



Secondary School Teachers' Awareness of SC/ST Incentives and Scholarships Provided by The Central and State Governments in West Bengal

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Abstract

This study investigates the awareness of secondary school teachers in West Bengal regarding SC/ST incentives and scholarship schemes offered by the Central and State Governments, an essential yet often overlooked dimension of educational equity. Despite the extensive network of scholarships designed to promote access, retention and academic advancement among marginalized SC/ST learners, their effective utilization depends heavily on school-level actors who bridge policy and practice. Using a descriptive survey method, data were collected from 276 teachers, including 48 Heads of Institutions (HOIs) and 228 Assistant Teachers, through a standardized 14-item Likert-type Awareness Scale. Findings revealed a strikingly uneven awareness landscape. HOIs exhibit strong familiarity with widely publicized state schemes such as 'Sabooj Sathi', 'SVMCM' and 'NMMSS', but show limited knowledge of lesser-known initiatives like 'FCS', 'OASIS' and 'Taruner Swapna Yojana'. Assistant Teachers display even more pronounced deficits, with very low awareness of several central and digital platform based schemes. Yet, the study finds no significant rural-urban difference in awareness level, indicating that information gaps stem from systemic dissemination issues rather than geographic factors. The study emphasizes that scholarship policies cannot succeed without informed intermediaries. Strengthening teacher awareness through structured training, improved communication channels and digital literacy is vital for ensuring that SC/ST students fully benefit from available educational support, advancing equity where it matters most.

Keywords: SC/ST Incentives, SC/ST Scholarships, Secondary School Teachers, Teachers' Awareness

Introduction

In India, social inequalities rooted in caste continue to influence educational access and outcomes. Among the most socially and educationally marginalized communities are those categorized as Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). Historically, these communities have faced structural disadvantages, including economic deprivation, social exclusion, discrimination and limited access to educational resources, that hinder their upward mobility (Nambissan, 1996; Kamat, 2019). Recognizing these disadvantages, the Government of India and various state governments have introduced a range of affirmative-action schemes to support SC/ST students. These include financial support through scholarships, fee waivers, maintenance allowances and other grants to reduce dropout rates and encourage educational attainment. Among the major initiatives are the Pre-Matric, Post-Matric,

Top-Class Education Scheme, National Fellowship and other scholarship programmes implemented by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (Department of Social Justice & Empowerment, 2024; National Scholarship Portal, 2024).

These interventions aim to promote social equity, reduce educational exclusion and foster socio-economic mobility. As emphasized by education advocates, such measures form a core component of 'inclusive education,' ensuring that historically marginalized groups gain equitable access to opportunities for learning (CRY, 2023).

However, the mere existence of these schemes does not guarantee their effective utilization or impact. A critical mediating factor is awareness: unless eligible beneficiaries and the educational ecosystem are informed about these scholarships, the intended benefits may not reach those for whom they are designed. Several studies highlight that limited awareness is a major barrier preventing SC/ST students from availing government support schemes (Pushpa, 2020; Ghosh & Halder, 2019).

Much of the existing research focuses on awareness among SC/ST students or their parents. For instance, research shows that while awareness of pre-matric and post-matric scholarships among SC students is relatively higher (50%+), awareness about specialized schemes such as the National Overseas Scholarship remains extremely low (around 25%) (Ghosh & Halder, 2019). Another village-level study found that marginalized rural communities remained largely unaware of available educational schemes (Sampath, 2018).

By contrast, limited scholarly attention has been given to the role of teachers and school leadership in enabling awareness of SC/ST incentives and scholarships. Assistant Teachers and Heads of Institutions (HOIs) are key intermediaries between the education system and learners; they guide students, facilitate the application process and communicate information to families. If teachers lack awareness, the outreach and effective implementation of these schemes are significantly weakened, reducing their impact on equity and social justice (Sharma, 2018).

Educational equity for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) remains a major concern within Indian schooling, with research consistently highlighting structural disadvantages that restrict their educational participation. Persistent barriers such as poverty, caste-based discrimination and limited institutional support continue to shape unequal access despite constitutional guarantees (Nambissan, 1996; Kamat, 2019). In this context, centrally and state-sponsored incentives and scholarships have emerged as key mechanisms to enhance access, retention and academic progression for marginalized learners.

