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## Status of multilingual education in Mayurbhanj District, Odisha

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to assess the extent to which efforts have been made to empower the community and the degree of teacher involvement in the multilingual education program and also to examine how much the tribal community has been able to create its own knowledge system through this program. A sample of 170, comprised of students and MLE teachers were randomly selected from 12 schools of Baripada out of which 10 are multilingual and 2 are non-multilingual school for the study. In this study two self-made tools, an interview schedule and a focus group discussion are used for the data collection. Additionally, achievement data were gathered from school records. The study's findings showed that both MLE teachers and students in Mayurbhanj district have a positive view of the MLE program. However several problems for MLE in the district include delays in receiving MLE books and materials, inconsistent use of TLMs, low student attendance, negative attitude from parents, strict tribal customs, lack of incentives for teachers, insufficient training programs, schools being isolated from mainstream areas and issues related to illiterate parents and family circumstances. So, for the success of this programme, it is suggested that the necessary steps should be taken to overcome these challenges.

**Keywords:** MLE, Tribal community, Mayurbhanj district, status, multilingualism

### Introduction

Multilingualism refers to the ability of an individual to communicate fluently in multiple languages, demonstrating a high level proficiency similar to that of a native speaker in each language. Additionally multilingualism encompasses the presence of several languages within a community or society, where these languages may vary in status-being formal or informal, indigenous or foreign and national or international. This linguistic diversity reflects the coexistence and interaction of multiple languages in both individual and societal contexts.

Multilingual Education (MLE) generally refers to an educational approach where learning begins in the students' native language and gradually transition to additional languages. An MLE programme typically follows four stages:

- **Stage 1:** All instructions is conducted in the child's native language.
- **Stage 2:** Fluency in the mother tongue is strengthened, and oral skills in a second language are introduced.
- **Stage 3:** Oral proficiency in the second language is further developed, along with the introduction of reading and writing skills in that language.
- **Stage 4:** Both the native language and the second language are used for continued education and lifelong learning

Odisha is a multilingual state having more than 40 ethnic languages used by 62 scheduled tribes, alongside modern Indian languages such as Hindi, English, Bengali and Telugu. Multilingual Education (MLE) was introduced as a pedagogical approach through the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005, highlighting that multilingualism is an asset, not a limitation. This approach facilitates the transition from the mother tongue to additional languages. In Odisha, MLE was launched in 2005 and has since expanded to 2,250 schools, primarily serving tribal children. This programmer is one of the most enduring MLE initiatives in Asia, drawing attention from educators in around seven other Asian countries, who have visited Odisha's MLE schools to learn from its implementation.

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### Research efforts on the status of multilingual education

A study investigated on “Multilingual education and social equity: A comparative study of integration policies in multicultural societies” identified key obstacles multicultural societies encounter in striving for educational and social equality, such as language barriers, cultural differences and economic inequalities. It emphasized the need for robust integration efforts and multilingual education policies to address these issues and build inclusive learning spaces and also provided suggestions for enhancing these policies and practices, including fair funding, culturally relevant teaching, language support programmes, community involvement and anti-discrimination strategies. [Patrica Diane Mouboua et al. (2024)]<sup>[15]</sup>.

Further a review study conducted on “The advantages of Multilingualism” and found that most research agrees that multilingualism provides substantial cognitive, social and academic advantages, making it a highly valuable skill in today’s globalized world. [Karin Gnaore (2024)]<sup>[12]</sup>.

Moreover a study was conducted on “Convivialist multilingual education: theoretical and practical suggestions from a Norwegian perspective.” aimed to investigate how multilingual education can contribute to fostering a harmonious and cooperative society. The data for the case study was collected through focus group discussions with three mother tongue teachers and two Norwegian language teachers employed at a language school for recently arrived immigrant students in Norway. The findings highlighted the shortcomings of Norway’s section 2-8 and gaps in the bilingual learning curriculum, advocating for the enhancement of mother tongue education and emphasizing the importance of mother tongue teachers in supporting sustainable development within the school curriculum. It also suggested that encouraging multilingual education in schools can contribute to addressing climate change, preserving bicultural diversity and fostering a more cooperative and harmonious society. [Frederique Brossard Borhaug & Mallika Manral (2024)]<sup>[5]</sup>.

