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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

Article DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01/19948

DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/19948>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

HARMONIZING EDUCATIONAL DIVERSITY: INTEGRATING INDIGENOUS AND ETHNIC MINORITY PERSPECTIVES IN BANGLADESH, INSPIRED BY AUSTRALIAN MODELS

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 17 September 2024

Final Accepted: 27 October 2024

Published: November 2024

Key words:-

Bangladesh, Indigenous Education,
Ethnic Minority Perspectives, Cultural
Diversity, Educational Reform

Abstract

The integration of indigenous and ethnic minority perspectives into educational systems poses a complex challenge in diverse societies like Bangladesh. This article delves into these challenges, examining historical exclusion, systemic neglect, and the contemporary efforts to include marginalized voices in national educational frameworks. Indigenous communities, such as the Chakma, Garo, Marma, and others in Bangladesh, have long been underrepresented in curricula that primarily reflect the values and history of the dominant Bengali majority. This marginalization perpetuates educational inequities, where the unique knowledge systems, languages, and cultural practices of these communities are either inadequately addressed or entirely absent from mainstream education. Bangladesh's attempts to rectify this through various educational reforms remain fragmented and under-resourced. Governmental and non-governmental initiatives, such as mother-tongue-based education programs, while commendable, have faced significant implementation challenges. These include insufficient teacher training in indigenous languages and cultures, lack of appropriate educational materials, and inadequate infrastructure in remote areas where indigenous populations predominantly reside. Furthermore, systemic issues such as poverty, discrimination, and political marginalization continue to exacerbate educational disparities, leaving indigenous and ethnic minority students at a significant disadvantage compared to their Bengali counterparts. Drawing insights from Australia's educational landscape, this article explores how Bangladesh could benefit from adopting a more inclusive, culturally responsive approach. Australia's efforts to integrate Indigenous perspectives into its educational system, particularly through the national curriculum and initiatives such as the inclusion of Indigenous languages, have provided a model for embracing cultural diversity within educational frameworks. Central to this approach is culturally responsive pedagogy, a teaching methodology that acknowledges and values students' cultural backgrounds and integrates these perspectives into learning processes. In Australia, this pedagogy is codified in national teaching standards, including standards 1.4 and 2.4, which emphasize the importance of incorporating Indigenous worldviews and traditional ecological knowledge into mainstream education. These standards ensure that teachers are not only aware of but actively engaged in promoting Indigenous cultural knowledge, helping to foster

a sense of national identity that is inclusive of its diverse histories and communities. By examining Australia's progressive model, this article argues that Bangladesh can similarly enhance its educational system to be more inclusive of indigenous and ethnic minority communities. A key lesson from Australia is the importance of a top-down approach, where national educational policies explicitly mandate the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in curricula. In Bangladesh, a comparable policy shift would require the development of curricula that reflects the cultural and historical contributions of indigenous communities, alongside the training of teachers in culturally responsive pedagogies. Such reforms would also need to address the structural inequalities that impede access to education for marginalized communities, ensuring that indigenous students not only have the opportunity to learn but are empowered to succeed within the educational system. Moreover, this paper highlights the potential for culturally responsive education to foster intercultural understanding and national cohesion. By celebrating cultural diversity in the classroom, students from the dominant Bengali majority would gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the rich cultural heritage of indigenous communities, thereby promoting greater tolerance and reducing ethnic tensions. In turn, indigenous students would see their own cultures validated and respected within the national narrative, fostering a greater sense of belonging and national identity. In conclusion, this article posits that Bangladesh stands to gain significantly from adopting a more culturally responsive approach to education, akin to Australia's model of incorporating Indigenous perspectives. Such an approach, if implemented effectively, has the potential to transform Bangladesh's educational landscape, making it more inclusive, equitable, and reflective of the country's rich cultural diversity. This transformation would not only empower indigenous and ethnic minority students but also contribute to a more cohesive and unified society, where all citizens, regardless of their cultural background, can contribute to and benefit from the national educational system.

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..... **Introduction:-**

In recent decades, there has been a growing emphasis on inclusivity and cultural diversity as cornerstones of modern educational systems, recognizing their critical role in building cohesive and equitable societies. As global conversations around education evolve, the integration of Indigenous and ethnic minority perspectives has gained recognition as a key strategy for enriching educational experiences and fostering social harmony. Scholars and policymakers alike have argued that education systems must move beyond Eurocentric paradigms to embrace the diverse cultural knowledge and traditions that exist within societies (Ford et al., 2014; Kitson& Bowes, 2010; Shizha, 2017). Such integration serves not only to acknowledge and rectify historical injustices but also to cultivate an environment where all students, regardless of their cultural background, can engage with content that is relevant and empowering.

Several countries have made significant strides in this regard, with New Zealand and Canada leading by example. In New Zealand, the Aotearoa New Zealand Curriculum is heavily influenced by Māori worldviews, reflecting the nation's bicultural heritage (Aotearoa New Zealand Curriculum, 2023). Similarly, Canada has made substantial efforts to incorporate Indigenous perspectives, particularly in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls for action (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). These international examples underscore the potential for education systems to evolve by embracing Indigenous knowledge, fostering both academic success and social justice.