Government schemes, including the Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarships, the Top-Class Education Scheme and other targeted interventions, are explicitly designed to reduce financial burdens and encourage sustained schooling among SC/ST students (Department of Social Justice & Empowerment, 2024). Research confirms that such initiatives contribute significantly to lowering dropout rates by compensating for tuition fees, transport costs and other hidden expenditures (Sharma, 2018). However, the extent to which these schemes achieve intended outcomes depends largely on stakeholders' awareness of available benefits.

Multiple studies reveal a substantial awareness gap among students and families. Although a portion of learners may be familiar with widely publicized schemes, their knowledge of eligibility requirements, documentation and application processes remains insufficient (Pushpa, 2020; Ghosh & Halder, 2019). Awareness of highly specialized schemes is often extremely low, limiting the utilization of available resources (Ghosh & Halder, 2019). These gaps are even more pronounced in rural regions where weak institutional communication, limited digital access and low community-school interaction reduce the flow of information (Sampath, 2018). Such disparities highlight the importance of comparing rural and urban contexts, as intended in the present study.

While teachers play a crucial role in disseminating information about educational welfare schemes, research specifically examining their awareness is sparse. Teachers serve as key intermediaries who guide students and families, assist with application procedures and ensure timely access to scholarships. As Sharma (2018) emphasizes, scholarship effectiveness is closely linked to how effectively school personnel communicate available

opportunities. However, emerging studies suggest that many teachers remain unaware of the full range of SC/ST scholarships, especially those administered through digital platforms such as the National Scholarship Portal (National Scholarship Portal, 2024). The lack of systematic training or institutional orientation further contributes to uneven dissemination (CRY, 2023; Kamat, 2019).

Overall, existing literature underscores that the success of SC/ST scholarship programmes relies not only on policy design but also on the awareness and engagement of school-level actors. The present study addresses a critical research gap by examining awareness among Heads of Institutions and Assistant Teachers in West Bengal, with specific attention to rural-urban variations.

With this background, the present study seeks to examine “*Secondary School Teachers’ Awareness of SC/ST Incentives and Scholarships Provided by the Central and State Governments in West Bengal*”. Specifically, it investigates awareness among Heads of Institutions (HOIs) and Assistant Teachers and explores whether there exists a significant difference in awareness between rural and urban schools.

By focusing on teachers rather than beneficiaries, the study addresses an important research gap. Understanding teacher awareness is crucial because even well-designed scholarship policies may fail in practice if school-level actors lack adequate knowledge or do not communicate the available benefits effectively. Exploring rural-urban differences further helps reveal geographic barriers to information flow and may guide policy efforts toward targeted sensitization programmes.

The findings of this study may contribute to improving the implementation strategies of SC/ST support schemes in West Bengal and beyond. Ensuring that teachers, who are the most immediate stakeholders in school-level guidance, are well-informed can strengthen the outreach and effectiveness of these policies. Ultimately, this aligns with the broader national goal of promoting educational equity and ensuring that disadvantaged communities receive the support necessary to participate and progress in formal education.

Therefore, this study is timely and relevant, considering the persistence of caste-based inequalities, governmental efforts toward social justice and the critical role of effective implementation of welfare schemes at the grassroots level.

Objectives

1. To find out the HOIs’ awareness level of SC/ST Incentives and Scholarships Provided by the Central and State Governments.
2. To find out the Assistant Teachers’ awareness level of SC/ST Incentives and Scholarships Provided by the Central and State Governments.
3. To analyze the significant difference in secondary school teachers’ awareness level of SC/ST Incentives and Scholarships Provided by the Central and State Governments in the context of the locality of schools (Rural/Urban).

Hypothesis

H₀1: There is no significant mean difference in secondary school teachers’ awareness level of SC/ST Incentives and Scholarships Provided by the Central and State Governments in the context of the locality of schools (Rural/Urban).

Research Method

To fulfill the objectives of the present study, the Descriptive Survey method was adopted by the researcher, which is quantitative in nature.

Population & Sample

All the secondary school teachers of North 24 Parganas district, West Bengal, were considered as population of this study and 276 teachers were selected as the sample through convenient sampling technique, including 48 Heads of Institutions (HOIs) and 228 Assistant Teachers.

Research Tool

To find out the results of the concerned problem, a 5-point Likert-type scale, titled “Awareness Scale About the Incentives and Scholarships of SC/ST Students Given by the Central and State Government”, was developed and standardized by the researcher. This tool contains 14 items.

