

Academic Motivation and Career Aspirations of Undergraduate Students in Tribal Areas

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Abstract

The transition to higher education represents a critical phase in shaping academic motivation, career orientations, and life trajectories, especially for students from tribal and geographically peripheral regions. For many, entering undergraduate education signifies not only academic advancement but also an escape from historically limited educational and occupational opportunities. This study examines students' academic motivation, clarity of career goals, perceptions of institutional support, and evolving future aspirations, highlighting how higher education functions as both an aspirational space and a site of negotiation between ambition and structural constraints. Using primary survey data collected through structured questionnaires, the study analyses how socio-economic challenges, institutional environments, and exposure to higher education shape students' outlook towards careers. Quantitative responses reveal patterns of motivation, confidence, and alignment between education and career goals, while qualitative insights reflect changing expectations, awareness of career possibilities, and perceived institutional gaps. Together, the data illustrate the uneven yet transformative impact of undergraduate education in tribal contexts. Findings show a complex interaction between intrinsic motivation, structural limitations, and emerging aspirations. Students display strong motivation and awareness of diverse career pathways, but financial constraints, limited access to resources, and insufficient career guidance often mediate their aspirations. Institutional support—through career guidance, mentoring, digital resources, and financial assistance—emerges as crucial in translating motivation into achievable outcomes. By centering students' experiences within broader socio-economic and institutional frameworks, the study contributes to discourse on higher education in tribal regions. It underscores the need for holistic, context-sensitive interventions that go beyond access to address support, guidance, and equity, positioning higher education institutions as key agents in fostering inclusive development and sustainable career outcomes.

Keywords: Academic motivation, career aspirations, tribal students, undergraduate education, institutional support

1. Introduction

Higher education is widely recognized as a transformative space that not only enhances academic knowledge but also plays a crucial role in shaping individual aspirations, career orientations, and long-term socio-economic mobility. For students from tribal areas, access to undergraduate education carries particular significance, as it intersects with historical patterns of marginalization,

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limited institutional infrastructure, and constrained employment opportunities. In such contexts, academic motivation cannot be understood solely as an individual attribute; rather, it is deeply embedded within broader social, economic, and institutional frameworks that both enable and constrain students' educational experiences.

Over the past decade, efforts to expand access to undergraduate education in tribal regions have opened up new possibilities for social mobility, knowledge acquisition, and personal development. Yet, access alone does not guarantee clarity of career goals or confidence in achieving them. Students often face multiple uncertainties, including navigating complex career pathways, coping with financial limitations, and confronting restricted exposure to diverse professional options. The interplay of these challenges with personal aspirations shapes not only students' motivation but also their perceptions of the practical attainability of different career trajectories.

This study aims to examine how undergraduate students from tribal regions experience and interpret their academic motivation, evolving career aspirations, and the role of institutional support in facilitating their future trajectories. By focusing on students' lived experiences, the study seeks to illuminate the ways in which higher education functions simultaneously as an aspirational space and a site of negotiation between ambition and structural constraints. Insights from this research are expected to inform policies and practices that can strengthen institutional support, enhance career guidance, and foster more inclusive educational outcomes in tribal contexts.

3. Objectives of the Study

The study is guided by the aim to examine the primary sources of academic motivation among undergraduate students in tribal areas, while also assessing their clarity regarding career goals and the confidence with which they pursue them. It seeks to analyse the degree of alignment between undergraduate education and students' evolving career aspirations, as well as to explore the perceived challenges and institutional support systems that influence their academic journeys. Furthermore, the study aims to understand how exposure to higher education reshapes students' career outlook, expectations, and overall engagement with their future trajectories, providing insight into the complex interplay between personal ambition and structural opportunities.

4. Research Methodology

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine academic motivation and career aspirations among undergraduate students in tribal areas. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used to ensure empirical depth and contextual grounding. Secondary data were collected from scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, government reports, and existing literature related to higher education, tribal studies, academic motivation, and career development. These sources provided the theoretical framework and helped situate the study within broader academic and policy debates.

