

PERSPECTIVE ON BUILDING SCHOOL CULTURE FOR TRIBAL CHILDREN WITH A VIEW TO CONTEXTUALIZATION OF NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL EDUCATION-2023 IN ODISHA

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Abstract

Odisha represents 9.66% of India's Scheduled Tribe population, ranking it as the state with the third-largest Scheduled Tribe population. According to the 2011 Census, the literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes in Odisha stands at 52.24%. The recent National Curriculum Framework for School Education-2023 (NCF) highlights the crucial role of school culture and processes in shaping student learning and fostering societal values. School culture carries values, norms, beliefs, behaviours, relationships, and practices, creates effective learning atmosphere and influences student motivation and participation. Positive relationships, meaningful achievement celebrations, and effective classroom and school processes are key manifestations of this culture. Reforming school culture is challenging as innovations are often assimilated into existing practices rather than transforming them. This need for genuine reform is evident in tribal education in India, where cultural alienation and lack of representation in educational content contribute to high dropout rates. An inclusive school culture that respects tribal traditions, languages, and values can enhance tribal children's learning experiences, fostering a sense of belongingness and motivation. By celebrating tribal culture and implementing culturally relevant pedagogical techniques, along with community involvement, a supportive environment can build academic development and cultural preservation. Therefore, a thoughtful and inclusive school culture is essential for addressing the educational needs of tribal children and supporting their overall development and success. The paper aims to discuss the perspective of establishing school culture that can incorporate the values of tribal context in light of recently developed curriculum frameworks in India.

Key words- School, culture, tribal, context, children, education and learning

Introduction

The school curriculum encompasses everything that shapes students' learning, including learning goals, subject content, teaching methods, and assessment. However, it often overlooks the significance of school culture in education for the best interest of children. The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE-2023) recognizes the significance of culture and processes in education. It translates statements of intent into actionable be-

haviours and practices, emphasizing respect for all and fostering values like pluralism and empathy in everyday school interactions. School culture plays a dual role in student learning by creating effective learning environments and shaping values. It can either constrain and control or enable trust and self-discipline, influencing students' motivation and engagement. A fear-free, supportive environment with clear direction is most conducive to learning. To understand how schools shape learning environ-

ments and values, it's essential to consider various aspects of school culture: values, norms, beliefs, behaviours, relationships, and practices. Cultivating positive relationships, celebrating meaningful achievements, and implementing effective classroom and school processes are key manifestations of school culture. Symbols such as display boards, quotes, and physical arrangements convey what is valued in the school classroom and premises. Even, classroom practices such as seating arrangements and student involvement in learning processes also reflect the school's beliefs and values. Additionally, school-wide processes such as assemblies, mealtime management, and community engagement contribute to the overall culture.

Schools in Tribal Areas- An Overview

The notion of schools as social institutions is relatively new in the tribal society of Odisha. Since the first Five-Year Plan, residential schools were established in tribal areas to integrate tribal communities into the state education system. This system designed by the upper-class aimed to serve their stereotype intention rather than address the needs of children from diverse socio-linguistic backgrounds. Consequently, Ashram schools often failed to recognize and respect cultural and linguistic diversity.

Teachers, predominantly from upper caste-class backgrounds, imposed their values on tribal students, leading to a perception that tribal culture was inferior to the mainstream language and values. This resulted in an emphasis on learning a single dominant language over multiple languages. As Illich (1981) observed, societal conditions are often created that make people despise their own languages and heritage, followed by minimal efforts to revive them. Schools in tribal pockets function as state institutions that adhere to a culturally dominant curriculum, aiming to assimilate tribal children into the mainstream state language and culture.

Context of Odisha

Odisha is home to 62 scheduled tribes and 13 Primitive Tribal Groups, making up 23 percent of the state's population, the highest in the country. The Constitution of India guarantees free and compulsory education for tribal children, ensuring their ed-

ucational needs are safeguarded. Article 350A of the Constitution emphasizes the use of children's mother tongues as medium of instruction in schools, reinforcing the importance of language in education.

Scheduled Tribe (ST) students in Odisha face specific learning challenges, including low motivation, poor parental participation in education, illiterate family backgrounds, and irregular attendance. Language barriers pose significant difficulties during the initial stages of schooling, and textbooks are often unsuitable for tribal children. Tribal students usually engage in household activities such as helping parents with work, caring for younger siblings, and managing the household tasks. Additional issues affecting the education of tribal students in Odisha include socio-economic problems, education that is not based on tribal culture, unscheduled school timings, lack of guidance for tribal learners, unavailability of textbooks in regional languages, insufficient in-service education programs for teachers, inadequate hostel facilities, negative societal attitudes towards tribal education and geographical access to educational institutions.

