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Attitude towards Employment among Scheduled Tribe Secondary School Students in Koraput District: A Gender, Locality and School-Type Analysis

Ms. Aseema Rath
Trained Graduate Teacher, Odisha Mining Adarsha Vidyalaya, Jeypore, Koraput
Corresponding Author Email: aseemarath15@gmail.com

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Abstract

Tribal adolescents in Koraput, one of India's most educationally disadvantaged districts, are approaching the transition from school to work, yet little is known about how they view employment. This study measured the employment attitudes of Scheduled Tribe (ST) secondary school students and tested whether attitudes differ by gender, school locality and school type. A descriptive survey was conducted with 80 Class IX and X ST students, selected by stratified random sampling (10 boys and 10 girls in each of four school-locality cells: government-urban, government-rural, private-urban, private-rural). Attitudes were measured with a 36-item, five-point Likert scale covering perceived employment opportunities, attitude towards skill development and learning, and career self-efficacy. Data were analysed with descriptive statistics and independent-samples t-tests. The mean score was 101.34 (SD = 8.78; possible range 36–180), which is slightly below the scale's neutral point of 108. Using mean ± 1 SD bands, 20.0% of students were low, 61.25% moderate and 18.75% high. Boys scored significantly higher than girls (d = 0.60), and students in government schools scored significantly higher than those in private schools (d = 0.61). Urban and rural students did not differ (d = 0.12). Attitudes towards employment among Koraput's tribal students are ambivalent rather than strongly positive, and the gaps are by gender and school sector rather than by geography. Gender-responsive career guidance and closer attention to career support in private schools are warranted.

Keywords: *employment attitude; tribal students; Scheduled Tribes; secondary education; gender; locality; school type*

1. Introduction

Education is widely regarded as a means of social and economic empowerment: it widens access to opportunity, improves quality of life and enables people to contribute to society. Its benefits are unevenly shared, however, and the disparities in access, participation and outcomes are sharpest among marginalised groups such as India's Scheduled Tribes (STs). Historical, geographical, cultural and economic factors limit the ability of tribal communities to compete in mainstream education and employment.

Getting a good education has never been easy for tribal children in India. Many live in remote villages, in families with little money, and far from a decent school. Those who do reach school often find the buildings poorly equipped and the lessons taught in a language and style that feel distant from their own lives. Some leave before finishing secondary school because their families cannot pay for it or because no school is close enough. The Right to Education Act (2009), ashram schools and scholarships were all meant to help, but tribal students still drop out more often than others. Part of the reason is that many parents do not see what schooling can lead to, and children are often sent to earn a living early.

Koraput, a tribal population dominated district in southern Odisha, is one of the country's most backward districts. Tribal people there majorly depend on agriculture, forest produce and handicrafts. Limited access to good schooling, poor infrastructure and economic hardship make it hard for young people to enter the formal job market. Understanding how

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tribal secondary school students think about employment is therefore important, because it reveals their aspirations, the obstacles they perceive and the social influences on their choices.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual framework

Attitudes matter because they precede and guide behaviour. In the theory of planned behaviour, the favourability of a person's evaluation of an action, together with perceived social norms and perceived control, shapes the intention to act (Ajzen, 1991). Social cognitive career theory adds that career interests and choices follow from self-efficacy and outcome expectations, which are themselves shaped by learning experiences and by contextual supports and barriers (Bandura, 1977; Lent et al., 1994). For tribal adolescents these contextual factors include family occupation, gender norms, school resources and exposure to role models. The scale used here reflects this logic by covering three dimensions: perceived employment opportunities (outcome expectations and context), attitude towards skill development and learning (the evaluation of preparatory action), and career self-efficacy.

2.2 Evidence on tribal education and employment

The empirical base is largely about tribal women and about education rather than work. Three themes recur.

Structural disadvantage persists. Literacy and schooling among Scheduled Tribe women lag behind other groups, with poverty the main barrier (Mitra & Singh, 2008). In Odisha, ST women's literacy rose from 1.77% in 1961 to 41.20% in 2011, yet remained well below that of Scheduled Caste women (58.76%) and all women in the state (64.01%) (Sahu, 2021). Studies from India, Nigeria and Pakistan identify poverty, traditional mindsets, community authority structures and the belief that girls belong in domestic work as obstacles to education (Ahmad et al., 2021; Hassan et al., 2019; Javaid et al., 2022; Stephen et al., 2020).

