

## Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Programme: A Panacea for Tribal Learners

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### KEYWORDS

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### ABSTRACT

Many tribal learners in Odisha find it difficult to learn in Odia as it is not their native tongue. Tribal students lack familiarity with textbook background, which hinders their ability to fully understand classroom instruction and activities. Learning results and retention are impacted by this. In addition, teachers are lack of knowledge in the methodology, materials, and training they need to effectively manage diverse classroom contexts. Understanding that language used in classrooms has a significant impact on issues related to fairness and quality, the RCFCE Act, 2009, properly stressed, in Section 29 (2), the utilization of mother tongue (MT) as the instruction medium wherever possible. NEP 2020 also recommended that mother tongue should be the instruction medium at least upto class 5. Children who have get education through Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) become more proficient speakers of both their MT and their country's official language. A child develops complex knowledge networks (cumulative bilingualism) when their rich first language knowledge (L1) is combined with their second language (L2). In other words, it is the means of comprehend the subjects in other languages and also connect the culture, enhanced the intellectual development of the Tribal Learners. However, Teaching through mother tongue boosts academic achievement and learning outcomes while also promoting inclusivity and high-standard learning. Most importantly, MTB-MLE allows all students to actively engage in society. Hence, the present paper outlines the significance of MTB-MLE for tribal learners in the state Odisha, some common challenges to MTB-MLE execution and then goes how it is benefited as well as advantage for the tribal learners in Odisha.

### INTRODUCTION

Despite an increase in enrollment among marginalized groups, there are still challenges with retention and educational quality. The high dropout rates in Scheduled Tribe areas of the state are primarily caused by the language barrier. Most young people, especially those living in areas dominated by Scheduled Tribes, lack sufficient exposure to Odia, which is the primary language of instruction (Misra & Parvati, 2015). Although Odia is the official language of Odisha, 22 officially recognized tribal languages are spoken in the state. In 2011, the overall literacy rate in Odisha increased to 73 per cent from 49 per cent in 1991(OPEPA). Over the years, there has also been an increasing trend in literacy rates among tribal populations but still a significant gap exists between rural and urban dwellers (OPEPA). The enrollment of tribal children in primary along with upper-primary schools has significantly increased as a result of the interventions by DPEP and SSA, together with other initiatives by the State. However, ensuring that these children stay in school until they complete their elementary education remains a concern. The language barrier in classrooms has been acknowledged by experts as a significant factor contributing to low retention and also educational outcomes across aboriginal children. In Odisha, the educational instruction is conducted in Odia, which poses a difficulty for numerous tribal youngsters whose native language is not Odia (OPEPA). Tribal youngsters, due to their unfamiliarity with the framework of textbooks, struggle to completely understand classroom teaching and also activities. That has an impact on retention and also learning outcomes. (OPEPA) Moreover, there is insufficient training, and pedagogy, and material support provided to teachers to effectively handle various classroom contexts. Teachers are not prepared with the necessary skills to effectively manage classrooms that have students from diverse linguistic along with cultural backgrounds.

## What is Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE)?

Multilingual education is the utilisation of two or even more languages as instruction mediums (UNESCO, 2003). MTB-MLE is the utilisation of MT/home language (L1) of the learners as the instruction medium and move on to add many languages. In other words, it can be said that a child is taught in their first language (L1) with the goal of progressively moving on to a second (L2) or even third language (L3) later on in primary school (Mohanty, 2015). It also is the utilisation of students' MT and two or even more additional languages as instruction languages (Malone, 2007). It is a widely-recognized and efficient tool for improving early childhood education, which encourages pupils to read and learn in the language they use at home. Research conducted by UNESCO and UNICEF has established that learning in one's MT not only improves increase student performance but also fosters a more enthusiastic attitude toward pursuing higher education. In the classroom, children who have a good foundation in their mother language become more proficient readers (UNESCO, 2014). Using multiple languages for academic performance and lifetime learning is made possible for learners through the usage of MTB-MLE (Bernardo, 2018). In MTB-MLE, the teacher and the learners utilise their MT to explain the lesson (UNESCO, 2003). It is widely recognized as a crucial element of high-quality education, especially during the early stages. MTB-MLE programme instruction should be given in students' mother tongue (L1) until the completion of primary school. In fairness, NEP 2020 also recommended that "the instruction medium in schools be the home language, local language, regional language, or even mother tongue until at least grade 5, and preferably until grade 8 or even beyond." The MTB-MLE program is executed with the goals of providing equal and high-quality education to tribal children; boosting their reading, and writing, and learning abilities through the utilization of their mother tongue within the early grades; introducing the state along with national language at an early stage to integrate tribal children into the state-wide education system; fostering respect across tribal children for their culture and language; improving learning for all children; improving school retention rates; improving early literacy rates; helping students become completely bilingual, biliterate, and culturally competent; and developing appropriate cognitive and reasoning skills.

