


## Original Research

# Professional Development of Teachers in Tribal Gurukula Schools for Promoting Equitable and Inclusive Education

Gugulothu Balaji 

Department of Education of Groups with Special Needs, NCERT, India

### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received 12 02, 2025

Revised 03 06, 2026

Accepted 06 21, 2026

#### Keywords:

RPwD act

Culturally responsive pedagogy

Equity

Inclusion

### ABSTRACT

This study, titled "Professional Development of Teachers in Tribal Gurukula Schools for Promoting Equitable and Inclusive Education," explores the perspectives, challenges, and professional development needs of teachers working in Telangana's Tribal Gurukula Schools, operated by the Telangana Tribal Welfare Residential Educational Society (TTWREIS). Using a mixed-methods approach involving surveys and interviews with 40 secondary-stage teachers, the research reveals that while many teachers are aware of general concepts of equity and inclusion as emphasized in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, there is limited understanding of key areas such as the RPwD Act, gender-related concerns, and inclusive pedagogical strategies. Despite familiarity with emerging technologies and recognition of tribal students' unique learning needs, the use of culturally relevant pedagogy and inclusive teaching resources remains inadequate. Teachers face several challenges, including language barriers, insufficient infrastructure, administrative burdens, and a lack of specific training on tribal culture and inclusive education. Moreover, awareness of government policies, schemes, and support systems is limited. The findings underscore the need for targeted teacher training, improved school infrastructure, culturally responsive pedagogy, and greater systemic support to bridge the gap between policy vision and classroom practice. The study highlights to empower teachers through knowledge, resources, and professional development for achieving equitable and inclusive education for tribal students.

*This is an open-access article under the CC BY-SA license.*



### Corresponding Author:

Gugulothu Balaji

Department of Education of Groups with Special Needs,  
NCERT, New Delhi-110016, India

Email: [ncertbalaji@gmail.com](mailto:ncertbalaji@gmail.com)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is essential for every individual, but it is also a process that is influenced by social, political, cultural, and economic factors. Because of these influencing factors, educational achievements differ among different social groups. One of the important groups is the tribal community; tribes are the indigenous communities having their own culture, socio-economic, and governance system (Maclean et al., 2024; Reddy et al., 2024). Tribal people reside in remote hilly areas and deep forests; these habitations are usually hard to access (Sujatha, 2002). Education plays a significant role in the lives of tribal people; it can be a way to improve their economic status by keeping their culture alive (Hembrom, 2020). India is considered the home of one of

the largest tribal populations in the world, with a total of 834 tribal communities, forming 8.6 per cent, which is 10.3 crores of the total population (Shivagunde, 2020; Census, 2011). According to the 2011 census, the literacy rate of the Scheduled Tribe is 58.96 per cent compared to 72.99 per cent for the total population of India. Since independence government has made efforts towards the strengthening the education of tribes by introducing different programs and schemes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2001-02), Right to Education Act (2009), Ashram schools and opening of tribal residential schools run by state tribal welfare schools like Gurukula in Telangana state and many more, but the overall achievement of tribal educational development has lagged behind (Shivagunde, 2020), as many children feel alien and left out as it is not similar to their culture, language and way of life (Hasnain, 1991; Hembrom, 2020).

The reason behind this is that the school system is mostly designed for urban, middle-class children, and textbooks and teaching methods often reflect a culture that is very different from that of tribal children (Hasnain, 1991). As a result, tribal students find it hard to connect with what they are learning. Along with it, most of the teachers who are working in the tribal schools cannot speak or understand the tribal language. Bag (2020) reflected on this issue that a curriculum that does not involve culture, trained teachers, and linguistic differences further ingrains this problem. Similarly, Putri & Bimantara (2025) found that a lack of teacher competence in inclusive education and insufficient infrastructure are major obstacles to the successful implementation of inclusive education. Further elaborated by Bag, the challenge of hidden curriculum, which is not part of the official curriculum, can be biased and hurtful; it can make tribal children feel that their culture and language are not important, which further results in low self-esteem and an unconfident identity.

To ensure effective teaching in such settings, it is essential that teachers are empowered in both subject content and culturally responsive pedagogy. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes that transformative change in the education system must revolve around the teacher, recognizing their pivotal role in shaping the future generation. The policy calls for repositioning teachers as the most respected and valued members of society and highlights the importance of supporting them in fulfilling their responsibilities effectively.

