

Educational Challenges and Schooling Experiences among Tribal Adolescents in the Tea Garden Communities of North Bengal

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HOW TO CITE:

Ganga Parajuli, Ranjita Chanda
(2026) Educational Challenges and Schooling Experiences among Tribal Adolescents in the Tea Garden Communities of North Bengal
International Journal of Special Education, 41(22s), 764 - 778

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ABSTRACT:

This paper studies the educational challenges faced by school-going Tribal Adolescents in the tea gardens of the Dooars region of North Bengal. The study was conducted in those blocks of Jalpaiguri district having a significant concentration of tea gardens. The study used a descriptive survey research design and a quantitative approach. The survey used a structured questionnaire with four dimensions and 25 items, with a sample of 120 students. The results indicate that general challenges are the most significant, followed by issues related to the home environment, school infrastructure and learning experiences at School. The findings highlight critical areas for intervention and policy focus to improve the academic experience and educational outcomes of these adolescents.

Keywords: Educational Challenges, Tribal Adolescents, School Infrastructure, Home environment, Learning experiences.

1. Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in September 2015 by all United Nations (UN) member states as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, mention quality education as one of its goals among the 17 listed in it. However, the goal of Quality Education, which is the fourth item in the list (SDG 4), is closely connected to the three goals mentioned in the same list just before it, making it clear that achieving the goal of quality education requires the achievement of the goals of no poverty, zero hunger, and good health and good mental well-being for all the citizens of the world. Thus, attainment of quality education requires concerted effort not only from civil society and government agencies but from individual citizens.

Taking into perspective the Indian scenario, the country has taken up a new educational policy. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

mentions quality education in many important segments and highlights ways of achieving the same. In the four segments- School Education, Higher Education, Making it happen and Other key areas- it has laid down significant steps which, if taken up in the right direction would lead to the attainment of quality education for every child in India.

However, the existing scenario significantly diverges from the envisioned ideal situation, which continues to be a developmental objective for the country. This paper explores the conditions prevailing in one such region of the nation, the Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal.

Background of the study

The tea-growing region in the state of West Bengal is divided into three regions, which in planting parlance are called tea districts. These are Dooars, comprising the tea-growing area of

Jalpaiguri district and Cooch Behar; the Terai, comprising the tea-growing area in the plains of Darjeeling district and West Dinajpur; and Darjeeling, comprising the tea-growing area in the hills of Darjeeling district (Bhowmik, 1996).

Jalpaiguri district of North Bengal is the northern part of the state of West Bengal. Its geographical proximity to Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan in the North, Assam and Bangladesh in the east, South Bengal and Bihar in the South and West has provided it a special place of strategic importance. North Bengal has been serving as the eastern gateway for the passage and communication of people, commodities and ideas between the Indian Sub-continent in the West and Assam, Burma, China and other parts of South-East Asia in the East. This area is situated in the centre of the network connecting different civilisations. It is a region where people of Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh can easily identify themselves in terms of history, heritage, languages, culture and customs.

When the British were exploring prospective areas to grow tea in India, the Darjeeling Hills appeared to be one of the possible sites. Located at altitudes ranging from 600 to 2,000 meters (2,000 to 6,600 ft) and having an annual average rainfall of around 309 centimetres (122 in), it had the advantage of location, climate and soil conditions. There were experiments from the early 1800s, followed by commercial cultivation around 1853. By 1874, there were 113 gardens in the Darjeeling district. Tea planting in the Dooars region of Jalpaiguri district began in 1874 with Gazoldhoba (Gazeldhubi) as the first tea garden. R. Haughton is recognised as the pioneer of the tea industry in the district, while H. P. Brougham took the first lease of Gazoldhoba, appointing Haughton as manager. The rapid growth of the tea industry from the earliest days inspired planters to try out tea cultivation in the Terai region, and James White set up the first Terai plantation in 1862 at Champta. The first Dooars garden in the Jalpaiguri district came up at Gazalduba, and by 1876, the area had 13 plantations.

The altitude in the tea-growing areas of the Dooars-Terai region ranges from 90 to 1,750 meters (300 to 5,740 ft) and receives an annual rainfall of around 350 centimetres (140 in). The tea grown in the Dooars-Terai region of Jalpaiguri district has the distinction of having bright,

smooth and full-bodied liquor that's a wee bit lighter than Assam tea (Bhattacharya, 2018). The Dooars, a strip of land at the foothills of the Himalayas east of the Teesta River, was annexed from Bhutan in 1865. This region is part of North Bengal, which includes Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, and Upper Coochbehar.

For working in the gardens in the Jalpaiguri district, the British imported labourers from Chota Nagpur and Santhal Parganas. The Oraon, Munda, Kharia, Mahali, Chik Baraik and Lohora are the tribes who work as labourers in these tea gardens established by the British since 1853. The three major tribes of this region are Oraon 50.35%, Munda 11.38% and Santhal 5.31% (Census, 2011).

