Kokborok Language: Education, Policy, and the Digital Age

Dr. Pritilata Debbarma

Ex-Guest Faculty, Department of Kokborok,Tripura University, West Tripura, India, 799022
pritilatadebbarma@gmail.com

ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
Research Paper	This paper explores the evolving role of the Kokborok language within the frame works of education, policy, and technology, particularly in the context of the modern digital age. Despite its official recognition in Tripura in 1979, Kokborok language continues to face challenges related to its integration into the formal educational system and broader societal usage. The National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes multilingualism, and efforts are under way to include Kokborok in school curricula across Tripura, although disparities between rural and urban areas remain. Furthermore, government policies have been instrumental in promoting the language, but debates over script standardization persist, which complicates its formal adoption in both education and administration. The digital age presents both challenges and opportunities for Kokborok. The rise of mobile applications, social media, and digital story telling platforms has opened new avenues for promoting and preserving the language. Apps like Rwngmari, designed to aid in learning Kokborok, represent innovative ways to engage the younger generation. However, competition from dominant languages in digital spaces poses a threat to the sustained growth of Kokborok. This volume delves into the technological, educational, and governmental efforts aimed at ensuring the survival and modernization of Kokborok in a rapidly globalizing world.
Keywords:	

1. Introduction

The Kokborok language, a pillar of the cultural identity of the Borok people of Tripura, has seen significant developments in recent decades, particularly following its recognition as an official language in 1979s. The teaching of the Kokborok language began at the primary school level in the 1980s. In 1994, the Centre for Tribal Languages at Tripura University introduced a three-month Certificate Course in Kokborok, led by Kumud Kunda Chaudhury, Naresh Chandra Debbarma, Dr. Nitai Acharjee, and Dr. Nilmani Debbarma. This was followed by the introduction of a Postgraduate Diploma in Kokborok in 2002. In 2011, a Diploma Course in Kokborok was made available in colleges, and by 2012, Kokborok was included as part of the Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree program. Finally, in 2015, a Master of Arts (M.A.) program in Kokborok was introduced at Tripura University. in Kokborok in Tripura University. Historically an oral language, Kokborok's transition to a written form has brought both opportunities and challenges as it navigates its role in modern education, policy, and the digital world.

Efforts to integrate Kokborok into the educational system have expanded since the 1980s, with the language now included in primary, secondary, and higher education. Tripura University has been instrumental in promoting Kokborok through certificate courses and postgraduate degrees. However, challenges such as script standardization, the shortage of qualified teachers, and disparities between rural and urban schools limit its wider adoption. The language, predominantly spoken in rural areas, often struggles for space in urban educational institutions, where Bengali and English dominate.

Government policies, while supportive, are still evolving to meet the needs of promoting Kokborok more effectively. The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) has been a key player in advancing the language within governance and administration, though ongoing debates regarding script choice—whether to use the Roman, Bengali, or Devanagari script—continue to create obstacles for consistency in education and official usage.

In the 21st century, digital technology has introduced new avenues for preserving and promoting Kokborok. Mobile applications, social media platforms, and digital learning tools have created spaces for the younger generation to engage with the language. For instance, apps like Rwngmari, designed specifically for learning Kokborok, have made language learning more accessible and interactive for modern learners. These digital initiatives not only help preserve the language but also ensure its relevance in a globalized world.

However, the rise of digital platforms also presents challenges. As more young people in Tripura turn to Bengali and English content on the internet and social media, Kokborok faces increasing competition from these dominant languages. The urban-rural divide further complicates the situation, as access to digital tools is uneven, with rural areas often lagging behind in terms of technological infrastructure.

This volume will explore the intersections of education, policy, and technology in the preservation and promotion of Kokborok. By examining the role of government efforts, the current status of the language in the education system, and the potential of digital platforms, we will assess how Kokborok can thrive in the face of modern challenges. As we navigate the digital age, it is crucial to balance tradition with innovation, ensuring that Kokborok remains a living, evolving language for future generations.2. Kokborok in the Educational System

The inclusion of Kokborok in Tripura's educational system has been a major step toward preserving and promoting the language. Education is one of the most powerful tools for ensuring the survival of indigenous languages, and Kokborok's integration into formal schooling is essential for passing the language on to future generations.