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 100 undergraduate students enrolled in higher education institutions located in tribal regions. The questionnaire comprised six closed-ended questions and two open-ended questions, designed to capture students' academic motivation, clarity of career goals, perceived alignment between education and aspirations, confidence levels, challenges faced, and perceptions of institutional support. The

closed-ended questions generated quantitative data, which were analysed using percentage distributions and presented through graphical representations for clarity. The open-ended responses were thematically analysed to capture students' subjective experiences, expectations, and reflections, thereby complementing the quantitative findings with qualitative insights. This mixed-data approach enabled a more comprehensive understanding of students' academic and career-related perceptions within their socio-economic and institutional contexts.

5. Analysis and Interpretation of Data

5.1 Sources of Academic Motivation Among Undergraduate Students

Academic motivation among undergraduate students in tribal areas reflects a complex interplay of personal ambition, pragmatic considerations, and socio-cultural influences. Survey responses indicate that students are driven not only by a genuine desire for knowledge and intellectual growth but also by the recognition of education as a critical tool for securing stable employment and improving socio-economic conditions. For many, undergraduate education represents more than an academic pursuit; it is seen as a pathway to break long-standing cycles of limited opportunity, overcome historical and structural disadvantages, and open doors to a wider range of professional and personal possibilities. In addition, students often perceive their educational achievements as a means to contribute meaningfully to the well-being of their families and communities, serving as role models and agents of positive change. This dual orientation—balancing individual aspirations with collective responsibilities—highlights the multifaceted nature of academic motivation in tribal contexts, where education is intertwined with both personal development and broader social advancement.

Graph-1: *What motivates you most to pursue undergraduate education?* immediately after this subsection to visually represent the dominant motivational factors identified by respondents.

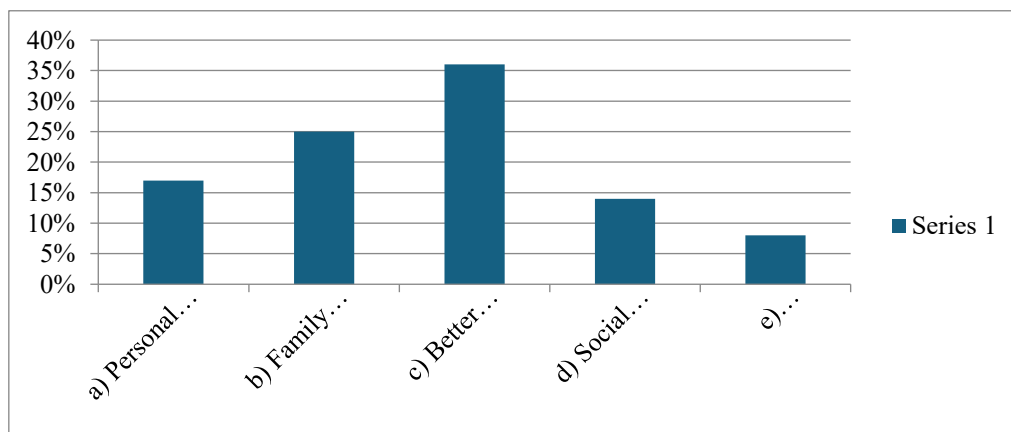


Figure 1 Survey Report

5.2 Clarity of Career Goals

Clarity regarding future career goals emerges as a key indicator of students' academic orientation. The findings indicate varying levels of certainty, with some students expressing clear and well-defined aspirations, while others remain uncertain or exploratory. This variation is influenced by limited exposure to diverse career options, the absence of structured guidance, and the evolving nature of students' ambitions as they progress through undergraduate education. Socio-economic

factors and regional constraints further affect how students perceive achievable career paths, making goal clarity a dynamic aspect of their academic journey rather than a fixed trait.