Attitudes towards education and work are linked and gendered. Among 96 tribal women in Jammu and Kashmir, attitudes towards education were associated with attitudes towards employment, for employed and non-employed women alike (Gul & Sheikh, 2014). Educated tribal women were more likely than illiterate women to support higher education for girls (Saha, 2016), and among the Maram Naga, community attitudes towards women's higher education were negative (Stephen et al., 2020).

Enabling conditions can shift outcomes. Entrepreneurship raised measured empowerment among Santhal women in Mayurbhanj, Odisha (Naveen et al., 2023) and among tribal women in Sylhet, Bangladesh (Khanum et al., 2021). Qualitative work in the Nilgiris suggests that information and communication technology can widen awareness and productive participation (Monisha & Thomas, 2022).

2.3 Research gap

The literature shows that structural disadvantage, gendered norms and enabling conditions such as entrepreneurship and ICT shape the educational and economic prospects of tribal populations. It leaves four gaps.

1. **Population.** Existing studies largely examine the employment attitudes and empowerment of adult tribal populations, especially women (e.g., Gul & Sheikh, 2014; Saha, 2016; Samanta & Sinha, 2021). Research on secondary school tribal students, who are at a crucial stage of shaping career aspirations, is largely absent.
2. **Location.** Most available literature concerns tribal communities in states such as Jammu and Kashmir and West Bengal. Tribal-dominated districts such as Koraput in Odisha, among the most educationally and economically backward in India, remain underexplored.
3. **Construct.** Studies of educational access or socio-economic empowerment do not assess how secondary school tribal students perceive employment, or how ready they feel to participate in the workforce.
4. **Variables.** Very few studies investigate how gender, school type (government vs. private) and school locality (rural vs. urban) influence tribal students' attitudes towards employment, although these variables are central to understanding diversity within the tribal student population.

3. Rationale, Objectives and Hypotheses

3.1 Rationale of the study

The tribal population in India, including Odisha, continues to face systemic barriers in education and employment. In regions like Koraput district these are intensified by poverty, geographic isolation, and limited access to quality schooling and career guidance. While several policies aim to enhance tribal participation in the workforce, such efforts often fail to take into account the attitudinal orientation of tribal youth, especially at the secondary school level.

The review shows that previous research has focused heavily on adult tribal populations, with emphasis on tribal women's education, empowerment and entrepreneurship (Naveen et al., 2023; Saha, 2016; Samanta & Sinha, 2021; Stephen et al., 2020). Although these studies offer valuable insight into tribal empowerment, they overlook adolescence, the critical stage at which career attitudes and employment aspirations are first formed. Koraput, despite being a designated tribal-dominated and backward region, has not been adequately studied in this context, and there is little empirical evidence on how gender, school type and locality influence tribal students' attitudes towards employment.

Hence this study addresses these gaps by focusing on tribal students in secondary schools in Koraput. It contributes to the wider discourse on tribal education and employability and supports grassroots efforts to improve employment readiness among tribal youth in Odisha.

3.2 Objectives of the study

1. To study the level of attitude of secondary school tribal students towards employment.
2. To study the attitude of secondary school tribal students towards employment with reference to their gender.
3. To study the attitude of secondary school tribal students towards employment with reference to their locality of school.
4. To study the attitude of secondary school tribal students towards employment with reference to their school type.

3.3 Hypotheses of the study

Objectives 2,3 and 4 were tested through three null hypotheses.

- **H1:** There is no significant difference between the mean scores of attitude towards employment of secondary school tribal boys and girls.
- **H2:** There is no significant difference between the mean scores of attitude towards employment of urban and rural secondary school tribal students.
- **H3:** There is no significant difference between the mean scores of attitude towards employment of government and private secondary school tribal students.

4. Methodology

4.1 Design

A quantitative descriptive survey design was used to describe existing attitudes in natural school settings, without manipulating any variable, and to compare groups defined by gender, school locality and school type.