2.1 Historical Overview of Kokborok in Schools

Kokborok has been part of the school curriculum in Tripura since the early 1980s,following its recognition as an official state language. Initially, the language was taught in primary schools in rural areas where Kokborok is more widely spoken. Over time, Kokborok education expanded to secondary levels and beyond, with Tripura University offering advanced courses, including a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degree in Kokborok. This growth highlights the increasing institutional recognition of Kokborok as a significant regional language.

However, despite these advancements, Kokborok's presence in urban schools remains limited. Urban schools in Tripura often prioritize Bengali and English, languages that are seen as offering greater academic and professional opportunities. This creates a disparity in language education between rural and urban students, with rural students more likely to be exposed to Kokborok in formal education settings.

2.2 Challenges in Integrating Kokborok into Modern Education

Despite Kokborok's official status and its inclusion in school curricula, several challenges hinder its full integration into modern education. One major issue is the lack of standardized teaching materials. Due to ongoing debates over script standardization, schools often struggle with inconsistent textbooks and educational resources. Some schools use the Roman script, while others use Bengali or Devanagari, leading to confusion and a lack of uniformity in Kokborok education.

Despite ongoing debates about the Kokborok script, the language was introduced in the Central Board of Secondary Education (C.B.S.E.) in 2023 and will also be included in the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (I.C.S.E.) curriculum in 2024.

Additionally, there is a shortage of trained Kokborok teachers. Many teachers in rural areas may be fluent in the language but lack formal training in language pedagogy. Meanwhile, urban areas often have difficulty recruiting Kokborok-speaking teachers due to a focus on Bengali and English in these regions. This shortage of qualified educators limits the effectiveness of Kokborok instruction and discourages schools from offering it as a primary subject.

2.3 Bilingual Education: The Path Forward

A promising solution to the challenges faced by Kokborok education lies in the adoption of bilingual education models. By integrating both Kokborok and Bengali (or English) into the curriculum, schools can ensure that students gain proficiency in their native language while also learning the dominant regional or global languages. This approach would help bridge the gap between urban and rural schools, providing a more balanced education for all students in Tripura.

Bilingual education has been shown to have numerous cognitive and cultural benefits. Studies indicate that students who learn in two languages tend to perform better academically and develop stronger cognitive skills. Moreover, bilingual education helps preserve indigenous languages by making them part of everyday academic life, rather than relegating them to informal or extracurricular contexts.

2.4 The Role of Teachers in Promoting Kokborok

Teachers play a crucial role in promoting Kokborok within the educational system. In rural areas, teachers often serve as cultural ambassadors, not only instructing students in the language but also sharing folktales, songs, and cultural traditions. These practices help students connect more deeply with

their heritage and foster a sense of pride in their linguistic identity. For the development of the Kokborok language, it is essential to appoint regular faculty members in colleges and universities who initially began teaching the language. Additionally, to ensure a trained faculty in Kokborok, it is vital to introduce the language in **District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET)** and **Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.)** colleges. Without a dedicated and well-trained faculty, advancing the Kokborok language would be challenging, especially as other languages are also focusing on similar foundational steps in their development.

To strengthen Kokborok education, there must be a concerted effort to train more teachers in both language and pedagogy. This can be achieved through teacher training programs and workshops that focus specifically on Kokborok, ensuring that educators have the tools they need to effectively teach the language. Additionally, there must be greater investment in creating standardized teaching materials, including textbooks, digital resources, and classroom aids, all of which are essential for a cohesive language education experience.

