



Educational Aspirations and Challenges on Academic Performance of Tribal Adolescent Girls: A Review Study

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70798/TGJCT/01020009>

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Abstract

This review paper explores the complex interplay between educational aspirations and the academic challenges faced by tribal adolescent girls in India. Drawing insights from recent empirical studies and literature reviews, the paper explored how various socio-cultural, psychological, economic, and systemic factors influence the aspirations and academic performance of this marginalized group. The analysis reveals that while educational aspirations among tribal girls are gradually increasing due to improved awareness and exposure, significant barriers such as poverty, cultural norms, lack of infrastructure, and psychosocial stress continue to hinder their academic success. The paper underscores the urgent need for context-specific interventions, robust policy implementation, and inclusive support systems to ensure equitable educational opportunities for tribal adolescent girls.

Keywords: Educational Aspiration, Tribal Adolescent Girls, Academic Performance, Educational Challenges, Socio-Cultural Factors

Introduction

Tribal communities in India constitute a significant yet underserved section of the population. Tribal adolescent girls, in particular, face compounded challenges due to their gender, socio-economic status, and cultural background. Education is often seen as a pathway to empowerment and social mobility, yet these girls encounter numerous obstacles in accessing and benefiting from formal education. This review explores two core dimensions:

- (1) **educational aspirations**—their development and impact on academic performance and
- (2) **educational challenges**—barriers that impede academic growth and retention.

Level of Aspiration

A student's aspiration level aids in goal-setting, self-confidence building, and failure prevention. Education offers a unique way for human learners to achieve their desired level of goals. **Dembo et al. (1931)** were the first to establish the concept of the level of aspiration. The definition of aspiration as a term is "frame of reference involving self-esteem or as a standard with reference to which the individual experiences the feeling of success or failure". Therefore, the "**Level of Aspiration**" is the degree to which a student aligns his or her goals with his or her physical capabilities, intellectual ability, and overall circumstances. In every community, social factors have an impact on educational aspirations and performance to some degree. **Gardner (1940)** defined as, "level of aspiration is a surely quantifiable concept, which has two inevitabilities that the subjects make some open signal of his goals and, he/she makes it in quantifiable terms." A student's aspirations help them set objectives, boost

their self-confidence, and prevent failure, but all of this is hampered by their anxiety about their aspirational levels. One must determine what makes up the favorable hierarchy of vocations by taking into account the workplace and each person's level of ambition. A number of factors, including income, personality traits, and training and intellect levels, are thought to influence occupational hierarchy.

James Drever (1958) provides the clearest definition of the word "level of aspiration" in his **Dictionary of Psychology** as "a frame of references involving self-esteem alternatively as a standard with references to which an individual experiences" i.e., the sense of failure or achievement The level of occupational prestige hierarchy at which a person considers his objective is known as his career aspiration.

Hurlock (1967) described it as a desire for something higher than one's current level, with progress toward that goal as its ultimate goal. Stated differently, ambition refers to the goal that an individual sets for themselves in a particular work that holds significant personal meaning for them or in which their ego is involved. Fantasy level, with or without a hint of realism, was the definition of "aspiration" in the later half of the 20th century. Accordingly, determining one's "level of aspiration" requires evaluating one's performance in the future based on prior experience, aptitude, and capacity. Therefore, it is necessary to inform parents about the various positive and negative reward systems that might help raise their children's level of aspirations. In order to support children's high educational aspirations, parents have the primary responsibility to do everything in their power to establish a positive and healthy atmosphere at home. High levels of aspirations and determinants for academic and social accomplishment are highly wanted in schoolchildren, particularly in tribal and non-tribal adolescents **Kumari (2015)**.

Educational Challenges of Adolescent Girls

Educational challenges means challenges related to different areas of education like social and educational atmosphere, teaching problems, organizational and administrative problems and problems due to cultural and historical causes.

Many challenges arise related to education such as funding, teaching quality and profession, academic performance of students, cultural differences and different educational opportunity, unsafe schools and unequal access to educational technology.

