International DESIGN JOURNAL
Print ISSN 2090-9632
Online ISSN 2090-9640

Innovative Upholstery Fabrics Design Inspired by Hearing-Impaired Symbols to Integrate Deaf Children into Society

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Abstract

Due to communication barriers, deaf children frequently encounter significant obstacles when it comes to social integration. Teaching sign language or using assistive technology are the mainstays of traditional approaches to this problem. Nevertheless, fostering inclusion can also be greatly aided by the incorporation of visual cues and symbols associated with hearing loss into the physical surroundings. Our study investigates how creative furniture designs that draw inspiration from hearing loss symbols can help deaf children integrate socially in public settings like playgrounds, community centers, and schools. These designs seek to foster a more inclusive atmosphere, a sense of belonging, and the facilitation of communication and interaction between deaf children and their peers by integrating visual signs and symbols that represent hearing loss into furniture. These designs aim to create a more inclusive environment, a sense of belonging, and the capacity for deaf children to interact and converse with their classmates. Five textile products were created to accommodate kids with hearing impairments: a towel, a coverlet, a hanging, a curtain, and a pillow. Each of these products featured designs that included sign language. Based on the findings of a questionnaire survey given to a random sample of students in a hearing-impaired school in Egypt, these designs were created. Children's-friendly materials were used. Overall, the results show that the fabrics are strong and durable against washing, making them appropriate for their intended use. Future research could look into materials or treatments to improve color fastness even more when exposed to light.

Keywords

Design, Fabrics, Deaf Children, Hearing-Inspired, Sign language.

Paper received November 8, 2024, Accepted January 10 2024, Published on line March 1, 2025

1. Introduction

The lack of Arab and international resources that specifically address the needs of people with disabilities is one of the biggest obstacles faced by professionals and researchers who study these needs, especially in the Arab world. There is still a great deal to learn about the textile and clothing needs of children with disabilities, despite the fact that a lot of research has been done on many different facets of living with disabilities, from social integration and education to mobility aids and accessibility measures (Abdel-Hay, 2001; Kinsella & Senior, 2015). This disparity is particularly significant since appropriate attire can have a direct effect on their level of comfort, functionality, and capacity to engage completely in daily activities (Smith & Jones, 2017).

According to some research, hearing loss can have social and psychological repercussions and be brought on by environmental, genetic, or congenital factors (Pelin, 2014). The degree of impairment varies from mild to profound, and these factors may impact a person's capacity to participate in social and professional activities (Abdel-Hay, 2001). Due to difficulties with grammar and phonological

CITATION Amal Shaheen (2025), Innovative Upholstery Fabrics Design Inspired by Hearing-Impaired Symbols to Integrate Deaf Children into Society, International Design Journal, Vol. 15 No. 2, (March 2025) pp 229-239

awareness, people with hearing impairments frequently have difficulty reading and writing. Their incapacity to access language and sound in the same manner as hearing people is closely linked to these challenges (Pelin, 2014).

Children with disabilities can benefit greatly from textiles made especially for them in terms of increased mobility, independence, and self-worth. These children can engage more fully in social, educational, and recreational activities if clothing is made to meet their physical needs, whether those needs are related to dressing, compatibility with mobility aids, or sensitivity to textures (Thomas & Peters, 2020). Furthermore, by removing some of the obstacles that children with disabilities encounter, suitable textile solutions can greatly aid in their integration into society and enable them to interact with their peers in a more welcoming and encouraging setting (Kinsella & Senior, 2015).

The textile industry has mostly fallen behind in meeting the unique clothing needs of children with disabilities, even though inclusive design has received increased attention across various industries (Vassallo, 2019). Special fabric types, ease of dressing and undressing, adaptive designs, and sensory considerations that can improve these kids' everyday experiences are some examples of these requirements (Kim, 2021). Unfortunately, there is still much to learn about clothing and textile solutions because the research that has already been done in this area is either limited or concentrated on more general disability issues (Gans & Glover, 2022).

According to this study, adding hearing-related symbols to upholstery fabrics used in both public and private settings is a creative way to increase inclusivity. In addition to providing deaf children with a sense of inclusion in their environment, these symbols seek to establish a visual language that improves comprehension and awareness among hearing people (Caldwell & Hutton, 2018). To create products that are both useful and efficient, textiles are made with the needs of the target community in mind. Understanding the unique requirements and difficulties faced by the target age group—adolescents—is part of this. To create a supportive and inclusive environment that fosters their development and allows them to fully participate in society, families, schools, and the community must work together to meet the needs of adolescents with hearing impairments'. (Peters & Thomas, 2020)). Textile products have a significant impact on the lives of those who have hearing loss because they can improve communication, accessibility, and independence. According to Smith and Jones (2017), specially created textiles can offer useful answers to the particular requirements of this group, simplifying daily chores and enhancing interpersonal relationships. An inclusive atmosphere can be created by incorporating well-considered design into commonplace objects like textiles, which will help people with hearing loss move around more confidently. The study explores different design approaches, the cooperation between educators and textile specialists, and the difficulties of incorporating such symbols into common upholstery materials. Developing inclusive designs that convey the needs of people with hearing impairments and promote improved communication between them and their hearing peers is the aim.

