

CHAPTER-19

Mother tongue based multilingual education curriculum design for tribal learners in Telangana

Dr.P. Hathiram

Assistant Professor of English,

Sridevi Women's Engineering College, Hyderabad.

ram.palathi@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) has become an important curriculum and pedagogical solution for enhancing indigenous learners' educational access, equity, and quality. With over 19,500 mother tongues recorded in the Census of India (2011), 705 of which are categorized as Scheduled and non-Scheduled languages, India is one of the most linguistically varied nations in the world. Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities speak a large percentage of these languages. According to Census 2011 statistics, Telangana is home to more than 35 Scheduled Tribe communities. Major tribal languages spoken by around 10% of the state's population include Lambada (Banjara), Gondi, Koya, Kolami, Chenchu, Yerukula, and Naikpod. Telugu continues to be the predominant and frequently sole language of instruction in government schools despite this linguistic variety, posing significant obstacles for tribal children in their early schooling. The necessity, importance, and difficulties of MTB-MLE in Telangana are examined in this paper, with a particular emphasis on curriculum design. It examines how a curriculum that is both culturally sensitive and inclusive, in line with the three-language formula (L1–L2–L3), can improve learning results, lower dropout rates, and boost tribal learners' self-esteem. The advantages of MTB-MLE, policy alignment with NEP 2020, and useful techniques for creating successful curriculum for multilingual tribal classrooms are also covered in this study. According to the study's findings, MTB-MLE-based curriculum design is a viable and revolutionary strategy for guaranteeing inclusive and equitable education for Telangana's tribal students.

KEYWORDS: Mother Tongue Instruction, Multilingual Education, Telangana, Tribal Education, MTB-MLE, Curriculum Design

1 Introduction

It is commonly acknowledged that education is an essential tool for inclusive development, empowerment, and social change. The language of teaching has a significant impact on access, equity, and educational quality in linguistically diverse cultures like India. India is one of the world's most multilingual countries, with over 19,500 mother tongues, divided into 121 major languages and 705 categorized languages, according to the Census of India (2011). Tribal communities, whose languages are frequently not taught in the official educational system, contribute significantly to this linguistic diversity. At the regional level, Telangana is a reflection of this national linguistic variety. There are more than 35 Scheduled Tribe settlements in the state, making up about 9.3% of the total population. Prominent tribal

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communities with unique languages, dialects, oral traditions, and cultural knowledge systems include the Lambada (Banjara), Gond, Koya, Kolam, Chenchu, Yerukula, and Naikpod. In tribal-dominated districts like Adilabad, Bhadrachalam, Kothagudem, Mulugu, Jayashankar Bhupalpally, and Komaram Bheem–Asifabad, thousands of tribal households actively speak languages including Lambadi (Indo-Aryan) and Gondi, Koya, Kolami, and Chenchu (Dravidian).

Tribal students in Telangana continue to have lower literacy rates, higher dropout rates, and worse learning outcomes than the state average, despite quantifiable progress in increasing school access and enrollment through programs like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan. The language barrier in the educational system is one of the main causes of this ongoing disparity. Tribal students, especially those who live in remote and forested areas, are sometimes unfamiliar with Telugu, the primary language of teaching in government institutions, when they first start school.

According to empirical research, children who are exposed to reading and numeracy in a foreign language struggle with comprehension, classroom engagement, and conceptual understanding. Particularly in the early primary years, this language gap commonly leads to grade repetition, subpar academic achievement, low self-esteem, and eventual dropout. First-generation students from tribal communities are disproportionately impacted by monolingual teaching methods, according to evaluation reports from the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) and NCERT. Due to their limited exposure to Telugu outside of school, tribal students frequently find it difficult to interact effectively with textbooks and tests written solely in that language. This problem is made worse by a lack of culturally sensitive pedagogy, a shortage of teachers who are fluent in tribal languages, and a lack of teaching-learning resources. For many tribal students, this results in an alienating rather than empowering school climate.

Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) is a potent curriculum and pedagogical approach in this setting. MTB-MLE tackles linguistic and educational disparities by starting with the child's mother tongue (L1) and progressively incorporating Telugu (L2) and English (L3) in accordance with the three-language formula. The method affirms the linguistic identity and cultural legacy of indigenous groups while simultaneously improving early learning outcomes.

2 Conceptual Framework: Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE)

The employment of two or more languages as teaching languages is known as multilingual education (UNESCO, 2003). Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) places a strong emphasis on using the learner's mother tongue or home language (L1) as the main medium of instruction in the early years. A second language (L2), like Telugu, is then progressively introduced, followed by a third language (L3), like English (Mohanty, 2015).

The foundation of the MTB-MLE approach is the idea that children learn best when education starts in a language they can comprehend, speak, and relate to. Under this approach, students first learn the fundamentals of reading, math, and conceptual comprehension in their native tongue. A more seamless and efficient transfer to other languages and more difficult academic material is made possible by this solid linguistic basis. Malone (2007) states that MTB-MLE entails using the learner's mother tongue in addition to two or more other languages throughout the curriculum in a methodical and planned manner. Particularly in the early grades, teachers and students actively use the mother tongue to develop knowledge, explore ideas, and clarify concepts.

Children who start learning in their mother tongue regularly perform better academically, have better reading abilities, are more motivated, and have greater retention rates, according to

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UNESCO and UNICEF research. Additionally, MTB-MLE fosters bilingualism, biliteracy, and cultural competency, empowering students to effectively employ several languages for lifetime learning (Bernardo, 2018).