School education is an important segment in the whole education structure and also considered as a powerful instrument to develop the human behavior and society. Every education system has some problems which affects the achievement and motivation of the students. In Indian education system, students face many educational problems which are related to imparting and receiving education. Usually the age groups between 13-19 i.e. the adolescence period face a lot of problems in their education which may be personal, social, intellectual and psychological problems and this may create negative impact on their academic performance.

Review of Related Literature

Studies Related to Educational Aspiration

Bera & Pramanik (2025) investigated the relationship between level of aspiration and academic achievement among higher secondary students, focusing specifically on gender and area (rural vs. urban) as key variables. The results indicated that, overall, students exhibited relatively high levels of both academic performance and aspirations. Gender-wise analysis revealed that both boys and girls had comparable aspiration levels; however, girls demonstrated slightly higher academic achievement, although the difference was not pronounced. With respect to area, urban students showed marginally higher levels of aspiration and academic achievement compared to their rural counterparts. This disparity was attributed to the greater exposure and resource availability typically found in urban settings. Despite these observed variations, the differences across gender and area were not substantial, suggesting a fairly balanced distribution of performance and aspirations among the sampled students. This study highlights the influence of contextual factors—such as gender and locality—on student outcomes,

while also reinforcing that these differences may be narrowing due to improved access to education and aspirations across demographics.

Kumari & Ahmad (2023) studied a review on the level of aspiration among secondary school students. Aspiration levels significantly influence students' self-confidence, goal setting, and academic motivation. However, anxiety related to achieving these aspirations can hinder progress. Education plays a key role in helping students reach their goals by shaping their personality and potential. Factors such as socio-economic status, parental background, and emotional well-being strongly impact students' aspiration levels. High competition and limited resources can increase fear of failure and reduce motivation, especially among underprivileged students. This review highlights studies that explore these factors and their effects on student performance and aspirations, both in India and globally.

Singh and Saikia (2025) explored the relationship between academic procrastination and career aspirations among undergraduate students. Using a sample of 122 students, the study employed a self-developed Academic Procrastination Scale and the standardized Career Aspiration Scale by Gregor and O'Brien (2015). The findings revealed significant differences in academic procrastination based on both gender and locality. However, no significant gender-based differences were observed in career aspirations. In contrast, career aspirations differed notably between urban and rural students. Importantly, the study concluded that academic procrastination is negatively correlated with career aspirations, suggesting that higher levels of procrastination may hinder the formation or pursuit of career goals. This study highlights the importance of addressing procrastination behaviors to support students' career development, especially in varied demographic contexts.

Mane and Suryavanshi (2024) explored the concept of educational aspirations, emphasizing their role in motivating students to achieve academic goals. The study focused on three main predictors of educational aspirations proposed by Farmer (1985): background factors, parental involvement, and students' educational self-schema. The findings indicate that a student's educational self-schema is the most significant predictor, accounting for over 50% of the variance in aspiration levels. Students with a positive academic self-schema—characterized by confidence, valuing education, and positive perceptions of school and coursework—are more likely to set higher educational goals. The study highlights several components shaping educational self-schema, including academic achievement, attitudes toward school and homework, and participation in extracurricular activities. Furthermore, the review systematically analyzed research data across years, continents, countries, and regions to understand the varying degrees of influence of these factors on educational aspirations. By identifying key influencing factors and research gaps, this study contributes valuable insights for educators and policymakers aiming to support and enhance student aspirations across different educational contexts.

Manjunath (2020) investigated the relationship between educational aspiration and academic achievement among migrated children in Karnataka. Using a descriptive survey design and a quantitative approach, the study sampled 150 students from grades 5 to 9 whose families moved to Bangalore for employment. Data were collected through a standardized Educational Aspiration Test and school academic records. The study found a significant positive correlation between educational aspiration and academic achievement, indicating that students with higher aspirations tended to perform better academically. Additionally, the research showed significant differences in academic achievement across groups with low, moderate, and high levels of educational aspiration, with the highest achievers belonging to the group with the highest aspirations. The study suggests that higher educational aspirations may motivate migrated children to attend schools with better resources, contributing to improved academic outcomes. The findings emphasize the role of parents, teachers, and counselors in fostering high educational aspirations to support academic success among migrant students.