2. Methodology

2.1. Materials and Methods

2.1.1. Design Determinants

To successfully satisfy their needs, the designs are created with several considerations in mind. Including assistive technology, like wireless gadgets and hearing aids, improves the child's experience in general. Bright colors and striking contrasts are also necessary in designs to aid in the differentiation of people, symbols, and objects. Effective communication requires both easily understood symbols and legible, clear text. This objective is further supported by incorporating sign language into designs, either using sign language symbols or by creating areas for communication. To shield kids from potential risks, it's also critical to use high-quality, washable, and comfortable materials while making sure that designs follow all applicable safety regulations. Lastly, promoting the use of additional senses—such as touch, sight, and smell—can enrich the child's learning and promote inquiry and interaction.

2.1.2. Questionnaire and Analysis

entails a thorough examination of the input gathered from the surveys. The answers shed light on the child's tastes, sensory requirements, and how the designs represent the cultural setting. Specific sensory needs, like the value of tactile stimulation or materials that absorb sound, and cultural

preferences, like utilizing traditional Egyptian motifs or colors that represent regional symbolism, can be identified through the analysis of the questionnaire results. The design process is based on this input, which directs the production of textiles that are both practical and culturally appropriate (figures 1, 2 and 3).

1- Design Appeal: The majority of respondents (65%) thought the designs were attractive, especially the ones that included symbols for those who are hard of hearing. Nevertheless, 35% of kids showed less interest, indicating that more lively or playful designs could boost interest, particularly among the 30% who thought they were only marginally appealing.
2- Engagement and Awareness: Although 80% of respondents said the designs successfully increase public awareness of hearing impairment, 15% expressed no opinion and 5% disagreed. This suggests that to engage children with different levels of understanding, modifications are required, such as the addition of more relatable or explanatory elements.
3- Emotional Connection and Functionality: Most respondents (85%) thought that the textile designs were good at satisfying both emotional and functional needs. To accommodate a greater range of needs, there may be a need for enhancements, such as the addition of sensory-friendly components, as indicated by the 15% who rated them as fair or poor.
4- Symbol Clarity: Most people (80%) thought the designs were simple to comprehend, but 20% thought some of the symbols were overly abstract. By making symbols simpler or offering visual context for easier interpretation across cultural differences, designers can increase accessibility.
5- Cultural Relevance: Ninety percent of respondents valued the designs' integration of cultural heritage, demonstrating their importance for Egyptian children with hearing impairments. 10% of respondents, however, favored less culturally specific designs, indicating a well-balanced approach that incorporates both modern and traditional elements to appeal to all kids.
6- Usage Suggestion: Ninety percent of respondents said they would suggest these designs for kid-friendly areas, demonstrating their belief in their ability to promote inclusivity in places like playgrounds and schools. 10%, however, voiced reservations, perhaps because of unfulfilled inclusivity expectations. Taking this group's suggestions into consideration could improve the designs' usability and aesthetic appeal in a variety of settings.
7- Fostering Communication: According to most respondents (95%) the designs facilitate communication between hearing and hearing-impaired children by frequently acting as conversation starters. Clearer symbols or pairing with educational resources, however, might help close comprehension gaps for the 5% who believe this impact is minimal. All things considered, these designs are good at encouraging inclusivity, but they could be improved to encourage interaction even more.
8- Support for Use: In inclusive settings, a sizable majority of kids (90%) are likely to use or support the designs, indicating that they feel included and represented by them. The 10% who are less supportive, however, might feel that certain features are missing, such as usefulness or application to day-to-day activities. By taking these preferences into account, the designs may become more aesthetically pleasing to all.
9- Aesthetic Satisfaction: Most respondents (85%) are satisfied with the aesthetics, with the colors and patterns aligning with their preferences. The 10% neutral and 5% dissatisfied may have different aesthetic expectations. Exploring additional color schemes or patterns might further engage this minority, ensuring broader visual appeal.
10- Overall Feedback and Satisfaction: Most people (85%) are happy with the designs and believe no changes are needed, which speaks well of their usability, inclusivity, and beauty. Nonetheless, the 15% who make suggestions for enhancements might offer insightful opinions for improving usability, cultural relevance, or aesthetics, guaranteeing continuous adaptation to satisfy a range of demands.