A tribe refers to a group of families with distinct customs, occupying a specific territory, and often having limited contact with mainstream society. Scheduled tribes are considered "backward tribes" living in excluded and partially excluded areas (Census of India, 1931). Dr Virginius Xaxa (1999) opines that the term 'tribal', once used for administrative convenience, has now been embraced by the communities themselves to reflect their experience of deprivation and dispossession.

Article 275 of the Indian Constitution provides for grants-in-aid from the Consolidated Fund of India to support the welfare and development of Scheduled Tribes and improve administration in tribal areas. Despite these provisions, much of the tribal population in Jalpaiguri district, North Bengal, continues to face poor living conditions. For example, many tribal workers in the district's tea gardens still lack land rights and access to permanent housing (Bhowmik, 1996). Hence, even after 150 years and three generations of service to the tea gardens, these labourers do not have the basic rights of land and property.

In recent times, there has been a lockdown in most tea gardens, resulting in mass unemployment. In the absence of two square meals a day and a temporary thatched roof, the developmental stages of a growing adolescent go through a lot of physiological, psychological, social and educational challenges. These tribals are often referred to as Adivasis by the general population. Unfortunately, in reality, the right of being an Adivasi, which means native inhabitants,

has not been given to them, as no basic privileges are being enjoyed by them, starting from having a land of their own to having a good standard of living. They live in poverty and spend two-thirds of their income on food, clothing and shelter (Bhowmik, 1996). Hence, they depend solely on the tea garden owners for their survival, and if the owners decide to lock down the garden, they lose their jobs and become displaced. In such cases, they have no alternative source of income, and managing life becomes more difficult for these families. In these circumstances, it is evident that the children who grow up here do not enjoy the basic facilities of food, nutrition education and psychological development (ActionAid, 2016). However, many children in India, especially from the tribal community, are not privileged to receive a favourable environment for their holistic growth and development. Kamath (1998) writes in his book titled *Tribal Education in India*, "A very conducive environment is constructed by a community that has a large number of proactive, committed and enlightened persons". He has further written, 'It is a fact that relatively very few schools that serve tribal children pass out of school, and a fraction of them go to college, technical or vocational education (Kamath, 1998).

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines adolescence as a phase of life between 10 and 19 years of age. G. Stanley Hall (1904), the father of scientific research in adolescence, devised the concept that adolescence is a turbulent time charged with conflict and mood swings. He characterised adolescence as a 'period of storm and stress'. The adolescent period needs care, nurture, and guidance. Mental health, as we know, plays an important role in shaping personality and becomes a foundation in career building. Studies in both psychology and education have suggested that proper growth and development of Adolescence can prepare a valuable human resource for our nation. However, certain challenges at this age, if not addressed, may hinder the development of the adolescent. The adolescents who grow up in these tea gardens sometimes even have to worry about food and proper nutrition (ActionAid, 2016). Hence, the environment in which these adolescents are placed becomes not only unfavourable for their all-around development but also full of stress and worries. In these circumstances, the situation that

an adolescent in this tea garden falls into is very challenging. The hurdles are many, and the support systems are few. It is, hence a topic of interest to know, understand, and highlight the challenges faced by tribal adolescents in tea gardens, so that they can be presented to civil society. Interventions can be made to reach out to them.

1. Objectives of the study:

- □ The article focuses on studying the educational challenges and schooling experiences of tribal adolescents in the Tea gardens of the Jalpaiguri District of North Bengal.

Study Questions:

- □ What are the Educational Challenges and school experiences of tribal Adolescents in the tea gardens of the Jalpaiguri district of North Bengal?

3. Research Gap

The Educational inequality faced by the tribal communities is already a known fact. However, the studies so far have only focused on the external causes and have not studied the communities closely. Most of the study has focused on the condition of their houses, nutritional deficiencies, health issues, dropout rates, and unemployment of parents due to the closing down of the tea gardens. There is limited research that has closely studied the real challenges of the tribal communities, their children and the educational challenges faced by the adolescents. Little attention has been given to the school infrastructure, the home environment, the socio-economic challenges, the learning experiences, the education of parents, the peer group influence, etc. The list is long, as challenges are many. The hurdles and difficulties faced by a growing adolescent, and specifically their education, thus became an area of interest for the researcher.

4. Review of Literature

A study conducted in the southern part of India by Sujatha (2000) published in the report, the India Education Report, mentions that a major part of tribal children are out of school. It is also impressive to notice that there is an increase in the enrolment ratio of both the scheduled caste and the scheduled tribe, even though the dropout

rate is also a serious concern.

Verma & Srivastava (2020) Conducted a study on nutritional status and food-related status of the Tribals in the tea gardens of Malbazar, concluding that most of the tribes belong to the Oraon tribe. The nutritional value of the food they consume is very low. The ICDS scheme has managed to cater to only 25% of the energy requirement of the Tribal children. A report conducted by the West Bengal School Education Department and Statistics of School Education states that a high dropout rate has been observed among tribal students, particularly at the secondary and senior secondary stages.