Studies Related to Challenges

Radiowala and Molwane (2021) investigates the multifaceted challenges that rural women face in accessing basic education. Using exploratory factor analysis, the researchers identified four key factors contributing to these challenges: family problems, personal issues, infrastructural limitations, and societal constraints. These dimensions accounted for approximately 72% of the variance, highlighting their significant impact. The findings emphasize that despite increasing awareness of educational rights, rural women continue to experience systemic barriers that hinder their educational progress. The study advocates for targeted interventions and suggests further research using confirmatory factor analysis to validate the identified dimensions and enhance educational accessibility for rural women.

Jayasree and Ramana (2023) focuses on the psychosocial problems faced by urban adolescent girls during a critical developmental phase marked by significant biological, emotional, and cognitive changes. Adolescence, particularly for girls, is portrayed as a challenging period characterized by identity formation, heightened vulnerability, emotional fluctuations, and the onset of physiological milestones like menarche. The research underlines that this transitional stage often leads to behavioural and psychological challenges, including anxiety and social issues, which may require intervention if persistent. The study emphasizes the need for awareness and support mechanisms to identify and address psychosocial disorders among adolescent girls, especially in urban settings where independence and reduced adult supervision are more prominent.

Yadav (2021) focuses on the psychosocial challenges and developmental issues faced by adolescent girls in India, highlighting the unique pressures they encounter due to societal, familial, and educational expectations. The author emphasizes that adolescent girls represent a substantial and vulnerable segment of India's population, often caught between cultural expectations and modern aspirations. The review underscores how stress, depression, early marriage, and limited educational opportunities continue to impact the lives of young girls, especially those who drop out of school. For those who manage to pursue higher education, new challenges arise in the form of emotional instability, academic pressure, health concerns, social adjustment, and peer-related stress. The paper also explores serious concerns such as suicide, substance abuse, technology addiction, and career confusion. Yadav advocates for a strong psychosocial support system that addresses emotional, educational, and health-related adjustments to help girls overcome these challenges. The review highlights the urgent need for policies and interventions that are both sensitive and specific to the evolving needs of adolescent girls in a rapidly changing society.

Hembram and Acharya (2022) explores the pressing issue of educational challenges faced by tribal girl students at the higher secondary level in Mayurbhanj district, Odisha—a region with a dense tribal population. The research highlights a significant disparity in literacy rates, where tribal girls exhibit an alarmingly low literacy rate of just 23.51%, compared to the overall female literacy rate of 37.84% in the district. Despite multiple government initiatives, including national policies and international commitments aimed at improving educational access for women, tribal girls continue to experience considerable barriers to education. These include socio-cultural constraints, lack of infrastructure, and systemic neglect. The study underscores the need for a deeper understanding of these barriers to formulate more effective, localized interventions to uplift tribal girls' education. It also emphasizes the failure of existing programs in adequately addressing the unique challenges of this marginalized group, thereby calling for targeted policy reforms and community-based support systems.

Vinu (2021) provides an insightful overview of the socio-economic and educational difficulties faced by tribal communities in India. It highlights how tribes such as the Biagha, Bhil, Kol, and Mundas, residing mainly in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, and West Bengal, live under challenging conditions marked by poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, poor housing, and malnutrition. The author emphasizes the critical role of education in improving the overall quality of life for these communities, while also acknowledging the persistent educational barriers they face. Importantly, the paper discusses various government laws and policies aimed at tribal upliftment and analyzes

the ongoing challenges in implementing these measures effectively. This work underscores the need for continued efforts to address not only educational deficits but also the broader socio-economic factors influencing tribal welfare, making it a valuable contribution to the discourse on tribal development in India.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the Educational aspirations on their development and impact on academic performance.
2. To study the Educational challenges or barriers that impede academic growth and retention.

