



A conceptual analysis of socio-cultural and linguistic responsiveness in Odisha's secondary teacher preparation

Eliza Mahapatra¹, Dr. Kulamani Sahoo², Jyotiranjana Panda³

¹ Research Scholar P.G. Department of Education Fakir Mohan University, Balasore, Odisha

² Assistance professor, Department of Education College of Teacher Education, Balasore, Odisha

³ Lecturer of, Department of Education B.S college, Daspalla, Odisha

Abstract

This paper explores how secondary teacher preparation programmes in Odisha address the state's significant socio-cultural and linguistic diversity. Odisha's classrooms include students from varied tribal communities who speak multiple languages and dialects, posing unique demands on teachers. Drawing on concepts of culturally responsive pedagogy and multilingual education, this conceptual analysis examines policy frameworks, curriculum design, and institutional practices. Findings indicate that although national and state-level policies emphasise inclusivity and contextual relevance, practical implementation remains limited. Diversity-related content is often treated superficially in pre-service curricula, and teacher trainees receive little practical training in adapting pedagogy for diverse learners. Teacher educators themselves frequently lack adequate preparation in culturally and linguistically responsive teaching. The paper argues that bridging this gap requires comprehensive curriculum renewal, stronger community engagement, and continuous professional development for teacher educators. It recommends developing locally relevant materials, promoting mother tongue-based multilingual strategies, and redesigning practicum experiences to connect trainees with diverse communities. Strengthening these areas can help prepare future teachers to create inclusive, supportive learning environments that affirm Odisha's cultural and linguistic richness. The study offers insights for policymakers, teacher education institutions, and stakeholders working to advance equitable and context-sensitive teacher preparation.

Keywords: Socio-cultural diversity, linguistic responsiveness, teacher education, Odisha, culturally responsive pedagogy

Introduction

Background

Preparing teachers to work effectively with the socio-cultural and linguistic diversity of their students is widely recognised as a crucial element of quality education (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995) [3, 5]. In contexts such as Odisha, India which is both multilingual and culturally diverse — teacher education needs to extend beyond generic pedagogical training to genuinely address the lived realities of local communities. Odisha alone is home to 62 officially recognised tribal communities and more than 21 languages and dialects, including Odia, Kui, Santali, and Saora (Census of India, 2011; Government of Odisha, 2021, 2022). This rich diversity demands that teachers are prepared not only with sound pedagogical skills but also with the knowledge and sensitivity to draw upon students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds as assets in the classroom (Gay, 2010) [3].

Despite policy guidelines such as the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE, 2009) [8] and the National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) underscoring the importance of inclusive, contextually relevant teacher preparation, the reality often shows a clear gap between policy vision and actual practice (NCERT, 2021). Many secondary teacher education programmes continue to rely on uniform curricula and approaches that fail to adequately reflect the diverse languages, cultures, and knowledge systems of the region (Kumar & Gupta, 2021; Mohanty, 2009) [7]. This neglect limits teachers' capacity to recognise and build on students' home languages and cultural experiences in meaningful ways (Banks, 2009). Culturally

responsive pedagogy calls for acknowledging learners' socio-cultural identities as valuable resources for learning rather than barriers (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995) [3, 5]. However, the extent to which secondary-level pre-service teacher education in Odisha embraces this responsiveness remains insufficiently explored and documented. This paper critically examines how socio-cultural and linguistic responsiveness is understood and operationalised within Odisha's secondary teacher education programmes, identifying enduring gaps and pointing towards possibilities for transformative and locally rooted reform.