Virginus Xaxa (2014) mentions that despite the concerted effort by the government, there are still a large number of schools that do not have the minimum facilities for education in the tribal areas. "While there has been a decline in the percentage of out-of-school children across gender and social categories, tribal children still need greater and focused attention in this regard".

Deb (2018), in her article titled Tribal Habitat and the Characteristics of their houses, writes that the Santhal, Munda and Oraon are the major scheduled tribes of West Bengal. 19% of the total population is Tribal. All 40 Tribal communities that are found in the state exist in Jalpaiguri. However, since they migrated from the Chotanagpur plateau and Santhal parganas, they have been living in kuccha houses and semi-built houses.

A study conducted by **Samhitha & Sreedevi (2020)** clearly states that the environment at home is a dominant factor for the growth of Adolescents. While the school environment and care play a pivotal role in the responsibility, care and trust they enjoy at home help them grow into a successful individual in their life, making them self-reliant and highly mature.

Urdu & Pajares (2002) pointed out in their study that most Adolescents try to connect with friends and parents, build a bond, and trace out their career paths, but many find this a challenge. The self-determination theory of Ryan (2012) examines the social contextual factors at home and school that are responsible for adolescents' wellbeing, motivation and cultivation of values and good habits. It observes that just like plants require sunlight, air and water for proper growth

and nourishment, an adolescent requires social support for healthy psychological development. Jamadar & Sindhu (2015). Their study concluded that socioeconomic status has a high impact on emotional intelligence and creativity.

Mohammad Naeem Mohsin Mohammad Ayub Buzdar et al. (2017) found that the Academic Achievement of students can be enhanced if the behaviours, deviance, aggression and depression of adolescents can be controlled. There is a great role played by the parents and teachers at school in providing a conducive atmosphere to the students in order to enhance their academic achievement. Socio-economic and other inequalities are directly related to the mental health of young people.

Das (2020) concluded that a higher level of socio-economic status contributes towards high achievement in Adolescents. Socio-economic status is one of the important family characteristics that contributes towards the academic achievement of students.

5. Methodology:

The study followed a descriptive survey method. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS. Descriptive statistics- mean and standard deviation were calculated. Cronbach's alpha assessed the reliability of the scales.

Sample

A total of 120 school-going tribal adolescents from the tea gardens of the Dooars region of North Bengal were surveyed. The study was conducted in 5 blocks of the Jalpaiguri district. The 5 blocks were chosen based on a purposive sampling technique in quantitative research. These 5 blocks, often referred to as the Dooars, have a significant concentration of tea gardens in the district compared to other areas, which feature paddy fields and the cultivation of vegetables.

Study tools

Data were collected through a questionnaire. To study the objectives of the study, the researcher used a Likert scale. The first part of the questionnaire has the basic demographic data (name, class, age, school and name of tea garden). The second part has the four dimensions. The first three dimensions have 5 items each, and the last dimension has 10 items. Hence, there are a total of 25 items.

Validity and Reliability

The researcher employed two types of validity:

- **Content and face validity-** To ensure face and content validity, the initial version of the questionnaire was presented to 5 experts. Based on the feedback and recommendations of the experts, final changes were made.
- **Construct Validity-** To achieve internal consistency, a pilot study was conducted. The items were administered to 50 school-going tribal adolescents of the tea gardens of the Dooars region and to the same population after a period of one month. The results of this trial were, however, excluded from the main study.
- **Reliability-** To check the internal consistency between the dimensions, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated. It ranged between 0.7 and 0.8.

Dimensions of the Study:

1. Infrastructure facility at School: The infrastructure facility at school is a very significant (1= Very poor)

factor for a student's well-being and good learning experience. It supports the academic life of a student, catering to their all-around and wholesome development. A good infrastructure facility would include clean drinking water, clean toilets, good classroom seating with proper furniture, facilities for a library, laboratories, a games room, a good playground, etc. Lack of any of these hinders the all-around development of a student's personality. The questionnaire in this study included the following items:

- Quality of the classroom.**
- Availability of Educational resources.**
- Cleanliness and maintenance of the classroom.**
- Cleanliness and maintenance of toilets.**
- Laboratory facilities.**

A five-point Likert Scale was adopted. (5= Very good, 4= Good, 3= Acceptable, 2= Poor)

Table 1.1: Mean and standard deviation were calculated for the above dimension (Infrastructure facility at School)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Quality of Classroom	120	2	5	3.41	.750
Availability of Educational Resources	120	1	5	3.35	.993
Cleanliness of the classroom	120	1	5	3.23	.965
Cleanliness and maintenance of toilets	120	1	4	2.17	.882
Laboratory facilities	120	1	5	3.02	1.237

Analysis: The results presented in Table 1.1 show the mean and standard deviation for each item under the infrastructure facility at the school. Among the five items, the highest Mean was found for the item: Quality of Classroom (Mean = 3.41, SD = 0.75). This indicates that most of the schools have acceptable classroom infrastructure. In contrast, the lowest mean was observed for the

item: Cleanliness and Maintenance of Toilets at School (Mean = 2.17, SD = 0.8), which means that in most schools, the toilet facilities need to be improved. The standard deviation was higher for the item, Laboratory Facilities, indicating more variability among students' responses for this item.