3. Government Policy and Language Preservation

Government policies have played a vital role in shaping the trajectory of the Kokborok language. Since its recognition as an official language of Tripura in 1979, the government has implemented various initiatives to promote Kokborok within educational institutions and public administration. The Government of Tripura has circulated the notification Ref. No.F.25 (1-5) – TLC/SCERT/2009/146-52, on Dated, Agartala the 24 April, 2012, address to , The District Education Director Officer, as mentioned, "Subject: Introduction of Kokborok Language in all Govt. and Govt. aided Schools". However, ongoing debates about script standardization, limited integration into administrative practices, and the broader sociopolitical landscape continue to influence how effectively Kokborok is preserved and promoted.

3.1 Impact of Language Policy on Kokborok Development

The recognition of Kokborok as an official language was a significant step toward preserving the linguistic heritage of the Borok people. This move formalized the language's status and paved the way for its inclusion in public education. Over the years, state policies have aimed to strengthen Kokborok's role in schools, government offices, and cultural events.

However, despite its official status, Kokborok faces several challenges due to inconsistent policy implementation. Many schools in urban areas still prioritize Bengali and English, and the presence of Kokborok in administrative processes is limited. While policies exist to promote the language, practical implementation often lags behind, leaving Kokborok underutilized in public life. Efforts to increase Kokborok's visibility in governance and public communication remain fragmented, especially in comparison to the more dominant regional languages.

3.2 The Role of TTAADC (Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council)

The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) ; Khumulwng, Tripura, has been a key player in promoting Kokborok within tribal governance and administrative structures. The TTAADC was established to provide a level of autonomy to the indigenous tribal populations of Tripura, and its efforts have been central in supporting the use of Kokborok in governance, education, and cultural programs.

Through TTAADC, Kokborok has been incorporated into local governance, with efforts to encourage the use of the language in official documents, public notices, and communication within tribal areas. Additionally, the council has worked on organizing cultural festivals, language workshops, and community events aimed at revitalizing Kokborok and preserving traditional Borok practices.

However, despite these efforts, the TTAADC's reach is limited by the broader political landscape of Tripura, where Bengali remains the dominant language in many sectors. The council's ability to promote Kokborok more widely is hindered by the lack of a comprehensive state-wide policy that fully integrates Kokborok into all aspects of governance and education.

3.3 The Debate over Script Standardization

One of the most persistent challenges in the development of Kokborok has been the lack of consensus over script standardization. The debate over whether to use the Roman, Bengali, or Devanagari script continues to divide the community and complicates the development of educational resources, administrative documents, and literary publications.

The Roman script is favored by many because of its neutrality and widespread use in global contexts. However, others argue that the Bengali script should be used due to its historical association with

education and governance in Tripura. A smaller faction supports the Devanagari script, viewing it as an indigenous Indian script that aligns Kokborok with other Indian languages.

This ongoing debate has delayed the creation of standardized textbooks, administrative forms, and educational materials, hindering the broader acceptance and use of Kokborok in schools and official capacities. Without a standardized script, it remains difficult to develop a cohesive educational strategy that can be implemented uniformly across the state.

3.4 The Future of Kokborok in Administration and Governance

Despite the challenges, there is a growing movement to increase the use of Kokborok in public administration. Recent initiatives aim to introduce Kokborok in more government offices, particularly within the TTAADC, and encourage its use in official documentation. For Kokborok to thrive as an official language, it must be integrated not only into cultural and educational contexts but also into the daily operations of governance.

Efforts to ensure the inclusion of Kokborok in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, which would provide it with national recognition and further protections, are ongoing. Inclusion in the Eighth Schedule would elevate Kokborok's status, ensuring greater resources for its promotion, including the development of teaching materials, cultural programs, and digital resources that could strengthen its position in both education and governance.

4. Kokborok in the Digital Age

In the 21st century, digital technology has revolutionized how languages are learned, shared, and preserved. For Kokborok, the rise of digital platforms, mobile applications, and social media provides both opportunities and challenges. The language, which was traditionally transmitted orally, now has the potential to reach a global audience, creating new spaces for cultural exchange and revitalization efforts. However, the digital sphere is also dominated by more globally prominent languages, such as Bengali and English, which presents a significant hurdle for Kokborok's survival and growth in online spaces.