## Significance of MTB-MLE for Tribal Students

The state's tribal communities speak either Munda or even Dravidian languages. Odisha paints a dismal image in terms of poverty, with 56.58% of its people living below poverty line (BPL) and a tribal literacy rate of 52.24% relative to the state's 72.87% overall literacy rate as the suffering and deprivation of the indigenous people are concerned. Clearly, education offers a path out of the extreme difficulties that today's tribal people must endure in order to survive. Furthermore, one of the main variables influencing how long a tribal child attends school is the instruction medium they get throughout their formative years of education. (Mohanty, 2017). Various steps as well as measures have been taken by the Govt. to improve the status of tribal education. The MLE program is simply one of the government's numerous helpful initiatives aimed toward ST students. However, given the critical role language plays in a child's social development, it is unquestionably a significant element (Mohanty, 2015).

However, Linguistic variety is the unique characteristic of Orissa, a state inhabited by tribes. The Indian Constitution has highlighted the advantages of providing education in the MT in Articles 21 A, 29(1), 46, and 350. It is also suggested by the National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005) that language instruction be multilingual, both in terms of the variety of languages that students are exposed to and in terms of the development of new teaching methods that benefit from the multilingual classroom (Panda, 2020). In spite of this their linguistic abilities are useless in the classroom since instruction is given in languages, they are unable to comprehend or even speak, according to textbooks. This leads to a decline in self-assurance, elevated rates of recurrence and dropouts, which further contributes to the erasure of languages, civilizations, and knowledge systems. Tribal children do much better in mother-tongue medium classes; it is estimated that around 25% of children in India endure moderate to severe learning disadvantages as a result of receiving instruction in a foreign language. Therefore, using MLE and, in particular, MTB-MLE, has several benefits (Taneja, 2023). The Right to Education Act of 2009 further highlights the need of using one's native tongue as the instruction language wherever feasible and NEP 2020 also pointed that mother tongue of the child should be the instruction medium until Class V. For this a new project named "SAMHATI" has been implemented by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI) along with the Academy of Tribal Language and Culture (ATLC), Bhubaneswar, Govt. of Odisha with an intention to address the language issues tribal students face in early grades or even elementary classes. Over 302 textbooks along with 2,500 reading materials include story books and picture charts, have prepared under this project.

## Challenges of MTB-MLE Programme

Besides its significance for Scheduled Tribe children, MTB-MLE programme encounters some challenges:

**Shortage of Teachers:** The lack of qualified multilingual teachers is one of the difficulties of the implementation of MTB-MLE programme (Education Sector Analytical and Capacity Development Partnership, 2014; Mohanty, 2015; Taneja, 2023; and NCERT Evaluation Report, 2011).

**Multilingual Environment:** Another obstacle to the execution of MT-grounded instruction is the presence of multiple languages in the environment. The issue lies in the rigorous adherence to the standard of MT-grounded instruction, which is not only a challenge for the students but also for teachers who lack proficiency in the primary language of their students. The generally sought remedy to the issue is to utilize the designated phrase. (Yap-Dequina and Oliva, 2022; Monje, 2019; and Cabansag, 2016).

**Inadequacy of Instructional Materials:** The MTB-MLE curriculum has not faced criticism about its educational relevance, but the lack of necessary teaching materials presents a significant hurdle to its proper implementation. It is found that in most of the MLE schools the learning materials are not available in the mother tongue of the child. Hence, the students as well as the teachers face the problems in teaching learning process (Hunahunan, 2019; Mohanty, 2015; Cabansag, 2016; and Education Sector Analytical and Capacity Development Partnership, 2014 and NCERT Evaluation Report, 2011).