This strategy is highly supported by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which advises using the mother tongue or home language as the medium of teaching at least through Grade 5 and ideally through Grade 8 or higher. The policy acknowledges the importance of language in enhancing learning outcomes and lowering educational disparities.

3 Significance of MTB-MLE for Tribal Learners in Telangana

Telangana's tribal people continue to struggle with socioeconomic issues such as poverty, remote location, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to high-quality education. Many people believe that education is an essential means of achieving social mobility and community empowerment. The language of instruction throughout the formative years is one of the most important factors affecting a tribal child's school engagement, retention, and achievement (Mohanty, 2017). Learning becomes mechanical, demanding, and uninteresting when kids are taught in a language they don't comprehend. Articles 21A, 29(1), 46, and 350 of the Indian Constitution highlight the value of mother tongue education and the protection of linguistic minorities. Additionally, multilingual education that acknowledges and makes use of students' language resources is supported by the National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2005). Nonetheless, Telugu is still the primary language of instruction in many Telangana schools. Tribal children's language and cultural experiences are marginalized as a result, which causes them to lose confidence, perform poorly academically, repeat grades, and exit out early.

According to studies, a significant percentage of Indian youngsters have learning difficulties as a result of receiving education in foreign languages. With the help of SCERT Telangana, the Tribal Welfare Department, and other tribal research organizations, Telangana has started MTB-MLE initiatives to address these issues. With the goal of making education more inclusive and significant, these initiatives include the creation of textbooks, primers, storybooks, charts, and teaching-learning materials in indigenous languages including Lambadi and Gondi.

4 MTB-MLE Curriculum Design for Tribal Learners

A key element of an effective MTB-MLE implementation is curriculum design. Learner-centered, culturally sensitive, linguistically inclusive, and developmentally appropriate are all essential components of a successful MTB-MLE curriculum.

4.1 MTB-MLE Curriculum Design Principles

- **Mother Tongue as Foundation (L1):** To develop literacy, numeracy, and conceptual clarity, early grades should employ the child's mother tongue as the main medium of instruction.
- **Gradual Language Transition:** Reading and writing should come after the oral introduction of Telugu (L2), without the mother tongue being suddenly replaced.
- **Integration of Culture and Local Knowledge:** Tribal culture, customs, folklore, occupations, festivals, and environmental knowledge should all be reflected in curriculum content.
- **4.Spiral and Thematic Approach:** Concepts should be revisited and expanded across grades, ensuring continuity and reinforcement across languages.
- **Child-Centered Pedagogy:** Activity-based learning, storytelling, songs, games, and group work should form the core of instructional practices.

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4.2 Curriculum Structure Across Grades

- **Grades I–II:** Instruction primarily in L1; focus on oral language development, early literacy, numeracy, and environmental studies using local contexts.
- **Grades III–V:** Balanced use of L1 and Telugu (L2); introduction of formal reading and writing in Telugu; gradual integration of English (L3) orally.
- **Upper Primary Level:** Increased use of Telugu and English while continuing support through the mother tongue

5 Difficulties in Telangana's MTB-MLE Curriculum Implementation

The implementation of the MTB-MLE curriculum confronts a number of obstacles despite its potential:

- **Lack of Qualified Instructors:** There are insufficiently qualified multilingual educators who are fluent in Telugu and indigenous languages. Tribal languages and customs are foreign to many educators.
- Context of Multilingual Classrooms :** Students in classrooms frequently come from a variety of linguistic backgrounds, which makes it challenging to teach the curriculum consistently.
- **Insufficient Educational Resources :** There are still few high-quality textbooks, glossaries, and subject-specific resources available in indigenous languages.
- **Complexity of Pedagogy:** The absence of standardized vocabulary in tribal languages makes it difficult to teach abstract concepts in science and mathematics.
- **Administrative and Infrastructure Limitations:** Effective implementation is further hampered by inadequate classrooms, dorms, teacher incentives, and ongoing professional development.
- MTB-MLE Curriculum's Advantages for Tribal Students

6 MTB-MLE curriculum design has shown itself to be transformative in spite of these obstacles:

- **Better Educational Results:** Understanding, involvement, and engagement are all improved by instruction in the mother tongue.
- **Improved Academic Achievement:** Pupils do better in all disciplines and have more fluid language transitions.
- **Higher Enrollment and Retention:** Particularly in the early grades, MLE schools report increased enrollment and better retention.
- **Lower Dropout Rates:** Dropout rates are considerably decreased by language-friendly education.
- **Growth in Self-Belief:** Youngsters enthusiastically participate in class activities and express themselves freely.
- **Inclusivity and Cultural Preservation:** Tribal identity, culture, and knowledge systems are validated by the curriculum.

7 Conclusion

When paired with a well-crafted curriculum, the Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) program has shown great promise in raising attendance, retention, and learning results among Telangana's tribal students. Classrooms that incorporate local knowledge, cultural artifacts, and tribal languages produce lively, welcoming, and significant learning environments. Tribal students in MTB-MLE schools do better than their classmates in non-MLE settings, especially in language and arithmetic, according to data from evaluation studies and fieldwork. In addition to improving academic performance, MTB-MLE upholds the

identity, dignity, and cultural legacy of tribal people by promoting early learning through the mother tongue.

To sum up, MTB-MLE-based curriculum design is a potent, long-lasting, and fair educational approach for resolving historical inequalities in tribal education and achieving the inclusive education goal outlined in the NEP 2020.

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