Rationale of The Study

In diverse and multilingual societies like India, teacher education must be rooted in local contexts to promote inclusive and equitable learning. Odisha, with over 62 tribal communities and a substantial population speaking tribal and regional languages, presents a compelling case for contextually grounded secondary teacher education (Census of India, 2011; Government of Odisha, 2021). However, despite clear policy articulations in the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE, 2009) [8] and the Education Policy (NEP, 2020) [12], teacher preparation in the state often fails to adequately engage with the linguistic and cultural realities of learners, especially in tribal and rural areas. Existing pre-service teacher education programmes tend to emphasise general pedagogy and theoretical foundations, with limited attention to strategies for addressing cultural discontinuities and linguistic diversity in classrooms (Mohanty, 2006; Panda & Mohanty, 2009) [6, 7, 10]. As a result, future teachers are often

underprepared to manage heterogeneous classrooms and build on learners' socio-cultural experiences, leading to alienation and academic underperformance among students from marginalised backgrounds (Banks *et al.*, 2005; Mohanty, 2009) [2, 7].

This paper, therefore, seeks to address a critical gap in the literature and practice by undertaking a conceptual analysis of how socio-cultural and linguistic responsiveness is framed within Odisha's secondary teacher preparation programmes. It aims to generate insights that can inform curriculum reform, faculty development, and policy implementation for a more inclusive teacher education system that reflects and respects the diversity of Odisha's learners.

Objectives

This study is guided by the following objectives

1. To examine conceptual frameworks that inform socio-cultural and linguistic responsiveness in teacher education.
2. To analyse the extent to which secondary teacher education programmes in Odisha incorporate these frameworks into policy and practice.
3. To identify key challenges and gaps in implementing responsive approaches.
4. To propose actionable measures at the policy and institutional levels to strengthen responsiveness in teacher preparation.

Review of Related Literature

a. International Views on Teaching for Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Across different countries, there is growing agreement that education should reflect and respect the cultural and linguistic identities of students. In the 1990s, Ladson-Billings put forward the idea that teaching methods should build on what learners already know from their communities and cultural backgrounds. Later, Gay stressed that teachers need to be aware of the varied ways students learn and communicate, so that lessons connect with students' lives and experiences.

Studies from different parts of the world have found that when teachers are trained to recognise and value cultural diversity, students feel more included and are likely to do better in school. Banks and his team argued that new teachers should not only know their subject but should also know how to adapt lessons for students from different cultural groups. In practice, this means teachers should be able to examine their own attitudes and choose teaching methods that make sense for all students in the classroom.

b. Research in India on Multilingual and Inclusive Education

In India, the mix of cultures and languages is vast, yet many children from tribal or minority language groups still face challenges at school. Mohanty and Panda have written about how schools that ignore home languages often make students feel left out, which can lead to poor results or students dropping out altogether. Scholars like Skutnabb-Kangas have also shown how using only dominant languages in schools can push local languages aside and disadvantage many learners.

To address this, the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (2009) [8] pointed out that teachers

should be trained to work well in multilingual and multicultural settings. It encourages programmes to include learning about local languages and community practices. The National Education Policy (2020) [12] added to this by saying that children's home languages should be used as far as possible in early education so they understand better and build stronger foundations for learning.

Despite these good ideas in policy, research shows that most teacher training courses still focus more on general teaching skills and less on how to deal with cultural and linguistic differences in the classroom. Many teacher educators have not had enough training in this area, and student teachers often do not get a chance to work in schools where they might face real-world diversity.

c. Odisha-Specific Context and Insights

Odisha stands out because of its large tribal population and its many languages and cultures. Some projects, like Multilingual Education in a few districts, have tried to help students learn in their own languages. But these efforts are small and not yet part of regular teacher training.

Research by Nayak and Mohanty has shown that tribal students in Odisha often find it hard to succeed because teaching rarely uses their language or local ways of learning. While training institutes know this diversity exists, they do not yet provide enough practice or ideas on how to teach in these contexts. Most student teachers do their practice teaching in towns rather than villages or tribal areas, so they are not prepared for the reality they might face later.

There is also not enough learning material in tribal languages or that includes local stories and knowledge. This means that students' cultural strengths are not recognised or built upon in class. Without changes in how teachers are trained, placed for practice, and given resources, there is a risk that teaching in Odisha will continue to miss the mark for many students.

In summary, research from around the world and within India shows that recognising students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds can make schooling more fair and more effective. But putting this into practice is still a major challenge, especially in states like Odisha. Teacher education needs to catch up so that new teachers are well prepared to teach in classrooms where students come from many different backgrounds and speak many different languages.

