially prompts are often used multiple times, it is gradually followed by fading as progress and confidence are observed in the learner. An interviewee provided an example of incorporating prompts in teaching, whereby she said that students are encouraged to follow the basic instructions like "open the window", or "drink water from your water bottle" by pointing out the corresponding physical prompts or cues. Gradually, students are introduced to complex instructions with the minimal use of prompts to gauge the development in the receptive ability of the pupil.

Another crucial intervention to help learners with communication disorders is the modification of text. Text is modified to be easily comprehensible for the learners with minimal effort. It is enriched with visuals corresponding to the text so that the content is

reinforced with the help of pictures. The special educators were of the view that using visual cues in teaching abstract concepts, particularly grammar like prepositions, articles, and verbs, serves to be beneficial. This makes it possible to progress from simple to complex, known to unknown, and concrete to abstract, as the imagination of the learners is ignited by the visual aids that accompany the text. Text modification also includes enlarging the font size, underlining the stressed sounds, and frequently providing a phonetic breakdown of the text.

'Picture-reading' is another interventional strategy used to facilitate learning with the help of visuals, be it in the form of pictures, flashcards, realia, objects, and other items necessary as per the learner's needs. The special educators were of the view that using visual cues in teaching abstract concepts, particularly grammar like prepositions, articles, and verbs, serves to be beneficial. Special care is taken to ensure that the pictures used for therapeutic communication must be simple and clear in colour. Often, picture books are made by speech therapists by cutting out simple, colorful illustrations from magazines and old books and pasting them on cardboard, along with the word or phrase used with each picture, written underneath it, thus providing repeated auditory input of the same sequence of sounds. The child is presented with small increments of learning, beginning with simple consonant-vowel-consonant combinations and gradually proceeding to longer and more complex units.

Colour coding constitutes another important technique to tackle language disorders, whereby parts of speech are given specific colour so that the syntax of the language becomes easy to understand as well as to apply while using the language. In this method nouns pronouns, verbs, prepositions, and conjunctions are given a distinct colour for easy identification.

The 'sight word' or the 'whole word' method is the common method adopted by special educators to teach reading includes the following sequence: the word is taught first by associating it with its corresponding picture, then comes tracing the word with finger either in the air, grains such as rice or wheat, cereals or on sandpaper. Followed by matching the word being read and its picture without any distractors. The difficulty level increases as the learner must match the word and its corresponding pictures with multiple distractors. The final stage consists of identifying the word being read from multiple distractors, which are usually in the form of other similar words and pictures, and finally reading/naming the word. As can be deduced from this method, the emphasis is not on learning individual alphabets to learn to read but rather on learning directly the word to be read by '*matching-identification-naming*'.

Interventions, also in the guise of well-planned games, such as verbal games that focus on memory or concentration, are employed too. For instance, game such as '*My Grandmother's Trunk*', where a child says any item, he/she would like to pack for a trip followed by the next student repeating the previous item and adding another and so forth, the chain is broken if a child forgets the sequence of the items and is started all over again. Items are replaced with letters of the alphabet, days of the week, and months of the year in their accurate sequence. The end goal of harnessing such methods is that

playful practice is better than monotonous drills, as the sense of achievement motivates the learners to participate and be competitive.

An interviewee also recounted how both flashcards and board games are employed for reinforcing skills or for rehearsing vocabulary. Flashcards with illustrations of grammar concepts such as prepositions, opposites, vowels, and conjunctions are used for the same. '*Sea of Vowels*' is a board game wherein each player draws a card with a picture of a vowel on it, identifies the picture, sounds out the vowel, and moves to the corresponding letter on the board. The end goal of harnessing such methods is that playful practice is better than monotonous drills, as the sense of achievement motivates the learners to participate and be competitive.

For learners with receptive language disorders, following written or verbal directions proves to be a nightmare. In such cases, several strategies are used to improve listening comprehension, for example, before reading a pictorial passage, the learners are told in advance about some of the questions he/she will have to answer, for which they have to raise their hands each time he/she hears an answer. Usually, the passage is as simple as describing a farm, a zoo, or a family. Another technique is giving simple and short instructions that require students to do things like walking to the door, shaking hands with their partner, jumping, scratching their forehead, picking up a pencil, and so forth. This is followed by increasing the complexity of the instructions, such as asking the learners to follow the teacher in doing simple origami crafts and finally to bigger tasks, such as asking the child to give instructions to their peers to complete a task.