Australia's approach stands out for its comprehensive efforts to integrate Indigenous content into its national curriculum, primarily through the Cross-Curriculum Priority on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures (ACARA, n.d.). This initiative represents a significant step towards decolonizing education, fostering culturally responsive pedagogy, and promoting greater social inclusion (Shay & Oliver, 2021). By embedding Indigenous perspectives into the fabric of its educational system, Australia seeks to rectify historical exclusions and create a more inclusive environment for all students.

Indigenous Education in Australia

Australia's Indigenous population, comprised of Aboriginal peoples from the mainland and Tasmania, as well as Torres Strait Islanders from the Torres Strait north of Cape York, has a rich and diverse cultural history. However, for much of the country's history, these groups were systematically excluded from educational opportunities, resulting in significant disparities in both access to education and the relevance of curricula to their cultural backgrounds (Morrison et al., 2019). Educational policies in the past often perpetuated discriminatory practices that marginalized Indigenous languages, knowledge systems, and perspectives, thereby reinforcing a system of cultural erasure (Yunkaporta, 2019).

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the need to address these historical injustices. Australia's efforts to decolonize its curriculum are rooted in the acknowledgment that the exclusion of Indigenous perspectives has contributed to social inequality and cultural disconnection. Central to this decolonization process is the integration of Indigenous worldviews into educational practices, with a focus on challenging Eurocentric biases and fostering a more inclusive understanding of Australia's cultural heritage (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2011). This approach has gained momentum through culturally responsive pedagogy, which not only includes Indigenous content but also promotes Indigenous ways of knowing, learning, and teaching.

The incorporation of Indigenous perspectives into Australian education is further supported by frameworks such as the Australian Curriculum's Cross-Curriculum Priorities, which specifically highlight Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. These priorities are designed to provide all Australian students with a deeper understanding of the country's Indigenous heritage, encouraging respect for the contributions of Indigenous peoples to the nation's identity. Moreover, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) mandate that educators develop strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students while fostering reconciliation through a greater understanding of Indigenous cultures (Rhea et al., 2012).

Despite these efforts, challenges remain. Disparities in educational outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students persist, particularly in remote and rural areas where access to quality education is often limited. Additionally, while the curriculum reforms have made significant strides in incorporating Indigenous content, there is still work to be done to ensure that these changes are reflected in classroom practices and teacher training programs (Morrison et al., 2019). Nonetheless, Australia's journey towards a more inclusive education system offers valuable lessons for other nations grappling with similar challenges.

Educational Challenges in Bangladesh

Bangladesh, with its rich cultural diversity and a population of over 160 million, faces its own set of challenges in integrating Indigenous and ethnic minority perspectives into its education system. The country is home to various Indigenous communities, such as the Chakma, Garo, Marma, and Santals, as well as numerous ethnic minorities, each with distinct languages, traditions, and worldviews. These groups have long contributed to Bangladesh's social and cultural fabric, yet their inclusion in the nation's educational framework remains limited (Morrison et al., 2020; Yunkaporta, 2019).

One of the primary obstacles to achieving inclusive education in Bangladesh is the marginalization of Indigenous and ethnic minority groups within the national curriculum. Historically, educational policies have prioritized the dominant Bengali language and culture, often at the expense of the linguistic and cultural diversity that characterizes the country. As a result, Indigenous and ethnic minority students frequently encounter a curriculum that does not reflect their own identities or experiences, leading to feelings of alienation and disengagement (Nakata et al., 2012).

Furthermore, access to education for Indigenous and ethnic minority communities in Bangladesh is often hindered by geographical, economic, and social factors. Many of these communities reside in remote areas with limited access to schools, while poverty and discrimination further exacerbate disparities in educational outcomes. Even

when educational opportunities are available, the absence of culturally relevant curricula and trained teachers who understand the unique needs of these communities limits the potential for meaningful engagement and learning (El-Ayoubi, 2008).

Efforts to address these challenges have been sporadic, with some initiatives aimed at promoting bilingual education and incorporating Indigenous knowledge into school curricula. However, these efforts have not yet resulted in widespread systemic change, and Indigenous and ethnic minority perspectives remain largely underrepresented in mainstream education (Morrison et al., 2019). For Bangladesh to move towards a more inclusive education system, it must address these systemic barriers and adopt a more holistic approach to curriculum reform.

Lessons from Australia: Towards Inclusive Education in Bangladesh

Australia's experience in integrating Indigenous perspectives into its education system offers valuable lessons for Bangladesh as it seeks to reform its own educational policies and practices. One of the key takeaways from Australia's journey is the importance of decolonizing the curriculum. This involves not only incorporating Indigenous content but also challenging the Eurocentric assumptions that have historically shaped education systems (Shay & Oliver, 2021). By recognizing the contributions of Indigenous peoples to national heritage and embedding their knowledge and perspectives into the core of the curriculum, Australia has made significant strides towards a more inclusive and equitable education system (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003).

