

Challenges and Strategies in Leadership and Management

Insights from Principals of Eklavya Model Residential Schools

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ABSTRACT

Principals of Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) face significant challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, financial constraints, and socio-cultural barriers. This study explored these challenges through descriptive research, employing a structured questionnaire to gather data from 30 respondents in leadership roles across the EMRS. The findings revealed scarcity in staffing, resource management, and gaps in governance, which impede the delivery of quality education. Additionally, behavioral issues among students and limited community participation complicate school operations. Despite these challenges, notable achievements, such as high success rate in the board examinations and innovative academic programmes underscore the transformative potential of effective leadership. This research emphasises the need for systemic reforms, including timely fund allocation, capacity-building initiatives, and streamlined governance, to enhance the operational efficiency and impact of the EMRS. By aligning with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, and the equity, inclusion, and quality imperatives outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the findings highlight the critical role of adaptive and collaborative leadership in empowering tribal communities through education. These insights provide a roadmap for policymakers and educators to foster a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape. These findings suggest systemic changes are necessary, including prompt fund distribution, National Education Society for Tribal Students (NESTS) centred governance, transparent policy frameworks, and continuing capacity-building programmes.

Keywords: *Eklavya Model Residential Schools, Tribal School Leadership, Educational Quality*

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Introduction

Education has long been recognised as a powerful driver of social and economic development, particularly in marginalised communities where access to quality education remains a persistent challenge. In India, tribal populations, constituting a significant portion of the country's demography, have historically faced barriers to education due to geographical isolation, socio-cultural differences, and systemic inequities (Xaxa, 2001). The Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS), established under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, aim to bridge these gaps by providing residential education tailored to the unique needs of tribal students. These schools are designed to foster academic excellence, cultural inclusion, and holistic development, serving as a critical intervention for enhancing educational access and outcomes for tribal communities (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2020). However, managing and leading such institutions comes with its own set of challenges. Principals and administrators of the EMRS must navigate complex issues, including inadequate infrastructure, resource constraints, and teacher shortages, while also addressing cultural sensitivities and promoting inclusivity (Panda and Patra, 2024). Research has shown that effective school leadership is directly linked to improved student performance and institutional growth. Leaders who exhibit adaptability, strong decision-making skills, and collaborative approaches often create more resilient educational ecosystems (Stronge et al., 2018; Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2018). Despite these insights, studies also highlight significant gaps in the support systems available to the EMRS principals, such as insufficient professional development opportunities and delays in fund disbursement, which exacerbate existing challenges (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2010).

Globally, the role of school leaders has evolved to encompass academic oversight, administrative efficiency, financial management, and stakeholder engagement. This aligns with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which emphasises inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015). Within the Indian context, addressing leadership challenges in the EMRS is critical for achieving these objectives and ensuring that tribal students are not left behind in the national educational agenda. This study adopts a systematic approach to explore the leadership and management challenges faced by principals of EMRS. The findings are intended to provide

actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders committed to improving the quality of education in tribal regions. Moreover, the research underscores the need for a collaborative and inclusive policy framework that empowers school leaders to navigate the complexities of managing the EMRS. The existing literature has identified several areas requiring urgent attention, including timely resource allocation, better teacher training programmes, and robust grievance redressal mechanisms (UNESCO, 2019; World Bank, 2018). These leadership challenges acquire greater urgency in the light of policy commitments, such as UNESCO's SDG 4, which advocates for inclusive and equitable quality education, and the NEP 2020, which emphasises decentralisation, equity, contextual learning, and capacity-building for school leaders. Both SDG 4 and NEP 2020 position school leadership as central to educational transformation, particularly in underserved regions. Therefore, addressing leadership issues within the EMRS is critical to institutional performance and achieving national and global education goals. This study contributes to the discourse by mapping these challenges and offering evidence-based recommendations for building a more resilient and responsive educational leadership model in tribal areas. By doing so, it aligns with global efforts to promote equity in education and highlights the pivotal role of leadership in transforming marginalised educational landscapes.

The Context of EMRS

Geographic isolation, socio-economic marginalisation, and restricted access to public services have historically resulted in systemic barriers to education for India's Scheduled Tribes (STs) (Geddam, 2015). In response to these inequalities, the Indian government established the EMRS programme in 1997, intending to give tribal children free, high-quality residential education, especially in upper primary and secondary school. Equality in educational opportunities and enabling tribal youth's engagement in national development are the main goals of the EMRS (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2020). The EMRS are modelled after the Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNVs), which are central government-run residential schools for rural students. However, unlike the JNVs, the EMRS cater specifically to ST students and face distinct challenges, including socio-cultural sensitivity, teacher recruitment, and remoteness. In contrast, state-run Ashram Schools often suffer