Graph- 2: *How clear are you about your future career goals?* after this discussion to support the analysis of varying levels of career clarity.

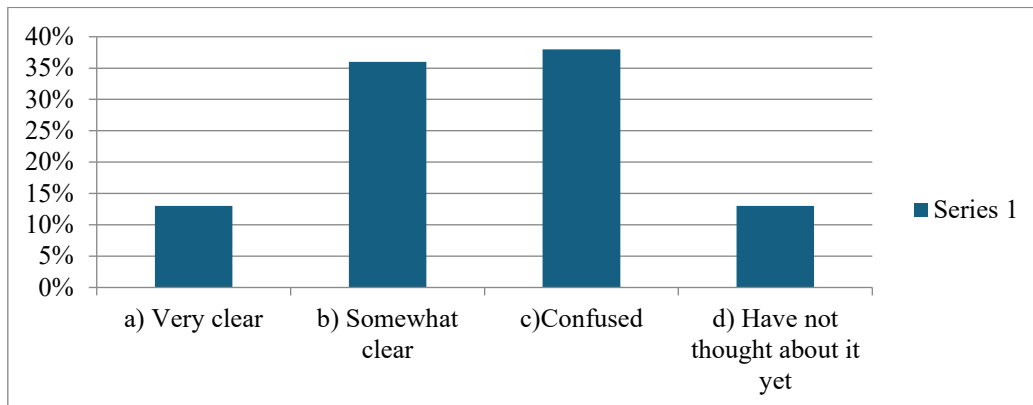


Figure 2 Survey Report

5.3 Alignment Between Undergraduate Education and Career Aspirations

Students' perceptions of the alignment between their undergraduate studies and future career aspirations offer valuable insights into curriculum relevance and academic planning. While a number of respondents feel that their coursework closely supports their intended career paths, a significant portion express concerns regarding the practical applicability of what they are learning to real-world employment scenarios. Many students highlighted that while theoretical knowledge is emphasized, opportunities for skill development, hands-on experiences, and exposure to professional environments remain limited. This perceived gap between academic learning and career readiness points to the importance of designing curricula that not only provide conceptual understanding but also incorporate practical training, skill-based modules, internships, and career-oriented learning outcomes. Addressing these issues could enhance students' confidence in the relevance of their education and better prepare them to navigate the challenges of the job market effectively.

Graph-3: *To what extent does your undergraduate education align with your career aspirations?* following this subsection.

