

Short Research Article

Culture Sensitive and Child Friendly Curriculum Framework for Tribal School Education

Dr. V. Sudhakar^{1*}

¹ Professor of Education, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad-500007, India

Received: May 2, 2019

Accepted: May 9, 2019

Online Published: May 27, 2019

doi:10.22158/jecs.v3n2p171

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/jecs.v3n2p171>

Abstract

A number of efforts have been initiated by the state in collaboration with various non-governmental organizations for extending quality schooling and to raise academic standards for providing opportunities to tribes in the national and global market. In spite of many top-level interventions, the present status of tribal education is not satisfactory and the schooling system has not become children and community centric. There is an immediate need to rethink and critically reflect on the fundamental assumptions and basic underpinnings of the teaching learning processes and most importantly the curricular practices in the educational settings. This paper is an attempt construct culture sensitive and child friendly curriculum framework for tribal school education.

Keywords

Culture sensitive curriculum, child-friendly curriculum, pedagogic approach

1. Introduction

Education is an essential constituent for growth and overall development of individuals and communities. It empowers people with greater awareness and knowledge, better comprehension and understanding of their surroundings and societies. Education enables people to actively participate, improve and redefine their economic, social, political and cultural environment and living conditions. Research studies across the continents clearly showed that literacy and education are the powerful indicators of social-economic development. The planning commission report, India Vision 2020, observes that education is the foundation for a vibrant democracy, growth of productivity and income and employment opportunities.

Amartya Sen, Nobel Laureate in Economics (1998) and Master, Trinity College, Cambridge, United Kingdom, strongly believes that education (especially basic education and schooling) expands human freedom and capabilities of individuals. And he showed how enhanced capabilities altered people's

opportunities and gave them more options and greater power in leading their lives.

What is said above is true in the case of the Scheduled Tribes in India. Though India has made significant progress in different sectors of education, the educational attainment and literacy of the Scheduled Tribes and other marginalized groups, even after so many years of independence, has been a major matter of concern. For several historical, economic and social reasons the scheduled Tribes have remained economically, socially and educationally backward. Despite large scale funding and mass efforts, the status of education of tribes in India is not at all satisfactory.

One of the major concerns of Tribal education is the low ST literacy rate and high ST dropout rate. The main challenges in education of tribal children physical access to schooling at upper primary level, diverse socio-cultural context and schooling and curricular practices. Improving the ST literacy in general and ST female literacy in particular is a major challenge and require serious efforts which is not possible without the active involvement of various section of the people. The tribal communities suffer from poor economic development, physical isolation and deprivation, and are at the lowest rung in terms of poverty indicators in comparison to even other disadvantaged groups.

The low percentage of ST students joining primary schooling is primarily due to poverty, lack of interest and parental motivation, inability to understand the medium of instruction (i.e., state language), teacher absenteeism and attitude, opportunity cost of time spent in school (particularly for girls), large seasonal migration, etc. Many committees identified cost of schooling, lack of motivation of teachers, lack of inspection, and the increasing dependence on private tutoring to be the main hurdles in the path of education for tribal children. This clearly indicates that educating the tribal children, parents and communities is not an easy task. Hence it is a very big challenge. In addition to this low literacy rates in tribal communities continue to indicate a need for integrated-comprehensive-inclusive educational interventions at elementary school level.

Experiences of many NGOs indicated that education and literacy support programs need to be designed on the bases of the history, culture, language and values of the tribal communities. And at the same time there is a need to integrate these programmes into other national level developmental programmes initiated for the development of other people. Economists, social scientists and policy makers are of the opinion that educational content must encompass building life skills that can help integration with the mainstream system (Bagai & Nundy, 2009).

Research on tribal schools and children revealed that one of the main reasons for children dropout in Tribal areas is the way children are taught and handled in classrooms. It is greatly realized that children belonging to tribal populations walkout of the classrooms primarily because of the irrelevant curricular practices, insensitive pedagogic transactions and unresponsive teachers.

2. Culture Sensitive and Child Friendly Curriculum Framework

A number of efforts have been initiated by the state in collaboration with various non-governmental organizations for extending quality schooling and to raise academic standards for providing

opportunities to tribes in the national and global market. In spite of many top-level interventions, the present status of tribal education is not satisfactory and the schooling system has not become children and community centric. There is an immediate need to rethink and critically reflect on the fundamental assumptions and basic underpinnings of the teaching learning processes and most importantly the curricular practices in the educational settings.