This study focuses on teachers working in Tribal Gurukula Schools in the state of Telangana, which uniquely integrate formal education with traditional tribal knowledge. These schools are crucial in delivering quality education to tribal communities, particularly those residing in remote regions. In response to the educational needs of tribal children, the Telangana Tribal Welfare Residential Educational Society (TTWREIS) was established. This registered organization is committed to delivering quality education to Scheduled Tribe (ST) students. Currently, TTWREIS operates 160 institutions, ranging from kindergarten to postgraduate levels. These include Mini Gurukulams dedicated exclusively to girls, along with residential schools, junior colleges, and degree colleges—all offering instruction in the English medium. Of these, 84 institutions were sanctioned during the era of united Andhra Pradesh, while 76 new institutions and degree colleges have been sanctioned since the formation of Telangana. TTWREIS has been a pioneer in setting up innovative institutions such as Law Colleges, Fine Arts Colleges, and Armed Forces Preparatory Colleges, aiming to empower tribal students to become active contributors to society and national development.

The Society envisions the establishment of dynamic learning environments that promote academic excellence, ethical values, and moral integrity. The mission of the Gurukula schools is to collaborate closely with students, guiding them toward becoming responsible citizens, valuable assets to the nation, and committed family members. Teachers serve as critical mediators, bridging the gap between modern educational practices and tribal cultural heritage. Gaining insights into their perspectives and teaching approaches can inform better classroom practices, teacher training programs, and educational outcomes for tribal students. This initiative also aligns with the core goals of NEP 2020, which advocates for an education system that is inclusive, culturally responsive, and respectful of the linguistic and social needs of tribal children.

### 1.1 Objectives

1. To understand the teachers' perspective on equitable and inclusive education.
2. To identify the training needs of the teachers in the area of Equitable and inclusive education.

### 1.2 Significance of the study

Teachers are at the heart of any effort to make education equitable and inclusive. Their role becomes even more crucial in tribal areas, where children often face multiple layers of marginalisation, including social, cultural, linguistic, and economic. For many tribal children, access to education that is meaningful and free from discrimination remains a significant challenge. Despite efforts by the government and civil society, educational outcomes among tribal communities continue to lag behind due to systemic barriers and deeply rooted inequalities (Hembrom, 2020). One of the most important, yet often unnoticed, factors in this situation is the experience and preparedness of teachers working in tribal schools. These educators frequently work in remote, under-resourced areas where they not only lack access to adequate teaching materials and training but also face challenges related

to cultural and language differences with the communities they serve (Hasnain, 1991). Many teachers are not from tribal backgrounds themselves, which makes it difficult for them to fully understand or connect with the lived realities of their students. This disconnect can limit their ability to create a learning environment that is truly inclusive, culturally relevant, and responsive to the needs of tribal learners. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 clearly acknowledges these gaps. It states that “children from tribal communities often find their school education irrelevant and foreign to their lives, both culturally and academically” (NEP, 2020, Section 6.2.3). This not only highlights the alienation faced by tribal students but also points to the challenges teachers face in bridging these cultural and educational gaps. Teachers are not just delivering content; they are also expected to create awareness about the value of education in communities where formal schooling may not align with traditional ways of life. For them to succeed, they need appropriate support, ongoing training, and an understanding of inclusive pedagogies. This study is therefore significant because it aims to explore the perspectives, challenges, and support needs of secondary-level Tribal Gurukul teachers concerning equitable and inclusive education. By understanding their experiences, this research can help inform better policies and training programs. Insights from this study can guide teacher education institutions, curriculum developers, and policymakers in designing more responsive and culturally relevant interventions. Ultimately, empowering teachers with the right tools and understanding can lead to a more inclusive educational system where every tribal child can access quality education.

## 2. METHOD

Both qualitative and quantitative methods have been used in this study by using a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data was collected through a semi-structured interview schedule, and quantitative data was collected by using the survey method. The sample was 40 secondary school teachers from Gurukula Schools of Telangana State.

A simple random sampling technique was used to choose the respondents. The study was conducted in Hyderabad surrounding Gurukula schools, i.e., Jangammet, Ibrahimpatnam, Mahbubnagar, and Balanagar. The questionnaire has been framed based on 5 Dimensions. Those are: Equity and Inclusive Education - Awareness and Understanding, Teachers’ Awareness about the Learning Needs of Students, Awareness of available Government Policies, Programs, Schemes, and Scholarships for Students among teachers, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy – A Critical Overview of Pedagogical Practices of Teachers and Challenges and Needs-Teachers Perspective.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The overall conceptual understanding of teachers regarding Equitable and Inclusive Education stands at 61.54%, indicating that 38.46% of teachers have limited awareness in this area. In particular, awareness of gender-related concerns and the provisions of the RPwD Act, 2016, remains low. Teachers are also not actively participating in activities aimed at teaching in tribal communities. Furthermore, most teachers have not received training on tribal cultures and traditions, which is essential for making teaching more relatable and fostering a sense of belongingness among tribal children within the curriculum. The majority of teachers also face significant challenges, including language barriers and inadequate infrastructure, etc.