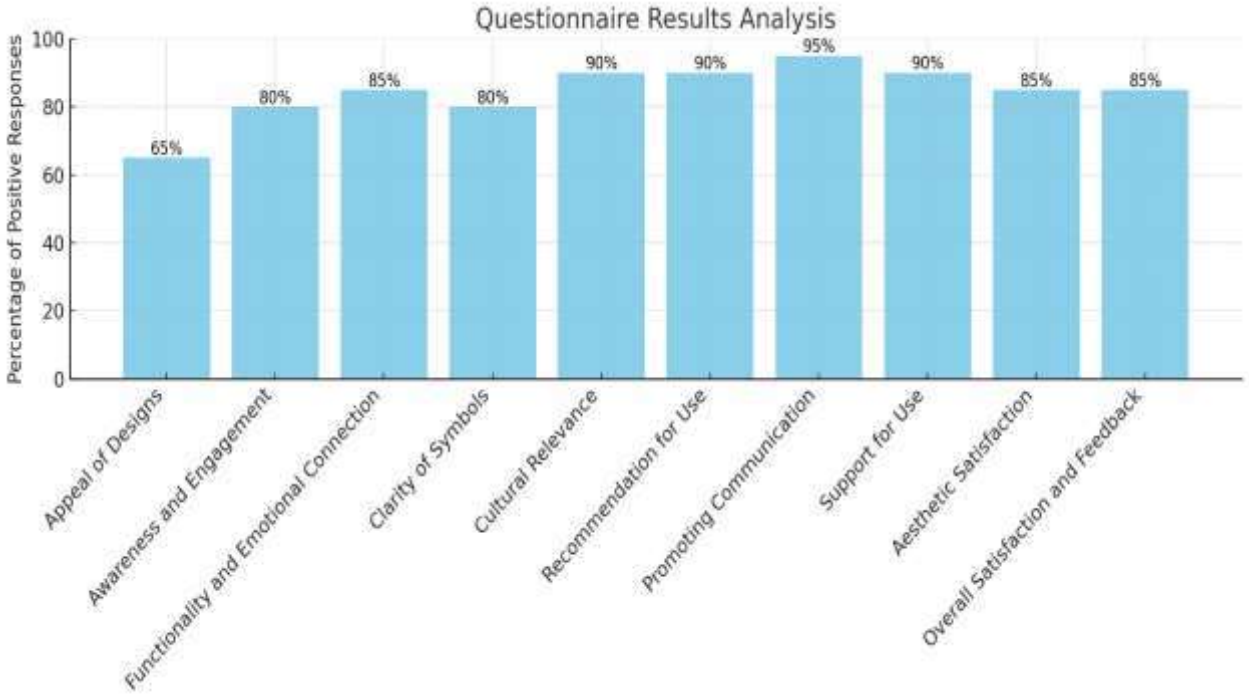

Figure 1: The column chart representing the results of the questionnaire analysis. It clearly shows the percentage of positive responses for each category, highlighting areas where the designs excel, such as promoting communication and cultural relevance, while also indicating categories that could benefit from enhancements.