**Modalities of Instruction:** In multilingual classroom the modalities of instruction is also one of the challenges to implement MTB-MLE programme. Language plays an essential factor in MTB-MLE programme and MLE teachers who are teaching Science and Math face these problems. They are mostly affected by the perplexing phenomenon of language mixing. The employment of MTB-MLE as both a subject and an instructional medium, especially in Government schools, has caused confusion in language education. Teachers encountered ambiguity in the application of languages taught to students. (Taneja, 2023; Yap-Dequina and Oliva, 2022; Hunahunan, 2019; and Mohanty, 2015)

There are also some other challenges to the MTB-MLE programme like lack of adequate count of classrooms, infrastructure facilities, lack of proper hostel facilities for tribal students school managements, lack of incentives and training for teachers (Espada,et.al., 2017; and Alberto, et.al. 2016; and Mohanty, 2015)

## Benefits of MTB-MLE Programme

MTB-MLE has unquestionably been a game-changer for tribal learners despite the challenges. The program has provided them with multilingual education, which has significantly improved their educational outcomes. By empowering them to learn in their own language, MTB-MLE has helped them better comprehend complex concepts. There is no doubt that MTB-MLE has been a vital tool in improving the educational outcomes for tribal learners.

**Improve learning:** Research has shown that students who develop foundational literacy and communication skills in their first language are more likely to participate fully in the classroom and build confidence among their peers. By providing instruction in students' mother tongue, educators can create a learning environment where students feel comfortable and engaged, leading to better academic outcomes and greater success in the long run (McNaughton, 2023; Lacson, 2019; Cabansag, 2016; and UNESCO,2014).

**Improve academic performance:** Investigations indicate that utilizing the native language as the instruction medium is a crucial element for promoting inclusivity and ensuring high-quality education. It can also boost learning outcomes along with academic performance of the tribal students (McNaughton, 2023; Taneja, 2023; and Lacson, 2019, Alberto, et.al. 2016)).

**Increase Enrolment:** There is a boost in enrolment inside MLE schools owing to the MLE interventions. However, it is also seen that the retention rates has also risen inside all 10 tribal languages inside MLE schools, but there are some variations as per tribal language (Cabansag, 2016; and NCERT Evaluation Report, 2011).

**Reduce Dropout Rate:** The dropout rate among the tribal learners has been decreased due to the MTB-MLE programme's implementation. As per the report of UDISE+ 2021 the dropout rate among the tribal learners at primary level in Odisha is zero. It provides ample opportunities for tribal learners to learn other subjects. So that the retention rate is increasing day by day and dropout rate is decreasing (McNaughton, 2023 and NCERT Evaluation Report, 2011).

**Develop Self-Confidence:** The tribal learners gained self-confidence and became more actively engaged in the teaching and learning (T&L) process through their knowledge of concepts delivered in their mother tongue, which provided them with relevant teachings. Utilising the native language in the classroom facilitated unrestricted expression of their responses. (McNaughton, 2023; and Cabansag, 2016; OPEPA)

**Promoting Friendly Environment:** The experiences that students have during their early years in school can have a significant impact on their attitudes towards learning, their career aspirations, and their overall outlook on life. It is essential for teachers to create a friendly and supportive learning environment. One of the ways to achieve this is by

encouraging students to speak in their mother tongue. This can foster a sense of comfort and confidence, which can lead to increased participation and engagement in the classroom. (Cabansag, 2016; Lacson, 2019).

**Support intercultural understanding and inclusivity:** MTB-MLE can strengthen access to learning and equitable education. So that, the marginalized group students can be treated as equal to other students in the classroom and their culture, traditions also respect by other students.

## CONCLUSION

Since the MTB-MLE programme was implemented in schools, there has been a rise in indigenous children attendance and retention rates (NCERT Evaluation Report 2011; Cabansag, 2016). Children are now more interested in the T&L process when mother language education is used in the school. With the utilisation of images and artifacts from tribal cultures, MLE classrooms are vibrant and engaging. The indigenous pupils now feel more confident and like they belong. Local resources enhance the teaching and learning resource areas in schools. Tribal museums have also been established with items from the area (OPEPA). Children may now study more about their own culture in their own language thanks to this. According to a National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) evaluation study, pupils' performance in language and mathematics when learning in tribal languages is positively impacted by the MLE curriculum. When compared to children who attend non-MLE schools, MLE school students exhibit superior success in language and math on oral, written, and comprehensive exams.

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