



Analysis of the Humanist Perspective on Traditional Child Education with Special Reference to the Maram Naga

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Abstract: Education is the process of acquiring knowledge, skills and values that enables an individual to developed holistically and contribute meaningfully to the society. Education is not about academic learning alone but encompasses the physical, intellectual, emotional, moral and social development of a person. Traditional child education is an ingrained system of learning that has been preserved within indigenous communities for generations. Unlike formal education that follows a structured curriculum traditional form of child education is interwoven with daily life, cultural practices and communal experiences. Traditional child education is primarily transmitted orally by elders, parents and skilled members of the community serving as educators. In this system of learning a child gets educated through storytelling, folklores, proverbs, songs and traditional ceremonies, in which knowledge is transferred as an interactive and immersive process. Beyond oral transmission, indigenous education emphasizes hands-on learning whereby children acquire skills by actively participating in activities such as farming, hunting, fishing and crafting along with elders. These experiences not only equip them with practical survival skills but also instill in them impressive core values such as respect for nature, elders and community cooperation. Traditional child education as a holistic approach ensures that children develop a strong

cultural identity while understanding their own role within the community. Rather than focusing solely on academic knowledge, indigenous child education nurtures a way of life that balances spiritual, social, and environmental teachings. It reinforces traditions, moral values, and ecological wisdom, for which indigenous knowledge systems must be preserved despite the growing influence of modern education and globalization.

Keywords: *Humanist perspective, traditional child education, Maram Naga*

1. Introduction

The Maram Naga tribe belongs to one among the 33 recognized tribes of Manipur, having their own distinctive language, family and society with intimate knowledge of their historical background united by common past, language, customs and practices. The Maram Nagas are well known for their rich cultural heritage where the tribe's folk songs and folk tales speak of their glorious past. The geography of the Maram area is marked by hills, shrubs and tropical forest. Maram Khullen (also called Maramei Namdi) is the biggest and oldest Maram village. The quintessential role of Maram Khullen as the preserver of the tribe's culture, social norms and ethos continues to hold importance. It proudly guards the many customs and traditions of the tribe.

At present child education is commonly linked to structured institutions with formal curriculum and standardized evaluations (Johnson and Majewska 2022). However, long before modern schooling was introduced, indigenous communities like the Maram Nagas had established an intricate system of knowledge transmission, known as traditional child education system. This system of traditional child education was not confined to the acquisition of knowledge alone but served as a fundamental way of life which prepared a child to survive, enhance societal roles and develop ethical conduct. Unlike conventional education, which separates learning from daily existence, traditional child education integrates knowledge into everyday activities, making it a non-going adaptable process (Neuhaus and Vogt 2024).

Child education is a lifelong process that begins within the cultural environment of a community (Kaplan 2016). Similarly, among the Maram Naga, traditional education was deeply rooted in oral story telling especially during bedtime by elders (parents and grandparents), communal mentorship, dormitory-based learning in the traditional dormitory called the *morung*- Ranhagki for boys and Raliiki for girls (Athickal 2009; Lungbila 2015)-

participation in communal festivals and involvement in community events thereby enhancing early child education. These indigenous pedagogical systems ensured that children not only acquired knowledge but also developed cognitive skills, moral reasoning and social values through life experiences. Bedtime story telling which was passed down from generations was a fundamental aspect of early childhood education nurturing creativity, ethical understanding and critical thinking (Marti 2019). It served as a means of preserving the cultural identity, ensuring that knowledge, values and essential life skills are passed down across generations (Greenwood 2016).

Traditional child education among the Maram Nagas covers multiple dimensions that foster a child's intellectual, physical, emotional, spiritual and social growth (Athickal1996). Traditional child education does not depend on structured classrooms or written materials but is imparted through experiential learning. Skills such as agriculture, hunting, craftsmanship and environmental stewardship are acquired through storytelling, participation in rituals and mentorship of elders. Such learning ensures that the knowledge imparted is not merely theoretical but directly applicable to real-life challenges within the community. Unlike modern education, which often places greater emphasis on academic intelligence, traditional learning embraces inclusivity and diversity by respecting various forms of child intelligence be it a child's excellence in storytelling/ craftsmanship/ leadership. Every role within the community is valued equally, preventing disallowance of individuals based on their specific talents. This stands in a stark contrast to modern education systems, where hierarchical structures based on academic performance frequently result in economic and social disparities (Srivastava, Nigam and Kapoor 2023).