4.1 Digital Platforms and Online Communities

The internet has allowed Kokborok-speaking communities to connect in ways that were previously impossible. Several websites dedicated to Kokborok literature, language learning, and cultural promotion have emerged, offering resources for both native speakers and learners. These platforms

feature digital copies of Kokborok texts, including folktales, poems, and educational materials, which can be accessed from anywhere in the world.

Online communities have also grown, particularly on social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp, where Kokborok speakers engage in discussions, share cultural content, and promote language-related events. These communities have become important forums for keeping the language alive, especially for younger generations who are more accustomed to digital communication.

Moreover, digital platforms have allowed for the documentation of oral traditions, with video and audio recordings preserving Kokborok songs, stories, and religious chants. These recordings are valuable for both cultural preservation and linguistic research, as they capture the nuances of oral performance that might otherwise be lost in written form.

4.2 Kokborok in Social Media and Digital Storytelling

Social media platforms have played a key role in bringing Kokborok to younger audiences. Content creators have started producing videos, podcasts, and stories in Kokborok, leveraging platforms like YouTube and Instagram to share these with a wider audience. Digital storytelling, in particular, has emerged as a powerful tool for preserving and sharing Kokborok's rich oral traditions in a format that appeals to tech-savvy audiences.

For example, YouTube channels focused on Kokborok content range from language tutorials and cultural documentaries to creative retellings of traditional folktales. These digital narratives allow for the modernization of Kokborok storytelling, ensuring that the language remains relevant in the modern world while still preserving its cultural roots.

However, one of the key challenges is the competition from content in Bengali, Hindi, and English, which dominates digital spaces. The Kokborok-speaking community is relatively small, and without sufficient digital infrastructure and resources, it is difficult to produce content at the same scale as more dominant languages. Nonetheless, the presence of Kokborok content creators is growing, and their work is vital to ensuring the language's visibility in the digital age.

4.3 Mobile Applications and Language Learning Tools

Mobile apps have become an essential part of language learning, and Kokborok is no exception. Apps such as Rwngmari have been designed specifically to teach Kokborok, offering lessons on vocabulary,

grammar, and pronunciation in an accessible format. These apps provide interactive exercises and quizzes that make language learning more engaging, especially for younger users.

Mobile applications help overcome the barriers of traditional classroom-based language instruction by allowing users to learn at their own pace and convenience. This is particularly important in urban areas, where Kokborok is less commonly spoken and where learners may not have access to formal classes. By integrating Kokborok into digital learning platforms, there is potential to reach a larger audience and ensure that the language is passed down to future generations.

The integration of Kokborok into more mainstream language-learning apps like Duolingo could further boost the visibility of the language and make it accessible to a global audience. However, developing such resources requires significant investment in creating standardized content, which remains a challenge due to the ongoing debates over script standardization and the limited number of qualified language experts.

4.4 The Role of Podcasts and Videos in Reviving Oral Traditions

Podcasts and video platforms have become powerful tools for reviving Kokborok's oral traditions. These formats allow for the preservation of storytelling elements that are lost in written text, such as intonation, rhythm, and expression. Podcasts featuring folktales, oral histories, and interviews with community elders help keep Kokborok's oral traditions alive, while also making them accessible to a wider audience.

Similarly, video content can bring Kokborok folktales to life through animation and live performances. These formats allow for creative interpretations of traditional stories, engaging younger audiences who might not be as familiar with Kokborok's cultural heritage. By combining traditional storytelling with modern technology, content creators are ensuring that Kokborok's oral literature continues to evolve and remain relevant in the digital era.

5. The Influence of Technology on Kokborok Literature

As technology continues to shape the ways in which people communicate, it has also influenced how Kokborok literature is preserved, shared, and consumed. While traditional forms of Kokborok literature, such as oral storytelling, remain foundational to the language's cultural expression, digital platforms have created new possibilities for engaging with both traditional and contemporary Kokborok literature.

