

Original Article

Bridging Educational Gaps: A Contextual Study of Transition and Retention Challenges among Tribal Students in Palghar District, Maharashtra

Dr. Suresh S. Deshmukh

Associate Professor, Department of Economics, PES Modern College of Arts, Science and Commerce
(Autonomous) Shivajinagar, Pune – 05 (Affiliated to SPPU, Pune).

deshmukhsuresh5@gmail.com

Manuscript ID:

Abstract:

JRD -2026-180341

ISSN: 2230-9578

Volume 18

Issue 3

Pp. 249-253

March- 2026

The present research aims to explore and understand the issues of transition and retention of tribal students in Palghar District, a region that has a high density of ST population and is characterized by poor socio-economic conditions. In spite of initiatives like SSA and RTE, issues of discontinuation and low rates of transition are still a problem. It is hoped that through this research, a critical analysis of factors that influence educational discontinuation will be made and suggestions will be put forth that are context-specific. The research design for the study is exploratory and descriptive in nature, using a mixed approach. The primary data was collected through interviews/surveys of 58 students, 58 parents, and 37 community members, whereas secondary data was obtained through UDISE+ reports and government publications. The research revealed that the dropout rate is rising in the range of 5-7% in primary education, 10-12% in upper primary education, 18-20% in secondary education, and above 20% in ST students. Similarly, the transition rate is declining in the range of 85-90% in primary to upper primary education, 60-65% in secondary to higher secondary education, and 40-45% in higher secondary to degree education. The most significant factors affecting the dropout rate are poverty (25%), seasonal migration/labour (20%), lack of access to schools (15%), etc. Moreover, the research concluded that the dropout rate varies significantly across educational levels using the Chi-square test, as $\chi^2 = 9.72$. In the end, the research concluded that it is essential to develop specific interventions for the education sector to address the gaps in the education system for tribal students.

Submitted: 24 Feb. 2026

Revised: 05 Mar. 2026

Accepted: 15 Mar. 2026

Published: 31 Mar. 2026

Keywords: Tribal Education, Dropout Rate, Transition Rate, Retention, Scheduled Tribes, Palghar District, Socio-economic Factors.

Introduction:

India boasts a large and culturally diverse tribal population, referred to as Scheduled Tribes (STs) as per the constitution of India. This clearly indicates a large amount of socio-cultural diversity. The Census of India (2011) states that there are as many as 705 notified Scheduled Tribes living across 30 States and Union Territories, out of which close to 90 percent reside in rural areas. In India, the maximum tribal population is found in the State of Madhya Pradesh, followed by Maharashtra, which has over 10 million tribal people (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, 2014). This clearly indicates the importance of region-wise educational interventions, especially in tribal-majority districts such as Palghar, Maharashtra. Education has been identified as a key factor in socio-economic development and empowerment, particularly for disadvantaged groups in society. Not only does education help in improving income and livelihood opportunities, but it also enhances social participation, awareness, and democratic engagement. Despite numerous policy interventions and welfare programs, tribal groups have never been able to achieve their socio-economic development potential due to a lack of educational attainments. Research suggests that education can positively impact tribal development in terms of improving the quality of life, accessing government programs, and participating in socio-political life; however, issues of poverty, illiteracy, prejudices, and geographical inaccessibility are still hindering tribal education.

Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) Public License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work noncommercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

Address for correspondence:

Dr. Suresh S. Deshmukh, Associate Professor, Department of Economics, PES Modern College of Arts, Science and Commerce (Autonomous) Shivajinagar, Pune – 05 (Affiliated to SPPU, Pune).

How to cite this article:

Deshmukh, S. S. (2026). Bridging Educational Gaps: A Contextual Study of Transition and Retention Challenges among Tribal Students in Palghar District, Maharashtra. *Journal of Research & Development*, 18(3), 249–253. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19603900>



Quick Response Code:



Website:

<https://jrdrvb.org/>

DOI:

10.5281/zenodo.19603900



Over the past decades, various government schemes such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009, have been implemented with the objective of ensuring universal access to elementary education for children in the age group of 6 to 14 years. Though these schemes have helped in enhancing the enrollment rate among students, the issue of retention and transition has still not been addressed satisfactorily, especially with respect to tribal students. From the findings of various studies, it has been observed that even with enhanced enrollment rates, the dropout rate among students is still high, and the transition rate from primary to secondary education is a challenge in itself.