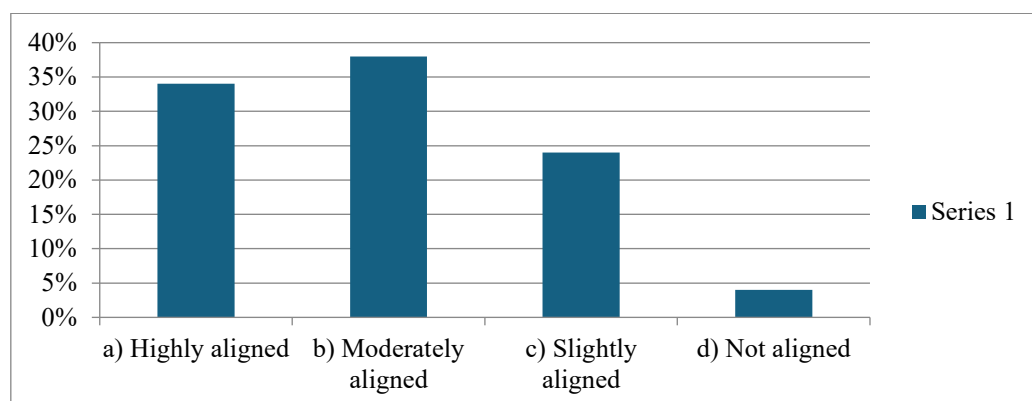


Figure 3 Survey Report

5.4 Preferred Career Paths After Graduation

Students' preferences regarding career paths reflect a combination of personal aspirations and structural constraints. Many students indicate a strong interest in professional employment, preparation for competitive examinations, or pursuing further studies, viewing these pathways as means to secure stable livelihoods and upward social mobility. A smaller proportion, however, consider entrepreneurial ventures, creative professions, or alternative career routes, often constrained by limited resources, exposure, and guidance. These preferences are shaped not only by socio-economic realities and the perceived stability or prestige associated with certain jobs but also by the visibility of role models and examples within students' immediate family and community environments. Cultural expectations, regional employment opportunities, and the broader societal context further influence how students prioritize and evaluate different career options. Overall, career preferences emerge as a dynamic interplay between ambition, opportunity, and the practical limitations that students encounter in tribal and peripheral contexts, highlighting the need for informed guidance and supportive institutional frameworks to broaden students' horizons and facilitate more diverse professional choices.

Graph- 4: *What is your preferred career path after graduation? after this analytical section.*

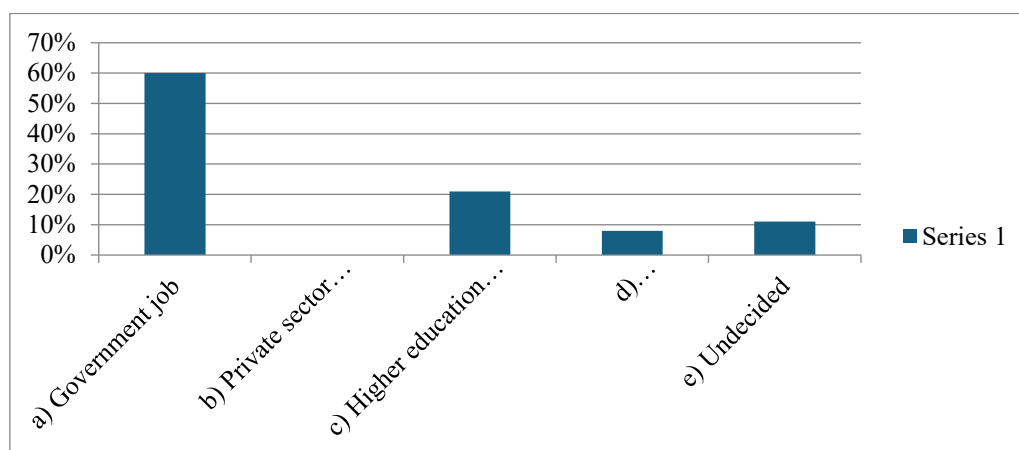


Figure 4 Survey Report

5.5 Confidence in Achieving Career Goals

Confidence levels among respondents vary considerably, reflecting deeper inequalities in access to educational resources, mentorship, and preparatory support. For some students, engagement with higher education has fostered a sense of self-belief, improved problem-solving skills, and a clearer understanding of potential career pathways, contributing positively to their overall confidence. However, a significant number of students continue to experience apprehension and self-doubt, often driven by financial pressures, limited exposure to competitive environments, and uncertainty about the demands of the job market. These differences suggest that confidence is not solely an individual trait but is closely linked to the availability and quality of institutional support, including guidance, mentoring, and skill-building opportunities, as well as to the students' own resilience in navigating structural and socio-economic challenges. Understanding these dynamics highlights the need for targeted interventions that can bolster confidence among students, enabling them to translate motivation and ambition into tangible academic and career outcomes.