One of the defining characteristics of traditional child education among the Maram Nagas is its flexibility and adaptability. Indigenous communities like the Maram Naga had thrived in diverse and challenging environments, ranging from dense forests to arid landscapes, for which their survival depended upon refining their knowledge systems continuously. Unlike conventional education which follows a fixed curriculum, traditional child education exists and adapts alongside environmental and societal changes, ensuring that knowledge remains relevant across generations. In a rapidly globalizing world, traditional child education focuses on imparting knowledge on indigenous languages and traditional knowledge systems enhancing culture preservation (Nganga, Kambutu and Maldonado 2025).

This process can transform children into cultural stewards responsible for safeguarding and transmitting their heritage.

From the past, Marams are immersed in a social environment where learning occurs naturally through observation, participation, and storytelling. Folktales and oral traditions are not merely a source of entertainment but a crucial medium for imparting moral lessons, historical awareness and a strong sense of identity (Chara and Moyon 2022). These narratives reinforce values that define the Maram society.

2. Spaces for Transmission of Traditional Knowledge to a Child among the Maram Nagas

Among the Maram Nagas, bedtime stories, folktales, and legends serve both entertainment and moral instruction, shaping children's ethical reasoning, cultural identity, and critical thinking. These narratives often feature historical events, ancestral wisdom and community values, instilling a sense of belonging and continuity. Storytelling encourages creativity, language development and cognitive engagement, reinforcing traditional knowledge in an interactive manner. Oral tradition of narrating bedtime stories play a crucial role in educating children about their history, moral values, social norms and taboos. Elders particularly the grandparents take the role in the narration of myths, legends and folktales ensuring that the cultural knowledge is preserved and passed down to future generations.

Children's participation in community festivals like 'Kanghi festival' 'Mangkang festival' 'Maliim rituals' and 'Rakak' enhance traditional child education among the Maram Nagas by serving as key platforms for learning cultural values, rituals and life skills. These events provide opportunities for children to observe and engage in traditional rites, deepening their understanding of customs and beliefs. Through storytelling, songs and dances performed during festivals, children learn moral values, history and social norms that shape their identity. Participation in these communal activities fosters teamwork, leadership, and a sense of responsibility. Additionally, these festivals reinforce spiritual teachings and discipline, ensuring that children develop a deep connection to their heritage while preparing themselves for their roles in society.

Learning through traditional songs and chants enhances child education by making cultural knowledge, moral values and social lessons more engaging and memorable (Athickal 1996). In Maram Naga society, short stories are often imparted in the form of songs, helping

children absorb history and ethical teachings in an enjoyable way. Different types of songs are sung on various occasions, including festivals, rituals and work-related activities; each carrying unique meanings and lessons. Festival songs performed during celebrations, teach children about their ancestors' heroic deeds and communal unity, reinforcing a sense of identity and belonging. Ritual songs instill spiritual and cultural values, while work songs sung during collective tasks like farming or construction, promote cooperation and discipline. Through these diverse songs and chants, children develop linguistic skills, cultural awareness and a deep-rooted connection to their traditions.

Traditional child education among the Maram Naga was deeply embedded in their way of life. In their latter life after the stage of puberty, the youth dormitories, known as 'Rahangki' for boys and 'Raliiki' for young girls served as the primary institution where boys and girls were shaped in to responsible members of the society. More than just a sleeping quarter, the youth dormitories was a structured space for imparting discipline, leadership quality and survival skills for young boys. Elders trained young boys in warfare, hunting and craftsmanship while instilling values of respect, obedience and communal responsibility (Athickal 1996). Young girls learnt the art of weaving and crafts. Various folk songs and folk tales were also imparted in the Morung.

With the impact of modernity, the rise of modern education has transformed how children learn, replacing aged-old methods of knowledge transmission with formal schooling. While this shift has improved literacy rates and introduced new learning opportunities, it also distanced children from traditional cultural practices, languages and indigenous ways of learning. Below are significant ways in which modernity has reshaped traditional child education.