Table 1.2 Descriptive Statistics of Scores on Educational Challenges of tribal adolescents about

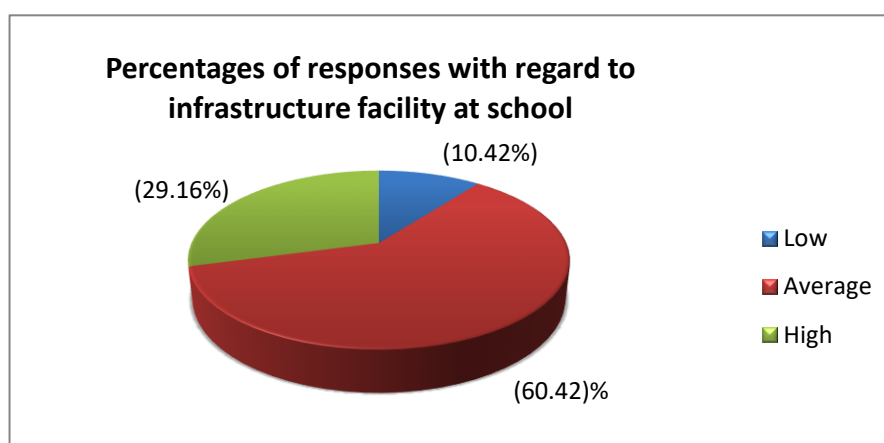
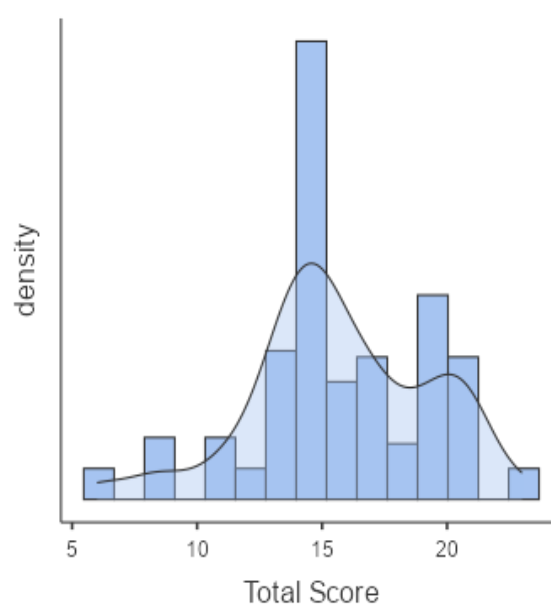
the infrastructure facility at school

	N	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Total Score	240	15.7	15.0	3.59	6	23

Table 1.3 Frequency distribution of educational challenges of tribal adolescents about infrastructure facilities at school (N=240)

CI	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	LEVEL
6-11	25	10.42	Low
12-17	145	60.42	Average
18-23	70	29.16	High

Figure 1. Graphical representation of the educational challenges of tribal adolescents about infrastructure facilities at school



Interpretation: The descriptive statistics show

that the mean of 15.7 and the median of 15.0 are closely aligned, indicating a relatively balanced distribution of scores on educational challenges about infrastructure facilities at school (n=240). The standard deviation was found to be 3.59, reflecting moderate variability, which suggests that while many respondents experience comparable levels of infrastructural challenges, there are some differences in the extent of difficulties faced across schools.

The wide score range from 6 to 23 indicates varied levels of infrastructural support and constraints, implying that certain schools are relatively better equipped, whereas others face significant deficiencies in basic facilities such as quality of classrooms, availability of educational resources, cleanliness, sanitation, and laboratory facilities. The frequency distribution shows that 29.16% of respondents fall in the high category, followed by 60.42% in the average category and 10.42% in the low category. This pattern, also reflected in the graphical representation, indicates that infrastructural factors play a crucial role in shaping students' educational experiences, with a considerable proportion of respondents experiencing moderate to high levels of challenges. This trend, as also reflected in the graphical representation, highlights the unequal availability and quality of school infrastructure, which may directly impact students' learning conditions and overall academic engagement.

2. Home Environment

The home environment plays a significant role

in the developmental stages of life. Disturbance in the atmosphere at home may further add to the stress of Adolescents and hinder proper psychological development. The study intends to find the challenges faced by the Adolescents of the tea garden who are mostly first-generation learners at their homes in the tea garden areas.

The Santhal, Munda and Oraon are the major scheduled tribes of West Bengal. 19% of the total population is Tribal. All 40 Tribal communities that are found in the state exist in Jalpaiguri. However, since they migrated from the Chota Nagpur Plateau and Santhal Parganas, they have been living in kuccha houses and semi-built houses (Deb, 2018). While many families of the Tribal population have managed to improve their living and socio-economic conditions, some are still in a stagnant condition. Hence, a collaborative effort from the state centre and local government, along with community partnership, can help improve the conditions of these people and help them improve their standard and quality of life (Basak, 2018).