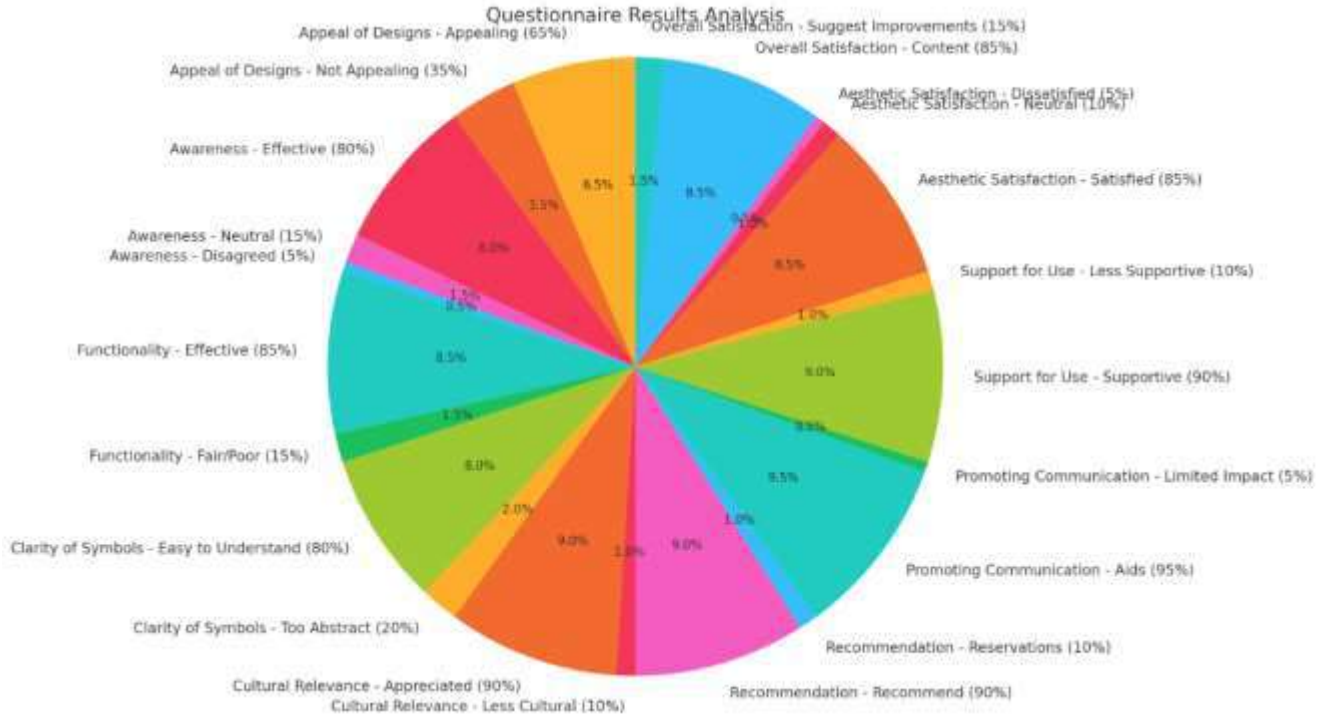

Figure 2: The pie chart visualizing the results from the questionnaire analysis, highlighting the various aspects of design appeal, awareness, functionality, clarity, cultural relevance, recommendations, communication support, aesthetic satisfaction, and overall feedback from the respondents. Each segment reflects the percentage of responses in each category, illustrating the strengths and areas for improvement in the designs for children with hearing impairments.

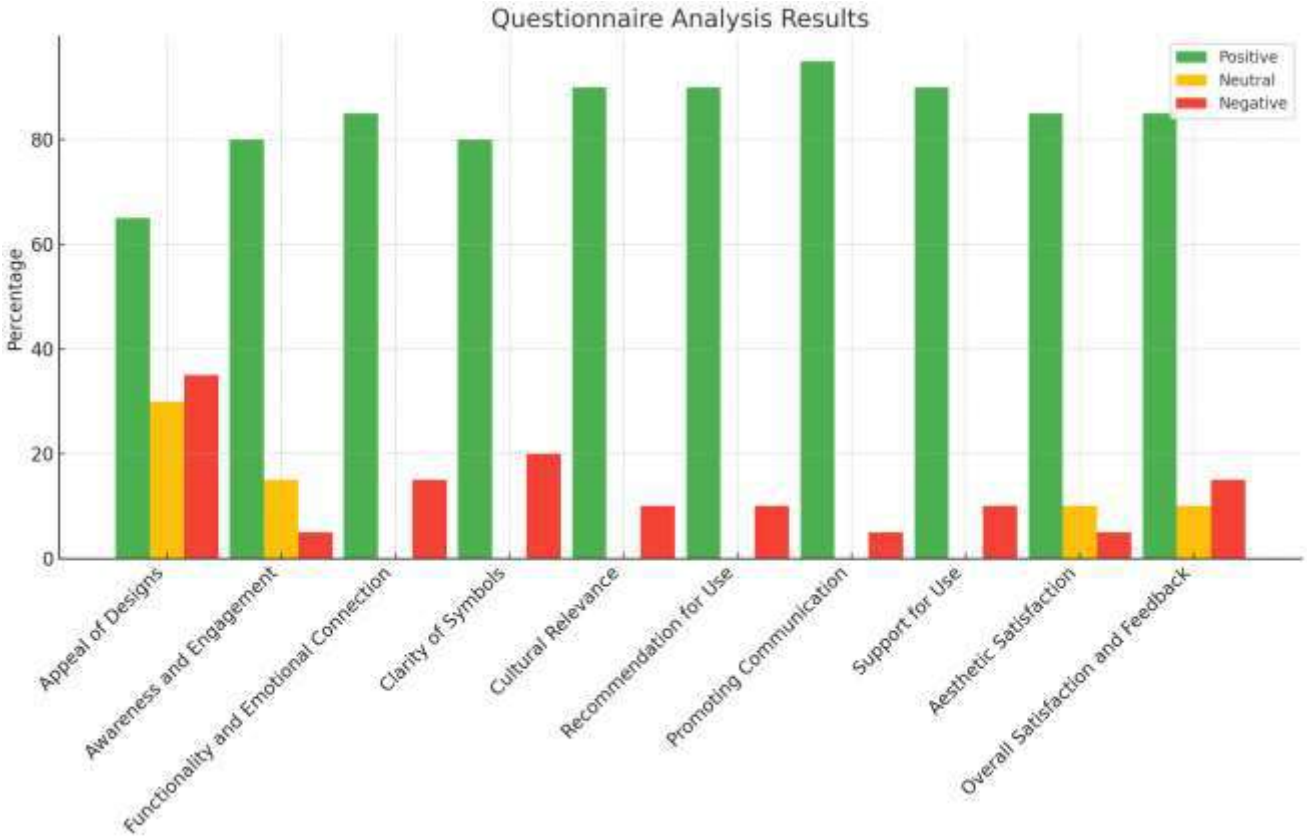

Figure 3: Bar chart summarizing the questionnaire analysis of culturally relevant textile designs for children with hearing impairments. Each category reflects the percentage of positive, neutral, and negative feedback, offering insights into areas such as appeal, cultural relevance, functionality, and overall satisfaction. The data highlights the majority's positive reception of the designs, with specific areas noted for potential improvement to enhance inclusivity and engagement