Tribal school education like other systems of education is a colonial legacy and deeply rooted in the western system of education. Control and domination is an inherent and integral part of the institutional disciplinary structures of the current education system. The structures and practices of the educational institutions are designed on the European models of instruction and education. Like other mainstream institutional programmes tribal school curricular practices are strongly committed to the Western beliefs. This compels them to convert diversity and complexity into uniformity and one-dimensional thought.

The institutional disciplinary practices are crystallized with a linear, clinical, inhuman, ruthless, and rationalist mode of thought, which is in strong opposition to the multi-dimensional, pluralistic, indigenous approaches of tribal people and tribal cultures. Due to this the knowledge and experience gained over a period of time remained consistently blind to the social and historical factors. In addition, the knowledge acquired over the years is increasingly becoming counterproductive in accounting the social realities and addressing people concerns and problems.

The above stated crisis situation cannot be solved until we generate alternative ways of thinking which reduce the gap between the formal schooling and curricular structures and social realities. The rethinking needs a through interrogation of the received notions of ideas and practices related to teaching and learning. This would enable us to move towards evolving an eclectic and realistic tribal school curriculum to address diversified issues concerned to pedagogic practices, and development of authentic learning materials. Hence the search for a new vision of Tribal Education.

A cursory look at the existing schooling processes would reveal that most of the instruction in the classrooms is centered on memorizing and drilling. The goals of education of children are very narrow and the scope is very much restricted. In this context, it is necessary to shift our focus from teaching to learning. This shift in the focus makes a positive influence on the quality of the individuals and the larger social transformation. The crux of the entire process of tribal education lies in its curriculum, design, structure, organization and transaction modes as well as the extent of its appropriateness. The knowledge base of tribal education must be a conceptual bending of their knowledge systems, history, culture and the modern ideas of different cognate disciplines.

Children belong to tribal families are vibrant, energetic and self-motivated. Their surroundings and social environment and cultural beliefs determine their worldview. Children bring with them certain beliefs, values, commitments, personalities, and moral code from their upbringing, home language and social life, to classrooms and school. This background greatly effects on their perceptions, understanding and skills. Tribal education must sharpen their observation and practical skills and

enable them to think independently and critically. Tribal education system has to become more sensitive to the emerging demands from the changing societal needs and the day to day living conditions of children and people.

As discussed above the dominant practices in tribal schools are centered on how to transfer knowledge from textbooks to the minds of children rather than bringing desirable behavioral and attitudinal changes among children. It is necessary to understand and negotiate with their prior conceptions, ideas and images about world they construct. This is not fully possible with the existing curriculum.

Tribal school education should be construed not in terms of mechanical activities of information transmission and sharpening of memory and drilling skills. But it needs to build capacities in children to construct knowledge and meaning from their personal experiences, to deal with different contexts and develop the abilities to reflect and judge.

The dominant understanding of education system in our country construed education as teaching problem. According to this framework the goal of school education is to induct certain laws, principles and knowledge into the minds of tribal children through universal, scientific and objective training techniques and methods. So all that a student is supposed to know is a catalogue of laws and codes and perform a set of defined disciplinary practices and drilling exercises. The results of this approach are too apparent and disturbing. Hence the search for new ways of understanding tribal elementary education.

Considering the crucial role of school curriculum in influencing everybody's life and everyday life, the curriculum is viewed with a policy approach. Some of the policy parameters in this context are selection of curricular content or subject matter, field requirements, teacher selection and training, contextualization of pedagogic practices, assessment and evaluation strategies, designing positive learning environments, community involvement, building networking with other institutions and organizations, formulating academic standards etc. Public and different stakeholder's views and inputs are essential on such critical and essential parameters to formulate the tribal school education policy. What is important to note here is not to view tribal school education policy merely in terms of economic and financial allocations and other rational choices and decisions, but primarily considering it as the political space comprising the struggles over ideas, ideals, competing goals, values and notions about what constitutes public and private interest. Such understanding would enable us to locate tribal education in the larger social and political structures within which it is embedded.

The curriculum of tribal elementary education must be broad based and need to be designed on the foundations of experiential learning, contemporary developments in education and in other disciplines of knowledge. The following principles should guide the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies, curricular programmes.