5.1 Preserving Oral Literature through Digital Media

Historically, Kokborok literature has been transmitted orally, with stories, folktales, and songs passed down through generations. While this oral tradition is rich and dynamic, it also presents challenges in terms of preservation. The transition to written Kokborok has been an essential step in ensuring that these stories are not lost, but the digital age has taken preservation efforts even further.

Digital media now allows for the recording and archiving of oral performances, preserving not only the stories themselves but also the performative elements of Kokborok oral literature, such as tone, rhythm, and gestures. Video and audio recordings of elders narrating traditional tales have been made available online, creating a permanent digital archive that can be accessed by future generations. These archives ensure that even as oral traditions evolve or fade, the original forms of these stories remain accessible.

Platforms like YouTube have become invaluable tools for preserving Kokborok's oral heritage. Elders and cultural practitioners are featured in videos where they perform folktales and share the history behind the stories. These digital archives are an important step toward protecting the cultural and linguistic identity of the Borok people.

5.2 Publishing Kokborok Literature in Digital Formats

In addition to preserving oral traditions, digital formats have made it easier to publish and distribute written Kokborok literature. With the rise of e-books and online publishing platforms, Kokborok writers can now reach a broader audience, both within Tripura and globally. This has opened up new opportunities for both traditional and contemporary Kokborok literature to thrive in the modern age.

Several Kokborok authors are embracing these platforms, publishing poetry, short stories, and novels that blend traditional themes with modern concerns. By digitizing their works, Kokborok writers are able to transcend the geographic limitations of print publications, making their work accessible to readers beyond the local context.

Digital publications also support the growing interest in Kokborok as an academic subject. Scholars researching the language can now access digitized versions of texts and manuscripts, which were once difficult to obtain. This has encouraged more research into the language, contributing to its preservation and continued development.

5.3 Global Access to Kokborok Literature through Technology

One of the most significant advantages of digitization is the ability to share Kokborok literature on a global scale. With the internet, anyone interested in the language and its literature can access materials, learn the language, or engage with cultural content from anywhere in the world.

This global accessibility not only helps preserve the language but also creates opportunities for cross-cultural exchange. People from different cultural backgrounds can explore the literary traditions of the Borok people, and Kokborok literature can be showcased in international contexts, enhancing its visibility and significance. As more Kokborok literature becomes available in digital formats, the language's cultural impact is likely to grow, contributing to both its preservation and global recognition.

6. Challenges and Opportunities for Kokborok in Modern Education

Kokborok's integration into modern education systems remains a crucial element in the survival of the language, but it also presents both challenges and opportunities. The language's inclusion in school curricula, alongside competing with dominant regional and global languages, has required innovative approaches to ensure its preservation in contemporary educational settings.

6.1 Overcoming the Urban-Rural Divide

One of the most significant challenges Kokborok faces in education is the urban-rural divide. In rural areas of Tripura, where Kokborok is more commonly spoken, there is stronger community support for its use in schools. Rural schools are more likely to incorporate Kokborok into their curricula, and teachers in these areas often speak the language fluently, fostering a more immersive learning environment.

However, in urban areas, where Bengali and English dominate both socially and academically, Kokborok is often sidelined. Many urban schools do not offer Kokborok as a subject, and even when it is available, students may not prioritize learning it due to the perceived economic and professional advantages of Bengali and English. This creates a gap between rural and urban students in terms of language proficiency and cultural connection.

To overcome this divide, efforts must focus on promoting Kokborok in urban schools through government policy, teacher training, and public awareness campaigns. Creating more inclusive language

programs that balance Kokborok with other essential languages can help bridge this gap and ensure that urban students remain connected to their linguistic and cultural roots.

6.2 Competing with Dominant Languages in Education

In a multilingual country like India, regional languages often compete with more dominant ones like Bengali, Hindi, and English. Kokborok, as a minority language, faces particular challenges in maintaining its relevance in formal education settings where the focus is often on languages that offer greater academic or economic opportunities.