It was standardized through Content Validity and Split-Half Reliability, with the reliability coefficient value of 0.83.

Every item has five alternatives: Fully Aware, Mostly Aware, Partially Aware, Aware to a Small Extent and Unaware, with the scores 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively.

Delimitations

- The study was delimited to only the North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal.
- Only 276 secondary school teachers were considered as the sample for this study. Among them, there are only 48 HOIs.
- Only the quantitative data were collected and analyzed to find out the results.

Result & Discussion

Objective 1: To find out the HOIs' awareness level of SC/ST Incentives and Scholarships Provided by the Central and State Governments.

Table 1

HOIs' awareness level of SC/ST Incentives and Scholarships Provided by the Central and State Governments

Sl. No.	Name of the Incentives and Scholarships	Fully Aware	Mostly Aware	Partially Aware	Aware to a Small Extent	Unaware
		Percentage (%) of HOIs				
1.	<i>Shikshashree</i>	68.75	31.25	00	00	00
2.	<i>Ashram Hostel Project</i>	29.16	52.08	1.25	00	0.62
3.	<i>Pre-Matric Scholarship</i>	56.25	39.58	0.42	00	00
4.	<i>Dr. Ambedkar National Merit Award Scheme</i>	64.58	31.25	4.16	00	00
5.	<i>Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojana</i>	6.25	14.6	22.92	39.58	16.7
6.	<i>National Means-Cum-Merit Scholarship</i>	75	25	00	00	00
7.	<i>Saral Vidya Sahay Scheme</i>	10.42	12.5	16.67	22.92	37.50
8.	<i>Sabooj Sathi</i>	95.83	4.16	00	00	00

9.	<i>Swami Vivekananda Merit-Cum-Means Scholarship</i>	91.67	6.25	2.08	00	00
10.	<i>OASIS Scholarship</i>	14.58	20.83	16.67	22.92	25
11.	<i>Taruner Swapna Yojana</i>	12.50	18.75	20.83	27.08	20.83
12.	<i>Hostel Grant</i>	72.92	22.92	4.16	00	00
13.	<i>Central Sector Scheme of Free Coaching (FCS)</i>	00	6.25	14.58	20.83	58.33
14.	<i>National Scheme of Incentives to Girls (SC/ST)</i>	8.33	10.42	35.42	6.25	39.58

The awareness levels of Heads of Institutions (HOIs) regarding various SC/ST incentives and scholarships reflect considerable variation across the schemes. The data shows that HOIs are highly aware of several major and widely publicized programmes. For instance, schemes such as 'Sabooj Sathi' and the 'Swami Vivekananda Merit-cum-Means Scholarship' show exceptionally high awareness, with 95.83% and 91.67% of HOIs respectively reporting themselves as fully aware. These initiatives are prominently implemented in West Bengal and receive extensive media and institutional attention, which likely contributes to such high awareness levels. Similarly, the 'National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship' also shows strong awareness, with 75% of HOIs fully aware, indicating that central schemes with long-standing implementation tend to be well recognized among school heads.

Moderate to high awareness is also observed for schemes like 'Shikshashree', 'Pre-Matric Scholarship', 'Dr. Ambedkar National Merit Award Scheme' and 'Hostel Grant', where more than half of HOIs report being fully aware. For example, 68.75% of HOIs are fully aware of the 'Shikshashree' scheme and 56.25% are fully aware of the 'Pre-Matric Scholarship', while none reported being unaware of these schemes. This suggests that foundational or traditional scholarship initiatives continue to be well circulated within schools. The 'Ashram Hostel Project' displays a slightly different pattern, where only 29.16% are fully aware but 52.08% are mostly aware, indicating a reasonably strong but not complete awareness profile.

In contrast, certain schemes show noticeably lower levels of awareness among HOIs. For schemes such as 'Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojana', 'Saraswati Vidya Sahay Scheme', 'OASIS Scholarship' and 'Taruner Swapna Yojana', awareness appears to be fragmented. For example, only 6.25% of HOIs are fully aware of 'Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojana', while 39.58% are aware to a small extent and 16.7% are completely unaware. Similarly, the 'Saraswati Vidya Sahay Scheme' has only 10.42% fully aware and a significant 37.50% unaware. This indicates that state-specific or less frequently publicized schemes may not be reaching institutional heads with the same effectiveness as the more well-known programmes.