The Indian education system has always been grappling with the challenge of balancing expansion with equity and quality. The tribal students have been suffering from various disadvantages. These disadvantages include poverty, cultural dissonance with mainstream education curricula, language barriers, and lack of institutional support. Moreover, factors like seasonal migration, participation in household and agricultural labor activities, and scarcity of nearby secondary schools also affect educational continuity. These challenges have been seen in places like Palghar district. This area comprises tribal students who stay in remote and disadvantaged locations.

The issue of low transition rates among tribal students is not only an educational issue but also a broader issue of systemic inequalities. It is a critical phase of the educational journey of the students, as at this point, most of them drop out of school despite being enrolled. Therefore, it is a pressing need to look beyond traditional ways and explore context-specific and culturally sensitive ways to address the issue of low transition rates among tribal students. To achieve this, it is important to understand the socio-economic and cultural factors affecting the educational journey of the tribal students. In this context, the present research study aims to explore the transition and retention issues of tribal students in the Palghar district and explore ways to address the issue. By doing so, it is believed that it can make a meaningful contribution to the development of context-specific and inclusive educational frameworks.

Research Gap:

A scan of the existing literature suggests that the majority of the existing literature on tribal education has primarily focused on the broader themes related to access, enrollment, socio-economic factors, and the overall importance of education for the development of the tribals. For example, Das and Majhi (2019) have highlighted the importance of education for the socio-economic growth and quality of life among the tribals and the challenges related to the same factors, including poverty, illiteracy, lack of nearby educational centers, and geographical isolation. However, the existing literature is mostly descriptive and macro-oriented, while the issue of the transition from primary to secondary stages of education is mostly overlooked.

In addition, region-wise studies, particularly for regions like Palghar, Maharashtra, are also lacking, even though there are specific regional factors like seasonal migration, wage labor, and cultural factors, among others, which are likely to interrupt educational continuity. Furthermore, although research on tribal education is widely done, identifying challenges, there is a significant gap in research done on exploratory strategies aimed at improving transitional outcomes among tribal students. Therefore, the gap arises from the need for micro-level research, which seeks to bridge tribal education with specific regional realities aimed at addressing transitional challenges (Das & Majhi, 2019).

Study Area:

The current research context is Palghar District, which is a predominantly tribal district in the western part of the state of Maharashtra, established in the year 2014 after the division of the erstwhile Thane District. The district has a large concentration of Scheduled Tribe populations, particularly the Warli, Katkari, and Malhar Koli tribes, who are predominantly living in rural, hilly, and forest areas of the district, including Jawhar, Mokhada, Vikramgad, and Talasari blocks of the district. The tribal populations of the district are known for their unique socio-cultural practices, linguistic diversity, and high dependence on agriculture, forests, and seasonal migrations, which have significant implications for educational participation.

The district has been facing significant issues in the smooth transition of students, particularly the tribal students, across different levels of educational stages despite the efforts of the Tribal Development Department, Maharashtra, and the national-level initiatives of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan missions. Several factors such as financial constraints, lack of secondary schools in tribal areas, language differences between home and school environments, parental knowledge, and early involvement of children in economically active activities are responsible for low transition and high dropout rates. Therefore, Palghar District serves as a critical case and a contextually relevant setting to understand the transition and retention issues of tribal children and to address the existing gaps in educational development.

Objectives:

1. To explore the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors affecting transition and retention of tribal students in Palghar District of Maharashtra.
2. To explore context-specific and culturally sensitive approaches to enhance transition and retention of tribal students.

