



Mother Tongue Based Education and Learning Outcomes among Tribal Students in West Bengal

Mamoni Khamrai

Assistant Professor in Education, Prodyumna Institute of Higher Education, Katul, Joypur, Bankura, West Bengal
Email: mamonikhamrai286@gmail.com

Abstract:

Language plays a crucial role in the teaching–learning process, particularly for children from indigenous and tribal communities. In West Bengal, many tribal students speak mother tongues such as Santali, Kurmali, Mundari, and Lodha, while formal schooling is mainly conducted in Bengali or English. This linguistic gap often creates learning difficulties and affects academic achievement among tribal learners. The present study examines the role of mother tongue based education in improving learning outcomes among tribal students in West Bengal. It also explores challenges related to language barriers in education and suggests strategies for promoting inclusive multilingual education for tribal communities.

Keywords: *Mother Tongue Education, Tribal Students, Multilingual Education, Learning Outcomes, West Bengal.*

Introduction:

Language is one of the most important factors influencing educational success. For children belonging to indigenous and tribal communities, learning through their mother tongue helps in better understanding of concepts, effective communication, and active participation in classroom activities. However, in many parts of India, including West Bengal, tribal children often receive education in languages different from their native languages.

West Bengal has a diverse tribal population comprising communities such as Santhal, Munda, Oraon, Bhumij, Lodha, and Kheria-Sabar. Many of these communities have distinct languages and dialects. For instance, Santali is widely spoken among the Santhal community, while other tribal groups use languages such as Kurmali and Mundari.

The medium of instruction in most government schools in West Bengal is Bengali, which may not be familiar to tribal children during the early stages of schooling. This linguistic mismatch can lead to comprehension difficulties, reduced classroom participation, and lower academic achievement.

Educational researchers have emphasized that mother tongue based education during the early years of schooling significantly improves learning outcomes. Therefore, promoting multilingual education and incorporating tribal languages in the education system can help enhance educational inclusion and improve academic performance among tribal students.

Significance of the Study:

The study highlights the importance of language in tribal education.

- It contributes to understanding the role of mother tongue in improving learning outcomes.
- The study supports multilingual education policies for tribal communities.
- It provides insights for educators and policymakers to develop inclusive teaching practices.
- It promotes culturally responsive education for tribal learners.

Brief Review of Literature:

Several scholars have emphasized the importance of mother tongue based education for marginalized communities. **Cummins (2001)** argued that children learn concepts more effectively when they are taught in their first language during the early years of schooling.

UNESCO (2016) highlighted that the use of mother tongue in education promotes cognitive development and improves educational participation among indigenous learners.

Sujatha (2002) noted that tribal students often face educational disadvantages due to linguistic barriers between home language and school language.

Mohanty (2017) emphasized that multilingual education can significantly improve literacy and learning outcomes among tribal children in India.

Nambissan (2014) pointed out that language barriers contribute to educational exclusion among marginalized communities.

Research conducted in tribal regions of India also indicates that students perform better academically when teachers use local languages or bilingual teaching strategies.

These studies underline the importance of integrating tribal languages into the education system to enhance learning outcomes.

Objectives of the Study:

- To examine the role of mother tongue based education in tribal schooling.
- To identify language-related barriers affecting learning among tribal students.
- To analyse the impact of language on academic achievement and classroom participation.
- To suggest strategies for promoting multilingual education in tribal areas.

Methodology:

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design based on secondary sources of data. Information has been collected from research articles, policy documents, government reports, and academic publications related to tribal education and multilingual learning.

The collected information has been analysed through qualitative content analysis to understand the relationship between language and learning outcomes among tribal students.

Analysis and Discussion:

Objective 1: Role of Mother Tongue in Tribal Education

Mother tongue plays a significant role in facilitating the learning process among tribal children. When students are taught in their native language, they can easily understand concepts and actively participate in classroom discussions. It also helps build confidence and encourages students to express their ideas freely.

In tribal areas of West Bengal, children who receive initial education in their mother tongue show better literacy development and improved learning abilities.

Objective 2: Language Barriers in Education

One of the major challenges faced by tribal students is the linguistic gap between home language and school language. Many tribal children begin schooling with little or no knowledge of Bengali, which is the primary medium of instruction.

This situation often leads to misunderstanding of lessons, difficulty in reading and writing, and reduced interest in learning. Teachers who are unfamiliar with tribal languages may also face difficulties in communicating effectively with students.

Objective 3: Impact on Learning Outcomes

Language barriers can negatively affect academic performance among tribal students. When students struggle to understand classroom instruction, they may lose confidence and gradually disengage from learning activities.

Studies indicate that many tribal students drop out of school during the early grades due to difficulties in adapting to unfamiliar languages used in schools. Introducing mother tongue based instruction during the early years can significantly improve learning outcomes and reduce dropout rates.

Objective 4: Strategies for Promoting Multilingual Education

Several strategies can help promote mother tongue based education:

- Introducing bilingual or multilingual teaching methods in early grades.
- Recruiting teachers who are familiar with tribal languages.
- Developing textbooks and learning materials in tribal languages.
- Encouraging community participation in the education process.
- Training teachers in culturally responsive and multilingual teaching practices.
- Such measures can help bridge the language gap and enhance learning outcomes among tribal students.

Limitations of the Study:

The study relies primarily on secondary sources of information.

- It does not include primary field-based research.
- The analysis focuses on general trends rather than specific tribal language groups.

Policy Suggestions:

- Introducing mother tongue based multilingual education in primary schools.
- Developing educational materials in tribal languages such as Santali and Kurmali.
- Training teachers to use bilingual teaching methods.
- Promoting community participation in tribal education programmes.
- Strengthening language-inclusive policies under the National Education Policy.

Conclusion:

Language plays a vital role in shaping the educational experiences of tribal students. The use of unfamiliar languages in schools often creates learning barriers and contributes to educational inequalities among tribal communities in West Bengal. Promoting mother tongue based education can significantly improve comprehension, participation, and academic achievement among tribal learners.

Integrating tribal languages into the education system not only enhances learning outcomes but also preserves cultural identity and promotes inclusive education. Therefore, multilingual education policies are essential for ensuring equitable and culturally responsive education for tribal communities.

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