**Table 1.** Dimensions and Responses of Teachers (in %)

No.	Dimensions	Sub Components	Yes (%)	No (%)
1.	Equity and Inclusive Education- Awareness and Understanding	Equity and Inclusive Education concept	70	30
		RPwD 2016 Act	45	55
		Gender focus in NEP 2020	35	65
		<b>Total Average</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>
2.	Teachers’ Awareness about the Learning Needs of Students	Students with disabilities	35	65
		Tribal students	92.5	7.5
		<b>Total Average</b>	<b>63.75</b>	<b>36.25</b>
3.	Awareness on available Government Policies, Programs, Schemes, and Scholarships for Students among teachers	Policy, program, commissions, and committees	57.5	42.5
		Scholarship and Financial Support	72.5	27.5
		<b>Total Average</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>35</b>
4.	Culturally Responsive Pedagogy – A Critical Overview of Pedagogical Practices of Teachers	Address needs	87.5	12.5
		Use of culturally relevant resources	62.5	37.5
		Use of technology	92.5	7.5
		<b>Total Average</b>	<b>80.83</b>	<b>19.17</b>

**Table 1 (continued)**

No.	Dimensions	Sub Components	Yes (%)	No (%)
5.	Challenges and Needs-Teachers Perspective	Received training on tribal culture	12.5	87.5
		Participated in activities focused on teaching in tribal communities	37.5	62.5
		Professional development needs	55	45
		Facing challenges	87.5	12.5
		<b>Total Average</b>	<b>48.13</b>	<b>51.88</b>
<b>Total Average</b>			<b>61.54</b>	<b>38.46</b>

### 3.1. Equity and inclusive education: awareness and understanding

Equity and Inclusive Education are two vital concepts in the education system. The National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes the importance of equity and inclusive education. The policy highlights that an inclusive and equitable society through education is an essential goal in its own right. Hence, the education system must aim to benefit India's children so that no child loses any opportunity to learn and excel because of the circumstances of birth or background. Teachers in Gurukula schools play a significant role in imparting knowledge to students studying in these schools. In order to understand their awareness and perspective around equity and inclusive education, it was found that 70 per cent of the teachers were aware of these concepts, though many of them were not aware of the policy's point of view. The responses included providing education to all children irrespective of their background, and that education is supposed to be the same for everyone. However, 30 per cent of teachers were not aware of these terms and concepts. Some of them said they didn't know, and a few gave different views, like the CCE pattern comes under equity and inclusion, and that inclusive education deals with vocational classes at the secondary level. Also, 55 per cent of teachers were not aware of the different types of disabilities as outlined in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016.

The knowledge regarding gender concerns was also found to be very limited. 65 per cent of teachers were not aware of it, while others shared different views, like providing knowledge about puberty and menstruation, promoting child-centric lessons, and making children aware of biological changes. A respondent said that NEP 2020 talks about addressing gender-related concerns and making the curriculum gender-sensitive. Gender also comes under equity and inclusive concerns, and priority should be given to girls' education by accepting and treating them equally. So, it was found that very few teachers are aware of the concepts, but they hold a vague perception influenced by their preconceptions. They teach in tribal schools, but the lack of understanding around equity and inclusivity affects the professional values they hold and their point of view towards tribal students.