The attitudes of non-tribal teachers towards tribal children, their languages, and cultures present significant challenges in education. Mostly, all these teachers are getting influenced by stereotypes and unfairly blaming students and parents in assuming that tribal children are inherently below average. Also the thought blame parents that they do not support education and give guidance at home properly. Such preconceptions hinder the expansion of primary education in tribal areas by creating barriers to learning. Although cultural diversity is a societal strength, non-tribal teachers' indifference to tribal languages, traditions, and lifestyles shows a lack of acceptance for the values within the mainstream society. When education is delivered in unfamiliar languages and contexts, it becomes difficult for tribal students to grasp the material, rendering teaching efforts ineffective. Tribal children often find the classroom environment stressful and unproductive as the content and language of the textbooks are beyond their comprehension. This disconnect makes sitting in class for extended periods feel meaningless and unengaging. Non-tribal teachers often have a

limited understanding of the socio-cultural contexts that shape the lives of tribal children, focusing solely on the school curriculum and overlooking the rich, experiential knowledge embedded in the students' cultural practices. Despite serving in tribal villages for decades, many teachers fail to explore and integrate this cultural knowledge into their teaching, missing the opportunity inherent creativity expression and experiential learning of tribal children (Mishra, 2019).

Similar to other social institutions, schools are deeply embedded with its own cultural norms and work methods. When innovations are introduced as mere additions to existing practices, they often become quickly assimilated into the prevailing culture. Therefore, the real challenge lies in reforming the culture itself, which presents a dilemma regarding the starting point for the change process. The goal is not to introduce entirely new tasks for teachers and administrators, but rather to approach familiar tasks in innovative ways. Within the current school structure, teachers develop adaptive strategies to manage the diverse demands of their professional lives. These strategies include various pedagogical techniques, classroom organization methods, information dissemination procedures, examination scoring practices, and ways of distributing opportunities to students. While these adaptive skills facilitate pedagogical adjustments, they are also the very elements that need to be transformed for genuine reform, presenting a central challenge. Research on tribal education domain in India highlights that high dropout figures among tribal children are primarily due to cultural alienation (Sujatha, 1994). Tribal culture is often inadequately represented in both educational content and teaching methods. Even if tribal children attend school despite their economic hardships, they frequently struggle to bridge the significant cultural gap between their home environment and the school.

Civil Society Intervention in building School Culture in Odisha

Case study-1

Save the Children (Bal Raksha Bharat) implemented comprehensive interventions across various districts

in Odisha, specifically targeting the tribal regions of Koraput, Kandhamal, and Boudh. The organization launched several programs aimed at enhancing school culture and creating a supportive learning environment. Key initiatives included:

- **Quality Learning Environment:** Strengthening the overall learning atmosphere in schools.
- **Library Development:** Establishing and improving school libraries.
- **School Code of Conduct:** Developing and implementing a school code of conduct.
- **Print-Rich Walls:** Creating walls filled with educational content and visuals to promote learning.
- **Child Cabinet Formation:** Setting up child cabinets to encourage student participation in school governance.
- **Capacity Building:** Training and empowering school forums.
- **Children's Literature Development:** Creating and distributing literature specifically for children.

A notable project titled "Creating Education Opportunities for Children from the Most Marginalized Communities" was undertaken between 2018 and 2019. This project aimed to establish a child-friendly learning environment in state-run preschools (Anganwadi Centers) and prepare preschool children for school. The project covered 200 Anganwadi centers and 100 schools across Kandhamal and Boudh districts. Following this, from 2020 to 2022, Save the Children continued its efforts in Kandhamal with a project titled Back to Basics: Fostering Continuum in Early and Primary Education of 3-14 Years Old Children. This initiative expanded to 400 Anganwadi centers and 150 schools in Boudh and Kandhamal districts. The primary objectives were to improve access to quality early and foundational education, create child-friendly learning environments, build the capacity of educational functionaries, and generate evidence of best practices. Through these initiatives, Save the Children (Bal Raksha Bharat) significantly contributed to build a supportive and inclusive school culture in Odisha particularly benefiting the tribal children of the state.