4.2 Participants and sampling

The population was all ST students enrolled in Classes IX and X of government and private secondary schools in Koraput district, Odisha. A stratified random sample of 80 students was drawn on three criteria: school type, school locality and gender. Each of the eight resulting cells held 10 students, giving a fully balanced design (Table 1). [Number of schools sampled, selection of schools, students' age range and the procedure for confirming ST status to be added.]

Table 1: Sample Design

School type	**Locality**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**
Government	Urban	10	10	20
Government	Rural	10	10	20
Private	Urban	10	10	20
Private	Rural	10	10	20
Total		40	40	80

Note. Students were selected by stratified random sampling on school type, school locality and gender, with 10 students in each of the eight cells.

4.3 Instrument

Employment attitude was measured with the *Attitude Scale towards Employment for Tribal Secondary School Students*, developed by the author after reviewing Indian and international studies and consulting education experts, whose suggestions led to modification and revision of the items. The scale has 36 five-point Likert items (strongly agree to strongly disagree), 25 worded positively and 11 negatively. Items are evenly distributed across three dimensions (Table 2). Positive items score 5 to 1 from strongly agree to strongly disagree; negative items are reverse-scored. Total scores range from 36 to 180, with higher scores indicating a more favourable attitude, and a neutral response pattern (all "undecided") scores 108.

Table 2: Dimensions of the Scale

Dimension	**Items**
Perception of employment opportunities	12
Attitude towards skill development and learning	12
Self-efficacy in career aspirations	12
Total	36

Note. Each item is scored from 1 to 5, so each dimension ranges from 12 to 60 and the total from 36 to 180. The scale has 25 positively and 11 negatively worded items.

The internal consistency of the scale was estimated with Cronbach's alpha on a pilot sample of 30 students, separate from the main sample of 80 (Table 3). The coefficient was 0.821.

Table 3: Reliability Analysis of the Attitude Scale for Students Towards Employment

Particulars	Value
Name of the tool	Attitude Scale for Students towards Employment
Number of items	36
Number of respondents	30
Response format	Five-point Likert scale
Cronbach's alpha coefficient	0.821
Interpretation	Good internal consistency

Note. Cronbach's alpha was computed for the total scale of 36 items after reverse-scoring the 11 negatively worded items. Values of .70 or above are conventionally taken as acceptable for research instruments.

4.4 Procedure and ethics

Permission was obtained from the university department and then from school principals, who fixed dates for administration. The researcher visited each school, explained the purpose of the study and the instrument, and asked students to respond honestly. The participants were informed that their responses will be used only for research purpose. No time limit was set; completion took about 30 minutes.

4.5 Data analysis

Mean, median, mode, standard deviation, variance and range were used to describe the score distribution. Attitude was classified under three levels as low (below M − 1 SD), moderate (M ± 1 SD) or high (above M + 1 SD). Independent-samples t-tests (two-tailed, $\alpha = .05$, $df = 78$) were applied to compare boys with girls, urban with rural, and government with private students. Cohen's d with the pooled SD and 95% confidence intervals for mean differences are reported alongside p-values. Test statistics were recomputed from the reported group means and SDs.

5. Results

Girls and students in private schools reported less favourable employment attitudes than boys and government-school students, by about 0.6 standard deviations each, while urban and rural students did not differ. Each analysis is presented below with a note and an interpretation.

5.1 Level of employment attitude (Objective 1)

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Employment-Attitude Scores (N = 80)

Statistic	Value
Mean	101.34
Median	101
Mode	96
Standard deviation	8.78
Variance	77.06
Lowest – Highest	85 – 120
Range	35

Note. Possible scores range from 36 to 180. The neutral point (all items "undecided") is 108, a mean item score of 3.

The mean score of 101.34 indicates that students, on average, have a moderate attitude towards employment whereas the standard deviation of 8.78 suggests a moderate spread of scores around the mean. The mode of 96 is the most frequently occurring score, showing a clustering of students at this level and the range of 35 highlights a notable variation in attitudes

Table 5: Levels of Employment Attitude

Level	Score range	Students	%
Low	below 92.56	16	20.00
Moderate	92.56 – 110.12	49	61.25
High	above 110.12	15	18.75

Note. Levels are defined from the sample mean and SD (M = 101.34, SD = 8.78): low is below M − 1 SD, moderate is M ± 1 SD, and high is above M + 1 SD. Percentages are of N = 80.