Bengali and English, in particular, are prioritized due to their roles in higher education and global communication. Students and parents often view these languages as more advantageous for securing jobs and accessing broader opportunities, which reduces the incentive to prioritize Kokborok in academic pursuits. This trend is especially pronounced in urban areas, where access to resources and opportunities linked to these dominant languages is more prevalent.

Despite these challenges, the promotion of Kokborok as part of a multilingual education system offers significant benefits. Multilingual education has been shown to enhance cognitive abilities, promote cultural diversity, and create a more inclusive society. By emphasizing the value of Kokborok alongside other languages, educators can help students see the importance of maintaining their linguistic heritage while also preparing them for the demands of the modern world.

6.3 Opportunities for Digital Integration in Classrooms

The rise of digital tools in education presents a valuable opportunity for integrating Kokborok into classrooms in both rural and urban settings. E-learning platforms, language apps, and digital resources can supplement traditional classroom teaching, making it easier for students to access Kokborok materials and practice the language outside of school.

Programs such as Rwngmari, a mobile app designed for Kokborok learners, exemplify how technology can facilitate language learning in an engaging and accessible format. These digital resources provide students with interactive lessons, quizzes, and multimedia content, making the learning experience more dynamic and appealing to younger generations.

Additionally, digital platforms can help bridge the resource gap between rural and urban schools by providing centralized, easily accessible educational materials. Teachers can use online resources to

enhance their lessons, and students can practice Kokborok through videos, podcasts, and interactive exercises, even if the school itself lacks adequate Kokborok teaching resources.

6.4 Developing Language Resources for the Digital Age

One of the key challenges in integrating Kokborok into the modern education system is the development of high-quality, standardized language resources. The ongoing debate over script standardization continues to complicate the creation of consistent teaching materials, with schools and publishers often using different scripts for textbooks and resources.

To address this issue, the development of standardized, digital Kokborok resources is essential. Creating a cohesive library of digital textbooks, interactive exercises, and multimedia content in a unified script would greatly enhance the teaching and learning of Kokborok across Tripura. These resources should be easily accessible through mobile apps, websites, and e-learning platforms to ensure that all students, regardless of their location or school, can benefit from a standardized Kokborok curriculum.

Government investment in language development programs, as well as partnerships with educational technology companies, could accelerate the creation and distribution of these resources. By making Kokborok materials available in digital formats, the language can better compete with more dominant languages in the educational landscape.

7. Conclusion

Kokborok's journey from an oral tradition to a formally recognized language has been marked by both significant advancements and ongoing challenges. The efforts to integrate Kokborok into Tripura's educational system, alongside government policies aimed at its preservation, have provided a foundation for the language's survival in the modern era. However, disparities between rural and urban areas, a lack of standardized educational resources, and competition from dominant languages continue to hinder Kokborok's widespread adoption, especially in formal education and public administration.

The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) has played a key role in promoting Kokborok, particularly in tribal regions, but broader state policies must ensure that the language is supported across all sectors. The unresolved debate over script standardization remains a major obstacle, affecting the development of educational materials and the language's integration into public

governance. A standardized script, along with consistent resources, would be a vital step toward Kokborok's broader acceptance and growth.

In the digital age, Kokborok faces new challenges and opportunities. Digital platforms, mobile applications, and social media provide innovative ways to engage younger generations and expand the language's reach. Apps like Rwngmari, online communities, and digital storytelling platforms are helping to keep Kokborok relevant in a globalized world, but the dominance of languages like Bengali and English on these platforms remains a significant barrier.

Education, policy, and technology must work together to ensure the continued preservation and promotion of Kokborok. The introduction of bilingual education models, investment in digital learning tools, and the development of standardized teaching materials are all critical for Kokborok's future. By embracing the opportunities offered by digital technology while addressing the systemic challenges that remain, Kokborok can continue to thrive as both a cultural and educational language.

Ultimately, the future of Kokborok lies in balancing tradition with modernization. By supporting the language in both formal and informal settings, and by leveraging digital tools to make it more accessible, the Borok people can ensure that Kokborok remains a living, evolving language that continues to connect generations to their heritage in the 21st century.

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