- Adopting a Human Rights—Based Approach
- Operating under Ethical Guidelines
- Ensuring Gender—Responsiveness

- Respecting Child Rights
- Employing Culturally Appropriate Measures
- Responding to Diversity
- Operating within the Ecological Model
- Working in Partnerships

The objective of this new curricular exercise is to move towards designing a theory of teaching and learning that addresses the important role of knowing and understanding the culture of tribal children and using such knowledge to inform curriculum development and teaching methodologies.

Educational philosophers across the world argued that the development of curricula should be based on students' own interests. According to them education should be a child-centered process. They emphasized the importance of connecting curriculum to the interests and activities of students. Effective education requires teachers who use students' interests and guide them toward an understanding of the sciences, history, and the arts. They also urged teachers to connect each child's life experiences and interests to the existing curriculum. As a result, students would be able to understand and succeed in attaining standards.

The primary objective of this Cultural sensitive and child friendly curriculum and pedagogy is to empower children intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 382). As part of this curricular exercise teachers make standards—based content and curricula accessible to children and teach in a way that children can understand. To do this, teachers must incorporate relatable aspects of children's daily lives into the curriculum. Such familiar aspects include language, prior knowledge, and extracurricular interests such as music and sports. Once children feel comfortable with how a teacher talks and discusses academic material, they will feel comfortable enough to focus and try to learn the content. According to Crystal Kuykendall, "*culture determines how children perceive life and their relationship to the world. Because culture also influences how and what children learn, educators can use culture to improve self-image and achievement. Not only must teachers show an appreciation of cultural diversity, they must also incorporate teaching strategies that are congruent with the learning styles of their students*" (1989, pp. 32-33).

A culturally sensitive school curriculum is generally defined as one that honors, respects, and values diversity in theory and in practice and where teaching and learning are made relevant and meaningful to students of various cultures. Cultural sensitive education supports students in developing a lifelong appreciation for understanding and valuing cultural understanding in all settings of life. The incorporation of culturally responsive education as a critical component of all current curriculum, activities and services is a mainstream pedagogical practice that can serve to improve the academic lives of all students.

This new curricular and pedagogic approach enables children use their cultural backgrounds to aid in the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Culturally responsive teachers use culturally relevant

instructional material, affirm student cultural identities, and use cultural backgrounds as a knowledge base for learning and academic success. Further, family involvement and community partnerships are encouraged. While helping to close the achievement/opportunity gaps, culturally responsive education also helps fight all forms of discrimination, bias and oppression. Through this process all school children can become skilled at working within a diverse world. Early and frequent interactions with children from different cultures, as well as learning the beliefs, values, customs and perspectives of others, should be a natural part of the curriculum.

- Use high academic standards as the basis of instruction for all students
- Adopt a curriculum that fosters cultural competency
- Demonstrate respect for students' identities and welcome a diverse community to participate in schools
- Acknowledge students' diverse learning styles
- Ensure qualified personnel for all students
- Provide extra help for schools and students who need it.

References

- Bagai, S., & Nundy, N. (2009). *Tribal Education: A Fine Balance*. Mumbai: Dasara Catalyst for Social Change.
- Kuykendall, C. (1989). *Improving black student achievement by enhancing students' self-image*. Chevy Chase, MD: The Mid-Atlantic Equity Center.
- Sen, Amartya. (1985). *Commodities and Capabilities*, Amsterdam. North-Holland.
- Sen, Amartya, & Dr èze, Jean. (1989). *Hunger and public action*. Oxford England New York: Clarendon Press Oxford University Press.
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. New Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Sen, Amartya. (2000). *Development as Freedom*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Sen, A. (2002). *Pratichi Committee Report*.
- STATISTICS OF SCHOOL EDUCATION. (2008-2009). Government of India Ministry of Human Resource Development, Bureau of Planning, Monitoring & Statistics New Delhi, 2014.
- Statistical Profile Of Scheduled Tribes In India. (2013). Ministry Of Tribal Affairs Statistics Division, Government of India. Retrieved from <http://www.tribal.nic.in>
- Sujatha, K. (2002). Education among Scheduled Tribes. In R. Govinda (Ed.), *India Education Report: A Profile of Basic Education*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Sujatha, K. (2015). *Education Among Scheduled Tribes*. India Education Report, 2015.
- The Working Group Report on Elementary Education and Literacy 12th Five Year Plan 2012-2017. (2011, October). Department of School Education and Literacy MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT Government of India, New Delhi.
- India Vision 2020. (2002 December). *Planning Commission Government of India New Delhi*.