from weaker infrastructure and low central oversight, making the EMRS a unique bridge between centralised planning and local implementation. The EMRS scheme aims to provide tribal students with a solid academic foundation and access to extra-curricular, cultural, and skill-building activities. By giving students the skills and self-assurance to pursue higher education, take advantage of constitutional protections like reservations, and successfully compete in both the public and private spheres, these schools are intended to be tools for social change. However, despite its well-meaning policy, the nationwide implementation of EMRS has been fraught with difficulties. This study, which is based on responses from 30 EMRS principals and administrators in different Indian states, identifies recurrent problems with community engagement, governance, staffing, and infrastructure. Teacher shortages, inadequate professional development, delayed funding distribution, and administrative overload are problems that many schools face. The school leadership, responsible for maintaining academic quality and institutional efficiency in the face of limited resources, is significantly burdened by these operational barriers (Kumar and Naseema, 2018; Ramachandran, 2009). Effective leadership is acknowledged more widely as being essential to the success of organisations such as EMRS, particularly in situations with limited resources and complex social dynamics. In addition to overseeing academic performance, principals are also in charge of staff, infrastructure, finances, and community relations. These positions call for flexible tactics and team-based leadership styles that complement inclusive and equitable education objectives (Hallinger and Murphy, 1986; Pless and Maak, 2011). As a result, this study places school leadership in a crucial position to implement the EMRS policy and close the gap between systemic goals and actual conditions on the ground.

Review of Related Literature

The challenges and strategies associated with educational leadership and management have been extensively discussed in the global and Indian contexts. Effective leadership is widely regarded as pivotal for improving the quality of education, particularly in marginalised and underserved communities. This literature review is structured into four main sections; the role of leadership in educational settings, challenges in managing marginalised schools, financial and resource management in education, and systemic

reforms for inclusive education. Each section integrates relevant insights and in-text citations from the provided references.

The Role of Leadership in Educational Settings

Leadership in educational institutions is critical for fostering academic excellence, promoting inclusivity, and ensuring sustainable institutional growth. Stronge et al., (2011) emphasised the link between effective school leadership and improved student outcomes, particularly when leaders adopt collaborative and innovative approaches. Educational leaders are tasked with administrative oversight and cultivating a positive school culture that motivates teachers and students alike (Nambissan, 2003). Within the Indian context, Panda and Patra (2024) highlighted the unique challenges faced by tribal schools, where cultural differences and resource constraints require adaptive leadership. Globally, frameworks such as the UNESCO roadmap for education emphasise the need for leadership that integrates sustainability and equity (UNESCO, 2014). This aligns with SDG 4, which prioritises inclusive and equitable quality education (United Nations, 2015). Effective leaders are expected to navigate systemic barriers, including infrastructural inadequacies and teacher shortages, while maintaining accountability and transparency in their decision-making processes (World Bank, 2018).

Challenges in Managing Marginalised Schools

Marginalised schools, particularly in tribal regions, face unique challenges that demand tailored leadership strategies. Xaxa (2005) noted that tribal communities in India often experience educational deprivation due to geographical isolation and socio-cultural barriers. The EMRS were established to address these disparities, yet their leaders face persistent challenges, such as inadequate teacher training programmes, high staff turnover, and limited community participation (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2020). Ramachandran (2009) explored how systemic inequities exacerbate these challenges, leading to delays in resource allocation and policy implementation. Resistance from local communities, as noted by Hungerford and Volk (1990), further complicates efforts to foster inclusivity. Effective leadership in such settings requires a deep understanding of local contexts and the ability to bridge gaps between diverse stakeholders, including government bodies, teachers, parents, and students.

Leadership and Educational Equity in the Indian Tribal Context

In India, providing education to tribal groups presents special obstacles that have been the subject of numerous research studies. Karmakar (2022) contends that the main challenges to school performance in the EMRS include systematic delays in money utilisation, a lack of autonomy in decision-making by school heads, and deficiencies in leadership preparation. Furthermore, Karmakar (2024) states that inclusive tribal school governance structures, culturally relevant pedagogies, and ongoing teacher training are all necessary. The intended equity of the EMRS is sometimes undermined by under-qualified staff, low community involvement, and a lack of culturally appropriate pedagogy (Kumar and Naseema, 2018). According to Ramachandran et al., (2020) there are frequent discrepancies between teachers' expectations and the socio-cultural realities of tribal pupils, which results in sub-optimal services to these kids. Recruiting contract teachers with little incentive adds to these difficulties, resulting in low morale and little responsibility (Patra, 2018). A study conducted by Centre for Budget and Policy Studies (CBPS) (2017), argues that there is a misunderstanding regarding resource distribution and monitoring due to inadequate coordination between the state-level department of education and the Tribal Development Department. Although the EMRS system has good intentions, it needs more decisive leadership, transparent governance, and localised management techniques to achieve its objectives.