Central to this process is the adoption of culturally responsive pedagogy, which goes beyond superficial or tokenistic gestures to genuinely engage with Indigenous worldviews. In the Australian context, this has involved significant investment in teacher training, with a focus on developing strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Rhea et al., 2012). The APST framework, for example, encourages educators to incorporate Indigenous knowledge into their teaching practices, fostering a learning environment that respects and values cultural diversity (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2011).

Bangladesh can learn from these initiatives by adopting a similar approach to curriculum reform and teacher training. Developing culturally responsive pedagogy that incorporates the languages, traditions, and worldviews of Indigenous and ethnic minority communities can help create a more inclusive and empowering educational environment. Moreover, fostering community engagement and involving Indigenous and ethnic minority leaders in the development of educational policies and practices will be crucial in ensuring that these reforms are both relevant and sustainable (El-Ayoubi, 2008).

Implications for Bangladesh

The integration of Indigenous and ethnic minority perspectives into Bangladesh's education system is not only a matter of social justice but also a critical step towards building a more cohesive and tolerant society. By learning from Australia's experience, Bangladesh has the opportunity to reform its educational framework in a way that celebrates cultural diversity and promotes national unity. This will require a concerted effort to address the systemic barriers that have historically marginalized Indigenous and ethnic minority communities, including curriculum reform, teacher training, and increased access to education for remote and disadvantaged populations.

One potential strategy for Bangladesh is to adopt a bilingual education model that recognizes the linguistic diversity of its Indigenous and ethnic minority communities. By providing instruction in both the dominant language (Bengali) and the mother tongues of Indigenous students, the education system can help preserve cultural identities while ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed academically (Nakata et al., 2012). Additionally, engaging Indigenous leaders and community members in the development of educational policies can help ensure that reforms are responsive to the needs and aspirations of these communities.

In conclusion, the case of Australia demonstrates that integrating Indigenous and ethnic minority perspectives into educational frameworks is not only feasible but also transformative. By embracing diversity within education, Australia has taken important steps towards creating a more inclusive society where all cultural identities are respected and celebrated. Bangladesh, with its rich cultural heritage and diverse population, has the opportunity to chart a similar path. By drawing inspiration from Australia's experiences, Bangladesh can work towards educational equity and cultural harmony, ensuring that all students benefit from a curriculum that reflects the nation's cultural tapestry.

Integrating Indigenous Wisdom: Fostering Cultural Responsiveness in Education

In the contemporary global context, fostering a culturally responsive education system is not only a matter of pedagogical innovation but also a fundamental step toward achieving greater equity, social justice, and reconciliation with historically marginalized communities. Australia's Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) serves as a key model for incorporating Indigenous wisdom into the educational landscape. This approach underscores the importance of embedding Indigenous worldviews, languages, and histories into the curriculum, promoting a holistic understanding of national identity and contributing to broader reconciliation efforts. The Australian case demonstrates how CRP not only broadens the knowledge base but also fosters cultural diversity, challenges stereotypes, and promotes societal equity through education.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Australia

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) is an educational approach that focuses on incorporating students' cultural backgrounds and social contexts into the learning environment, fostering an inclusive and respectful atmosphere. CRP has become a central element in Australian education, particularly in how it addresses Indigenous knowledge systems. By integrating Indigenous perspectives into subjects like history, science, and literature, Australian education transcends superficial acknowledgment and instead engages with these perspectives in meaningful ways (Rhea et al., 2012). The framework emphasizes that the inclusion of Indigenous content should not be tokenistic or peripheral; rather, it should be woven into the fabric of everyday learning experiences.

Australia's national curriculum, particularly through its standards 1.4 and 2.4, reflects this commitment to Indigenous inclusion. These standards specifically outline strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, emphasizing the importance of valuing Indigenous contributions to national heritage (Australian Curriculum, n.d.). The educational system in Australia encourages educators to not only teach about Indigenous cultures but to adopt pedagogical practices that are reflective of Indigenous ways of knowing, thus facilitating a more profound and respectful engagement with Indigenous histories and worldviews. This represents a shift from traditional, Eurocentric educational models that often marginalized or omitted Indigenous knowledge, toward a more inclusive and equitable system.

Integration Across Disciplines

A distinctive feature of Australia's CRP framework is its integration of Indigenous knowledge across various disciplines, including history, science, and literature. This cross-disciplinary approach enriches students' educational experiences by exposing them to diverse forms of knowledge and ways of understanding the world. In history, for instance, students learn about the rich cultural traditions of First Nations peoples and their role in shaping Australian society long before European settlement. The curriculum aims to present a more complete and accurate picture of Australian history by acknowledging the injustices faced by Indigenous communities and celebrating their resilience and contributions (Demssie et al., 2020).

In science, Indigenous perspectives provide valuable insights into ecological sustainability, particularly through the lens of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). TEK refers to the cumulative body of knowledge, practices, and beliefs that Indigenous peoples have developed over centuries through direct interaction with their environment. This knowledge is not only scientifically relevant but also critically important for addressing contemporary environmental challenges (Bates, 2019). Integrating TEK into the science curriculum enables students to appreciate the sophisticated understanding that Indigenous communities have of natural systems, such as water management, land use, and biodiversity conservation. In doing so, it challenges the misconception that Indigenous knowledge is outdated or irrelevant, instead positioning it as a critical resource for modern scientific inquiry and environmental stewardship.