2.1. The Disappearance of the Morung as a Learning System

For generations, the Morung system had served as a vital educational institution among the Maram nagas. It was a dormitory-style learning space where young boys and girls were mentored by elders in practical life skills, moral values and cultural traditions. This system emphasized communal living, discipline and self-sufficiency. However, with the introduction of modern schooling, the Morung system has nearly vanished. Formal education prioritizes textbook knowledge over experiential learning, leaving little room for traditional mentoring. As a result, many indigenous skills and ethical teachings that once thrived within

the Morung are being lost, creating a disconnection between younger generations and their ancestral wisdom.

2.2 The Decline of Oral Storytelling in Favor of Modern Educational Content

Storytelling has always played a crucial role in shaping children's morality and understanding of their heritage. Bedtime stories, folktales, and historical narratives passed down through generations taught children about courage, wisdom and social values. However, with the growing emphasis on structured education, digital entertainment and academic texts, traditional storytelling is rapidly fading. Modern children are more likely engaged with school textbooks, cartoons, or online media than listening stories from their elders. While formal education provides theoretical knowledge, it lacks the emotional and cultural depth that storytelling offers, leading to the weakening of moral teachings and traditional wisdom.

2.3. Declining Community Involvement in a Child's Learning Journey

Traditionally, education was not limited to classrooms; it was a shared responsibility involving parents, elders, and the broader community. Life skills, ethical teachings, and cultural practices were passed down through active participation in rituals, ceremonies, and everyday communal interactions. However, as modern education demands longer hours in school and extensive academic commitments, children spend less time engaging with their communities. This shift has led to a decline in intergenerational learning, where young people no longer receive direct guidance from elders. Over time, this has weakened communal bonds and reduced children's exposure to indigenous knowledge and customs.

2.4. The Shift to English and the Erosion of Indigenous Languages

The impact of modernity on indigenous languages is evident in the Maram Naga community, where English has largely replaced the native language as the medium of instruction. While this shift has expanded educational and career opportunities, it also led to a decline in fluency and everyday usage of the Maram language among younger generations. In an effort to preserve linguistic heritage, Maram literature has been introduced in schools up to Class 10. However, the curriculum remains limited, lacking depth and comprehensive documentation of oral traditions, folklore and historical narratives. There are still significant rooms for improvement in enriching the content, standardizing the script and integrating indigenous knowledge into formal education. Without proactive efforts to strengthen Maram language education, there is a risk that modern influences may further erode linguistic and cultural identity over time.

2.5. Decreasing Interest in Cultural Learning among Younger Generations

Modern education and digital advancements have significantly influenced children's preferences, often pulling them away from traditional learning. Unlike earlier generations who actively participated in cultural festivals, folk music and indigenous crafts, many modern children view such practices as outdated. Their growing fascination with urban lifestyles, social media and mainstream entertainment has led to a decline in cultural engagement. Schools also rarely integrate indigenous knowledge into their curriculums, making it even less appealing for children to learn about their heritage. As a result, many traditional customs, arts and practices are at risk of disappearing because fewer young people are willing for preservation.

The impact of modernity on traditional child education is undeniable. While formal education has brought advancements in literacy and global exposure, it also disrupted indigenous ways of learning, weakened community bonds and led to the decline of native languages and traditions. If this trend continues unchecked, many valuable cultural practices could be lost. To address this, a more balanced approach is necessary—one that blends modern education with indigenous knowledge, ensuring that children grow academically while staying connected to their cultural roots. Schools and communities must work together to revive traditional storytelling, language preservation and community involvement in education, creating a system where modernity and tradition coexist harmoniously.

3. Concluding Discussions

Education should not come at the cost of cultural heritage. The modern schooling system must find ways to incorporate indigenous wisdom alongside academic knowledge. Instead of replacing traditional learning methods, formal education should embrace them as complementary tools for holistic development. A child's education should be both globally competitive and locally rooted, ensuring their connection to their identity while preparing for the modern world.

Some key points to address the gap between modern and traditional child education for balance are

3.1. Integration of Indigenous Knowledge into Formal Education

Modern education in its standardized form, often disregards the cultural and intellectual contributions of indigenous societies. By embedding indigenous knowledge

within mainstream curricula, children can gain a more holistic understanding of their identity and heritage. Traditional ecological knowledge for instance, offers sustainable environmental practices that modern science is only beginning to recognize. Similarly, indigenous governance systems and conflict-resolution mechanisms provide valuable insights into communal harmony. Including folklore, mythology and oral traditions in literature and history classes can enhance moral reasoning and cultural pride among students. Furthermore, integrating indigenous knowledge fosters intellectual diversity, allowing children to approach problem-solving from both scientific and ancestral perspectives.