“A systematic review of bilingual education teacher’s competences” analyzed various frameworks and research on the competencies needed by bilingual education teachers for secondary education, creating a professional competence model for these teachers. Through a systematic review of 79 reports, it identified 16 key competencies, many of which emphasize language proficiency, collaboration skills and knowledge of bilingual education research. [Luisa Scherzinger & Taiga Brahm (2023)]<sup>[14]</sup>.

“Multilingual education: A comprehensive guide mentioned that multilingual education (MLE)” is a powerful approach for fostering linguistic diversity, encouraging intercultural dialogue, enhancing social inclusion and ensuring quality education for all students. In India it is crucial to acknowledge the significance of incorporating multiple languages in education and to advocate for its implementation across all levels of the educational system. Hence it is vital to keep exploring and testing various models of multilingual education (MLE) to address the diverse needs of learners while fostering linguistic and cultural diversity.

Again a study conducted on “Multilingual education in India: Challenges ahead” discussed the challenges of multilingual education like the medium of instruction, the language of the text books and other related teaching resources and training the teachers and shared some

recommendations like providing trained teachers, textbooks, reading materials, children’s literature and other learning resources with planned pedagogical and assessment process. [Sikha Tripathi (2023)]<sup>[18]</sup>.

Further a study conducted on “Implementation of bilingual and multilingual education in Indonesia” by using a qualitative descriptive strategy i.e. library research and found that although Indonesia has adopted the multilingual strategy in the class room but there are several serious problems like language barriers, lack of financial supports and lack of fluency in regional, national and foreign languages. It also addressed that to address these issues the government develops and implements a single bilingual education program as an international standard school. [Wulan Fadila (2022)]<sup>[19]</sup>.

Moreover a study was conducted on “Just accept each other, while the rest of the world doesn’t- teachers’ reflections on multilingual education” examined interaction data using critical discourse analysis to identify how other strategies emerge when teachers discuss their linguistically and culturally diverse students. The findings revealed that teachers generally have positive attitudes, especially regarding the use of students’ home language in the classroom, with other strategies toward multilingual students being rare. This underscored the potential value of ongoing professional development for teachers and offered useful insights for other schools interested in implementing multilingual education. [Joana Duarte & Mirjam Gunther-van der Meij (2022)]<sup>[11]</sup>.

Again a longitudinal mixed method study on “Multilingualism, multilingual identity and academic attainment: evidence from secondary schools in England” found a significant difference between external and self-identifications of being “multilingual” and suggested that multilingual identity may be a more valuable indicator for understanding academic performance than the conventional markers of multilingualism used in UK schools. The data were collected from 5 secondary schools in Southeast England through both school reports and student self-reports using questionnaires and interviews and analysed by SPSS version 25. [Dieuwerke Rutgers (2021)]<sup>[3]</sup>.

Moreover a study conducted on “School effectiveness in multilingual education: A review of success factors” revealed that the interconnectedness of factors at the individual, school and national/regional levels along with others factors must be considered by the educators and policymakers for the effective multilingual education.

Again a study conducted on “Supporting multilingual development in early childhood education: A scoping review compiled empirical research on teacher’s method for fostering multilingual development in young children. A systematic search for the literature yielded 18 studies, which outlined various strategies grouped into four key themes: 1) translanguaging, 2) Promoting interaction,

3) Linguistic focused approaches and 4) culturally oriented strategies. It offered a thorough overview of strategies that can aid in multilingual development and pointed out gaps in the research concerning strategies for various cultural groups and multilingual infants, emphasizing the need for future studies to explore the connections between specific strategies and children multilingual outcomes. [Zhijun Zheng et al. (2021)]<sup>[20]</sup>.