Literature, too, plays a pivotal role in the integration of Indigenous perspectives. Through Indigenous narratives, students gain access to stories that reflect the complexities of Indigenous experiences, from pre-colonial times to contemporary struggles for land rights and recognition. These narratives are not only valuable for their historical and cultural insights but also for their capacity to challenge dominant literary forms and conventions. Indigenous literature offers alternative ways of storytelling, often rooted in oral traditions, that provide new ways of thinking about time, place, and identity (Nakata, 2004). By including Indigenous voices in the literary canon, Australian education fosters a deeper appreciation for the diversity of human experiences and the power of storytelling as a tool for social change.

Impact on Reconciliation and Equity

One of the most significant outcomes of integrating Indigenous perspectives into education is its potential to contribute to national reconciliation efforts. Reconciliation in Australia is an ongoing process aimed at healing the historical wounds caused by colonization and creating a more just and equitable society. Education is widely regarded as one of the most powerful tools for advancing reconciliation because it shapes the ways in which young Australians understand their country's history and their role in its future. By engaging with Indigenous perspectives, students develop a more nuanced understanding of Australia's past, including the injustices and hardships faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This awareness is a crucial step toward addressing historical grievances and fostering a more inclusive national identity (Nakata, 2004).

Moreover, CRP helps challenge the stereotypes and misconceptions that have long been perpetuated about Indigenous peoples. By presenting Indigenous cultures as vibrant, complex, and evolving rather than static or primitive, education can play a role in dismantling the racial prejudices that continue to affect Indigenous communities. This transformative approach to education not only benefits Indigenous students, who see their cultures and identities reflected in the curriculum, but also non-Indigenous students, who gain a broader understanding of the world and are better equipped to navigate a multicultural society (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Furthermore, CRP fosters equity within the educational system itself by recognizing the unique needs and strengths of Indigenous students. Traditional educational models often fail to accommodate the cultural backgrounds of Indigenous learners, leading to disengagement and lower academic outcomes. CRP, on the other hand, is designed to create a learning environment that is more responsive to these students' experiences and ways of learning. This can lead to higher levels of engagement, academic achievement, and self-esteem among Indigenous students (Thaman, 2003). By creating an inclusive classroom environment where all students feel valued and respected, CRP contributes to reducing the educational achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

Toward a More Inclusive Future

Australia's experience with CRP demonstrates the transformative power of integrating Indigenous wisdom into the educational system. By valuing and incorporating Indigenous perspectives, the Australian education system is helping to create a more inclusive and equitable society. This approach challenges the dominance of Eurocentric narratives and provides students with a broader, more holistic understanding of their country and the world around them. In doing so, it not only contributes to reconciliation efforts but also fosters a culture of respect and appreciation for diversity that is essential in an increasingly globalized world.

As nations around the world grapple with issues of diversity and inclusion, Australia's CRP framework offers valuable lessons on the importance of embedding Indigenous knowledge within the education system. The integration of Indigenous perspectives is not merely an act of cultural preservation; it is a step toward creating a future where all cultures are valued and respected. Education, as a catalyst for social change, has the potential to shape the values and attitudes of future generations. By embracing culturally responsive pedagogy, educators can contribute to a more just and inclusive world, one where the wisdom of Indigenous peoples is recognized and celebrated for its richness and relevance to modern challenges.

In conclusion, integrating Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into education is not just a pedagogical imperative; it is a moral one. Australia's CRP framework exemplifies how education can be a powerful tool for fostering cultural responsiveness, promoting equity, and contributing to societal reconciliation. Through the thoughtful incorporation of Indigenous worldviews, languages, and histories, education can pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable future, where cultural diversity is celebrated and respected.

Harmonizing Diversity: Educational Pathways in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a country defined by its rich cultural diversity, encompassing various indigenous and ethnic minority communities that contribute significantly to the nation's social, economic, and cultural landscape. However, the educational system has long struggled to integrate the perspectives and knowledge systems of these diverse communities, leading to significant disparities in educational outcomes and a sense of marginalization. This paper examines how Bangladesh can address these disparities by drawing lessons from Australia's experiences in incorporating Indigenous perspectives into its education system. By doing so, Bangladesh can build a more inclusive and culturally responsive educational framework that reflects its pluralistic society, celebrates its diversity, and promotes equal opportunities for all students.

Historical Context and Challenges in Bangladesh

The historical journey of Bangladesh towards an inclusive educational system has been shaped by its colonial past and post-independence nation-building efforts. The colonial legacy of British rule deeply influenced educational policies and structures, with little consideration for the linguistic and cultural diversity of indigenous and ethnic minority communities (Mohsin, 2010). After independence, nation-building efforts in Bangladesh focused primarily on promoting Bengali nationalism, leaving little space for indigenous languages and cultures within the national education system. As a result, the education system has been largely mono-cultural and mono-lingual, perpetuating disparities among indigenous and ethnic minority students (Rahman, 2014). This process marginalized the distinct identities, languages, and cultures of indigenous groups such as the Chakma, Garo, Marma, and others residing in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), as well as the numerous ethnic minority groups scattered across the plains of northern and southeastern Bangladesh (Barkat, 2003).