### 3.2. Teacher's perspective on learning needs of students

Teachers can easily transmit subject knowledge to the students if they are aware of the needs of the students. For this, a teacher needs to be empowered in both content and methodology (Shulman, 1987; Park & Chan, 2025). As Shulman (1987) conceptualized, Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) is a unique blending of content and pedagogy that enables teachers to transform their content knowledge into "forms that are pedagogically powerful and yet adaptive to the variations in ability and background presented by the students" (p. 15). This theoretical foundation has been empirically validated; Park & Chan's (2025) systematic synthesis of 217 empirical studies confirmed PCK's strong connections with content knowledge and teaching practices, reinforcing its centrality to effective instruction. Understanding the type of learning needs and how teachers provide education according to the needs of the student is essential. Research further emphasizes that PCK principles—including differentiated instruction, formative assessment, collaborative learning, and cultural responsiveness—are critical for supporting inclusive education and addressing the needs of diverse learners (Yadav et al., 2025). Some teachers highlighted the need for specific resources, books, equipment, labs, and therapy sessions for differently-abled students. While a few teachers said that students have reading and writing challenges and need special attention from teachers. It was also found that students with disabilities needed extra care. Another teacher said that their classes are inclusive, but one caretaker would be required before the class starts and after the class ends. Some teachers also pointed out that for students with disabilities, writing and listening are challenges and require extra focus from teachers. Hence, teachers need to focus on different teaching methods. This is consistent with findings that a teacher's experience, test scores, and regular licensure—which reflect a combination of content and pedagogical preparation—have positive effects on student achievement (Clotfelter et al., 2007). While the responses also focused on the lack of teaching and learning resources in their schools, 65 per cent of teachers were found not aware of the learning needs of students with disabilities. This lack of awareness is a critical barrier; Panda & Singh (2026) identified that the absence of awareness surrounding specific learning disabilities, alongside the lack of suitable teaching and learning materials, significantly hinders the learning experience of children with disabilities.

While 92.5 per cent of teachers were aware of the learning needs of tribal students, 7.5 percent of teachers are not aware of the learning needs of the tribal children. During interviews, they highlight the need for students with language and psychological challenges. As per the respondents, because students use different languages, students from the tribal community face difficulty in understanding classes. Other respondents shared that since children live with their families in interior places, they know only their culture, they need to live with another community and should travel and study with other social groups so they can become familiar with other cultures as well. Another teacher said that students need bilingual teaching, but language-specific teachers face challenges.

It was found that most of the teachers who were aware of the challenges and needs of their students were facing challenges related to proper equipment and learning resources, which led to a lack of space to explore teaching methods for students with disabilities (Das, 2024). Research consistently shows that schools in tribal and remote areas suffer from a chronic shortage of textbooks, workbooks, and teaching-learning materials, particularly those developed in local languages or tailored to the needs of diverse learners (Times of India, 2024). Additionally, inadequate infrastructure, resource shortages, and cultural conflicts further hinder effective instruction (Jabbar et al., 2024; Bhogle, 2025). To address these challenges, special training for teachers focusing on subject material as well as conduct with tribal students can help in minimizing the challenges faced by students and increase motivation among teachers (Palai, 2025). Studies emphasize that teachers working with tribal communities require training that includes cultural sensitivity, effective teaching methods for multilingual classrooms, and strategies to engage students with varying learning styles (Phillips, 2024). Furthermore, teacher professional development must prioritize both subject-matter knowledge and an understanding of students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Sinha, 2026). Systematic issues such as resource shortages and infrastructure limitations must also be addressed through equitable resource distribution and institutional support (Jabbar et al., 2024). By investing in targeted teacher training and providing adequate resources, schools can foster a more inclusive and effective learning environment for tribal students and those with disabilities (Bhogle, 2025; Palai, 2025).

### **3.3. Awareness of available government policies, programs, schemes and scholarships for students among teachers**

According to Shivagunde (2020), the tribal population is one of the most marginalised groups in India, and a lack of education among them is a key driving factor. However, issues related to education cannot be analysed in isolation. Although policies and programmes for the education of tribals have been undertaken since 1956, overall development has lagged behind compared to the mainstream population. Since independence, several constitutional provisions have been introduced—for instance, Article 45, which mandates free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years, and Article 350(A), which directs every state and local authority to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary level. In addition, programmes such as residential schools and schemes like scholarships for students, among other significant measures, have been implemented to make quality education accessible to all. In this study, it was found that very few teachers at Gurukula schools were aware of the available schemes and programmes for students, and most had only vague knowledge of the subject. 42.5 per cent of teachers were not aware of available government policies, programs, schemes, and scholarships for students.

A few respondents stated they were aware that the state and central governments provide various scholarships, free uniforms, books, laptops, etc., but they did not know the exact names of these schemes. Some other respondents also mentioned that residential schools like Ashram, and referred to the reservations that Scheduled Tribes (STs) receive in famous universities. A few teachers also cited programmes like the Amazon Future Engineer Program, Mindspark, and initiatives by the Aga Khan Foundation for English, although these are private (non-profit/CSR) efforts. Since teachers play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between government initiatives and tribal students, their lack of awareness is concerning. Many tribal students and families remain uninformed, and teachers, being their primary point of contact, can play a crucial role in guiding parents and students.