2.1.3. Conceptualization and Design Philosophy

Feedback helped shape the textile designs, which emphasized three key components and were centered on practical efficacy and cultural relevance:

A balanced sensory experience to prevent overload, high contrast colors for visual stimulation, and a variety of textures for tactile engagement are all components of sensory-friendly design.

- Cultural Integration: The children feel a sense of familiarity and heritage thanks to traditional Egyptian patterns and a color scheme inspired by their culture.
- Safety and comfort: In addition to safe, kid-safe design elements and ergonomic comfort for effortless mobility, hypoallergenic, soft materials were selected for sensitive skin.

Concepts were sketched, materials were assessed for sensory and cultural fit, and prototypes were made to improve the final designs in response to user input. To address the requirements mentioned in the feedback, several versions were created, resulting in a cohesive and engaging products.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Examination methods for the fabrics

Examination methods for the fabrics:

These materials were used to create early prototypes that combined cultural elements with functionality. Based on responses to the questionnaire, the prototypes were subsequently evaluated for suitability, durability, and sensory compatibility.

Lab Fabric samples were tested at the Textile Research and Technology Institute, National Research Center, to ensure they met quality and safety standards. Under typical room conditions, tests were performed on samples of towels and woven fabrics to determine their water permeability, color fastness, and thickness. Important conclusions include:

- Water Permeability: Towel samples met performance standards with a moderate permeability of 1.428 L/cm³.s.
- Color Fastness: Whereas yellow areas showed significant fading, green areas showed medium color stability, indicating the need for increased dye durability.
- Thickness: The fabric's 2.621 mm thickness,

which balanced durability and warmth, matched acceptable standards.

Additional tests on color fastness revealed high resistance to washing and moderate resistance to light, indicating good overall durability but room for improvement in light exposure stability

3.2. Implementation

3.2.1. The Wall-Hanging

To engage and uplift hearing-impaired children, the wall hanging was carefully created, emphasizing cultural and sensory elements. In order to ground the piece in cultural authenticity, the design used a warm color palette of red, yellow, and brown to evoke energy, optimism, and stability, along with flowing, curved lines that symbolize inclusivity and harmony. Adding layers of meaning through the integration of sign language symbols promoted accessibility and sense of community among sign language users. Cotton and linen are examples of lightweight, long-lasting materials that were chosen for their practical and decorative qualities. Natural cotton yarn guaranteed strength and softness, and the plain weave design offered simplicity and durability.

Careful alignment of the warp and weft threads prevented warping, and the weaving process maintained even thread density for flexibility and resilience. Overall, the wall hanging serves as a visually appealing, culturally meaningful, and inclusive piece that promotes sensory engagement and emotional well-being (figure 4).