The lowest awareness is observed for the 'Central Sector Scheme of Free Coaching' (FCS) and the 'National Scheme of Incentives to Girls (SC/ST)'. For the FCS scheme, no HOI reported being fully aware, while 58.33% were unaware, suggesting extremely limited dissemination of information about this central initiative at the school level. Likewise, the 'National Scheme of Incentives to Girls' shows only 8.33% fully aware and 39.58% unaware, indicating that gender-focused incentive schemes may not be adequately communicated to institutional heads despite their relevance for SC/ST girl students.

Overall, the results illustrate a mixed pattern of awareness among HOIs. Well-established, widely implemented, and locally reinforced schemes enjoy high recognition, whereas lesser-known, newer, or less publicized schemes show substantial gaps in awareness. This variation suggests the need for more systematic dissemination of information and targeted orientation programmes so that HOIs can effectively guide SC/ST students in accessing all available educational benefits.

Objective 2: To find out the Assistant Teachers' awareness level of SC/ST Incentives and Scholarships Provided by the Central and State Governments.

Table 2

Assistant Teachers' awareness level of SC/ST Incentives and Scholarships Provided by the Central and State Governments

Sl. No.	Name of the Incentives and Scholarships	Fully Aware	Mostly Aware	Partially Aware	Aware to a Small Extent	Unaware
		Percentage (%) of Assistant Teachers				
1.	<i>Shikshashree</i>	49.27	29.71	14.85	6.16	00
2.	<i>Ashram Hostel Project</i>	14.85	22.83	26.09	26.45	9.87
3.	<i>Pre-Matric Scholarship</i>	18.84	24.64	34.78	15.22	6.52
4.	<i>Dr. Ambedkar National Merit Award Scheme</i>	15.22	20.29	25.72	20.65	18.11
5.	<i>Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojana</i>	00	00	5.43	47.83	46.74
6.	<i>National Means-Cum-Merit Scholarship</i>	16.67	18.48	36.96	27.90	00
7.	<i>Saral Vidya Sahay Scheme</i>	00	1.09	19.56	31.16	48.19
8.	<i>Sabooj Sathi</i>	40.58	30.07	29.35	00	00
9.	<i>Swami Vivekananda Merit-Cum-Means Scholarship</i>	26.09	23.91	47.83	2.17	00
10.	<i>OASIS Scholarship</i>	00	00	13.04	24.64	62.32
11.	<i>Taruner Swapna Yojana</i>	3.98	12.68	20.29	42.75	20.29
12.	<i>Hostel Grant</i>	14.85	24.64	19.93	36.96	3.62
13.	<i>Central Sector Scheme of Free Coaching (FCS)</i>	00	00	1.09	6.16	92.75

14.	<i>National Scheme of Incentives to Girls (SC/ST)</i>	2.54	10.14	18.48	44.93	23.91
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The awareness levels of Assistant Teachers regarding SC/ST incentives and scholarships show wide variation across the schemes, suggesting uneven dissemination of information at the teacher level. The data reveals that Assistant Teachers are significantly aware of a few widely implemented programmes, while several other schemes remain largely unfamiliar to them. 'Shikshashree' emerges as one of the better-known schemes, with 49.27% of Assistant Teachers fully aware and no respondents marking themselves as unaware. This indicates effective communication and familiarity with schemes that are commonly integrated into school-level processes. Similarly, 'Sabooj Sathi' displays fairly high awareness, with 40.58% fully aware and the remaining teachers mostly or partially aware. This is expected, as 'Sabooj Sathi' is a flagship initiative of the West Bengal government and actively implemented across state schools, resulting in strong recognition among Assistant Teachers.

Some major national and state scholarship schemes show moderate levels of awareness. For example, the 'Pre-Matric Scholarship' has only 18.84% fully aware and the largest share (34.78%) partially aware, suggesting that teachers may know the scheme by name but lack complete details regarding eligibility or application procedures. Awareness of the 'National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship' follows a similar pattern, with only 16.67% fully aware but a significant 36.96% partially aware. This indicates that Assistant Teachers possess fragmented understanding rather than comprehensive knowledge of these central scholarship schemes. Moderately known schemes also include the 'Dr. Ambedkar National Merit Award Scheme' and the 'Hostel Grant', where awareness is spread across mostly aware, partially aware, and aware-to-a-small-extent categories, suggesting incomplete information flow within schools.