- a) **Support in academics.**
- b) **Homework without distractions.**
- c) **Safe and secure home.**
- d) **Importance of Education in the family.**
- e) **Parents' School education.**

A five-point Likert Scale was adopted for the first four questions (5= Very good, 4= Good, 3= Acceptable, 2= Poor, 1= Very poor), and for the last one, the responses were (5= Always, 4= Very frequently, 3= Occasionally, 2= Rarely, 1= Never)

Table 2.1: Mean and standard deviation were calculated for the above dimension (Home Environment)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Supportive home environment	120	1	5	3.50	1.021
Completion of homework on time	120	1	5	3.48	.917
Safe and secure home environment	120	3	5	4.13	.784
Importance of Education in the Family	120	1	5	3.02	1.029

Parents School Education	120	1	5	3.27	1.172
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Analysis: The results presented in Table 2.1 show the Mean and Standard Deviation for each item under Home Environment. Among the five items, the highest Mean was found for the item -Safe and Secure Home Environment (Mean = 4.13, SD =0.78). This indicates that most of the Adolescents have a safe and secure environment at home. In contrast, the lowest Mean was observed for the item – Importance of Education in Family (Mean = 3.02 and SD = 1.02), which means most of the families do not give importance to Education. Standard deviation was higher for the item- Parents School Education, indicating more variability among students' responses for this item.

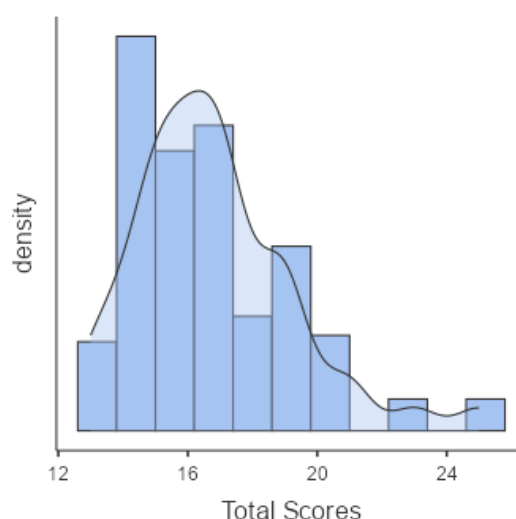
Table 2.2 Descriptive Statistics of Scores on educational challenges of tribal adolescents about home environment

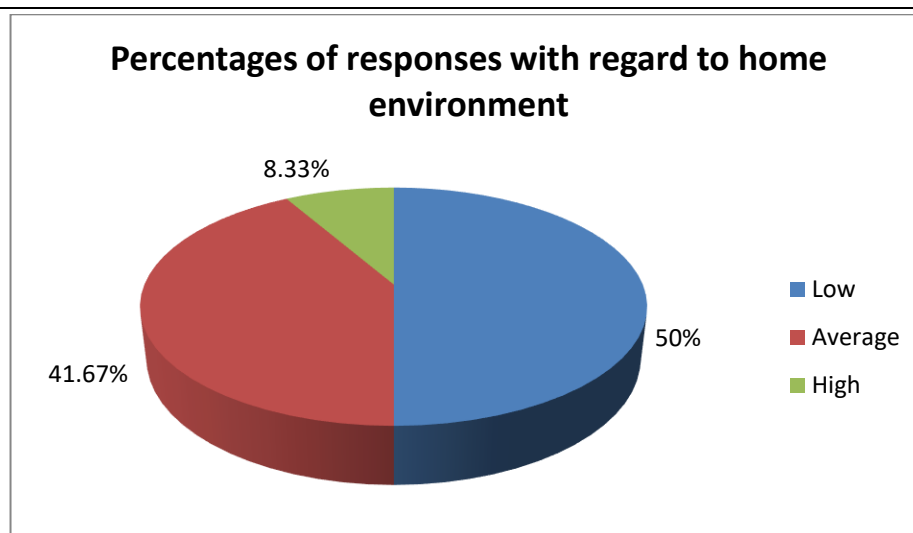
	N	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Total Scores	240	16.8	16.5	2.46	13	25

Table 2.3 Frequency distribution of educational challenges of tribal adolescents about home environment (N=240)

CI	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	LEVEL
13-16	120	50	Low
17-20	100	41.67	Average
21-25	20	8.33	High

Figure 2. Graphical representation of the educational challenges of tribal adolescents about the home environment





Interpretation:

The frequency distribution of scores on home environment-related educational challenges reveals that a majority of respondents fall within the low category (50%), followed by 41.67% in the average category and only 8.33% in the high category. The findings indicate that 50% of the respondents fall within the low category, suggesting that a substantial proportion experience less supportive home environments in addressing educational challenges. Additionally, 41.67% of the respondents are classified under the moderate category, indicating a moderate level of home support, which may partially facilitate their educational engagement. In contrast, only 8.33% of the respondents fall within the high category, reflecting that a very small proportion benefit from highly supportive home environments in coping with educational challenges.