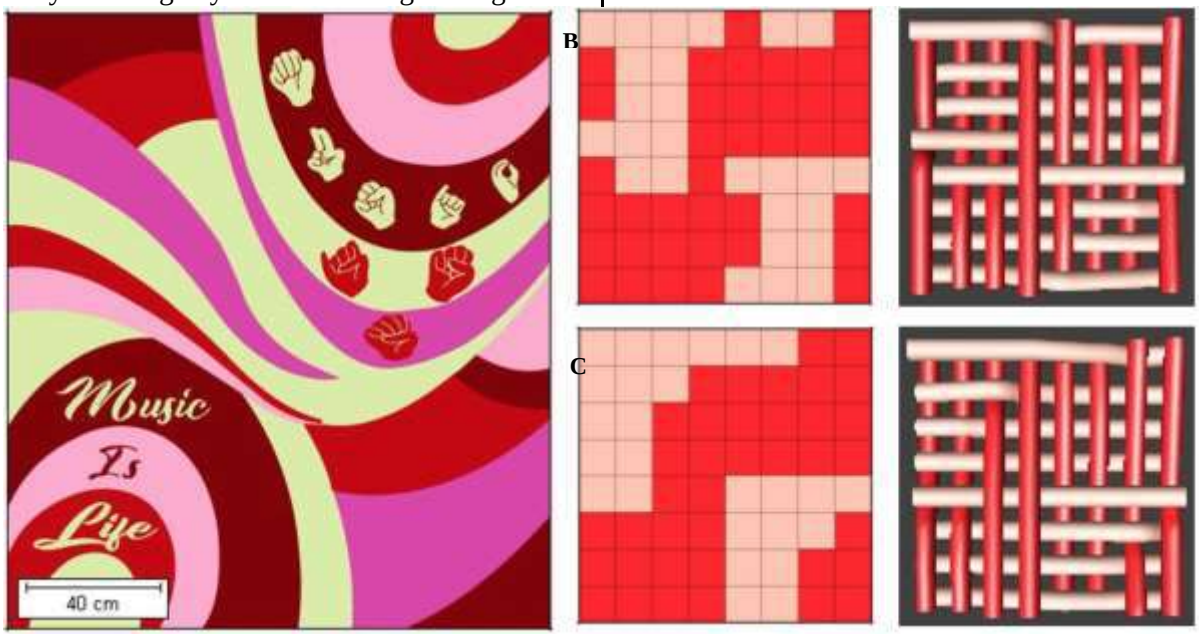

Figure 4: Shows the details of the design of the hanging wall. A: Shows the design of the hanging wall, note the lines, colors and sign language signs that illustrate the design philosophy. B, C: Shows the textile structures used in implementing the design and the model of the interweaving of the warp and weft fibers in the design.

3.2.2 The Curtain:

The curtain was painstakingly created to complement the area it resides in by combining cultural richness, practicality, and aesthetic appeal. The design, which began with precise measurements, focused on accessibility and structure while fusing classic patterns with contemporary components that offer playfulness and significance. Squares with dice and sign language symbols provide a structured contrast, while vertical lines in the fabric represent growth and order, giving the impression of height. These components improve inclusivity because the dice squares with matching numbers and the sign language symbols raise awareness of nonverbal communication, making the curtain interactive and captivating.

To create a welcoming atmosphere, a cheerful color scheme consisting of red, yellow, green, and blue was selected. Because of their softness, breathability, and cultural compatibility, lightweight yet sturdy materials like cotton and linen were chosen to offer comfort and longevity. The warp and weft threads were carefully aligned to maintain tension and prevent warping, and a plain or twill weave structure was selected to guarantee longevity and a smooth finish. Industrial machines were used in the weaving process to ensure consistency and balance the thread density, giving the curtain its structure, flexibility, and visual appeal. More than just a practical item, this curtain promotes engagement and sensory well-being as a meaningful, educational, and culturally relevant textile (figure 5).