However, several schemes show very low awareness levels among Assistant Teachers. The 'Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojana' demonstrates a striking lack of familiarity, with 47.83% aware to a small extent and 46.74% completely unaware; not a single respondent reported being fully or mostly aware. Similarly, the 'Saral Vidya Sahay Scheme' reflects extremely low awareness, with 48.19% unaware and none fully aware. A similar pattern is observed for the 'OASIS Scholarship', where 62.32% are unaware and the remaining respondents fall within partial or low awareness categories. These results indicate that teachers are least informed about schemes administered through specialized portals or particular departments, especially those less integrated into day-to-day school operations.

The lowest awareness is found in the 'Central Sector Scheme of Free Coaching' (FCS), with 92.75% of Assistant Teachers marking themselves as unaware and only a very small fraction reporting minimal familiarity. Likewise, the 'National Scheme of Incentives to Girls (SC/ST)' shows only 2.54% fully aware and 23.91% unaware, highlighting a concerning gap in awareness regarding gender-focused support for SC/ST girls. Such gaps suggest that many central schemes may not be communicated adequately to teachers, leading to limited guidance for students who could benefit from them.

Overall, the data reflects a highly uneven pattern of awareness among Assistant Teachers. Widely publicized and routinely implemented state schemes like 'Sabooj Sathi' and 'Shikshashree' demonstrate high familiarity, while a large number of central or department-specific schemes show low to very low awareness. This suggests the need for stronger institutional communication, regular orientation programmes and systematic dissemination of scholarship information so that Assistant Teachers can effectively support SC/ST students in accessing educational benefits.

Objective 3: *To analyze the significant difference in secondary school teachers' awareness level of SC/ST Incentives and Scholarships Provided by the Central and State Governments in the context of the locality of schools*

H₀1: *There is no significant mean difference in secondary school teachers' awareness level of SC/ST Incentives and Scholarships Provided by the Central and State Governments in the context of the locality of schools (Rural/Urban).*

Table 3

Difference in secondary school teachers' awareness level of SC/ST Incentives and Scholarships Provided by the Central and State Governments in the context of the locality of schools

Variables		N	Mean	SD	t-value	Remarks
Independent	Dependent					
Locality of School	Rural	118	46.94	8.66	0.255	Not Significant at 0.05 level
	Urban	158	47.20	8.29		

In Table 3, the descriptive results indicate that rural teachers obtained a mean score of 46.94 with a standard deviation of 8.66, whereas urban teachers recorded a mean score of 47.20 with a standard deviation of 8.29. The difference between the two mean values is minimal, suggesting that both groups demonstrate almost the same level of awareness. Such closeness in scores implies that locality may not exert any substantial influence on teachers' knowledge of SC/ST scholarship provisions.

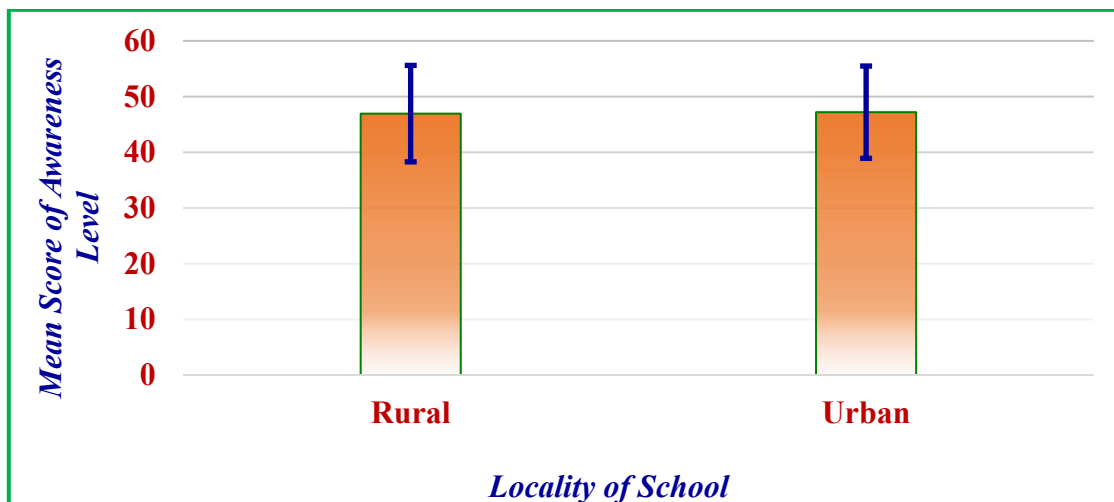
To determine whether this slight difference is statistically significant, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The obtained t-value of 0.255 is much lower than the critical value required for significance at the 0.05 level. This clearly indicates that the observed difference in awareness between rural and urban teachers is not statistically meaningful. The variation is minor and may be attributed merely to normal sampling fluctuations rather than an actual effect of locality.