Graph- 5: *How confident do you feel about achieving your career goals? immediately after this discussion.*

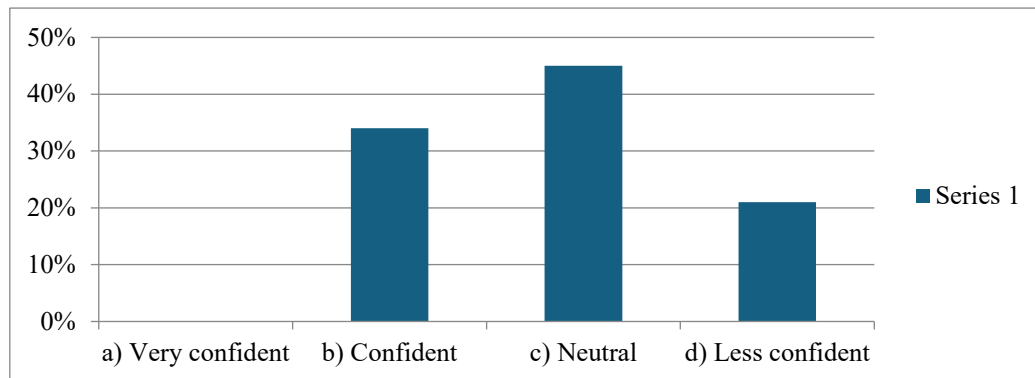


Figure 5 Survey Report

5.6 Challenges Affecting Academic Motivation

Academic motivation among students is frequently challenged by a combination of structural and personal obstacles. Respondents highlighted financial constraints, limited access to learning materials and digital resources, and the absence of adequate academic and career guidance as key barriers to sustaining their motivation. For students from tribal areas, these challenges are often compounded by geographic isolation, limited exposure to professional networks, and socio-economic disadvantages, which can make educational attainment feel both demanding and uncertain. Such obstacles not only affect students' engagement with their coursework but also influence their confidence, clarity of career goals, and long-term aspirations. The findings underscore the importance of targeted policy interventions that address these intertwined academic and socio-economic dimensions, including financial assistance, improved access to learning resources, structured mentoring programs, and career-oriented guidance. By alleviating these constraints, institutions can better support students' motivation, foster equitable opportunities, and help them translate their educational efforts into meaningful personal and professional outcomes.

Graph- 6: *What are the major challenges affecting your academic motivation? after this subsection.*

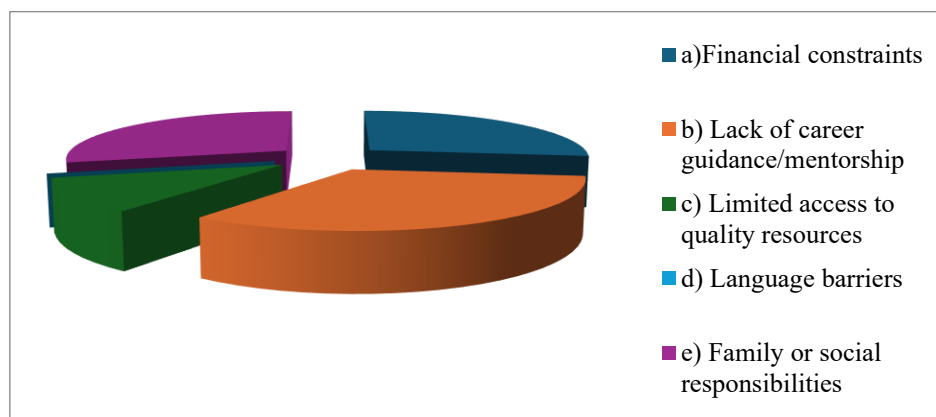


Figure 6 Survey Report

5.7 Perceived Institutional Support in Shaping Career Aspirations

Institutional support plays a decisive role in shaping students' academic progress and future career trajectories. The responses from students reveal mixed perceptions regarding the effectiveness of their institutions in providing adequate career guidance, mentorship, and exposure to diverse academic and professional opportunities. In cases where structured support mechanisms are in place—such as organized mentoring programs, career counseling sessions, workshops, internships, and access to digital learning resources—students tend to exhibit higher levels of clarity about their career goals and greater confidence in their ability to achieve them. Conversely, the absence or inadequacy of such support often leaves students feeling uncertain, underprepared, and constrained in their professional outlook. These findings underscore the transformative potential of well-designed institutional interventions, suggesting that proactive, context-sensitive, and consistent support can significantly enhance students' motivation, skill development, and ability to navigate both academic and employment pathways successfully.