Financial and Resource Management in Education

Financial constraints are a recurring challenge in the effective management of schools, particularly in underserved regions. Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (2018), discussed the critical role of timely fund disbursement and financial autonomy in improving school outcomes. Delayed grants and inadequate budgets have been marked as significant barriers in EMRS, where infrastructural projects and teacher salaries often face funding delays (Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment, 2025). Training for financial staff and streamlined budgeting processes are essential for overcoming these issues (Geddam, 2015). Moreover, collaboration with community organisations and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives have been suggested as potential solutions for addressing resource gaps (UNESCO, 2019). The

Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2020), emphasised the need for clear policies on financial management to ensure transparency and efficiency in fund utilisation.

Systemic Reforms for Inclusive Education

Systemic reforms are critical for creating an enabling environment that supports educational leaders. Sharma and Kumar (2023), highlighted the importance of consultative policymaking and stakeholder engagement in fostering systemic improvements. For EMRS, reforms must address procedural delays in fund allocation, coordination gaps between state and central authorities, and unrealistic policy expectations (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2020). Karmakar (2024), proposed that adopting a centralised management model, similar to the JNV structure, could enhance the operational efficiency of the EMRS. Additionally, periodic capacity-building workshops for leaders and teachers are essential for bridging skill gaps (Charania et al., 2023). The UNESCO roadmap for education (2014) and the World Development Report (2018) underscore the importance of aligning educational reforms with best global practices to achieve equitable outcomes for all learners.

The reviewed literature highlights the multifaceted nature of challenges in educational leadership, particularly in marginalised contexts. While the global discourse emphasises equity, sustainability, and innovation, the Indian context underscores the critical need for targeted interventions in tribal education. Leadership in the EMRS must transcend traditional administrative roles, embracing strategies that address systemic, financial, and cultural barriers. By integrating the findings of prior studies, this research aims to contribute to developing solutions for enhancing the effectiveness of EMRS leadership.

Research Methodology

Research Design

A descriptive survey design was adopted to examine the experiences of school leaders in the EMRS. This design was suitable for capturing varied leadership and management challenges across institutional contexts, aligning with the study's aim to identify patterns and strategies employed by principals in addressing systemic issues.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the leadership and management challenges faced by the EMRS principals.
2. To explore the strategies adopted to overcome these challenges.
3. To analyse the gaps in academic, financial, and institutional development in the EMRS.
4. To propose recommendations for systemic reforms to enhance the effectiveness of the EMRS leadership.

Sampling

The study employed a purposive sampling technique to select 30 respondents from the EMRS across India. The sample consisted of principals, administrators, and key leadership personnel directly responsible for managing the EMRS institutions. Schools were selected from various states to ensure diversity and representation, including West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Sikkim, Assam, and Tripura. These states were chosen due to their high concentration of populations and operational EMRS. The purposive approach ensured that respondents had relevant experience and contextual understanding of the challenges and strategies involved in EMRS leadership and management.

Data Collection Tools

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of closed-ended and multiple-choice questions. The questionnaire covered four major domains:

1. Leadership and management challenges
2. Academic and institutional development
3. Financial resource management
4. Support and governance

The structured questionnaire was developed based on guidelines of the EMRS from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and relevant academic literature on educational leadership.

Validity: The questionnaire was reviewed by three subject experts for content validity to ensure alignment with the objectives of the EMRS scheme and key leadership domains.

Reliability: A pilot test was conducted with five EMRS principals not included in the main sample. The questionnaire yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.85, indicating high internal consistency and reliability.

While this study primarily uses descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages), the consistency across respondent data, combined with a high reliability coefficient ($\alpha = 0.85$), supports the dependability of the findings. Although inferential statistics were not applied due to the study's exploratory nature and the sample size, the patterns presented are substantiated by national trends reported in related studies (Karmakar, 2022; Chowdhury Samanta and Soulé, 2025).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages. Tables and charts were employed to present the findings clearly and concisely. The analysis was structured to align with the research objectives and answer the key questions posed by the study.

Table 1: List of Sample Schools

Profile variable	Category	Frequency (N=30)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	22	73.33
	Female	8	26.67
Qualifications	MCA	1	3.33
	M.A.B.Ed.	5	16.67
	Ph.D.M.Ed.	3	10.00
	M.Sc. (Maths), B.Ed	2	6.67
	Other	19	63.33
Designation	IT Consultant	1	3.33
	Principal	23	76.67
	Administrator	3	10.00
	Other Roles	3	10.00
Mode of Appointment	Direct Recruitment	18	60.00
	Recruitment through promotion	12	40.00
Board of Examination	CBSE	20	66.67
	State Board	10	33.33
Training in Last Two Years	Yes	10	33.33
	No	20	66.67