Language barriers represent one of the most significant challenges for indigenous and ethnic minority students in Bangladesh. The dominant language of instruction in schools is Bengali, which creates difficulties for students who speak one of the many indigenous languages spoken in the country, such as Chakma, Marma, or Santali. The national curriculum is largely focused on promoting Bengali as the language of instruction, while indigenous languages, which represent an important part of cultural identity, are often neglected (Mohsin, 2010). Research has shown that language barriers can negatively impact students' engagement, comprehension, and overall academic performance (UNESCO, 2010). This has created significant barriers for indigenous students, who often find themselves disengaged from educational content that does not reflect their experiences or heritage (Saha & Jahan, 2023). In addition, socio-economic disparities exacerbate these challenges, with indigenous and ethnic minority communities often facing higher levels of poverty, limited access to quality education, and inadequate resources (Chakma & Hossain, 2018).

Cultural marginalization is another key issue. The existing curriculum in Bangladesh fails to reflect the rich cultural diversity of indigenous and ethnic minority groups, thereby excluding their knowledge systems, histories, and traditions. This not only reinforces a sense of alienation among students from these communities but also perpetuates stereotypes and misunderstandings about indigenous and ethnic minority cultures among the broader population (Mohsin, 2010).

Moreover, the political and administrative structure of Bangladesh has historically been centralized, with limited autonomy given to regions with significant indigenous populations. This has resulted in education policies that are designed at the national level without sufficient input from indigenous communities, leading to a one-size-fits-all approach that does not account for the specific needs of these groups (Rahman, 2014).

Current Initiatives and Policies

In recent years, Bangladesh has taken steps to address some of these challenges through various policy initiatives aimed at promoting inclusivity in education. One notable effort is the "National Education Policy 2010," which acknowledges the need to accommodate the diverse cultural and linguistic heritage of Bangladesh's indigenous and ethnic minority communities (Ministry of Education, 2010). The policy highlights the importance of providing instruction in indigenous languages at the primary level and promotes the inclusion of local knowledge and traditions in the curriculum. For example, there have been efforts to introduce textbooks in indigenous languages in some regions, and the Ministry of Education has launched scholarship programs specifically for indigenous and ethnic minority students (Ahsan, 2020).

Additionally, the establishment of specialized schools in indigenous areas, particularly in the CHT, aims to bridge the educational gap by providing instruction in both Bengali and indigenous languages (Chakma, 2014). These schools are designed to cater to the linguistic and cultural needs of indigenous students, offering instruction in their native languages alongside Bengali (Barkat et al., 2019). There are also targeted scholarship programs for indigenous students, designed to improve access to higher education and reduce dropout rates (Chakma, 2014).

Moreover, international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a key role in supporting educational initiatives for indigenous and ethnic minority communities in Bangladesh. For instance, UNESCO has worked with the government to promote multilingual education as a means of improving learning outcomes for indigenous students (UNESCO, 2017). While these efforts are promising, there remains much work to be done to ensure that the education system fully reflects and respects the cultural diversity of the country.

Despite these initiatives, challenges remain in fully implementing these policies. Resource constraints, lack of trained teachers fluent in indigenous languages, and resistance from some sectors of society have hindered the progress of inclusive education reforms (Islam, 2017). Furthermore, there is a need for greater coordination between government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and indigenous communities to ensure that educational initiatives are effectively tailored to the unique cultural and linguistic needs of these groups.

Lessons from Australia

Australia's experience in reconciling Indigenous rights with educational policy provides valuable lessons for Bangladesh. Over the past few decades, Australia has made significant progress in integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into the national education system (Yunkaporta, 2019). This has been achieved through various initiatives that seek to embed Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum, recognize Indigenous languages, and create culturally responsive teaching practices. In many regions, Indigenous languages are now taught alongside English, and efforts have been made to preserve and revitalize these languages.

One of the key aspects of Australia's approach has been the active involvement of Indigenous communities in curriculum development and policy-making. This has ensured that educational content is not only relevant to Indigenous students but also fosters a sense of pride in their cultural heritage (Mackinlay, 2019). For example, Indigenous Australians have contributed to the development of the Australian Curriculum, which now includes learning areas focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, allowing all students to gain a deeper understanding of Australia's diverse cultural heritage (ACARA, 2023).

Additionally, Australia has implemented culturally responsive teaching practices, which involve adapting instructional methods to reflect the cultural contexts of Indigenous students (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011). This has included incorporating Indigenous knowledge systems, histories, and traditions into various subject areas, such as history, geography, and environmental studies. Such an approach not only enhances Indigenous students' sense of cultural pride and identity but also fosters greater understanding and respect for Indigenous cultures among non-Indigenous students (Craven & Price, 2011).