Table 5 shows that most students (61.25%) were moderate, while the low (20.00%) and high (18.75%) groups were about equal in size. Because the bands are relative to this sample, they show how students compare with one another, not how favourable their attitudes are in absolute terms. The one in five students in the low band is the group most in need of support.

5.2 Attitude by gender (Objective 2, H1)

Table 6 : Comparison of Employment-Attitude Scores of Boys and Girls

Group	n	M	SD	Mean difference [95% CI]	t(78)	p	Cohen's d
Boys	40	103.85	8.77	5.03 [1.31, 8.74]	2.69	.009	0.60
Girls	40	98.83	7.91				

Note. Two-tailed independent-samples t-test with pooled variance, $\alpha = .05$. Mean difference = boys − girls. d uses the pooled SD. Values are recomputed from group means and SDs.

As Table 6 shows, boys (M = 103.85, SD = 8.77) scored about 5 points higher than girls (M = 98.83, SD = 7.91), t(78) = 2.69, p = .009, d = 0.60, a statistically significant difference of medium size. H1 is rejected: tribal boys held more favourable employment attitudes than girls. The confidence interval excludes zero, though its width (1.3 to 8.7 points) shows the size of the gap is imprecisely estimated in a sample of this size.

5.3 Attitude by school locality (Objective 3, H2)

Table 7: Comparison of Employment-Attitude Scores of Urban and Rural Students

Group	n	M	SD	Mean difference [95% CI]	t(78)	p	Cohen's d
Urban	40	101.88	8.12	1.08 [−2.80, 4.95]	0.55	.582	0.12
Rural	40	100.80	9.25				

Note. Two-tailed independent-samples t-test with pooled variance, $\alpha = .05$. Mean difference = urban − rural. d uses the pooled SD.

Table 7 shows that urban students (M = 101.88, SD = 8.12) and rural students (M = 100.80, SD = 9.25) differed by about one point, which was not statistically significant, t(78) = 0.55, p = .582, and the effect was negligible (d = 0.12). H2 is not

rejected: school locality was not associated with employment attitude in this sample. The interval (−2.80 to 4.95) does not extend to differences as large as the gender and school-type gaps, though a small difference cannot be ruled out.

5.4 Attitude by school type (Objective 4, H3)

Table 8 : Comparison of Employment-Attitude Scores of Government and Private School Students

Group	N	M	SD	Mean difference [95% CI]	t(78)	p	Cohen's d
Government	40	103.88	8.52	5.08 [1.36, 8.79]	2.72	.008	0.61
Private	40	98.80	8.17				

Note. Two-tailed independent-samples t-test with pooled variance, $\alpha = .05$. Mean difference = government − private. d uses the pooled SD.

As Table 8 shows, government-school students (M = 103.88, SD = 8.52) scored about 5 points higher than private-school students (M = 98.80, SD = 8.17), t(78) = 2.72, p = .008, d = 0.61, a significant difference of medium size. H3 is rejected: tribal students in government schools held more favourable employment attitudes than those in private schools.

5.5 Summary of hypothesis tests

Table 9: Summary of Hypothesis Decisions

Hypothesis	Comparison	t(78)	p	Cohen's d	Decision
H1	Boys vs. girls	2.69	.009	0.60	Rejected
H2	Urban vs. rural	0.55	.582	0.12	Not rejected
H3	Government vs. private	2.72	.008	0.61	Rejected

Note. Decisions are at $\alpha = .05$ (two-tailed). Each null hypothesis states no difference in mean attitude scores.

As summarised in Table 9, gender and school type were each associated with a medium-sized difference in employment attitude, whereas locality was not. The three tests were run separately on the same sample, so a small risk of chance findings applies; the two significant p-values (.009 and .008) would remain below .05 under a Bonferroni-adjusted threshold of .017.