Graph-7: *How supportive is your institution in shaping your career aspirations?* following this analysis.

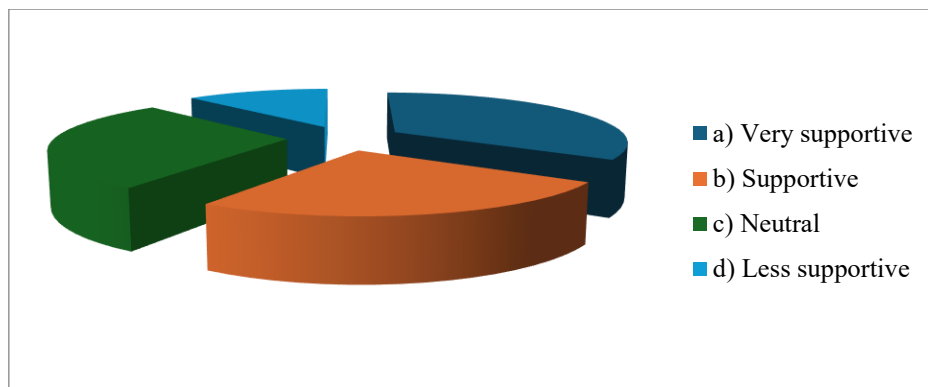


Figure 7 Survey Report

6. Insights from Open-Ended Responses

6.1 Impact of Higher Education on Career Outlook

Qualitative responses indicate that exposure to higher education has played a significant role in reshaping students' goals, aspirations, and expectations for the future. A substantial proportion of respondents (41%) report an increased awareness of diverse career options, highlighting how engagement with undergraduate studies helps broaden their horizons beyond traditional, locally familiar, or family-influenced occupations. In addition, many students (19%) note an improvement in their confidence to pursue higher studies, competitive examinations, or specialized professional pathways, reflecting the role of higher education in building both academic competence and self-efficacy. Another group of respondents (21%) emphasizes the development of a more future-oriented outlook on employment, including the ability to anticipate and plan for evolving labor market demands. Collectively, these reflections underscore the transformative potential of undergraduate education in fostering aspiration, agency, and forward-looking perspectives among tribal students. They also highlight the importance of higher education not merely as a site of knowledge acquisition, but as a critical space for personal development, career exploration, and the expansion of life possibilities in historically

marginalized contexts.

Table-1

Data	Percentage
<input type="checkbox"/> More future-oriented outlook on employment	21%
<input type="checkbox"/> Improved confidence in higher studies or competitive exams	19%
<input type="checkbox"/> Higher expectations for professional growth	7%%
<input type="checkbox"/> Clearer and more realistic career goals	12%
<input type="checkbox"/> Increased awareness of diverse career options	41%

Figure 8 Survey Report

6.2 Expectations Regarding Academic and Institutional Support

The responses indicate that undergraduate students perceive institutional support as a decisive factor in achieving their career aspirations. The demand for scholarships, financial aid, and support services (43%) reflects the economic constraints that continue to shape students' educational choices in tribal areas. Financial insecurity emerges not merely as a barrier to continuation of studies but also as a factor influencing students' confidence in pursuing higher education and competitive career pathways.

In addition to financial support, students emphasize the importance of regular career guidance and mentoring programmes (23%), highlighting a gap between academic learning and informed career planning. Limited access to structured guidance often results in uncertainty regarding career options and preparation strategies. Similarly, the need for improved academic and digital learning resources (23%) points to infrastructural disparities that affect students' exposure to contemporary knowledge systems and skill development opportunities.