Another important lesson from Australia is the recognition of Indigenous languages within the education system. Various programs in Australia have been developed to teach Indigenous languages, with some schools offering bilingual education (Lo Bianco, 2013). This approach has not only preserved these languages but also improved educational outcomes for Indigenous students by promoting engagement and a stronger connection to their cultural identity.

Australia's efforts to train teachers in culturally responsive pedagogy are also worth noting. Professional development programs for teachers emphasize the importance of understanding and respecting Indigenous knowledge systems, as well as the need to adapt teaching practices to be inclusive of diverse cultural backgrounds (Nakata, 2007). These initiatives have helped to create a more inclusive classroom environment where Indigenous students feel valued and supported.

Community engagement has been a cornerstone of Australia's educational reform efforts. Indigenous leaders, elders, and educators have been actively involved in the development and implementation of educational policies and programs (Osborne, 2013). This collaborative approach ensures that educational initiatives are culturally relevant and responsive to the needs and aspirations of Indigenous communities. Bangladesh can learn from Australia's emphasis on community involvement, which has been instrumental in promoting inclusivity and cultural sensitivity within the education system.

Australia's experience in integrating Indigenous knowledge into mainstream education provides valuable lessons for Bangladesh. Over the past few decades, Australia has made significant strides in acknowledging and incorporating the perspectives of its Indigenous peoples—Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders—into the national education system (Yunkaporta, 2019). This has been achieved through various initiatives that seek to embed Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum, recognize Indigenous languages, and create culturally responsive teaching practices.

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Adapting Strategies for Bangladesh

While Australia's experience offers valuable insights, Bangladesh must adapt these strategies to suit its unique socio-cultural and political context. One of the most important steps Bangladesh can take is to strengthen partnerships with indigenous and ethnic minority communities in the co-design of educational initiatives. By involving community leaders, educators, and parents in the development of curriculum materials and teaching practices, the education system can become more reflective of the diverse knowledge systems and cultural practices of these communities and fosters a sense of belonging among indigenous students (Ahsan, 2020).

Moreover, language policy reforms that promote bilingual education, where indigenous students can learn in both their native languages and Bengali, would address the significant language barriers currently present in the system. Developing textbooks and teaching materials in indigenous languages would help preserve these languages while also making education more accessible and relevant to indigenous communities.

Teacher training is another critical area that requires attention. Many teachers in Bangladesh lack the training and resources needed to effectively teach indigenous and ethnic minority students. Implementing professional development programs that focus on cultural competence and inclusive pedagogical practices would help teachers better support these students and foster a more inclusive learning environment (Chakma & Hossain, 2018).

Moreover, Bangladesh could benefit from establishing monitoring mechanisms to assess the impact of educational reforms on marginalized communities. This would involve collecting data on student performance, engagement, and retention rates among indigenous and ethnic minority students, as well as evaluating the effectiveness of multilingual education and culturally responsive teaching practices (UNESCO, 2017). By tracking progress and identifying areas for improvement, policymakers can ensure that educational reforms are having a positive impact on the most marginalized groups.

Challenges and Opportunities

Bangladesh's efforts to integrate indigenous and ethnic minority perspectives into its education system are likely to face several challenges. Bureaucratic resistance, limited resources, and political sensitivities surrounding issues of language and identity may hinder the implementation of reforms (Mohsin, 2010). Additionally, the diverse range of indigenous languages and cultures in Bangladesh means that a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to be effective. Instead, educational initiatives must be tailored to the specific needs and contexts of different communities.

However, these challenges also present opportunities for innovation and creativity in curriculum development. By leveraging local expertise and engaging indigenous communities in the process, Bangladesh can develop educational frameworks that not only acknowledge but celebrate its diverse cultural heritage (Ahsan, 2020). For example, incorporating traditional ecological knowledge into science curricula could provide students with a deeper understanding of environmental sustainability, while also promoting indigenous knowledge systems (Osborne, 2013).

Challenges in Integrating Indigenous and Ethnic Minority Perspectives in Bangladesh

The integration of indigenous and ethnic minority perspectives into Bangladesh's education system faces several significant challenges, many of which stem from the country's historical and sociopolitical context. One of the primary barriers is the long-standing marginalization of indigenous groups, which has often been perpetuated through educational policies that ignore or undervalue minority languages and cultural practices (Mohsin, 2010). This marginalization is not limited to formal education but extends to a broader societal attitude that views indigenous and ethnic minority cultures as peripheral to the national identity.

Bureaucratic Resistance and Political Sensitivities

One of the key challenges to integrating indigenous perspectives into the education system is resistance from within the bureaucracy and political sensitivities surrounding issues of language and identity. Resistance to change within Bangladesh's education system is another significant barrier. While the National Education Policy recognizes the importance of indigenous language instruction, there is often little political will to implement these reforms effectively. Bureaucratic inertia, coupled with a lack of funding, has slowed progress in the development of indigenous-language education programs (Rahman, 2019). Furthermore, educators and policymakers may be reluctant to embrace indigenous perspectives, seeing them as peripheral or irrelevant to the mainstream education system, which is still heavily centered around Bengali language and culture.