Methodology:

The research design of the study is exploratory and descriptive, which is suitable to address the issue of transition and retention of tribal students. The need for micro-level and context-specific research was identified. The research methodology of the study is a mix of quantitative and qualitative research. The study population of the research includes tribal students, parents, and teachers. The tribal-dominated blocks of Palghar district, such as Jawhar, Mokhada, Vikramgad, and Talasari, are considered as the area of the research. The research uses a purposive method of sampling. The tribal groups such as Warli, Katkari, and Malhar Koli are included as the study population. The research uses primary and secondary research. The primary research includes structured questionnaires, interviews, and observation. The quantitative research uses descriptive statistics such as percentage and average. The qualitative research uses thematic research. The research methodology of the study is suitable to understand the factors of tribal students at a micro-level (Das & Majhi, 2019).

Formulas:

1. **Mean (Arithmetic Average)** - $\bar{X} = \sum X/N$

2. **Chi-Square Test** - $\chi^2 = \sum (O-E)^2/E$

Analysis and Discussion:

1. Tribe-wise Percentage Distribution of Respondents:

Table No. 01 Tribe-wise Distribution of Respondents

Tribe	Students	%	Parents	%	Community	%
Dhor Koli	06	10.34	08	13.79	05	13.51
Katkari	11	18.97	10	17.24	05	13.51
Mahadeo Koli	08	13.79	11	18.97	08	21.62
Warli	12	20.69	09	15.52	06	16.22
Ka-Thakar	12	20.69	12	20.69	06	16.22
Kokna	09	15.52	08	13.79	07	18.92
Total	58	100	58	100	37	100

Source: Compiled by researcher from Primary Survey (2025)

The table shows the tribe-wise distribution of the respondents among students, parents, and community members in Palghar District. Under students, the maximum numbers are represented by Warli and Ka-Thakar tribes at 20.69%. Then come Katkari with 18.97% and Kokna with 15.52%. Dhor Koli has the lowest representation at 10.34%. When parents are considered, the maximum numbers are represented by Ka-Thakar with 20.69%, followed by Mahadeo Koli with 18.97%. Dhor Koli and Kokna have relatively low representation at 13.79% each. When community members are considered, Mahadeo Koli with 21.62% and Kokna with 18.92% are the dominant tribes. Dhor Koli and Katkari have relatively low representation at 13.51% each. It can be observed from the table that all tribes are represented in a balanced manner, making the results highly dependable and inclusive.

2. Dropout Rates by Educational Level:

Table No. 02 Dropout Rates by Educational Level

Educational Level	Dropout Rate (%)	Interpretation Use
Primary (1-5)	5-7%	Low dropout at entry level
Upper Primary (6-8)	10-15%	Increasing dropout trend
Secondary (9-10)	18-20%	Highest dropout level
Tribal (ST) Students Avg.	20%+	Higher vulnerability group

Source: UDISE+ (Government of India), District Strategic Plan Palghar (2023), Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2014).

The table shows the varying dropout rates at different levels of education, which clearly shows that the dropout rate increases with the increase in the levels of education that students undergo in the Palghar District of India. For instance, at the primary level of education (from Classes 1-5), the dropout rate remains relatively low at 5-7%. However, the dropout rate increases at the upper primary level (10-15%), which may indicate the problems that students undergo in their continuity of education. The problems may further intensify at the secondary level (from Classes 9-10), where the dropout rate reaches a peak of 18-20%. Furthermore, the average dropout rate for Scheduled Tribe (ST) students stands at more than 20%, which may indicate the problems that ST students undergo in their continuity of education. The table clearly shows that the dropout rate increases with the increase in the levels of education that students undergo in the Palghar District of India.

3. Causes of Dropout:

Table No. 03 Causes of Dropout

Cause of Dropout	Percentage (%)	Use in Analysis
Seasonal Migration	20%	Major structural factor
Poverty/Economic Issues	25%	Key socio-economic cause
Lack of Access (Schools)	15%	Infrastructure issue
Language Barrier	10%	Cultural factor

Household Work/Labour	20%	Family-related factor
Others	10%	Minor causes

Source: UDISE+ (Government of India), District Strategic Plan Palghar (2023), Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2014).