3.2. Bilingual and Multilingual Education for Language Preservation

Language is the vessel of culture, and when a language fades, a civilization's history, philosophies and worldview are lost. The dominance of English and other global languages in formal education has marginalized indigenous languages, weakening intergenerational transmission. Bilingual education ensures that children develop literacy in both their mother tongue and a globally relevant language, thus enabling them to navigate modern opportunities without detaching from their roots. Research indicates that multilingual children exhibit enhanced cognitive flexibility, problem-solving abilities and social adaptability. Additionally, language preservation strengthens community bonds, as it allows children to engage with oral histories, folklore and traditional wisdom. Governments and educational institutions should facilitate the development of indigenous language textbooks, interactive learning apps and linguistic research programs to sustain endangered dialects like the Maram language.

3.3. Restoring Community Participation in Child Learning

Historically, education was a communal process where elders, parents, and extended family played an active role in shaping a child's worldview. The shift towards institutionalized education has significantly reduced this involvement, leading to a detachment from traditional values and ethics. Restoring community-based learning can bridge this gap. Elders, who are custodians of oral history and indigenous knowledge, should be invited to schools for mentorship programs, storytelling sessions and practical demonstrations of traditional skills. Festivals, rites of passage and customary ceremonies should be actively integrated into school activities to strengthen cultural identity. Encouraging intergenerational learning not only preserves customs but also instills a sense of responsibility and belonging in children. Schools and policymakers must recognize that

education is not merely about academics but also about fostering social cohesion and cultural resilience.

3.4. Encouraging Research on Indigenous Education and Cultural Practices

The underrepresentation of indigenous education systems in academic discourse has led to their gradual erosion. Universities and research institutions must prioritize systematic documentation and analysis of traditional pedagogies, ensuring they are recognized as legitimate and valuable. Ethnographic studies, linguistic research, and historical inquiries should be encouraged to capture the nuances of indigenous learning. Scholars should explore the cognitive and moral development strategies embedded in traditional education such as apprenticeship-based learning, communal storytelling, and environmental wisdom. Funding should be allocated for research that examines the effectiveness of integrating indigenous knowledge into modern education systems. Moreover, indigenous scholars should be empowered to lead these research initiatives, ensuring authenticity and respectful representation.

3.5. Government Policies and Digital Documentation for Cultural Preservation

State intervention plays a crucial role in safeguarding cultural heritage. Governments should enact policies that mandate the inclusion of indigenous education in national curricula, ensuring that traditional knowledge is not relegated to the margins. Scholarship programs should support students who wish to pursue careers in indigenous studies, anthropology and cultural preservation. Additionally, digital technology presents a powerful tool for documentation and dissemination. The creation of digital archives—comprising oral histories, folklore, indigenous medicinal knowledge and language lessons—can make cultural education accessible to younger generations. Online platforms, mobile applications and multimedia resources can bridge generational gaps, allowing modern learners to engage with traditional wisdom in an interactive format. Collaborative efforts between governments, universities, and indigenous communities can ensure that cultural documentation remains both authentic and widely available.

4. Conclusion

Education should not be seen as a choice between traditional wisdom and modern knowledge but as a harmonious blend of both. While modern education offers scientific advancements, technological skills and global exposure, traditional learning preserves

cultural identity, ethical values and a sense of belonging. A balanced approach ensures that children are equipped to thrive in the contemporary world without losing their connection to their heritage. By incorporating indigenous knowledge into formal learning, promoting multilingual education, restoring community involvement and encouraging research on cultural education, we can create an inclusive system that respects the past while embracing the future. Schools, policymakers and communities must work together to design an educational framework that strengthens traditional knowledge instead of replacing it, allowing students to grow intellectually while remaining rooted in their culture.

True educational progress comes from recognizing the value of both knowledge systems. A society that preserves its heritage while embracing change fosters individuals who are not only academically and professionally successful but also deeply aware of their identity, responsibilities and ethical principles.

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