Overall, the distribution suggests that while a segment of respondents receives some degree of support at home, a majority lack adequate home environment facilitation, which may have implications for their learning outcomes and ability to effectively deal with educational challenges.

3. Learning experience at School

The school not only nurtures an individual but also shapes his/her personality. Studies have suggested that in many such situations, school

may help an individual to overcome even the personal problems faced at home. The teachers can many times substitute the role of parents and become guides in shaping an individual to make him a responsible citizen. The study, hence, intends to find out the role played by the schools of the Dooars region of North Bengal in shaping the lives of these tribal adolescents and the causes for failure and achievements in this attempt. Students come to school with a level of expectation to learn and gain knowledge; hence, it is the duty of the school management, along with the teachers, to support the students in the best way possible, being present for them whenever needed. However, not all students are fortunate enough to go through the same kind of experience. Based on the survey conducted in the present study, the responses were found to be mostly unsatisfactory.

- a) Lessons and activities at school.
- b) Teacher's teaching style.
- c) Support and feedback from teachers.
- d) Availability of remedial classes.
- e) Language barrier.

A five-point Likert Scale was adopted for items a, c and d (5= Always, 4= Very frequently, 3= Occasionally, 2= Rarely, 1= Never) and for item b (5= Very good, 4= Good, 3= Acceptable, 2= Poor 1= Very poor).

Table 3.1: Mean and standard deviation were calculated for the above dimension (Learning experience at school)

N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
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Lessons and activities in School	120	1	5	3.18	.987
Teaching Style of Teachers	120	2	5	3.22	.688
Support from Teachers	120	1	5	3.14	1.015
Extra classes and remedial help	120	1	5	2.69	1.242
Language barrier	120	1	5	2.88	1.055

Analysis: The results presented in Table 3.1 show the Mean and Standard Deviation for each item under Learning experience at School. Among the five items, the highest mean was found for the item -Teaching style of Teachers (Mean = 3.22, SD = 0.68). This indicates that most of the adolescents in the region are comfortable with the teacher's teaching style. In contrast, the lowest Mean was observed for the items – Extra Classes

and Remedial Help (Mean = 2.69 and SD = 1.24) and Language Barrier (Mean = 2.88 and SD = 1.05), which means most of the Adolescents do not get remedial help from school, and Language is a barrier for them. However, the Standard deviation was higher for the item- Language Barrier, indicating more variability among students' responses for this item.

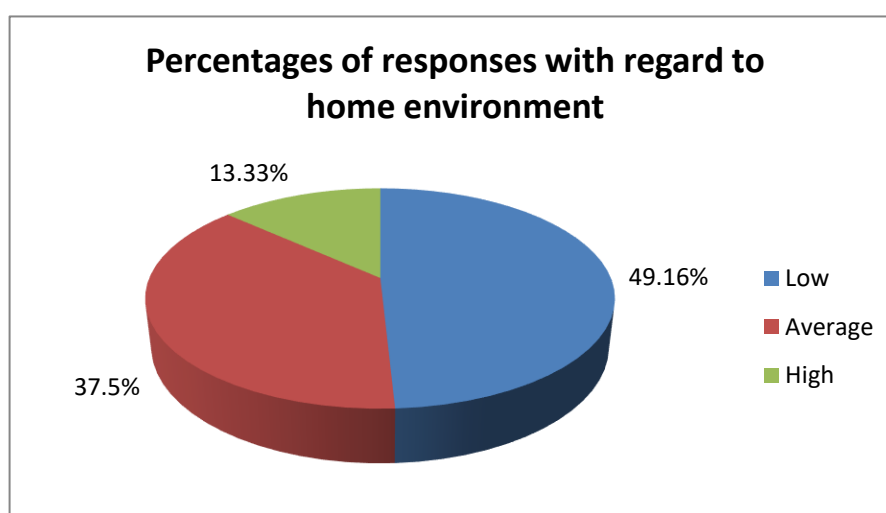
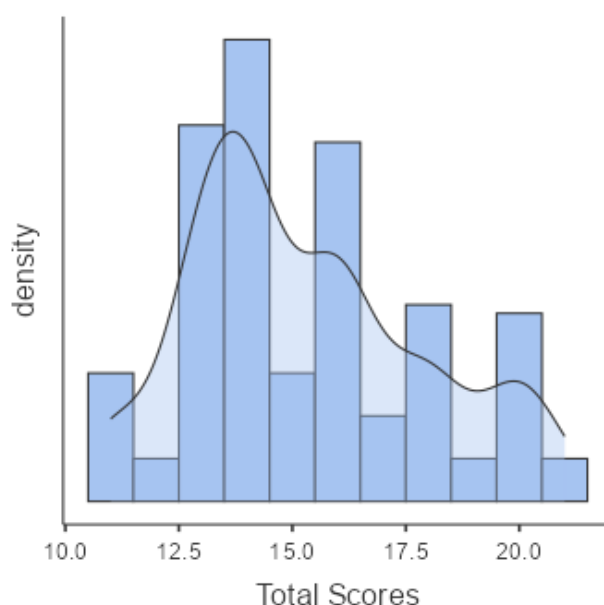
Table 3.2 Descriptive Statistics of Scores on educational challenges of tribal adolescents about Learning Experience at school