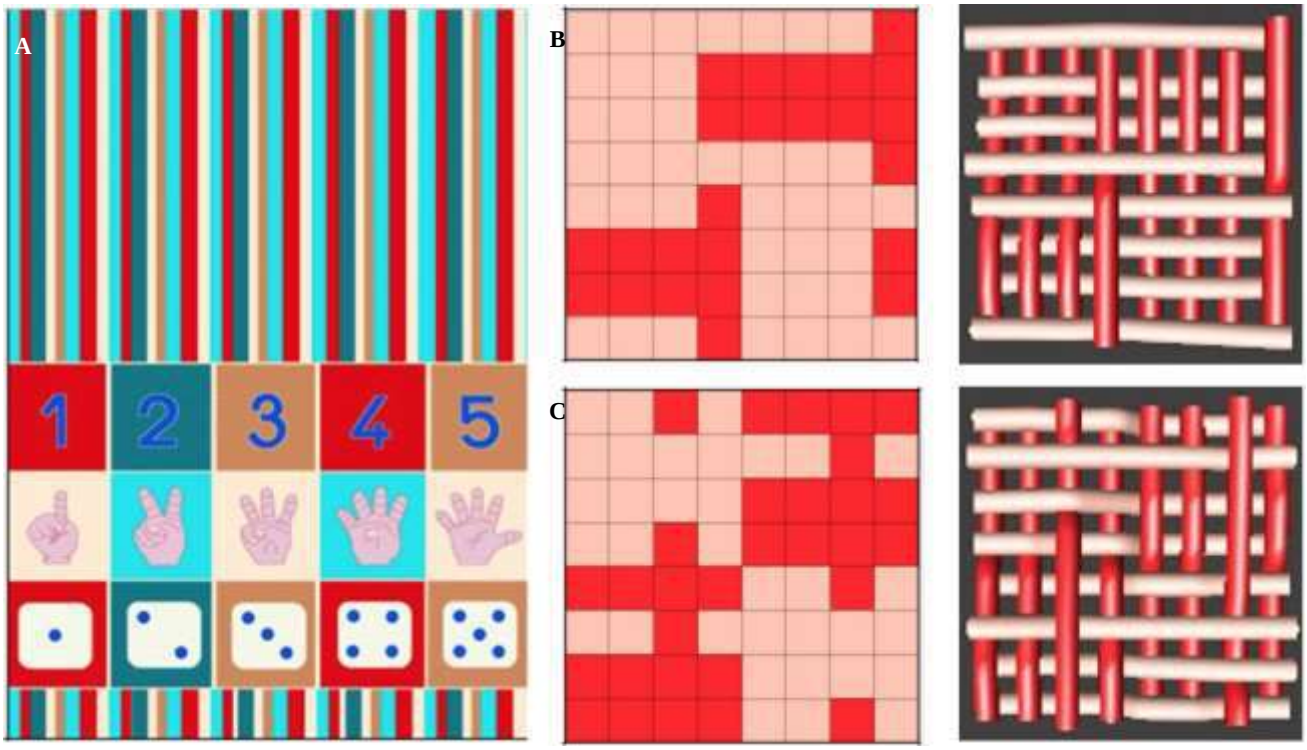

Figure 5: Shows the details of the design of the Curtain. A: Shows the design of the hanging wall, note the lines, colors and sign language signs that illustrate the design philosophy. B, C: Shows the textile structures used in implementing the design and the model of the interweaving of the warp and weft fibers in the design.

3.2.3. The Coverlet and Pillow

Starting with precise measurements based on the size of the bed or its intended use as a throw, the coverlet and pillow were created with cultural significance and sensory appeal in mind. With intersecting lines creating diamond shapes that represent connection and unity, the design exemplifies harmony, balance, and inclusivity. In addition to strengthening the theme of nonverbal communication, each diamond encloses a sign language symbol, elevating the coverlet from a practical item to a significant representation of inclusivity and awareness. With white signifying purity and openness, pistachio adding calmness and sophistication, and green representing growth and renewal, a color scheme of light green, pistachio, and white creates a calm, welcoming ambiance. When combined, these hues produce a calming atmosphere that is ideal for a bedroom and symbolizes emotional ties and cultural diversity.

For comfort and longevity, soft, long-lasting materials like cotton or linen were selected, with the option of a batting layer for additional quilting texture. To guarantee an even, long-lasting fabric structure, the warp and weft threads had to be carefully aligned. Depending on the production scale, the fabric was woven by hand or on industrial looms, paying close attention to thread density to guarantee a flexible, well-balanced fabric. After weaving, the fabric was cut with extra room for draping and edges, and a batting layer was positioned between the backing and top layers if quilting was desired.

The layers were meticulously stitched, reinforced at the corners and seams, then turned right-side out and completed. A final decorative touch was provided by optional components like fringe or quilting patterns, resulting in a coverlet that blends comfort, cultural expression, and careful design (figure 6).

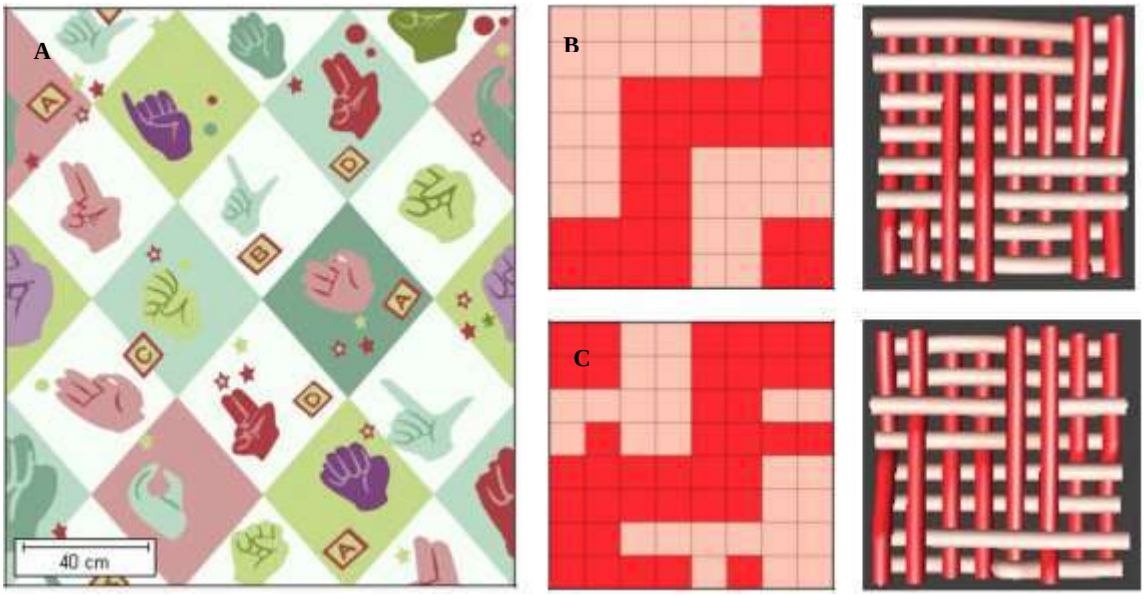

Figure 6: Shows the details of the design of the Coverlet and Pillow. A: Shows the design of the hanging wall, note the lines, colors and sign language signs that illustrate the design philosophy. B, C: Shows the textile structures used in implementing the design and the model of the interweaving of the warp and weft fibers in the design.