Case study-2

CARE India is a leading international NGOs undertook significant initiatives in Mayurbhanj district of Odisha, from 2009 to 2018. The organization launched several programs for tribal children, including an early grade reading program, school improvement program and accelerated learning program through 'Udaan' a residential set up for tribal children and intervening KGBVs also. These initiatives facilitated morning assemblies, formed child cabinets, strengthened school libraries, promoted girls' leadership and organized storytelling festivals for tribal children. Additionally, CARE India promoted dialogue to implement multilingual education in Odisha.

The innovative Early Grade Reading (EGR) intervention was designed to address systemic, pedagogical, and learner-centric challenges. Schools received assistance in developing libraries to create a print-rich environment for children. These libraries were equipped with accessible books, including picture books, mother tongue materials, and bilingual resources to foster reading habits from an early age. CARE India also emphasized the role of caregivers and community members as role models for children. They recognized the significance of cultivating a 'reading culture' in society to inspire children to read.

Recommendations for Building School Cultures for Tribal Children

Following recommendations are given below to build a school environment that can be an ideal condition to carry all the necessary components, strategies, cooperation and coordination which will be termed as school culture. Basically, an ideal school culture setting requires a collaborative effort involving community stakeholders, schools, and system in considering the dimensions of tribal context.

Empowering School Culture

- Establish a Collaborative School Community: Schools should create an environment where teachers, students, parents, and community members collaborate to foster equality, social justice, and mutual respect. Effective communication, collaboration and coordination among stakeholders are essential for building a sense of community and ownership. This involves developing positive relationships based on trust, openness, and responsible behaviour. Teachers should prioritize collaboration over competition, principals should adopt a consultative approach, and students should resolve differences through dialogue.
- Foster Dialogue with Tribal Children: Encourage open dialogue with children across all grades to remove hesitations, facilitate understanding, and build relationships. Provide platforms such as morning assemblies, meetings, and classrooms for meaningful discussions. Engaging children in decision-making processes and assisting them to develop critical thinking skills will strengthen interpersonal relationships. Discussing suggestions received through a suggestion box can also enhance dialogue between teachers and students.
- Engage with Parents and Caregivers: Establish constructive communication channels with parents through thoughtfully planned Parent-Teacher Meetings (PTMs). PTMs should give emphasis on exchanging ideas, celebrating children's successes and fostering collaboration between teachers and parents to support children's well-being and academic progress.
- Combat Discrimination: Develop initiatives to combat discrimination at school level based on gender, caste, and socioeconomic status within school cultures. Raise awareness, promote inclusive practices and develop a support mechanism for marginalized children and teachers.
- Foster Innovation: Promote innovative pedagogical approaches that reflect students' diverse needs and backgrounds. Foster a culture of creativity and experimentation, moving away from rigid adherence to standardized norms and practices.
- Foster Student Participation and Leadership: Build an environment where children are empowered to take charge of their learning progress and behaviour. Encourage open dialogue, independent problem-solving, and autonomous

learning. Involve students in school committees and decision-making processes to promote responsibility, leadership, and community participation.

- **Promote Inclusive Practices:** Ensure that schools cater to the needs of all children, especially those from marginalized communities. Encourage initiatives that foster inclusiveness and access to education for economically disadvantaged and marginalized groups, addressing issues of caste-based discrimination and social exclusion.
- **Support Teacher Well-being with Community and System Involvement:** In tribal areas, prioritize teachers' well-being by acknowledging their expertise, involving them in decision-making processes, and providing professional development opportunities. Create a culture of trust and collaboration with teachers through regular dialogue, reflection, and support systems.
- **Promote Peer-Learning Platforms among Teachers:** Facilitate opportunities for teachers to collaborate, share best practices and learn from each other through formation of pedagogical networks. Also, organize events and professional development programs that exchange mutual support among teachers across different school locations.
- **Endorse Indian Values through School Culture:** Emphasize values of patriotism, peace, sacrifice, non-violence, truth, tolerance, honesty, forgiveness, sympathy, helpfulness, courtesy, cleanliness, equality and fraternity.
- **Ensure Child Safeguarding:** Implement safety measures to create a stimulating, joyful, and secure environment in schools. Physical safety involves constant supervision, adherence to safety standards, availability of safety gear, secure storage of hazardous materials, and first aid training for teachers. Emotional safety requires prohibiting corporal punishment, avoiding bullying or harassment, ensuring equal participation, using positive language, and maintaining confidentiality. Also adhere to zero tolerance on child sexual abuse as per the POCSO Act, ensuring awareness, reporting procedures, and child protection

measures. Regularly update emergency contacts, be aware of medical conditions, and keep emergency numbers accessible. These comprehensive measures are vital for the well-being and safety of all children in educational settings. (section 8.2 NCF-FS).