Methodology

This study adopts a conceptual and analytical research design, focusing on the examination of theories, policies, and curriculum frameworks related to socio-cultural and linguistic responsiveness in secondary teacher preparation. As the aim of the paper is to understand and critique existing structures rather than collect primary empirical data, the methodology is grounded in qualitative analysis of secondary sources. The data for this analysis were drawn from official national and state-level policy documents, curriculum outlines of pre-service teacher education programmes in Odisha, government reports, institutional guidelines, and relevant academic literature. Particular attention was given to curriculum frameworks, course structures, practicum components, and institutional practices of teacher education colleges operating in Odisha. A

thematic approach was used to identify recurring patterns, gaps, and strengths in how socio-cultural and linguistic responsiveness is conceptualised and addressed. The focus remained on how theoretical ideals are translated into curriculum and practice, and whether they adequately prepare teachers to work in diverse and multilingual classrooms. This approach enables a deeper understanding of the systemic and conceptual issues involved, allowing for informed recommendations aimed at improving teacher preparation in ways that are contextually and culturally relevant for the state of Odisha.

Conceptual Framework

This paper draws on two key theoretical perspectives to understand and analyse how socio-cultural and linguistic responsiveness can be meaningfully integrated into secondary teacher education programmes in Odisha: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) and Multilingual Education with Linguistic Responsiveness. These concepts together highlight how teacher preparation must move beyond general pedagogy to reflect the diverse cultural and linguistic realities of learners in the state.

a. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy focuses on the idea that students' cultural identities, values, and community knowledge should be recognised as assets in the teaching-learning process. Rather than treating students as passive recipients of uniform knowledge, this approach encourages teachers to connect classroom learning to students' own experiences and ways of life. Gay (2010) ^[3] explains that a culturally responsive teacher develops three key qualities: understanding students' cultural backgrounds, using culturally relevant materials and examples, and ensuring that all cultures are respected equally in the classroom.

In the context of Odisha, which is home to a large tribal population with distinct cultural practices and local knowledge systems, CRP requires teacher trainees to move beyond textbook content. They must learn how to integrate local stories, community histories, and traditional knowledge into classroom discussions to make learning more engaging and relatable. This approach also challenges hidden biases and stereotypes that sometimes shape mainstream teaching methods, especially when working with children from marginalised communities.

b. Linguistic Responsiveness in Multilingual Education

Odisha's classrooms often bring together students who speak a variety of languages, including Odia, tribal languages such as Santali, Kui, and Saora, and regional dialects. Many children face difficulties when the medium of instruction does not match their home language. Linguistic Responsiveness means that teachers acknowledge the value of students' mother tongues and know how to use them as bridges for learning new concepts.

Scholars like Mohanty (2009) ^[7] emphasise that using students' home languages in the classroom, alongside the language of instruction, helps children better grasp new ideas and stay connected to their cultural roots. Practical strategies include using bilingual teaching aids, encouraging code-switching where needed, and adapting classroom

activities to allow learners to express ideas in their own language before transitioning to Odia or English. This approach helps prevent feelings of alienation and boosts students' confidence and participation.

c. Application in Teacher Preparation

Combining these two frameworks, the study highlights the need for teacher education programmes to equip future teachers with practical tools and reflective skills for teaching in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. This means:

Curriculum Content: The pre-service curriculum should include clear modules on cultural diversity, local community knowledge, and multilingual teaching methods, rather than only theoretical overviews.

Field Experience: Student teachers should have placements in schools serving tribal and multilingual communities, so they gain hands-on experience in applying responsive approaches.

Faculty Capacity: Teacher educators must themselves be prepared to demonstrate and mentor culturally and linguistically responsive practices so that trainees can see these ideas in action.

Together, these elements form the conceptual foundation for analysing the extent to which Odisha's teacher preparation programmes promote equity, inclusivity, and cultural and linguistic relevance in practice.