An interviewee, a special educator, shared her experience while working with children with mild expressive language disorder. The intervention began in the form of teaching children auditory discrimination between speech sounds. Simple sound and word games were demonstrated to the learners. As the students' auditory discrimination improved, the educator demonstrated increasingly more complex verbal games. For instance, learners were challenged to find the most appropriate and most colorful word to describe a picture or an object; later, they were encouraged to describe pictures, objects, and events in simple connected statements, and eventually to make up brief stories about them. The children no longer avoided verbal communication in the classroom, and they expressed themselves freely and easily. Their tension and resistance disappeared, and their delight was evident in the expressive quality of their voices.

Educational drama is also used as a tool to help learners with communication disorders as it allows them to observe and understand the verbal use of language as well as express their views and feelings through non-verbal communication such as facial expressions and gestures. The goal of such an intervention is to provide a hands-on experience for the learners to use and manipulate language to achieve a desired goal. One speech therapist recounted an anecdote about organizing a theatrical performance of the NCERT primary lesson, '*The Wolf and the Three Pigs*,' with a cast of students with communication disorders. They were given minimal dialogue, encouraged to use animal sounds, and allowed pauses with off-stage prompting. This served the dual purpose of developing stage confidence and understanding theatrical dynamics. Listening to

environmental sounds is another method of increasing auditory awareness, as children are encouraged to experiment with speech sounds, like 'shhhhh....' or 'zzzzz...'. Such stimuli make them think carefully about what it reminds them of, such as the wind or a bee, and thus elicit a verbal response from the learners.

Educational drama sessions also usually include relaxation activities. These are of prime importance as a common hindrance to early classroom adjustment of learners with communication disorders is their lack of confidence, which manifests itself in increased bodily tension. Relaxation activities such as deep breaths and meditating for one minute prove to be an essential part of their education as physical relaxation eventually leads to mental relaxation, and this results in a more receptive mind.

Technology can be integrated and used as an intervention in enhancing the ELT techniques for students with special needs, particularly those with communication disorders. In Goa, particularly speech therapists and special educators take recourse to Electronic Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices and tools. AAC is a landmark innovation in communication technology, particularly developed to cater to the speech conditions of learners affected by cerebral palsy, autism, and speech delay. AAC apps and boards use either low-technology or high-technology methods to augment, complement, or replace speech. High-technology AAC devices include speech generation, thus enabling the voices of speech-impaired individuals to be heard. Voice output is activated by clicking on words or pictures or typing. The AAC devices were designed to cater to the specific purposes of learners with speech impairment. AAC apps such as '*SymboTalk-AAC Talker*', '*Jellow AAC Speech Communicator*', '*LetMeTalk*', '*Avaz*' and '*Coughdrop*' are specially designed for children as they involve a user-friendly interface with lots of pictures, thus providing a personalized experience yet at the same time promoting self-esteem, self-advocacy and independence of the learners.

Tests and other assessments are read to the student by the teachers, as students are allowed to give verbal as well as pictorial answers by allowing drawings as a means of expression. In some cases, the special educators also use recorded instructions so that the learners can listen to them at their own pace as many times as they want. Students with communication disorders do not perform well under time pressure since it takes them longer to read the questions, mentally compose the answer, and write it down. Hence, these students are allowed to answer without any time restrictions. Unlike the regular assessment pattern, which includes long written answers, the assessment of learners with communication disorders includes matching the columns, fill-in-the-blank, and short answers of two lines maximum, with lots of visual cues and prompts from the teachers. In case of profound reading and writing difficulties, special educators often allow shadow teachers as well as scribes to help learners during assessment.

Thus, a wide plethora of remedial interventions can be incorporated to help learners struggling with speech. Harnessing the correct strategy is the key to tackling speech disorders. The speech therapists, as well as special educators, were of the consensus that the personality of the teacher is of the highest importance. The teacher of learners with communication disorders must be a flexible person who can respond to



minimal cues in children. She/he must be imaginative and creative in adapting known instructional techniques to the needs of individual children and in inventing new techniques as and when needed.

## **10. Key Findings**

This study focuses on gaining a deeper understanding of how the language needs of learners with communication disorders are catered to. An examination of communication disorders delved beyond just its scientific definitions to include the interpretation and analysis of the special educators and speech therapists about these disorders. The wide plethora of remedial interventions and modifications in ELT for learners with communication disorders provided a stock of the techniques and strategies used in South-Goan educational institutes. While a functional curriculum forms the crux of special education, the effectiveness of techniques such as communication therapy, corrective feedback, visual prompts, and oral and mouth exercises for learners with stuttering, cluttering, and articulation disorders was of paramount importance to improve their language production. Similarly, simplification of complex activities and vocabulary, functional writing skills, picture-reading, colour coding, word games, educational drama, and storytelling are the interventions used for learners with receptive, expressive, and mixed receptive-expressive language disorder were helpful for learners to enhance their language learning. Irrespective of the language or speech disorders, interviewees reiterated the importance of early intervention to help the struggling learners from worsening their condition.