Based on this result, the null hypothesis, H₀1, which states that there is no significant mean difference in awareness levels between rural and urban teachers, is accepted. This suggests that teachers working in different geographic settings are not a determinant of the awareness level about the incentives and scholarships provided to SC/ST students by the Central and State Governments.

Overall, the findings imply that the dissemination of information about these schemes is fairly uniform across rural and urban schools. Teachers, irrespective of their locality, may be receiving information through similar channels such as school administrative communication, government circulars, digital platforms and the National Scholarship Portal. This uniformity in access to information ensures that both rural and urban teachers are equally equipped to guide SC/ST students in availing themselves of these scholarship opportunities.

Figure 3

Difference in secondary school teachers' awareness level of SC/ST Incentives and Scholarships Provided by the Central and State Governments in the context of the locality of schools



This mean difference is also shown in Figure 3, which clearly indicates that the error bars are fully overlapped. It suggests that there is no significant difference between the two means.

Recommendations

The study shows notable awareness gaps among both HOIs and Assistant Teachers. While HOIs know major schemes, they lack awareness of several lesser-publicized programmes. Assistant Teachers show even lower familiarity, with many unaware of key central schemes. These deficits indicate inadequate information dissemination and the need for systematic orientation. Therefore, the following recommendations are proposed.

- ✓ Strengthen dissemination of scholarship-related information through regular circulars, digital notices and official communication to ensure uniform awareness among HOIs and Assistant Teachers.
- ✓ Organize periodic orientation and training programmes focusing on schemes with low awareness such as 'FCS', 'OASIS', 'Saral Vidya Sahay' and 'Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojana'.
- ✓ Develop a centralized information handbook or digital repository detailing all scholarships, eligibility norms, timelines and application processes for easy staff reference.
- ✓ Mandate annual awareness workshops conducted by District and Block Education Offices to update schools on newly launched or revised SC/ST schemes.
- ✓ Integrate scholarship awareness into school academic planning by assigning responsibility to designated teachers or scholarship coordinators.
- ✓ Encourage systematic use of the 'National Scholarship Portal' (NSP) and 'OASIS' portal through school-level training for effective student guidance.
- ✓ Enhance coordination between government departments and schools by creating direct communication channels for schemes with low visibility.
- ✓ Display scholarship information prominently in notice boards, staffrooms, classrooms and assemblies to increase visibility and recall.
- ✓ Introduce monitoring mechanisms at district and block levels to ensure schools actively disseminate information to eligible SC/ST students.
- ✓ Promote community awareness initiatives where teachers engage with parents and local communities to improve utilization of SC/ST incentives and scholarships.

Conclusion

The present study highlights a critical dimension of educational equity, the awareness of school teachers about SC/ST incentives and scholarships that are designed to support marginalized learners. The findings reveal a dual reality. On one hand, Heads of Institutions (HOIs) exhibit strong awareness of widely publicized schemes such as 'Sabooj Sathi', 'SVMCM' and 'NMMSS'; on the other, their knowledge sharply declines for less-circulated

initiatives like 'FCS', 'OASIS' or 'Saral Vidya Sahay'. Assistant Teachers, who directly guide students in daily interactions, display even wider gaps, particularly regarding central and digital platform based schemes. This uneven awareness limits the potential reach of policies intended to uplift SC/ST learners.

Interestingly, the study shows no significant rural-urban difference, suggesting that information dissemination channels operate similarly across localities, yet not comprehensively enough. This uniformity of limited awareness underscores a systemic rather than regional challenge.

Overall, the study reinforces that scholarship effectiveness depends not only on policy design but on informed human intermediaries. Teachers are the bridge through which policy becomes opportunity. Unless this bridge is strengthened through structured training, streamlined communication, digital literacy and school-level coordination, many eligible SC/ST students may continue to miss out on life-changing support. Strengthening teacher awareness, therefore, is not just administrative refinement, it is an essential step toward social justice.

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