Socio-Cultural and Linguistic Landscape of Odisha

Odisha is one of India's most culturally diverse states, known for its rich heritage and significant tribal population. According to recent data, Scheduled Tribes constitute over 22% of the state's total population. Odisha is home to 62 officially recognised tribal communities, including the Santal, Kondh, Saora, Juang, and Bonda, each with its distinct language, customs, and traditional knowledge systems. Alongside Odia, the official state language, many communities speak tribal languages such as Kui, Ho, Santali, Mundari, and Saora, and numerous dialects are prevalent across different regions.

These communities possess unique oral traditions, folklore, indigenous ecological knowledge, and value systems that shape children's learning contexts long before they enter school. However, the dominant medium of instruction in schools is often Odia or English, which may differ significantly from the home language of many students, especially those from remote tribal areas. As a result, young learners frequently face both linguistic and cultural discontinuities when they transition from their community environments to formal schooling.

Additionally, traditional ways of learning in these communities emphasise observation, storytelling, and community-based knowledge-sharing. These culturally rooted pedagogies often find little space in mainstream classrooms, which tend to rely on standardised textbooks and teacher-centred approaches. The socio-cultural diversity and multilingual reality of Odisha therefore present both a

challenge and an opportunity: teacher education must prepare future teachers to value and integrate this wealth of cultural and linguistic resources into their teaching practice, thereby promoting more inclusive and meaningful learning.

Analysis of Current Practices in Secondary Teacher Preparation

An examination of current practices in secondary teacher education in Odisha reveals that significant gaps persist between policy commitments and what actually happens in teacher preparation institutions. While national frameworks such as the NCFTE (2009) ^[8] and the NEP (2020) ^[12] stress the need for context-sensitive and inclusive teacher education, these principles are not yet fully embedded in everyday practice.

Firstly, the curriculum in many pre-service teacher education programmes still tends to emphasise general pedagogical theories and subject knowledge rather than practical strategies for addressing the specific socio-cultural and linguistic diversity found in Odisha's classrooms. Modules that address diversity and inclusion often exist on paper but are treated as peripheral or theoretical topics, rather than being integrated into core courses or practicum experiences.

Secondly, opportunities for teacher trainees to gain hands-on experience working in diverse classroom settings are often limited. School placements are frequently concentrated in urban or semi-urban schools, which do not fully reflect the realities of remote tribal or multilingual rural communities. As a result, many trainees complete their teacher preparation without ever having to adapt lesson plans or teaching styles to meet the needs of children who speak different languages or come from distinct cultural backgrounds.

Another concern is the preparedness of teacher educators themselves. Many faculty members receive minimal training in culturally responsive or multilingual pedagogies. Without adequate exposure and professional development, it becomes challenging for them to model or mentor these approaches effectively for teacher trainees.

Furthermore, teaching-learning materials continue to be largely standardised. Textbooks and classroom resources are usually developed in Odia or English with limited content that draws on local stories, community histories, or indigenous knowledge. This lack of contextualised material makes it harder for trainee teachers to learn how to connect the curriculum with the students' lived realities. Taken together, these gaps suggest that the potential of Odisha's teacher preparation system to produce culturally and linguistically responsive teachers remains underutilised. Bridging this gap will require more than policy statements: it calls for a systematic review of curriculum design, stronger partnerships with diverse schools for meaningful practicum experiences, and sustained investment in faculty capacity-building. Only then can secondary teacher education truly reflect the rich cultural and linguistic fabric of Odisha and ensure that future teachers are well-prepared to make learning inclusive and meaningful for every student.

Challenges

Although policy documents and frameworks acknowledge the importance of preparing teachers to respond effectively to socio-cultural and linguistic diversity, several persistent

challenges continue to limit real change within Odisha's secondary teacher education system. One of the most pressing issues is that the curriculum offered in many teacher education institutions remains largely generalised and theoretical, with limited integration of content that directly reflects the realities of Odisha's tribal and multilingual communities. This means that future teachers often do not develop the skills needed to draw upon local cultures, oral traditions, or community knowledge as teaching resources. Another challenge is the lack of practical exposure to diverse classroom settings. Trainees are often placed in urban or easily accessible schools where linguistic diversity may be minimal, while remote schools — where students may speak tribal languages or dialects at home — are seldom used for practicum placements. This gap leaves many new teachers underprepared to manage real-life situations that require flexible, multilingual strategies.