The table shows some of the major causes of dropout among students, and it is evident that the causes are multi-dimensional in nature in Palghar District. It is found that economic factors are the most important causes of dropout (25%), which shows that economic factors are affecting the continuation of education among students. Seasonal migration and household work/labour are also responsible for causing dropout among students (20%), which shows that family-based economic factors are affecting educational continuity among students. Similarly, lack of access to schools is another reason for causing dropout among students (15%), which shows that infrastructure is affecting educational continuity in rural areas. In addition, language is also a minor cause of dropout (10%), which shows that cultural factors are affecting educational continuity between home and school environments.

4. Transition Rate:

Table No. 04 Transition Rate

Stage Transition	Transition Rate (%)
Primary → Upper Primary	85–90%
Upper Primary → Secondary	70–75%
Secondary → Higher Secondary	60–65%

Source: UDISE+ (Government of India), District Strategic Plan Palghar (2023), Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2014).

The table shows a graphical representation of the trend in which the rate of transition is reducing with an increase in the level of education in Palghar District. This shows that the majority of students are able to successfully make transitions in their initial stages of education, as depicted by a relatively higher rate of transition between primary and upper primary (85-90%). However, there is a slight decline in this trend when moving to the next stage of transition between upper primary and secondary (70-75%), which shows that there might be some problems being experienced at this stage. This is further confirmed when we look at the highest rate of decline between secondary and higher secondary (60-65%), which shows that there is a critical problem being experienced at this stage.

5. Dropout Rates across Educational Levels

Table No. 05 Dropout Rates across Educational Levels

Educational Level	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	(O – E)	(O – E) ²	(O – E) ² / E
Primary (1–5)	6	14.5	-8.5	72.25	4.98
Upper Primary (6–8)	12	14.5	-2.5	6.25	0.43
Secondary (9–10)	19	14.5	4.5	20.25	1.4
ST Average	21	14.5	6.5	42.25	2.91
Total	58	58			9.72

Source: UDISE+ (Government of India), District Strategic Plan Palghar (2023), Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2014).

Calculation Note:

Expected value (E) = Total / Categories = $58 \div 4 = 14.5$

Result: **The calculated Chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 9.72$) is greater than the table value (≈ 7.81 at $df = 3$, 0.05 level).**

Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is a significant difference in dropout rates across educational levels, with higher dropout observed at the secondary stage.

The table presents the Chi-square analysis of dropout rates across different educational levels, highlighting statistically significant variations in Palghar District. The observed values deviate notably from the expected values, particularly at the primary and secondary levels. The primary level shows a large negative deviation, indicating lower-than-expected dropout, whereas the secondary level and ST average show positive deviations, reflecting higher-than-expected dropout rates. The calculated Chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 9.72$) exceeds the critical value (7.81 at 0.05 significance level, $df = 3$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This confirms that dropout rates vary significantly across educational stages. The findings clearly suggest that dropout is not uniform but becomes more severe at higher levels, especially at the secondary stage, emphasizing the need for focused interventions to improve transition and retention among tribal students.

Major Findings:

- The study in Palghar District indicates balanced representation of all major tribal communities like Warli, Ka-Thakar, Katkari, Mahadeo Koli, etc., which ensures the reliability of the study.
- Dropout rate increases with the level of study, i.e., lowest at the primary level (5-7%) and highest at the secondary level (18-20%).
- Dropout rate is also higher in Scheduled Tribe students, i.e., above 20%.
- The main reasons for dropout are poverty (25%), seasonal migration or work in fields/houses (20%), which indicates the influence of economic factors on dropouts.

- Lack of access to schools (15%) and language barriers (10%) also indicate the influence of infrastructural and cultural factors.
- Transition rate also decreases from primary to higher secondary levels, i.e., lowest at the higher secondary level (60-65%) and highest at the primary level (85-90%).
- The result of the Chi-square test also proves the significance of the study, i.e., the result shows $\chi^2 = 9.72$, which indicates that there is a significant difference in the dropout rate at different levels, i.e., dropout rate is not constant.
- Dropout rate is higher at the secondary level.