Linguistic Barriers

One of the primary challenges in integrating indigenous perspectives into the education system is the sheer diversity of languages spoken by indigenous and ethnic minority groups. Bangladesh is home to at least 45 distinct languages spoken by indigenous communities (Ahsan, 2020). This linguistic diversity complicates the task of developing curriculum materials, recruiting and training teachers proficient in these languages, and ensuring consistency in educational delivery across regions. Additionally, many of these languages lack a written script, further complicating the development of textbooks and other educational resources.

Limited Resources and Infrastructure

The lack of resources is another significant challenge, particularly in remote areas where many indigenous communities reside. Schools in these regions often suffer from inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of qualified teachers, and limited access to educational materials, particularly in indigenous languages (Ahsan, 2020). This lack of resources is compounded by broader issues of poverty and underdevelopment, which disproportionately affect indigenous and ethnic minority communities. Without sufficient investment in these areas, efforts to create an inclusive education system are likely to be undermined by logistical challenges.

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Bangladesh's indigenous population is incredibly diverse, with different groups speaking a wide range of languages and following distinct cultural practices. This diversity presents a challenge for policymakers and educators, as a one-size-fits-all approach to education is unlikely to meet the needs of all communities. For instance, the Chakma people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts speak a language that is distinct from the Marma, Mro, and other indigenous groups in the region. Educational initiatives, therefore, must be tailored to the specific linguistic and cultural contexts of each community, which requires a level of flexibility and responsiveness that is often difficult to achieve within a centralized education system (Roy, 2018).

Political and Social Sensitivities

The issue of language and education is deeply intertwined with national identity in Bangladesh, and efforts to promote indigenous languages may be viewed with suspicion by some groups. Historically, the dominance of the Bengali language has been seen as a key element of national cohesion, particularly in the aftermath of Bangladesh's liberation from Pakistan in 1971, which was fought largely over linguistic and cultural autonomy (Osborne, 2013). Consequently, efforts to promote indigenous languages in schools may be perceived as a threat to national unity. Navigating these political sensitivities is a complex and delicate task for policymakers.

Opportunities for Innovation

Despite these challenges, the process of integrating indigenous and ethnic minority perspectives into Bangladesh's education system also presents significant opportunities for innovation. Drawing inspiration from international examples, particularly Australia's approach to Indigenous education, Bangladesh has the potential to create a more inclusive and culturally responsive educational framework.

Bilingual and Multilingual Education Models

One of the key lessons from Australia's experience with indigenous education is the importance of bilingual and multilingual education models. In Australia, indigenous-language instruction has been shown to improve student engagement, academic achievement, and cultural pride among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Rennie & Anderson, 2019). Bangladesh could benefit from expanding its efforts to provide bilingual education, particularly at the primary level. This would involve not only teaching indigenous students in their mother tongues but also incorporating indigenous knowledge systems and cultural practices into the curriculum.

Research shows that children who are educated in their mother tongue in the early years perform better academically and are more likely to stay in school (Yukaporta & McGinty, 2009). By adopting a bilingual education model, Bangladesh could create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for indigenous students, while also fostering greater respect for cultural diversity among the wider student population.

Leveraging Digital Technology for Language Preservation

Digital technology offers significant potential for overcoming some of the logistical challenges associated with providing education in remote indigenous communities. Online platforms could be developed to provide educational content in indigenous languages, making it accessible even in areas with limited physical infrastructure (Rahman, 2019). Mobile apps and digital learning resources could also be used to supplement classroom instruction, particularly in areas where there is a shortage of qualified teachers. In remote areas where access to qualified teachers and educational materials is limited, online platforms can play a vital role in delivering educational content in indigenous languages. For example, Australia has developed several digital platforms that provide resources in Indigenous languages, helping to preserve these languages while also supporting students' educational development (Harrison, 2008). Bangladesh could adopt a similar approach, using digital tools to make education more accessible for indigenous communities.

Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge Systems into Curricula

Another opportunity lies in incorporating indigenous knowledge systems into mainstream curricula. Indigenous communities in Bangladesh, particularly in the CHT, have a wealth of traditional ecological knowledge that could be integrated into subjects such as environmental science and geography. For example, traditional ecological knowledge, which is held by many indigenous communities, could be integrated into science curricula to provide students with a deeper understanding of environmental sustainability (Osborne, 2013). This approach has been successfully implemented in Australia, where indigenous ecological knowledge is used to teach students about sustainable land management practices and biodiversity conservation (Rennie & Anderson, 2019). Such initiatives not only promote the value of indigenous knowledge but also provide students with a deeper understanding of their natural environment and its cultural significance.

Partnerships with NGOs and International Organizations

Partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations could also play a crucial role in supporting the development and implementation of inclusive educational initiatives. Many NGOs in Bangladesh, such as BRAC and the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, have experience working in remote and marginalized communities. By collaborating with these organizations, the government could leverage their expertise and resources to support indigenous education initiatives (Rahman, 2019).