Equally important is the issue of faculty preparedness. Teacher educators themselves often have limited training in culturally responsive methods and multilingual education practices. Without opportunities for professional development or exposure to innovative teaching approaches, they may not be able to model inclusive strategies for student-teachers. Teaching-learning materials pose another barrier. Standard textbooks and resources are rarely adapted to local contexts; they are usually produced in Odia or English, with little space for content that validates students' home languages, folk stories, or indigenous knowledge systems. This lack of relevant resources reinforces the disconnect between students' lived experiences and school learning.

Attitudinal barriers within institutions also play a role. There can be a deeply rooted belief that local dialects or tribal languages are obstacles rather than assets in the classroom. Such mindsets limit the motivation to explore mother tongue-based or bilingual teaching strategies, despite research showing their benefits. Community engagement is another area that remains weak. Pre-service teacher education rarely includes systematic opportunities for trainees to work closely with local families, elders, or community knowledge holders. As a result, valuable cultural insights that could enrich teaching often go untapped. Infrastructure challenges in remote areas further compound the problem. When trainees are sent to rural schools, they frequently encounter inadequate facilities, multi-grade classrooms, or lack of basic teaching aids, making it difficult to practise innovative methods even when they are aware of them.

Finally, there is a broader institutional challenge of translating policy intent into practice. Although national and state-level frameworks promote inclusivity, many institutions lack clear structures, funding, or accountability to support curriculum renewal, resource development, or faculty training in this area. Without systematic support and incentives, teacher education providers may continue with traditional approaches that do not reflect Odisha's rich socio-cultural and linguistic diversity. Together, these challenges show that meaningful reform will require coordinated efforts across curriculum design, practicum planning, faculty development, community partnerships, and resource creation to build a more responsive and contextually relevant system of secondary teacher preparation.

Recommendations

Addressing the gaps in socio-cultural and linguistic responsiveness within Odisha's secondary teacher education system calls for a multi-pronged approach that goes beyond policy declarations and focuses on practical, context-sensitive strategies. First, the curriculum in pre-service teacher education must be revised to include well-defined modules that focus on local cultural contexts, tribal knowledge systems, and multilingual classroom practices. This means moving from generic discussions of diversity to courses that equip future teachers with concrete skills for adapting lessons to the realities of the communities they will serve.

Second, practicum placements should be planned in a way that ensures trainees gain hands-on experience in schools that represent the full socio-cultural and linguistic spectrum of the state. Strengthening partnerships between teacher education institutions and schools in tribal and remote areas can help expose trainees to real classroom dynamics, local languages, and community interactions that they might otherwise miss. Faculty development must also be prioritised. Teacher educators should have regular opportunities for professional training in culturally responsive pedagogy, mother tongue-based teaching methods, and community engagement. Workshops, peer-learning forums, and exposure visits to schools that have successfully integrated local knowledge and multilingual approaches could be valuable steps in this direction.

It is equally important to develop and make available teaching-learning materials that reflect local cultures and languages. Institutions can collaborate with local scholars, community elders, and storytellers to create supplementary resources, including folk tales, oral histories, and visual aids that resonate with students' backgrounds. Encouraging teacher trainees to create and use such materials during their practice teaching will build their confidence and resourcefulness.

Additionally, teacher preparation programmes should foster stronger linkages with communities. This could include structured activities where trainees interact with parents, village leaders, and local knowledge holders to better understand students' home contexts. Such engagement can also help build trust and a sense of shared responsibility between schools and communities. Infrastructure in remote schools must also be strengthened so that when trainees are placed there, they have access to basic teaching resources that enable them to implement inclusive methods effectively.