3.2.4. The Towel

The towel design creates a piece that transcends basic functionality by fusing emotional depth with practicality. Whether used as a bath towel or a hand towel, the size and design were customized with an emphasis on inclusivity and simplicity. The towel's calming, light rose background was selected to represent warmth and care, making it a reassuring object in everyday life. A light blue sign that reads "I love you" in sign language is prominent in the middle, adding a sentimental message and establishing a connection with users who communicate nonverbally.

This use of sign language encourages inclusivity and turns the towel into a loving symbol, making it a comforting and cozy object. The towel's functionality is improved using soft, absorbent materials like microfiber and terry cloth, which were chosen for their skin-friendly properties. Terrycloth was selected because of its looped weave, which maximizes absorbency while preserving softness. Cotton yarn was prepared with additional treatments for longevity and softness. The pile structure of the terrycloth, which is made by looping yarn on one or both sides, improves absorbency, and edge reinforcements, such as double hemming, guarantee stability even after repeated use.

To prevent fraying, the fabric was meticulously cut and hemmed. To further enhance the towel's practical and cultural appeal, finishing touches such as decorative borders or hanging loops were added. Thus, this towel adds a gentle reminder of love to daily routines by fusing practicality with an inclusive, thoughtful design (figure 7).

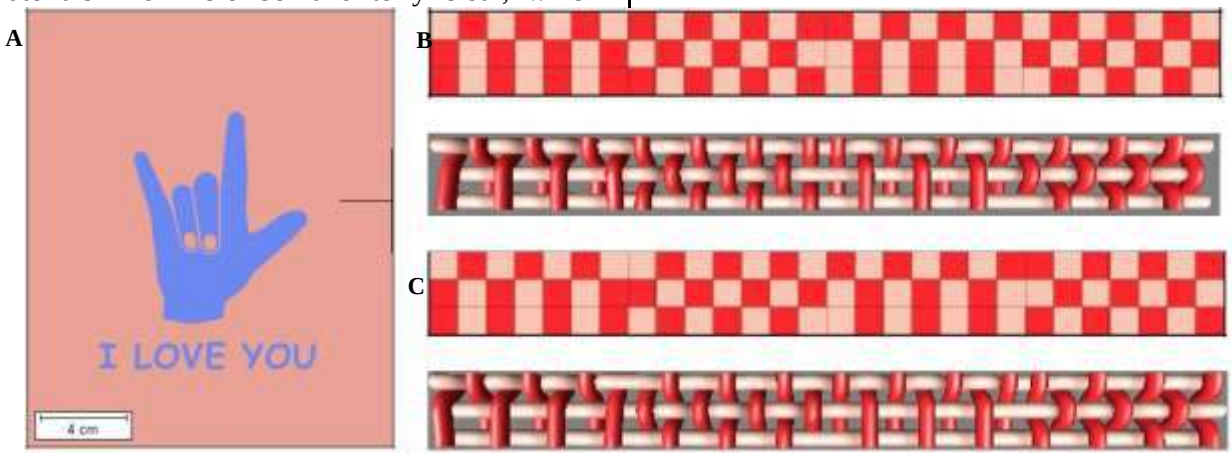

Figure 7: Shows the details of the design of the Towel. A: Shows the design of the hanging wall, note the lines, colors and sign language signs that illustrate the design philosophy. B, D: Shows the textile structures used in implementing the design and the model of the interweaving of the warp and weft fibers in the design.

4. Conclusion:

Children with hearing impairments gave the textile designs largely positive feedback, highlighting their visual appeal, usefulness, and cultural significance as their main advantages. Approximately 65% of kids thought the designs were visually appealing, and 85% thought they met their functional and emotional needs well. With 80% of respondents stating that the symbols were simple to identify and comprehend, the designs were especially effective in increasing awareness of hearing impairment. Also, 90% of respondents thought cultural integration was important. Furthermore, 90% of respondents were likely to support or advocate for the designs' use in child-centered settings, and 95% of respondents believed that they promoted communication between hearing and hearing-impaired children. A tiny portion of kids did, however, point out areas that needed work in terms of interpretation and design improvement.

Fabric samples tested at the Textile Research and Technology Institute performed well from a material standpoint, especially in terms of color fastness to washing, which allowed them to be laundered frequently. Although the fabrics fared well in light exposure as well, their resistance to fading could be strengthened. Overall, the findings support the designs' efficacy and longevity; however, based on user feedback, small changes are suggested for color stability and design improvement.

Children with hearing impairments responded favorably to textile designs that were functionally effective, visually appealing, and culturally relevant. The majority of kids thought the designs were interesting and helped spread knowledge about hearing impairment and communication. A few recommendations for enhancement were made, with an emphasis on inclusivity and design clarity.

With additional refinement for light exposure stability, the fabrics' use in frequent laundering applications was supported by their strong durability against washing but also their potential for improved light resistance. These tests ensured the fabrics' longevity and usability by confirming high color fastness to washing and acceptable fastness to light.

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