6. Discussion

The findings of the study shows that the mean attitude score of 101.34 indicated a moderate attitude of tribal secondary school students towards employment. This finding reflects a general awareness and balanced perception of employment among tribal students in the Koraput district. The moderate variability in responses (SD = 8.78) suggests differences in personal experiences, access to opportunities, and socio-cultural influences. These findings align with earlier research by Naik & Dasaratharamaiah (2019) and Sahu (2021), who reported that although education among tribal communities is improving, it has not yet significantly translated into employment-oriented attitudes due to ongoing social and economic challenges.

The study further revealed schedule tribe boys had significantly more attitude towards employment than girls, which is consistent with the findings of Gul & Sheikh (2014) whom noted that tribal women, particularly the unemployed, demonstrate traditional and less ambitious outlook towards employment. The gap difference in attitude may arise from enduring socio-cultural standards and restrictions concerning what is desirable for girls and what they are allowed to experience in terms of employment. Such inequalities in employment also discussed by Stephen et al. (2020) and Saha (2016), highlighting the need for targeted interventions to uplift the career-related motivation among tribal girls.

Interestingly, no significant difference was observed between the attitudes of tribal students based on their school's locality. This result implies that, within the tribal communities of Koraput district, urbanization may not be a major factor in shaping employment-related attitudes. This finding may reflect a broader homogenisation of educational access and employment awareness across rural and urban tribal settings, as indicated in the research by Samanta & Sinha (2021). It suggests that policy efforts toward uniform education delivery in tribal regions may be reducing the urban-rural divide to some extent.

A notable finding was that, in comparison to students from private schools, tribal students attending government schools showed noticeably more positive attitudes toward employment. These results are consistent with those of Monisha & Thomas (2022), who highlighted the role of ICT and public systems in empowering tribal students and

Naveen et al. (2023), who highlighted the transformative power of structured support in tribal communities through entrepreneurship and education.

7. Implications

1. **Gender-responsive career guidance.** As girls reported less favourable attitudes in comparison to boys, career counselling in tribal-area schools should include women role models from the region, information on training and jobs open to girls, and engagement with parents about girls' work and further study.
2. **Structured guidance in every school.** With the typical student near the neutral point, schools should give all students concrete information on public, private and self-employment pathways, using workshops, visits and mentoring rather than occasional talks.
3. **Contextual skills and vocational education.** Courses linked to local livelihoods like agriculture, handicrafts and tourism can raise students' belief that skills are necessary.
4. **Entrepreneurship and digital access.** Self-employment schemes and digital learning platforms can broaden perceived opportunities, provided connectivity and device access are addressed.
5. **District-wide rather than rural-targeted design.** Since locality made little difference, guidance programmes need not be confined to rural schools.

8. Limitations and Future Research

The study was conducted with a small sample (N = 80) and confined to one district. So, the results cannot be generalised to other tribal regions or to all ST communities in Koraput. Attitudes were measured with a researcher-developed self-report scale, which is open to social-desirability bias, and although reliability was good (alpha = 0.821), it was estimated on a pilot sample of only 30 respondents and validity evidence beyond expert review was not reported. The cross-sectional survey cannot show why groups differ; school type, gender and locality are also confounded with unmeasured family income, parental education and community. Comparisons were made one variable at a time, so interactions (for example, gender within school type) were not tested, though the balanced design would allow a factorial analysis. Finally, the study did not examine attitudes by scale dimension.

Future studies should (a) use larger, multi-district samples with clustering by school; (b) analyse the three dimensions separately and test gender × school-type interactions with ANOVA or regression controlling for family background; (c) compare tribal and non-tribal students; (d) combine surveys with interviews to understand girls' and private-school students' views; (e) follow cohorts from Class X to post-school destinations to test whether attitudes predict transitions; and (f) evaluate career-guidance and skill programmes for their effect on attitudes.

9. Conclusion

Tribal secondary school students in Koraput hold uncertain rather than strongly favourable attitudes towards employment: the average response was just below neutral, and one in five students scored low. Boys and government-school students were more favourable than girls and private-school students, by about 5 points (0.6 SD) in each case, while urban and rural students did not differ. These patterns point to gender and school sector, rather than geography, as the lines along which career support should be targeted. Gender-responsive guidance, wider scheme awareness in private schools and locally relevant skills education are practical starting points, and larger multi-district studies are needed to test the mechanisms suggested here.

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