At an institutional level, clearer monitoring and support mechanisms are needed to ensure that policies promoting inclusion are not just documented but actively practiced. Colleges should be encouraged to innovate and rewarded for designing and implementing context-specific approaches. Lastly, developing a culture of reflection among student-teachers is vital. Incorporating reflective assignments, peer discussions, and case studies of successful culturally responsive teaching can help trainees internalise these ideas as an integral part of their professional identity rather than as an optional add-on.

Collectively, these recommendations highlight that enhancing socio-cultural and linguistic responsiveness in

Odisha's teacher preparation system requires coordinated effort — from curriculum designers and faculty to local communities and policymakers — to truly make classrooms inclusive and meaningful for all learners.

Conclusion

Preparing future teachers to respond effectively to the socio-cultural and linguistic diversity of classrooms is no longer an option but a necessity, especially in a state like Odisha, where multiple tribal communities, rich local traditions, and a tapestry of languages shape the learning context. This conceptual analysis has highlighted how existing secondary teacher preparation programmes, despite being guided by progressive policy frameworks, continue to operate within generic structures that often overlook the lived realities of learners from diverse backgrounds.

The persistent gaps from insufficiently localised curricula and limited practicum exposure in tribal settings to the lack of culturally relevant teaching materials and underprepared faculty show that much work remains to be done to bridge the disconnect between policy and practice. However, this gap also presents an opportunity to reimagine teacher education in ways that value learners' identities, mother tongues, and community knowledge as strengths rather than obstacles.

By embedding socio-cultural and linguistic responsiveness into every stage of teacher preparation — curriculum design, field engagement, faculty development, resource creation, and community partnerships Odisha can set an example for contextually grounded, inclusive teacher education. Ultimately, a system that genuinely prepares teachers to recognise and build upon the cultural and linguistic assets of their students will not only foster better learning outcomes but also strengthen the social fabric by making schools spaces of affirmation, respect, and meaningful connection for all children.

References

1. Banks JA. *Cultural Diversity and Education* (6th ed.). Routledge, 2016.
2. Banks JA, Cochran-Smith M, Moll L, Richert A, Zeichner K, LePage P. *et al.* Teaching diverse learners. In L. Darling-Hammond & J. Bransford (Eds.), *Preparing Teachers for a Changing World* Jossey-Bass, 2005, 232–274.
3. Gay G. *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice* (2nd ed.). Teachers College Press, 2010.
4. Heugh K. Literacy and bi/multilingual education in Africa: Recovering collective memory and experience. In A. Mohanty, M. Panda, R. Phillipson, & T. Skutnabb-Kangas (Eds.), *Multilingual Education for Social Justice: Globalising the Local* Orient BlackSwan, 2009, 103–124.
5. Ladson-Billings G. Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 1995;32(3):465–491. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312032003465>
6. Mohanty AK. Multilingualism of the unequals and predicaments of education in India: Mother tongue or other tongue? In O. García, T. Skutnabb-Kangas, & M.

- Torres-Guzmán (Eds.), *Imagining Multilingual Schools: Languages in Education and Glocalization* Multilingual Matters, 2006, 262–283.
7. Mohanty AK. Multilingual education in India. In A. Mohanty, M. Panda, R. Phillipson, & T. Skutnabb-Kangas (Eds.), *Multilingual Education for Social Justice: Globalising the Local* Orient BlackSwan, 2009, 159–176.
 8. National Council for Teacher Education. *National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education Towards Preparing Professional and Humane Teacher*. NCTE, 2009.
 9. Nayak BK, Mohanty PK. Socio-cultural factors in education: A study of tribal students in Odisha. *Journal of Indian Education*, 2018;44(1):59–68.
 10. Panda M, Mohanty AK. Language matters, so does culture: Beyond the rhetoric of culture in multilingual education. In A. Mohanty M. Panda R. Phillipson T. Skutnabb-Kangas (Eds.), *Multilingual Education for Social Justice: Globalising the Local*, 2009, 295–312. Orient BlackSwan.
 11. Skutnabb-Kangas T. *Linguistic Genocide in Education – or Worldwide Diversity Human Rights?* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000.
 12. National Education Policy. *National Education Policy* Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020.
 13. UNESCO. *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives*. UNESCO Publishing, 2017.