	N	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Total Scores	240	15.3	15.0	2.58	11	21

Table 3.3 Frequency distribution of educational challenges of tribal adolescents about Learning Experience at school (N=240)

CI	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	LEVEL
11-14	118	49.16	Low
15-18	90	37.5	Average
19-21	32	13.33	High

Figure 3. Graphical representation of the educational challenges of tribal adolescents about the learning experience at school



Interpretation: The frequency distribution of scores pertaining to learning experience at school indicates that 49.16% of the respondents fall within the low category, suggesting that nearly half of the students experience less favourable or limited learning conditions within the school environment. A further 37.5% of the respondents are classified under the average category, reflecting a moderate level of learning experience, where students encounter both supportive and constraining classroom situations. In contrast, only 13.33% of the respondents fall within the high category, indicating that a relatively small proportion of students benefit from a highly positive and enriching learning experience at school.

Overall, the distribution reveals that while some students experience satisfactory learning conditions regarding lessons and activities at

school, teachers' teaching style, support and feedback from teachers, availability of remedial classes and language barrier, a significant majority do not perceive their school learning environment as highly supportive.

4. Challenges in General: This dimension encompasses the challenges faced by the adolescents of the tea gardens in general. These challenges sometimes hinder even the adolescents' attempts to attain education. In some cases, it was also observed that these adolescents could not fulfil their desire to study further. Many of the tea gardens are situated far from the main town, making it inconvenient for the Adolescents to be able to travel. Hence, the Adolescents are enrolled in a school but are not regular. In other cases, it was observed that there was a lack of awareness and information. Even though the government has been investing a lot of resources in their

upliftment, the students are not able to fully utilise them. The study focuses on a few of the following challenges:

- a) a) Balance between academics and housework/chores.
- b) Financial challenges as a barrier to School Education.
- c) c) Discrimination and Harassment.
- d) d) Challenges in pursuing higher education due to economic conditions.
- e) e) Challenges in accessing education due to the location of the tea garden.
- f) f) Irregularity due to health and hygiene.

g) g) Difficulty in attending school regularly.

h) h) Challenges in accessing vocational training opportunities.

i) i) Educational Support from the community.

j) j) Support from the tea gardens.

A five-point Likert Scale was adopted for items a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h (1= Always, 2= Very frequently, 3= Occasionally, 4= Rarely, 5= Never) and for items I and j (5= Very high, 4= Above average, 3= Average, 2= Below Average, 1= Poor).

Table 4.1. The mean and standard deviation were calculated for the above dimension (Challenges in General)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Housework and academic balance	120	1	5	2.65	1.090
Financial Challenges	120	1	5	2.58	1.097
Discrimination and Harassment	120	1	5	2.84	1.100
Challenges in Pursuing Higher Education	120	1	5	2.55	1.028
Distance and location of the school from home	120	1	5	2.89	1.035
Challenges due to Health and Hygiene	120	1	5	2.88	1.175
Challenges in accessing formal education	120	1	5	2.73	1.216
Challenges in accessing Vocational training	120	1	5	2.67	1.087
Community support towards education	120	1	5	2.83	1.205
Supported by Tea Garden Management	120	1	5	2.83	1.451

Analysis: The results presented in Table 4.1 show the Mean and Standard Deviation for each item under Challenges in General. Among the five items, the highest Mean was found for the item - Distance and Location of School from home

(Mean = 2.89, SD = 1.03). This indicates that most of the Adolescents very frequently have challenges in accessing education due to the distance and location of the school from home. In contrast, the lowest Mean was observed for the item -

Challenge in pursuing higher education (Mean 2.55 and SD 1.02) and financial challenges (Mean 2.58 and S.D 1.09), which means most of the Adolescents face challenges in accessing higher education and also face financial challenges. However, the Standard deviation was higher for the item – Support by Tea Garden Management, which means more variability among students' responses for this item. However, from the table we can easily interpret that Adolescents of the Tea Gardens of the Dooars region of North Bengal have responded in a similar way to Challenges due to House work (Mean 2.65 SD 1.09), Discrimination and Harassment (Mean 2.84 SD

1.10), Challenges due to health and hygiene (2.88 SD 1.17), Challenges in accessing formal education (Mean 2.73 SD 1.21), Challenges in Accessing vocational Training (Mean 2.67 SD1.08), Challenges due to less community support (Mean 2.83 SD 1.20). The standard deviation in most of the items is above 1, suggesting students had varied responses and their experiences are different from one another. This is also because data has been taken from 5 different blocks and from 12 different schools. The experiences of the Adolescents also vary as they belong to different tea gardens run by different companies.