### **3.4. Culturally responsive pedagogy: a critical overview of pedagogical practices of teachers**

Tribal communities have distinct cultures, customs, practices, and values, which they hold dearly. When it comes to educating students from tribal groups, both parents and teachers face challenges due to differing socio-cultural and political perspectives. This gap can be bridged through culturally responsive pedagogy. As stated by Jeffy & Cooper (2011), preparing teachers to instruct students from culturally diverse backgrounds is a complex task in a diverse classroom. Culturally relevant pedagogy says that, for students to learn effectively, teachers must accept and be non-judgmental of their cultural backgrounds (Jeffy & Cooper, 2011).

The teachers who participated in this study had various experiences in teaching, yet all shared a common role as guides and mentors, which is important for their students. These teachers use different methods and techniques to understand and meet their students' needs. The participants shared their practices, which reflected some different approaches. Their responses were categorized as follows:

#### **3.4.1. Awareness and use of technology in the classroom**

The majority of teachers were aware of some forms of technology that could be used in classrooms. This was found in the survey as well, where 92.5 per cent of teachers expressed that they have familiarity with the emerging technologies; however, most did not incorporate these into their teaching-learning processes. The most commonly mentioned tools were audio-visual aids and computers, though used by very few. Teachers cited ICT, artificial intelligence, digital classes, projectors, YouTube, smart TVs, and online lecture platforms, indicating familiarity with these technologies; however, their actual usage in the classroom was very limited. Some respondents shared a preference for low-cost materials over technology, while others mentioned that even though some resources were available, they were still not being used regularly.

#### **3.4.2. Teaching methods used by teachers**

For Students with Disabilities: It was found that the majority of teachers did not use any special pedagogical methods for students with disabilities. While some teachers provided mixed responses, including paying special attention to students, using Braille texts for visually impaired students, audio-visual aids, pictures, flashcards, and a "structured method" (which was not clearly defined by the teacher). One respondent highlighted the need for special educators. Earlier discussions also reflected teachers' concerns about the lack of functional and visible resources. Alongside these challenges, it was evident that the majority of teachers did not adopt differentiated pedagogical approaches tailored to the individual needs of children with disabilities.

For students from the Tribal Community: Most teachers discussed the types of pedagogy they used or the challenges they faced in employing them. Many respondents shared that they don't use specific pedagogy; they simply teach the content. Some practice - explaining concepts in the mother tongue using real-life examples, creating separate timetables for slow learners, group teaching, and incorporating students' backgrounds into lessons. However, many teachers expressed concerns about language gaps. Some respondents suggested developing a bridge course for students before formal subjects begin, while others recommended appointing a communicator to mediate between teachers and students.

#### **3.4.3. Use of culturally relevant resources**

Although culturally relevant resources are available and can be easily incorporated into classroom teaching, in this study, many teachers were not using them. Pandanu (2025) demonstrated that integrating cultural elements into education can create a more engaging and culturally relevant learning experience, yet the present study found that most teachers failed to utilize such resources. In the survey, 87.5 per cent of teachers said that through the teaching-learning process, they address the unique needs of tribal students, and 62.5 per cent of teachers include teaching resources that are culturally relevant to the students. However, during interviews, the majority of teachers stated that they did not use any additional resources relevant to tribal culture. Some seemed confused and equated standard resources like audio-visual aids, blackboards, chalk, and textbooks with cultural materials. The most commonly used cultural resources were activities related to folk songs, dance, and traditional dress. A teacher shared the use of videos depicting forest life and museum visits, while a biology teacher uses crops, flowers, and grains to support lesson topics. Despite these few efforts, the majority of teachers did not use specific culturally based resources beyond regional charts, songs, and costumes. The method, frequency, subject-specific applications, and impact on student engagement were largely absent from teachers' responses. When we imagine a classroom, we see the diversity in children's talents, hobbies, challenges, and needs. The teacher is responsible for keeping the flame of beauty and diversity alive within the students by using culturally responsive pedagogy.

According to Chen (2025), Ratri et al. (2024), and Quinn & Caudle (2025), concepts are more easily understood by young learners when placed in a familiar and local context. Yet, only a few educators succeeded in using the local context in their lessons. When we envision a classroom, we see diversity in students' talents, hobbies, challenges, and needs. The teacher is responsible for nurturing this diversity by implementing culturally responsive pedagogy. As Ladson-Billings (1995) asserts, culturally responsive pedagogy is student-centered, incorporates cultural references, and acknowledges the importance of students' cultural backgrounds and experiences in all aspects of learning. However, the findings of this study highlight a lack of innovation and sensitivity toward the inclusion of culturally relevant resources in the teaching-learning process. The responses above show that while teachers are making attempts, they often lack the specific skills and motivation to explore and integrate culturally significant values, customs, and materials into their pedagogy. Such

integration is essential for creating a classroom that embodies the principles of equity and inclusivity as described in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Beyond achieving academic excellence, culturally relevant teaching emphasizes providing students with opportunities to develop reasoning, broader consciousness, critical analysis, and problem-solving skills (Ladson-Billings, 1995). These competencies are also highlighted in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which states that students must be equipped with 21st-century skills, as the world is undergoing rapid changes in the knowledge landscape. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that all students acquire the necessary skills and knowledge. In classrooms led by culturally relevant teachers, students are expected to engage critically with the world and with others. However, most respondents in this study did not incorporate such discussions into their teaching, revealing a significant gap between the policy's vision and classroom practices on the ground.