Moreover a study was conducted on “Impact of multilingual approach to education on young learners in India.” In Mumbai city and Suburbs comprised of 150 samples including, teachers/professors, students and other

professional. Data is collected from both primary and secondary sources, i.e. through a questionnaire and from books, journals, newspaper and internet etc. The objective of the study is to explore the effects of a multilingual educational approach on young learners in India which maintains the focus on assessing the impact of multilingualism on education, specifically for young learners in India. It was found that young learners may be better prepared for formal education, but they still require ongoing support to develop adequate proficiency in both their first and second languages. [Rama Ray (2021)]<sup>[17]</sup>.

An assessment in multilingual schools was a comparative mixed method study of teachers' assessment beliefs and practices among language learners-CLILL and migrant students whereas a study was qualitative approach with 12 teachers of biology, history or English as a foreign language, another study utilized a mixed method design involving 196 teachers in a survey and 13 in follow up interviews. The survey responses were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, whereas thematic content analysis was applied to the interview data, assessment samples and an open ended survey questions. The findings from the two studies reveal that although teachers assert that language is not a part of the assessment but they believe students must utilize language to demonstrate critical thinking and advanced analytical skills. [Helena Reierstam (2020)]<sup>[8]</sup>.

### Research Problem

Many studies have concluded that the attitudes of teachers, parents and students towards multilingual education were positive but the implementation strategy was inadequate for which both teachers and students are encountering numerous challenges. Few study found that bilingual language learning is possible with the help of parents and teachers and through suitable classroom environment and also the findings showed that through multilingual education certain ethnic groups received equal opportunities for employment, job access and career advancement. Although various researchers indicate that the implementation of multilingual education differs across school, the success rate of multilingual schools also varies between districts and states. Yet no significant study is done in Baripada block of Mayurbhanj district, Odisha to know the status of multilingual education.

### Objectives of the study

1. To analyze the academic performance of students in multilingual and non-multilingual schools in Mayurbhanj district.
2. To investigate the perceptions of students and teachers in multilingual schools regarding the multilingual education program in Mayurbhanj district.
3. To examine the challenges and opportunities of multilingual education in Mayurbhanj district.

### Hypothesis of the study

There exists no significant difference in the academic performance between MLE and Non-MLE school students.

### Research questions of the study

1. What is the perception of teachers and students in multilingual education schools view the multilingual education program in Mayurbhanj district?
2. What are the challenges and opportunities of multilingual education in Mayurbhanj district?

### Methodology

The study is based on descriptive survey method. The 170 sample of students and some MLE teachers were selected from 12 schools of Baripada block of Mayurbhanj district, Odisha, out of which 10 are multilingual schools and 2 are non-multilingual schools.

### Tools Used

Two self-made tools i.e. an interview schedule and focus group discussion are used to collect the data from the sample. The achievement results were collected from the school records. The interview schedule for teachers was consisted of 14 questions categorized into 6 dimensions i.e perception about MLE, perception about MLE related materials, idea on MLE related workshop/training/meeting, idea about MLE curriculum designing process, perception on MLE books and problem faced by teachers. The focus group discussion tool is consisted of 9 questions. Out of them 5 questions have both yes and no questions along with open ended discussion while other 4 are fully open ended questions. This tool was categorized into 4 dimensions, those are about perception of students towards MLE programme, perceptions towards medium of instruction, idea about MLE related books and TLMs, prospects and problems of students related to MLE.

### Analysis and Interpretation of Data

#### Academic achievement of students from MLE and Non MLE schools

**Table 1:** The mean difference of academic achievement scores

Schools	N	Mean	SD	DF	Calculated t-value	Result
MLE	135	10.07	3.09	169	0.308	Not-significant
Non-MLE	35	10.28	3.70			

From table-1 we found that the computed t value i.e. 0.308 is smaller than the critical t-value i.e. 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance having DF 169. Hence the hypothesis H01 is accepted in this study, which means students from both multilingual education schools and non-multilingual education school have similar academic achievement scores.