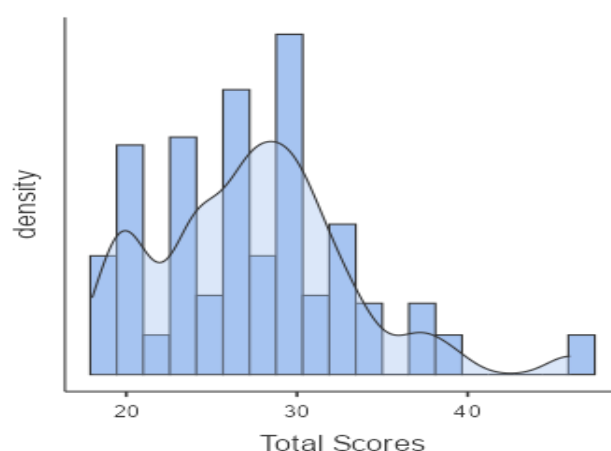
Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics of Scores on Educational Challenges of tribal adolescents about challenges in general

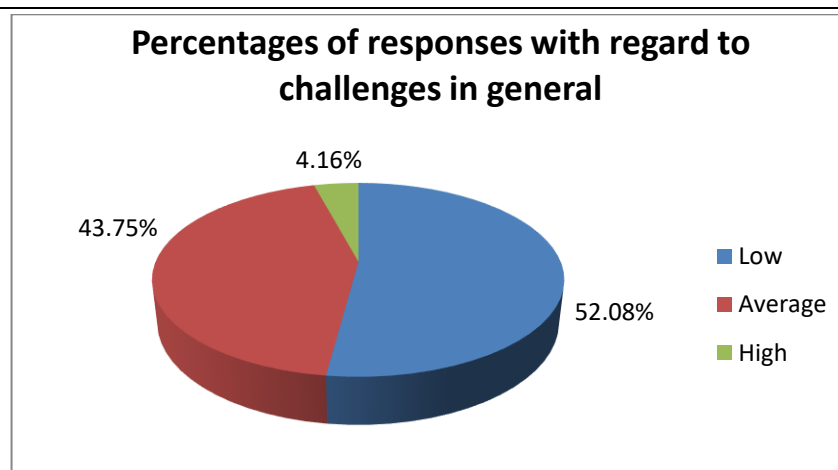
	N	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Total Scores	240	27.4	27.0	5.67	18	46

Table 4.3 Frequency distribution of educational challenges of tribal adolescents about challenges in general (N=240)

CI	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	LEVEL
18-27	125	52.08	Low
28-37	105	43.75	Average
38-46	10	4.16	High

Figure 4. Graphical representation of educational challenges of tribal adolescents about Challenges in general





Interpretation: The frequency distribution of scores on general challenges among tribal adolescents indicates that 52.08% of respondents fall in the low category, suggesting that more than half of the students experience a lower level of general educational challenges in their day-to-day academic life. A further 43.75% of the respondents are classified under the average category, reflecting a moderate level of challenges faced by the students in balancing and coping with educational demands. In contrast, only 4.16% of the respondents fall within the high category, indicating that a very small proportion of students experience severe or intense general educational challenges.

Overall, the distribution reveals that while a considerable number of students face moderate educational difficulties, the majority do not experience extremely high levels of general challenges. The findings suggest that issues such as adjustment to school life, peer interaction, academic pressure, motivation towards studies, access to learning resources, and other day-to-day educational concerns are present to varying degrees, but only a limited number of adolescents experience these challenges at a highly critical level.

6. Major Findings and Discussion:

- □ The Adolescents of the tea garden areas of the Dooars region face different kinds of challenges.
- □ For some, unhygienic toilet facilities are a matter of concern related to school infrastructure.
- □ For others, language barriers and lack of remedial help are areas where intervention is much needed.

- □ Difficulty in balancing housework and academic life, financial issues at home, discrimination and harassment faced, challenges in pursuing higher education, distance and location of school from home, personal health and no support from the tea garden management for regular education are a set of challenges being faced by some of them.

7. Conclusion

The Educational Challenges of tribal Adolescents in the Dooars tea gardens of Jalpaiguri district, North Bengal, are deep-rooted. Socio-Economic conditions, poverty, language barrier, unemployment of parents, discrimination, health, etc., are some of the prominent challenges faced by these Adolescents. Lack of support from the community, the tea company and parental guidance hinder their academic growth and development. These can be addressed through proper planning, execution, and continuous follow-up by the government, civil society, and institutions. Timely intervention can play a big role in supporting Adolescents and preventing them from dropping out of school, motivating them for further education and a good future. Some of these include Infrastructure development, upgrading the facilities at school including clean drinking water and toilet facilities, establishing residential school with hostel facilities for students from far flung areas, appointment of trained qualified teachers and providing incentives to them in the form of housing facilities, including tribal culture, history and identity in their curriculum as they are culturally sensitive in nature, health check-up and proper nutritious food as mid-day meal, remedial classes, career and personal guidance facilities, collaborating with

NGOs and local leaders can help address some of these challenges.

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