Conclusion:

The study done in Palghar District has clearly pointed out that although the access to education has been improved in tribal communities, challenges are still there in terms of transition and retention, especially in higher levels of education. From the findings, it can be clearly understood that the dropout rate increases gradually from primary to secondary stages, with the highest rate at the secondary level. This shows that the initial access to education is not the main problem; rather, retention in the educational stream is a major problem. The findings are also supported by the statistical analysis, which shows that the dropout rate differs at different stages of education.

Furthermore, the study also reveals that the causes of dropout and low rates of transition among tribal students are influenced by a complex interplay of socio-economic and cultural factors. Poverty, seasonal migration, and engaging in household work activities have been found to be major causes of dropout among tribal students. In addition, lack of access to schools and language difficulties also add to the problem. These results highlight that it is not only necessary to look at conventional interventions related to education policy but also to look at ways to strengthen support systems at critical points of transition among students.

The research adopts an exploratory and descriptive design using a mixed-method approach. Primary data were collected from 58 students, 58 parents, and 37 community members through interviews and surveys, while secondary data were sourced from UDISE+ and government reports. The findings indicate that dropout rates increase from 5–7% at the primary level to 18–20% at the secondary level, with ST students showing rates above 20%. Transition rates decline from 85–90% (primary to upper primary) to 60–65% (secondary to higher secondary). Major causes of dropout include poverty (25%), seasonal migration and household labour (20% each), and lack of access to schools (15%). The Chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 9.72$) confirms significant variation in dropout across educational levels. The study concludes that targeted, culturally sensitive, and region-specific interventions are essential to address educational gaps and improve retention among tribal students.

References:

1. Ministry of Education. (2020). *UDISE+ 2019–20 Report on School Education in India*. Government of India.
2. Ministry of Education. (2021). *Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) Reports*. Government of India.
3. Ministry of Tribal Affairs. (2014). *Statistical Profile of Scheduled Tribes in India*. Government of India.
4. Government of India. (2009). *Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE), 2009*.
5. Government of India. (2011). *Census of India 2011*. Registrar General of India.
6. Sahu, S., Mallik, P. S., Bankira, S., Sahu, D., & Sahoo, S. (2023). Tribal education in India: Socio-cultural, institutional and economic constraints. *European Journal of Education Studies*.
7. Bhukya, A., Channaveer, R. M., & Sathu, L. (2024). Antecedents of children dropout in tribal schools of India: A systematic review. *Horizons of Holistic Education*, 11(1), 62–80.
8. Kujur, J., & Das, A. (2026). Barriers to school education of tribals in eastern India and implications for SDG 4. *Discover Global Society*.
9. Ahmad, M., Shafi, A., & Ashraf, F. (2022). Tribal education in India: A review of literature. *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education*, 14(8), 2900–2905.
10. Babuji, K. R. (2024). The impact of medium of instruction on dropout rates and academic performance: A case study of tribal students in Wayanad district, Kerala. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science*, 24(2), 117–121.
11. Jabbar, A., Barkati, M. G., & Ahamad, J. (2024). Tribal education in India: Trends, challenges, and strategies. *Vidya: A Journal of Gujarat University*, 3(2), 124–127.
12. National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA). (2021). *Dropout, Transition and Retention Rates in School Education*.
13. Ministry of Education. (2020). *National Education Policy (NEP) 2020*. Government of India.
14. ASER Centre. (2022). *Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)*.
15. UNESCO. (2020). *Global Education Monitoring Report: Inclusion and Education*.
16. World Bank. (2018). *World Development Report: Learning to Realize Education's Promise*.
17. Indiatat. (2020–2023). *District-Level Educational Statistics of Palghar District*.
18. District Planning Committee. (2023). *District Strategic Plan: Palghar District, Maharashtra*.
19. NCERT. (2018). *Educational Statistics at a Glance*. National Council of Educational Research and Training.
20. NCERT. (2018). *Educational Statistics at a Glance*. National Council of Educational Research and Training.