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Phonetic Awareness And Its Impact On English Language Learning In Multilingual Classrooms

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Abstract

This study explores how phonetic awareness contributes to the development of English language skills in multilingual classroom environments. Learners who come from varied linguistic backgrounds often face challenges related to pronunciation, sound recognition, and reading accuracy. The paper argues that an improved awareness of speech sounds supports better articulation, listening ability, and decoding skills. A descriptive qualitative research design was adopted, with data collected through classroom observations, structured questionnaires, and diagnostic assessments. The findings suggest that students with stronger phonetic awareness demonstrate greater fluency, experience less interference from their first language, and show increased confidence in communication. The study emphasizes the need to incorporate systematic phonetic instruction into language teaching practices to promote comprehensive language learning.

Keywords

Phonetic Awareness, Multilingual Classrooms, English Language Learning, Pronunciation, Phonology, Language Acquisition

Introduction

Modern classrooms are increasingly characterised by linguistic diversity, where learners engage with more than one language system simultaneously. In such contexts, acquiring proficiency in English can be particularly demanding due to differences in sound patterns between English and learners' native languages. One important factor in overcoming these difficulties is phonetic awareness, which refers to the ability to recognise and work with the sound structure of a language.

Learners who lack this awareness often encounter problems with pronunciation, spelling, and comprehension. These challenges can slow down overall language development and reduce confidence in communication. Therefore, phonetic awareness should be viewed as a central component of language instruction rather than an additional or optional skill.

Objectives

- 1.To explain the concept and importance of phonetic awareness in learning English
- 2.To examine its effects on learners in multilingual classrooms
- 3.To identify teaching strategies that can improve phonetic skills
- 4.To analyse the connection between phonetic awareness and overall language proficiency

Literature Review

Research in language education has consistently highlighted the importance of sound awareness in learning to read and speak effectively. Adams (1990) identified sensitivity to the sound structure of language as a major factor influencing early reading success. Expanding on this, Goswami (2001) demonstrated that children who are better at recognising sound patterns tend to decode written language more efficiently. Ehri (2005) explained that awareness of individual sounds plays a key role in linking spoken language with written forms, which is essential for reading development.

In multilingual settings, the influence of a learner's first language is significant. Mohanty (2006) noted that learners often transfer pronunciation patterns from their native language when speaking English, which can lead to persistent errors. Similarly, a report by NCERT (2018) pointed out that limited focus on phonetic instruction in classrooms contributes to ongoing pronunciation difficulties among students.

From an international perspective, Crystal (2003) argued that being understood clearly is more important than achieving a native-like accent. Supporting this idea, Derwing and Munro (2015) found that direct and structured pronunciation teaching improves learners' ability to communicate effectively. Together, these studies underline the importance of phonetic awareness in successful language acquisition.

Background of the Study

India's linguistic diversity creates a complex environment for learning English. Students are often required to move between different language systems, each with its own phonological features. This situation can lead to confusion and errors, especially when the sound systems of the languages differ significantly.

Despite changes in curriculum and teaching methods, phonetic instruction is not always given adequate attention in classrooms. As a result, many learners continue to struggle with pronunciation and listening skills. This gap highlights the need for focused research on how phonetic awareness can support more effective language learning.

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it draws attention to the role of phonetic awareness in improving language teaching and learning. It provides practical insights for teachers on how to address pronunciation challenges and support clearer communication among learners. In addition, the study contributes to ongoing discussions about multilingual education by suggesting ways to make language instruction more inclusive and effective.

Methodology

A descriptive qualitative approach was used to investigate the role of phonetic awareness in English language learning. The study was conducted in selected secondary-level multilingual classrooms.

Tools and Techniques

Structured questionnaires for both students and teacher.

Classroom observation schedules.

Diagnostic tests focusing on pronunciation.

Audio recordings for analysing speech patterns.

Data Collection

Data were collected from a selected group of students representing different linguistic backgrounds. Both primary and secondary sources were used, including classroom interactions, student responses, and relevant academic literature.

Research Type

The research is primarily qualitative, with descriptive and analytical elements. Some quantitative interpretation was included based on assessment results.

Findings

The study revealed several key points:

Students with stronger phonetic awareness showed clearer pronunciation and better fluency.

The influence of the mother tongue decreased when phonetic instruction was provided.

Learners demonstrated improved listening and decoding skills.

Teaching methods that included phonetic drills and IPA-based instruction produced better results.

Lack of attention to phonetics led to ongoing pronunciation problems and lower confidence.

Implementation

Based on the findings, the following steps are recommended:

Include phonetic instruction as a regular part of the curriculum.

Provide teachers with training in the use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

Use digital tools and language labs to support listening and pronunciation practice.

Conduct regular interactive activities and pronunciation exercises.

Use comparisons between languages to help learners understand sound differences.

Conclusion

Phonetic awareness plays a crucial role in the process of learning English, particularly in multilingual classroom settings. It affects not only pronunciation but also listening, reading, and overall communication skills. When this aspect of language learning is overlooked, students may continue to face difficulties that hinder their progress. On the other hand, a structured focus on phonetics can significantly improve learning outcomes. For this reason, educators and policymakers should give greater importance to phonetic awareness in language teaching practices.

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