Strategies for Development of School culture

1. Building Classroom Best Practices

- Diversify seating arrangements to encourage collaboration among students, avoiding hierarchical seating based on perceived academic abilities.
- Ensure educational materials are accessible to children and integrated into learning activities. Teachers can develop low-cost TLM using local tribal resources and set up reading corners in classrooms in order to foster a reading culture among children.
- Empower children to take ownership of their learning by involving them in TLM preparation, peer learning sessions, and guided teaching activities.
- Promote responsibility among students by assigning daily classroom cleaning tasks.
- Create opportunities to acknowledge and appreciate children's small achievements, efforts, and ideas.

2. Assembly for Tribal Children

- Consider seating arrangements, duration, and communication during assemblies, encouraging student involvement in anchoring duties.
- Promote linguistic diversity by providing opportunities for children to present in different languages and incorporating music and dance from various Indian regions.
- Ensure assemblies are creative and meaningful, allowing all students to participate without performance pressure.
- Begin with classroom assemblies in the foundational stage, progressing to multigrade assemblies from the preparatory stage onwards.

- Include diverse activities such as singing, meditation, storytelling, skits, and news sharing to foster a sense of belongingness and engagement, encouraging audience participation and response.
- 3. Mid-Day Meal Management**
- Ensure children from diverse backgrounds dine together, maintaining hygiene standards and involving children in meal distribution and cleaning.
 - Adhere to strict hygiene practices during food preparation, serving, and storage to prevent contamination and foodborne illnesses.
 - Involve child cabinet members in planning and executing the mid-day meal program to learn life skills and encourage children to opt healthy foods.
 - Educate children on the importance of nutrition and healthy eating habits to influence lasting lifestyle choices.
- 4. Sports & Extracurricular Activities**
- Encourage all children in schools to participate in sports and extracurricular activities such as singing, dancing, painting, drawing, and crafting. Foster teamwork, courage, and resilience on the playground, breaking gender stereotypes in sports, games, and extracurricular competitions.
- 5. Involvement of Parents and Community**
- Create a welcoming environment for parents and visitors. Share holistic updates on students' education and involve parents in curricular activities.
 - Invite the larger community to school events and participate in local community activities to strengthen ties.
- 6. School Timetable**
- Design the timetable to accommodate various activities while ensuring sufficient time for different subjects and group work exercises also.
 - Use certain periods, like school assembly or the last period of the day, for multiple purposes such as common sports sessions or club activities. Saturdays can be flexible for educational outings and community interactions.
- 7. Celebrations of Special Days**
- Introduce block periods for activities requiring more time, like role-play, laboratory sessions, or project work.
 - Integrate celebrations of special days as valuable components of school culture to encourage participation of tribal children. Align special days or events with the tribal local context of Odisha, such as education days, women's day, girl child day, disability day, etc. School-community collaboration is also essential for success.
- 8. Development of Library**
- Libraries should provide opportunities for self-driven learning from diverse resources, including books, digital materials, and reading corners in classrooms.
 - Stock libraries with books and children's literature representing various genres, languages, and cultural backgrounds, including content relevant to socioeconomically disadvantaged groups and those with disabilities.
 - Implement activities like read-aloud sessions, storytelling, and book reviews to cultivate a culture of reading and sharing. Involve students in selecting books and organizing library activities to enhance learning.
- Conclusion**
- Therefore, the National Curriculum Framework for School Education-2023 (NCF) underscores importance of school culture in shaping student learning and societal values. Effective school culture, characterized by positive relationships, meaningful celebrations of achievement, and efficient classroom and school processes, is essential for student motivation and engagement. The reform of school culture, particularly in tribal areas, is a complex process. Innovations often assimilate into existing practices rather than transforming them. The educational experience for tribal children is marked by cultural alien-

ation and inadequate representation in educational content, contributing to high dropout rates. An inclusive school culture that respects tribal traditions, languages, and values is crucial for enhancing learning experiences, fostering the sense of belonging, and motivating tribal students. The experiences of Save the Children and CARE India in Odisha highlight the impact of community-driven, culturally sensitive educational interventions. Programs that focus on creating print-rich environments, promoting multilingual education and involving community members demonstrate significant strides in improving the educational landscape for tribal children. Ultimately, creating an inclusive, respectful, and supportive school culture is essential for addressing the educational needs of tribal children in Odisha. Such an environment not only supports their academic development but also preserves and celebrates their cultural heritage, ensuring their overall development and success.

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