#### Perception of MLE school teachers towards MLE program

From the interview schedule it is found that every MLE teachers was able to tell about MLE program and about its objectives. According to them, MLE means where different types of tribal children get education and able to translate from tribal language to ODIA language i.e. as second language. They told that the MLE program expands students' knowledge and perspective, encouraging them to express their thoughts openly and comfortably. It fosters confidence and fearlessness, both within and beyond the school environment. The MLE TLMs help the students to learn the ODIA language used in the schools and these are easy to understand and comprehend. It ensured that the MLE teachers consistently use TLMs during their classroom instruction. Again it was found that MLE books give ideas on tribal culture, custom and festival and are easy to understand and learn multilingual education for students. Most of the teachers told that MLE training at state, district and block level all are helpful. All MLE teachers

unanimously agree on the significant roles and responsibilities of MLE teachers, parents, students and local authorizes in the curriculum designing process.

### Perception of students towards MLE program

From focused group discussion we found that MLE program is helpful for students as it increases their outlook, motivates and makes them feel happy and value by dragging them towards the general education. Most of the students feel comfortable to participate in teaching learning process and do not feel language as a barrier for them as they use both ODIA and Ho language i.e. the tribal language of Baripada inside the classroom. All of the students agreed that MLE books and related TLMs are easy to understand and comprehend and also available timely.

### Problems of teachers

Based on the interview schedule we found that following challenges are faced by teachers in the implementation of the MLE program.

- Students' irregularity.
- Parents' negative attitude toward MLE program.
- Parental illiteracy.
- Rigid tribal culture.
- Lack of incentives.
- Schools being isolated from mainstream areas.
- Limited number of training programme.

### Problems of students

Based on the focused group discussion we found following problems faced by students in the implementation of MLE program.

- Late arrival of books.
- Irregular use of TLMs.
- Difficulty in writing Odia language.
- Communication problem.
- Family problems like low income and illiteracy parents.

### Findings and discussion of results

1. No significant difference was found in the academic achievement levels between MLE and Non MLE school students.
2. Both MLE teachers and students in the Mayurbhanj district hold a positive perception of the MLE program.
3. However challenges and opportunities in MLE implementation in the district include the late arrival of MLE materials, irregular use of TLMs, low student attendance, negative parental attitudes, rigid tribal culture, and lack of incentives for teachers, insufficient training programs, and school isolation from mainstream areas, parental illiteracy and other family related issues.

These findings are supported by Wulan Fadila (2022) <sup>[19]</sup> & Rama Roy (2021) <sup>[17]</sup>. But according to Helena Reierstam (2020) <sup>[8]</sup> language is not a part of the assessment but they believe students must utilize language to demonstrate

critical thinking and advanced analytical skills. This study will help in understanding the status of MLE in a multicultural and multilingual state like Odisha, as well as across the country.

### Recommendation

The present study will help the teachers, policy makers as well as Government to get an insight into actual status of MLE program in the Mayurbhanj district. It can be extended for the whole state taking samples from each district by using cluster sampling method. It will help policy makers to modify the policies and formulate new policies with relation to the quality improvement of the implementation of MLE program.

### Conclusion

Multilingual education (MLE) in India was initiated in 1968 when the Indira Gandhi government incorporated into the National Education Policy. The policy mandated that Hindi speaking states would teach Hindi, English and another modern India language, while non-Hindi speaking states would include English, Hindi and the regional language in their curricula. In Odisha, the state government launched the MLE program in 2006 to cater to the language needs of ethnic minority children in schools. The program adopted 10 tribal languages, including Santal, Sarora, Munda, Koya, Kui, Kuvi, Kishan, and Oram, Juang and Bonda and trained teachers from the same linguistic backgrounds in the MLE approach. The Government of odisha met the initial requirements for the MLE program, but the academic aspect in classrooms and teacher professionalism weakened. The late arrival of MLE materials, irregular use of TLMs, low student attendance, negative parental attitudes, rigid tribal culture, lack of incentives for teachers, insufficient training programs, and school isolation from mainstream areas, parental illiteracy and other family related issues have further weakened the program. If timely action is not taken the learning process of tribal children in classrooms may be hindered, as sustained interest and continuous attention are crucial for effective learning.

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