Overall, these expectations suggest that students view higher education as a process requiring coordinated institutional support rather than individual effort alone. Strengthening financial assistance, academic resources, and mentoring structures is therefore essential for enabling tribal undergraduate students to translate academic motivation into achievable career outcomes.

Table-2

Data	Percentage
<input type="checkbox"/> Better access to academic and digital learning resources	23%

<input type="checkbox"/> Regular career guidance and mentoring programmes	23%
<input type="checkbox"/> Skill development and employability-oriented training	11%
<input type="checkbox"/> Scholarships, financial aid, and institutional support services	43%

Figure 9 Survey Report**Discussion**

The findings of the study reveal that academic motivation among undergraduate students in tribal areas is shaped by a complex interplay of personal aspirations, socio-economic realities, and institutional environments. Students largely perceive higher education as a pathway to improved employment prospects and social mobility, indicating a pragmatic orientation toward education. This instrumental understanding of education reflects the broader structural conditions in which tribal students operate, where educational attainment is closely linked to economic security and upward mobility rather than purely intellectual pursuits.

At the same time, the varying levels of clarity regarding career goals suggest that motivation does not always translate into well-defined aspirations. While exposure to undergraduate education has expanded students' awareness of career possibilities, limited access to career guidance and mentoring constrains their ability to formulate concrete plans. The perceived misalignment between academic curricula and career aspirations further reinforces this uncertainty, pointing toward gaps in curriculum relevance and skill integration. Students' preference for secure career paths, such as government employment or further studies, reflects both aspiration and risk aversion shaped by socio-economic vulnerability and limited local employment opportunities.

Confidence in achieving career goals emerges as unevenly distributed among respondents, closely tied to access to resources, institutional support, and financial stability. Students facing economic constraints and inadequate academic infrastructure report lower confidence levels, despite demonstrating motivation and ambition. This highlights how structural inequalities continue to mediate individual agency within higher education spaces. Challenges such as financial hardship, limited learning resources, and lack of guidance significantly affect students' academic engagement, often diverting focus from long-term planning to immediate survival and academic continuity.

The open-ended responses deepen this understanding by illustrating how higher education has nonetheless transformed students' outlooks. Increased awareness of diverse career options and improved confidence in pursuing higher studies indicate the transformative potential of undergraduate education, even within constrained contexts. However, students' strong emphasis on scholarships, career guidance, and digital resources underscores the recognition that institutional support is central to converting aspiration into achievement. Collectively, these findings suggest that higher education institutions in tribal areas function as critical spaces of possibility, but their impact remains contingent upon the strength of support systems embedded within them.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that undergraduate education plays a significant role in shaping academic motivation, career aspirations, and long-term outlooks among students in tribal areas, while simultaneously revealing the persistent structural constraints that limit the realization of these aspirations. Students exhibit strong intrinsic motivation, growing confidence, and an increasingly future-oriented perspective, yet their career planning remains deeply conditioned by household income, social background, institutional capacity, and uneven access to guidance and resources. Higher education thus emerges not merely as an academic process, but as a socio-economic intervention with the potential to reshape life trajectories.

The findings underscore the necessity of interpreting student motivation and aspiration within a broader institutional, regional, and policy framework. In the absence of adequate financial assistance, structured career mentoring, digital access, and robust academic infrastructure, motivation alone cannot guarantee equitable career outcomes or sustainable social mobility. Many students navigate higher education while negotiating financial stress, limited exposure to professional networks, and uncertainty about viable career pathways.

Strengthening institutional support mechanisms is therefore essential for enabling tribal undergraduate students to convert educational participation into meaningful employment opportunities. Targeted scholarships, mentoring programmes, career counselling, and skill-oriented training can bridge the gap between aspiration and opportunity. By foregrounding students' lived experiences, this study contributes to ongoing debates on inclusive higher education and emphasizes the need for context-sensitive interventions that address both ambition and structural inequality in tribal regions. Such efforts can strengthen equity, resilience, and long-term development outcomes across generations.

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