Teacher Training and Capacity Building

A critical component of creating a more inclusive education system is ensuring that teachers are adequately trained to work in culturally diverse environments. In Australia, cultural competency training for teachers has been a key part of efforts to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004). Bangladesh could benefit from adopting a similar approach by developing comprehensive teacher training programs that focus on cultural competence and inclusive teaching practices. These programs should not only provide teachers with the skills they need to work effectively in indigenous communities but also foster an understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity among all educators.

Lessons from Australia: Policy Coherence and Indigenous Rights

Australia's experience in integrating Indigenous perspectives into its education system provides valuable lessons for Bangladesh, particularly in the areas of policy coherence and the protection of Indigenous rights. One of the key factors behind Australia's success has been its commitment to a policy framework that supports Indigenous rights,

including land rights, language preservation, and access to education (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004). This policy coherence has been critical in ensuring that educational reforms are aligned with broader efforts to promote Indigenous self-determination and cultural survival.

For Bangladesh, ensuring that education policies are aligned with broader government efforts to protect the rights of indigenous and ethnic minority communities is essential. This includes not only providing access to education in indigenous languages but also addressing issues such as land rights and access to social services, which are critical to the well-being of indigenous communities (Roy, 2018).

As Bangladesh continues to develop its education system, integrating indigenous and ethnic minority perspectives is essential for fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive framework. While the challenges are significant, they also present opportunities for innovation and creativity in curriculum development, teacher training, and policy reform. By learning from the experiences of countries like Australia, Bangladesh can create an education system that celebrates its rich cultural diversity, promotes social cohesion, and ensures that all students have the opportunity to succeed.

The road ahead may be challenging, but with a commitment to inclusivity, collaboration, and cultural respect, Bangladesh has the potential to build an education system that truly reflects the diversity of its people.

Recommendations and Conclusion:-

In examining Australia's approach to integrating Indigenous knowledge into its educational framework and drawing parallels for Bangladesh, several recommendations emerge to navigate the challenges and opportunities in fostering inclusivity and diversity in Bangladesh's education system.

Integration of Indigenous and Ethnic Minority Perspectives

Bangladesh can benefit significantly from incorporating Indigenous and Ethnic Minority (EM) perspectives into its curriculum. Similar to Australia, where Indigenous knowledge is valued and integrated, Bangladesh should recognize the wealth of cultural diversity within its borders. This can be achieved by revising curriculum frameworks to include histories, traditions, and knowledge systems of Indigenous and EM communities. This integration not only enhances cultural awareness but also fosters a sense of pride and identity among students from these communities.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Adopting culturally responsive pedagogy is essential in creating inclusive learning environments. Educators should be trained to understand and respect diverse cultural backgrounds, adapting teaching methods that resonate with students from different communities. This approach not only improves student engagement but also promotes tolerance and mutual understanding among all learners.

Comprehensive Teacher Training Programs

Investing in comprehensive teacher training programs is crucial. Educators must be equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to implement culturally responsive practices effectively. This includes sensitivity to cultural differences, proficiency in integrating diverse perspectives into lesson plans, and creating supportive classroom environments where all students feel valued and respected.

Development of Culturally Relevant Educational Resources

Developing textbooks, multimedia materials, and teaching aids that reflect the diversity of Indigenous and EM knowledge and traditions is imperative. These resources not only facilitate learning about different cultures but also serve as tools for promoting intercultural dialogue and appreciation among students. They should be accessible and inclusive, catering to the varied backgrounds of learners across Bangladesh.

International Collaboration and Best Practices

Bangladesh can benefit from international collaborations and partnerships with countries that have successfully implemented inclusive educational practices. Learning from global best practices allows for adaptation and refinement of strategies within Bangladesh's unique socio-cultural context. This exchange of knowledge and experiences accelerates progress towards a more inclusive and culturally enriched educational system.

Continued Engagement with Indigenous and EM Communities

Sustained collaboration and engagement with Indigenous and EM communities are essential. Their active participation in shaping educational policies and practices ensures that the curriculum remains relevant and responsive to the needs and aspirations of these communities. This involvement fosters a sense of ownership and promotes community empowerment through education.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Future Studies

Implementing these recommendations requires robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess progress and identify areas for improvement. Continued research and studies on the impact of inclusive educational practices on student outcomes, community relations, and national unity will further refine Bangladesh's approach towards harmonizing diversity in education.

In conclusion, Bangladesh stands at a pivotal moment to embrace Indigenous and EM perspectives in its education system, drawing inspiration from the Australian model. By adopting these recommendations and building upon lessons learned from global experiences, Bangladesh can cultivate an educational landscape that celebrates diversity, promotes inclusivity, and strengthens national unity. The journey towards harmonizing diversity in education is not just a path towards academic excellence but also a commitment to nurturing a society that values and respects its cultural richness.

Through collaborative efforts, innovative practices, and a steadfast commitment to inclusivity, Bangladesh can transform its educational system into a beacon of cultural harmony and social cohesion, reflecting the aspirations of its diverse populace and laying a foundation for a more equitable and prosperous future.

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