Result and Discussion

Educational Aspirations: Patterns and Influencing Factors

Several studies highlight the role of aspirations in shaping academic outcomes. Educational aspirations refer to the hopes, goals, or ambitions students hold regarding their future education and careers.

- **Bera & Pramanik (2025)** found that both rural and urban students demonstrated relatively high educational aspirations, with only marginal differences between gender and locality. Urban students exhibited slightly higher aspirations and academic performance, likely due to better access to educational resources.
- **Mane & Suryavanshi (2024)** emphasized the role of **educational self-schema**—a student's belief system about their own academic abilities—as the strongest predictor of aspiration. This highlights the internal cognitive and emotional factors that drive motivation.
- **Kumari & Ahmad (2023)** reviewed various studies and concluded that factors such as **parental background, socio-economic status, and emotional well-being** significantly shape students' aspirations. These factors are especially critical in tribal settings, where families may lack exposure to formal education systems.
- **Manjunath (2020)** demonstrated a **positive correlation** between aspiration and academic achievement among migrated children, suggesting that raising aspirations can directly impact academic outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged groups.
- **Singh & Saikia (2025)** added a psychological dimension by linking **academic procrastination** with lower career aspirations, showing how behavioral traits can suppress educational motivation.

Key Insight

While aspirations are rising among students—including those from tribal or rural backgrounds—internal factors like self-belief and external factors like parental support, socio-economic conditions, and school environment are critical in sustaining high aspirations.

Challenges Faced by Tribal Adolescent Girls

Despite growing aspirations, tribal girls continue to face a multitude of challenges that significantly impede their academic performance.

- **Hembram & Acharya (2022)** reported a shocking literacy rate of **23.51% among tribal girls** in Odisha, revealing a stark contrast even within already underserved regions. Their findings point to **socio-cultural constraints, systemic neglect, and poor infrastructure** as primary barriers.
- **Vinu (2021)** provided a broader context of the **socio-economic struggles of tribal communities**, including poverty, unemployment, and malnutrition. These conditions affect not only access to education but also the ability to sustain academic engagement.
- **Radiowala & Molwane (2021)** analyzed challenges faced by rural women through **exploratory factor analysis** and identified four major challenges: family problems, personal issues, societal constraints, and infrastructural deficits—factors that resonate deeply with tribal adolescent girls.

- **Jayasree & Ramana (2023)** and **Yadav (2021)** emphasized the **psychosocial issues** adolescent girls face, including identity crises, emotional disturbances, and peer pressure. For tribal girls, these issues are further intensified by cultural isolation and a lack of accessible mental health resources.
- Yadav also highlighted critical issues such as **early marriage**, **school dropout**, and **career confusion**, which disproportionately affect tribal girls due to limited guidance and societal expectations.

Key Insight

While educational initiatives exist, **deep-rooted socio-cultural norms**, **inadequate infrastructure**, **gender biases**, and **psychosocial challenges** remain persistent barriers for tribal girls' academic growth.

Interconnection Between Aspirations, Challenges, and Academic Performance

The reviewed studies indicate a strong **interdependence** between educational aspirations, the challenges faced, and academic outcomes:

- **Higher aspirations** often correlate with **better academic performance** (Manjunath, 2020), but only when students are provided with **adequate support systems**.
- Tribal girls often aspire to study and achieve more, but **external barriers**, such as **economic hardship**, **lack of parental education**, and **infrastructural gaps**, limit their actual performance (Hembram & Acharya, 2022; Vinu, 2021).
- **Psychosocial issues** (Yadav, 2021; Jayasree & Ramana, 2023) can suppress motivation, reduce school attendance, and increase dropout rates—even when aspirations are present.
- There exists a **gap between aspiration and achievement**, primarily due to **unmet educational and emotional needs**.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

To bridge the gap between aspirations and achievements among tribal adolescent girls, the following measures are recommended:

1. **Localized Educational Interventions:** Tailor policies to the specific socio-cultural realities of tribal communities.
2. **Parental and Community Engagement:** Raise awareness among tribal families about the importance of girls' education.
3. **Mentorship and Counseling Services:** Provide role models and career guidance to help girls sustain their aspirations.
4. **Infrastructure Development:** Ensure accessible schools with adequate facilities in tribal-dominated areas.
5. **Psychosocial Support:** Implement programs addressing mental health, emotional well-being, and social adjustment.
6. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Assess the impact of existing government schemes and modify them to be more inclusive and impactful.