### **3.5. Challenges and needs: a teacher's perspective**

Teachers are considered to be the single most important factor in a school. However, they often encounter students with diverse needs and backgrounds, which can present challenges, particularly when striving to maintain equity and inclusivity in the classroom. This study found that teachers face various challenges, both in working with students and in fulfilling administrative duties. A high percentage (87.5) of teachers expressed that they face different challenges, which are categorized as follows.

#### **3.5.1. Medium of instruction and tribal language**

This challenge was frequently mentioned by respondents and also identified as one of the key learning needs of the students. The primary issue is that the majority of teachers do not understand the language spoken by their students. This language barrier echoes findings from Muzata & Chomba (2025), who examined how communication challenges can limit rather than bridge inclusion for marginalized student populations. Furthermore, the medium of instruction is English, which further complicates learning, as students also struggle to comprehend it. At the same time, teachers often use their own language, which the students may not fully understand either. Some teachers remarked that this issue is persistent and that there is currently no viable solution in place. A few teachers shared that they attempt to learn the students' language by asking them the meaning of words, but such practices are limited, as students themselves face similar language challenges. Other teachers pointed out that not knowing the mother tongue creates a barrier, as they are required to follow a prescribed timetable and face certain institutional restrictions. Teachers emphasized that allowing a more open and flexible environment for both teachers and students would have a positive impact on learning outcomes.

However, some teachers shared that due to school regulations, school curriculum and syllabus, teachers have limited space for innovation in pedagogy. Saha and Sarkar (2024) explored a similar issue and found that tribal children often struggle due to inadequate teaching strategies, language barriers, and the lack of a culturally appropriate curriculum. Bag (2020), citing UNESCO (2003), noted that millions of children are still being taught in a language they do not understand, while UNESCO recommended that member nations incorporate indigenous languages into national curriculum and develop educational materials that reflect the cultural and educational needs of indigenous peoples. It also emphasized the need for bilingual instruction at all educational levels and for indigenous communities to be trained to compete at both national and global levels. Another commonly cited challenge was student absenteeism, a reluctance to live in school-provided hostels, and a lack of parental support, these interconnected factors often contribute to school dropouts of tribal children.

#### **3.5.2. Workload and lack of resources**

Another challenge shared by the teachers was the lack of resources in schools. These included educational equipment, subject-specific books, resources related to disabilities and tribal communities, as well as basic infrastructure. Some teachers noted that many issues could have been resolved if the school had proper infrastructure. For instance, some schools do not have its own building, nor does it provide residential facilities for teachers. This poses difficulties during night duties and leads to another concern, the additional burden on teachers due to their involvement in non-teaching tasks. The lack of proper infrastructure also poses challenges to the students because in some Gurukula schools there is no residential buildings/hostels for students, hence they compelled to stay in their classrooms along with their belongings, which not only disrupts the learning process but also fails to foster a conducive academic environment.

The majority of teachers reported that, as deputy wardens, they are unable to dedicate adequate time to lesson planning. Several teachers also spoke about the mental and physical stress they experience due to these extra responsibilities. Many teachers mentioned that schools are located far from their homes, and they are required to follow an exhausting timetable in addition to fulfilling various non-teaching duties. This leads to mental fatigue and general unwellness.