The significance of these interventions was aimed at helping learners with communication disorders to engage in basic language learning that was aimed to aid them in becoming independent, thus boosting their self-confidence to function as efficient members of society right from a tender age. Technological interventions also played a magnificent role in ELT remediation, as they helped special educators and speech therapists overcome physical constraints via the digital medium. The findings were invaluable, thought-provoking, and helpful in understanding the nuances, methods, strategies, and technological interventions used to cater to the learner's needs.

## **11. Implications of the Study**

The remedial interventions evident in the current special educational institutes recapitulate how diverse learner needs are met. This also reiterates the fact that homogeneity in classrooms is a myth, and that each individual learner requires different strategies and techniques to help him/her learn the language better. This study aims to raise awareness and sensitize education stakeholders and society about significant, yet often hidden, language problems. It is also crucial to note that not only special educators, but mainstream English teachers should be trained to cater to the needs of learners with communication disorders so that they do not feel neglected and unworthy in a

mainstream English classroom. This requires comprehensive training programs that address various communication challenges and pedagogical strategies, such as implementing differentiated instruction, adapting teaching materials, and fostering a culture of acceptance. Taking these factors into account will empower teachers to seamlessly integrate their roles as language learning facilitators and caregivers.

The study reinforces the importance of early identification and intervention for communication disorders. To achieve this, collaboration between special educators and mainstream teachers is essential for effective intervention. This allows for the sharing of expertise and the development of cohesive support systems, including the use of supportive technology. In essence, the findings of this research provide evidence and impetus to facilitate policy changes in teacher training, curriculum design, and resource distribution, guaranteeing equitable access to quality education for all learners with communication disorders with an underlying aim of eliminating derogative labels that club learners with communication disorders as 'Dumb', 'Mentally Retarded' or 'Mute' irrespective of their condition. The wide range of interventions, remedial measures, and techniques available for ESL learners makes the eradication of harmful labels not an unrealistic dream, but a realistic goal attainable with the implementation of accurate and effective interventions.

Thus, this study serves the two-fold purpose of documenting the ELT pedagogy interventions for learners with communication disorders for those interested in having a glimpse of it, along with providing relevant information on ground realities for ELT and ESL pedagogy professionals and policymakers.

### **11.1 Exploration of the Limitations**

Though the undertaken study was carried out smoothly and efficiently, there were several limitations, gaps, and challenges that could not be addressed due to various reasons. Firstly, Geographical constraints also posed a limitation in making the study inclusive of the entire state of Goa. The researcher, being a resident of South Goa, selected educational institutions in South Goa to be appropriate for the study. Including schools from North Goa to discern the ELT methods and ESL pedagogy adopted in both mainstream and special educational institutes would have provided a clearer picture. The lack of interaction and interviews with students and parents constitutes the second limitation of the study. Since recording and analysing student responses would have required more time, it was deemed to be beneficial to limit the study to English language teachers. Incorporating the views and inputs from the students and their parents would have included multiple perspectives, thus providing a better dimension to the study.

Another significant limitation is the lack of inquiry into the role of teacher education and training (B.Ed) in identifying and devising interventions and modifications for learners with communication disorders to create an inclusive classroom environment. This study focused on a limited selection of communication disorders and their interventions, specifically those most encountered by speech therapists and special educators in South Goan educational institutes, rather than encompassing the broader

spectrum of scientifically recognised disorders. The scope of this study was restricted to interventions at the primary level of schooling. A more comprehensive examination of high school interventions would have enabled an evaluation of the long-term effectiveness of primary-level strategies. Addressing these limitations and challenges would have elevated the analysis of this study, making it multifaceted.

## 12. Conclusion

ESL learners are a diverse group with different needs and abilities; ESL educators need to be mindful of this diversity in their classrooms. This study explores how learners with communication disorders can be supported to achieve their language learning goals. A wide range of interventions and strategies is available to ESL teachers to help learners with communication disorders. These include communication therapy, corrective feedback, modification of text, colour coding, word games, educational drama, and technological interventions. Early intervention is crucial to prevent learners from falling behind, regardless of their speech or language disorders.

ESL educators need to adapt their teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of their learners, particularly those with communication disorders. The onus lies on the teachers to modify their instruction and activities to create a stress-free, enjoyable environment where every learner feels valued and capable of success in language learning, regardless of their struggles and challenges.

## Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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