Conclusion

The synthesis of existing literature confirms that educational aspiration plays a pivotal role in determining students' academic performance and long-term success (Bera & Pramanik, 2025; Manjunath, 2020). Students who aspire higher tend to demonstrate greater motivation, persistence, and achievement. However, aspiration alone is insufficient; it must be supported by favorable socio-economic conditions, positive parental attitudes, and encouraging school environments (Kumari & Ahmad, 2023). For tribal adolescent girls, educational aspirations are often constrained by poverty, gender bias, cultural restrictions, and limited access to quality education (Mane & Suryavanshi, 2024). Despite these barriers, developing a strong academic self-concept and promoting emotional resilience can enhance their ability to aspire and achieve. Addressing behavioral factors, such as procrastination

and low self-regulation (Singh & Saikia, 2025), is equally essential to improving academic engagement. Thus, meaningful educational reform for tribal adolescent girls must move beyond access and focus on **empowerment**—cultivating ambition, confidence, and support systems that translate aspiration into achievement. Government programs, educators, and community leaders should work collaboratively to strengthen educational infrastructure, provide mentorship, and encourage parental participation. When aspirations are nurtured through equitable opportunities and supportive environments, tribal girls can overcome systemic challenges and contribute positively to societal and national development.

The review reveals a complex landscape where educational aspirations are increasingly visible among tribal adolescent girls but are often thwarted by systemic challenges. While several governmental and non-governmental efforts aim to promote education among tribal populations, the persistent socio-economic, cultural, and psychological barriers must be addressed with greater urgency and sensitivity. Strengthening aspiration through holistic support can significantly uplift academic performance and overall life outcomes for tribal girls.

The synthesis of literature clearly indicates that the educational challenges faced by tribal and rural adolescent girls are deeply rooted in socio-economic inequality, cultural constraints, and systemic neglect (Hembram & Acharya, 2022; Vinu, 2021). These barriers operate simultaneously, limiting girls' access to quality education and reducing their likelihood of academic success. Moreover, psychosocial difficulties such as anxiety, stress, and emotional instability (Jayasree & Ramana, 2023; Yadav, 2021) further exacerbate the educational gap, leading to lower retention and performance rates.

Despite increasing awareness of educational rights and the introduction of government welfare schemes, structural barriers—such as inadequate infrastructure, poverty, and gender discrimination—continue to restrict progress (Radiowala & Molwane, 2021). The reviewed studies collectively suggest that improving educational outcomes for tribal adolescent girls requires an integrated approach that combines policy reform, community engagement, psychological support, and infrastructural development.

Targeted interventions should focus on:

1. Strengthening community-based educational programs that respect tribal culture and language;
2. Providing psychosocial counseling and mentorship for adolescent girls;
3. Enhancing infrastructure, including transportation, sanitation, and school facilities; and
4. Ensuring effective implementation of existing government schemes with periodic evaluation.

In conclusion, education serves as a powerful tool for empowerment and social transformation. However, for tribal adolescent girls to truly benefit, educational policies must go beyond access and address the deep-rooted social, emotional, and structural barriers that constrain their learning. By creating inclusive, supportive, and culturally sensitive educational environments, India can make meaningful progress toward ensuring equity and empowerment for all its learners.

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The Global Journal of Contextual Thought

(A Double-Blind, Peer-Reviewed, Quarterly, Multidisciplinary Journal)

Volume: 1, Issue: 2 October, 2025 Home Page: www.tgjct.org Email: editor@tgjct.org ISSN: 3107-7528 (Online)

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