Despite these challenges, teachers expressed a strong willingness to promote equity and inclusivity in their classrooms. As a teacher shared, "We should all receive training to better understand the culture and customs of tribal communities. It will help us become more empathetic, knowledgeable, and better equipped to include students in the teaching-learning process." Several teachers emphasized the need for professional development, with one specifically highlighting the need for training in science pedagogy to make concepts more accessible to students. In the survey, 87.5 per cent of teachers said that they did not receive specific training on understanding the cultural and linguistic background of tribal students, and 62.5 per cent informed that they had never participated in professional development activities focused on teaching in tribal communities, and 55 per cent of teachers expressed the need for professional development activities in order to become more efficient and culturally responsive while teaching. Some teachers also expressed the need for a language lab, while one suggested inter-school visits to help students learn about different cultures and languages, and foster openness towards other communities. Another teacher emphasized the importance of conducting awareness activities for parents regarding the value of education, while another pointed out the need for counselling services for both teachers and students. These suggestions and needs reflect those that teachers have high expectations for Gurukulam Society education authorities to support them in making their classrooms more inclusive and equitable.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

National Education Policy (2020) has given emphasis on promoting equity and inclusion in education, and teachers are a significant unit who can ensure and promote this vision in the schools. This study was conducted to highlight the various challenges and potential opportunities related to equitable and inclusive education for children from tribal communities. Teachers in tribal Gurukula schools play a crucial role as they are the closest to the students and deeply involved in their learning journey. However, there are areas where they could be better supported to enhance their teaching effectiveness. Key findings reveal that although teachers possess a basic understanding of the concepts of equity and inclusion, their knowledge of specific policies and frameworks related to these areas remains limited.

Teaching methods are also limited due to a lack of resources, motivation, and awareness. Language barrier is one of the significant challenges to both teaching and learning, and culturally relevant pedagogy is often missing from the classroom environment. Inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teaching materials, and limited support for students with disabilities further restrict their ability to innovate and address diverse learning needs. Teachers are facing challenges due to a lack of professional development opportunities. Despite these challenges, teachers continue to play a vital role in the lives of tribal children. They act as mentors, bridging the gap between formal education and tribal culture. Their perspectives and practices are important in order to create a learning environment that is inclusive, culturally relevant, and responsive to the needs of children from diverse backgrounds.

This study highlights the challenges and needs faced by these teachers. To ensure equitable and inclusive education in tribal areas, it is crucial to empower teachers with culturally responsive teaching skills, provide adequate resources, and incorporate pedagogy that respects tribal culture, values, and customs. Targeted training, improved infrastructure, increased community engagement, and the adoption of culturally relevant pedagogy are necessary steps in this direction.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The author expresses sincere gratitude to the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), New Delhi, for providing financial support for this research. The authors also thank all the participants, colleagues, and experts who extended their valuable cooperation, guidance, and support during the course of this study.

#### **DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript.

#### **RESEARCH FUNDING**

This research was financially supported by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), New Delhi.

#### **ETHICAL STATEMENT**

Not Applicable.

#### **AI USE STATEMENT**

The author declares that the generative artificial intelligence (AI) tool ChatGPT was used only for language refinement and editing purposes during the preparation of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the content.

## REFERENCES

- Bag, P. (2020). *Ethnocentrism in education – Effects of hidden curriculum on tribal students*. In R. R. Patil (Ed.), *Tribal development in India – Challenges and prospects in tribal education* (pp. 42–57). Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9789354791710.n3>
- Bhogle, V. (2025). Tribal Education Ethics and Challenges in India. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)*, 9(26). <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.903SEDU0750>
- Census of India. (2011). Primary census abstract: Scheduled Tribes. Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India. <https://censusindia.gov.in>
- Chen, F. (2025). Nature and living in Hong Kong kindergartens: Involving local context towards glocalization in early STEM education. In *Early Childhood STEM Education in the Asia-Pacific Region* (pp. 123–145). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-95-0281-3\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-95-0281-3_8)
- Clotfelter, C. T., Ladd, H., & Vigdor, J. L. (2007). How and why do teacher credentials matter for student achievement?. *Working Paper*, 2. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w12828>
- Das, S. (2024). In *Lessons from the Ground: Why a Participatory Approach to Learning is Critical to Empowering Tribal Children*. American India Foundation (AIF). Retrieved from <https://aif.org/lessons-from-the-ground-why-a-participatory-approach-to-learning-is-critical-to-empowering-tribal-children/>
- Hasnain, N. (1991). Tribal India. Palaka Prakashan.
- Hembrom, B. G. (2020). Sociological analysis of educational experiences of Adivasi children. In R. R. Patil (Ed.), *Tribal development in India – Challenges and prospects in tribal education* (pp. 26–41). Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9789354791710.n2>
- Jabbar, A., Barkati, M., & Ahamad, J. (2024). Tribal education in india: trends, challenges, and strategies. *Vidya-a journal of gujarat university*, 3(2), 124-127. <https://doi.org/10.47413/7b5s2335>
- Jeffy, S. B., & Cooper, J. E. (2011). Toward a conceptual framework of culturally relevant pedagogy: An overview of the conceptual and theoretical literature. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 38(1), 65–84. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23479642>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that’s just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into Practice*, 34(3), 159–165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849509543675>
- Maclean, K., Rist, P., Rassip, W., & Prudames, N. (2024). A practical tool to enable Indigenous enterprise planning and development grounded in culture. *Sustainability Science*, 19(4), 1205-1220. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-023-01459-1>
- Muzata, K. K., & Chomba, R. M. (2025). Bridging or Limiting Inclusion? Deaf Perspectives on Sign Language Interpretation in Zambian Education. *Universal Education Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 2(3), 127–137. <https://doi.org/10.63081/uejtl.v2i3.99>
- Palai, P. (2025). Exploring the impact of in-service teacher education on the professional development of elementary teachers: A case study of Odisha. *Educational Dimension*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.55056/ed.983>
- Panda, R. B., & Singh, M. (2026). Factors Influencing Learning of Children with Specific Learning Disabilities: Exploring the Experience of Teachers. *Educational Trend (A Journal of RIE, Ajmer - NCERT)*, 6(1), P.87-95. <https://ejournals.ncert.gov.in/index.php/ET/article/view/5114>
- Pandanu, R. S. (2025). Ethnomathematics in the Jonggan Art of the Dayak Kanayat’ n. *Universal Education Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 1(3), 57–71. <https://doi.org/10.63081/uejtl.v1i3.49>
- Park, S., & Chan, K. K. H. (2025). Unpacking PCK Relationships and Development in Science Teachers: A Systematic Synthesis of Empirical Research. *Review of Educational Research*, 00346543251394404. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543251394404>
- Putri, A. Y., & Bimantara, A. (2025). Legal Dilemmas in Inclusive Education: Implementation Challenges and Teaching Strategies in Primary Schools. *Universal Education Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 2(1), 23–31. <https://doi.org/10.63081/uejtl.v2i1.42>
- Phillips, A. J. (2024). *Culturally sustaining policymaking in Indigenous communities: Partnering to promote lasting change*. Teachers College Press.
- Quinn, M. F., & Caudle, L. A. (2025). Embracing culturally relevant computational thinking in the preschool classroom: Leveraging familiar contexts for new learning. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 53(2), 393–403. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-024-01667-x>
- Ratri, D. P., Rachmajanti, S., Anugerahwati, M., Laksmi, E. D., & Gozali, A. (2024). Fostering cultural competence: Developing an English syllabus for young learners in the Indonesian EFL context with emphasis on local culture to maintain students’ identity. *Cogent Education*, 11(1), 2440177. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2440177>
- Reddy, A. A., Maraseni, T., Lahiri, S., Karki, S., Koju, U., Shrestha, A., & Cadman, T. (2024). Perspectives on Forest governance among the indigenous communities of India’s Eastern Ghats. *Forest Policy and Economics*, 169, 103350. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forpol.2024.103350>
- Saha, E., & Sarkar, R. (2024). Educational problems and needs of tribal students at the secondary level in Alipurduar District, West Bengal, India. *European Journal of Educational Studies*, 11(11), 511–524.
- Shivagunde, S. (2020). Revisiting policies and need for reform in tribal education. In R. R. Patil (Ed.), *Tribal development in India – Challenges and prospects in tribal education*. Sage.
- Shulman, L. (1987). Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard educational review*, 57(1), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.57.1.j463w79r56455411>
- Sinha, A. (2026). Margins within the margins: The everyday realities of SC/ST students with disabilities in Kolkata’s government and government-aided schools. *Support for Learning*, 41(2), e70042. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9604.70042>
- Sujatha, K. (2002). Education among scheduled tribes. In R. Govinda (Ed.), *India education report* (pp. 93–108). Oxford University Press. <https://global.oup.com>
- Times of India. (2024, September 22). *Tribal schools switching to English medium have no teachers, lack textbooks*. Times of India. Retrieved from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/pune/tribal-schools-switching-to-english-medium-have-no-teachers-lack-textbooks/articleshow/113572247.cms>
- UNESCO. (2003). Education in a multilingual world. UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org>

- 
- World Bank. (2021). Ending learning poverty: What will it take? India country brief. <https://www.worldbank.org>
- Wreis & Tswries. (2021). English medium policy and outcomes in residential schools: Internal report. <https://igtwreis.in>
- Yadav, M., Goyal, N., Maun, D., Chandel, A., & Hung, T. H. (2025). PCK in Inclusive Classrooms: how do teachers with PCK address the needs of diverse learners?. In *Digital and Cultural Influences on the Development of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) and TPACK* (pp. 319-344). IGI Global Scientific Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3373-2267-4.ch011>