The personal profile of the respondents in Table 1 provides an insightful look into the demographic and professional characteristics of the individuals serving as leaders and administrators in the EMRS. Among the 30 respondents, a significant majority were male (73.33 per cent), reflecting the gender composition of leadership roles in the context of the EMRS. Female representation stood at 26.67 per cent, highlighting the need for greater gender diversity in educational leadership, particularly in tribal-focused schools. Regarding qualifications, the data reveals various academic and professional backgrounds among respondents. While the majority (63.33 per cent) reported 'other' qualifications, likely encompassing a broad range of degrees and certifications, specific qualifications such as M.A.B.Ed. (16.67 per cent) and Ph.D.M.Ed. (10 per cent) underscore a strong focus on education-related disciplines. These academic credentials indicate a significant level of preparedness among many leaders to address the complex needs of tribal education. In terms of designation, 76.67 per cent of respondents identified as principals, underscoring their critical role in managing these institutions. Smaller percentages held roles as administrators (10 per cent) or IT consultants (3.33 per cent), reflecting the diversity of expertise needed in school leadership. Appointment modes reveal that 60 per cent of respondents entered their roles through direct recruitment, while 40 per cent achieved their positions via promotions. This balance indicates a preference for experienced candidates and an openness to appointing leaders through career progression. Additionally, the schools primarily align with CBSE (66.67 per cent), with the remaining 33.33 per cent affiliated with state boards, illustrating the dual administrative frameworks guiding these institutions. Interestingly, only a third (33.33 per cent) of respondents reported undergoing training in the past two years, signalling an urgent need to prioritise professional development for school leaders. Given that many of the respondents have advanced degrees in education, their professional roles and academic backgrounds point to a reasonably well-qualified leadership cohort. The data indicates a gap in continuous capacity-building, which also shows that only one-third (33.33 per cent) of respondents had received leadership training in the previous two years. The EMRS principals' professional and academic backgrounds seem to impact how they lead directly. Prior administrative experience and a formal education degree increased the likelihood of implementing proactive and structured tactics like staff mentoring, performance

data use, and creating inclusive school cultures. On the other hand, principals who lacked regular training or administrative experience concentrated more on mundane duties and found it challenging to handle systemic issues. As mentioned above, the disparity underscores the necessity of continuous, context-specific professional development to support adaptive and transformative leadership in the EMRS, even though academic credentials offer a solid basis.

Challenges Faced by Leaders

Table 2: Leadership and Management Challenges Faced by School Leaders

S. No.	Challenge Area	Specific Issues/Actions	Frequency (N=30)	Percentage (%)
1.	Personal Management Challenges	Socio-cultural barriers for learning	12	40
		Teachers' appraisal and promotion	18	60
		Teacher's low salaries and ad-hoc appointments	20	67
		Scarcity of subject teachers	25	83
		Vacant teaching posts	22	73
		Vacant non-teaching staff posts	19	63
		Teacher absenteeism and accountability	15	50
		Physical infrastructure problems	17	57
2.	Student Management Challenges	Indiscipline	14	47
		Lack of interest in studies	18	60
		Poor health and hygiene habits	16	53
		Use of intoxicants	8	27
		Writing love letters	6	20
		Adapting to the boarding system	15	50
		Poor study habits and low engagement	21	70
		Low educational background and weak foundational skills	20	67

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3.	Teacher Management and Leadership Challenges	Lack of professionalism	12	40
		Frequent absenteeism	14	47
		Non-cooperative behavior	10	33
		Lack of team spirit	11	37
		Poor adaptation to residential school rules	9	30
		Lack of motivation and innovation in teaching methods	18	60
		Reluctance to take additional responsibilities	19	63
4.	Strategies Adopted for Managing Teachers	One-on-one counseling	20	67
		Staff meetings and discussions	25	83
		Assigning responsibilities with deadlines	18	60
		Providing mentorship	15	50
		Conducting teacher training programs	22	73
		Writing to higher authorities for policy interventions	19	63
5.	Administrative Challenges	Heavy workload	24	80
		Managing with inadequate resources	26	87
		Coordination with tribal departments	20	67
		Responding to institutional emails	12	40
		Dealing with parents and communities	18	60
		Maintaining administrative files and data	10	33
6.	Common Administrative Issues	Untimely release of funds	25	83
		Delayed infrastructure development	23	77
		Heavy administrative workload	20	67
		Poor participation of the SMC	16	53
		Difficulty in managing parents and communities	14	47
		Poor connectivity and lack of IT infrastructure	19	63

7.	Strategies Adopted for Administrative Issues	Writing proposals to concerned authorities	20	67
		Organising meetings with SMCs and staff	22	73
		Counseling sessions with staff and parents	19	63
		Delegating tasks to trusted staff members	15	50
		Developing collaborative approaches with local department	18	60
		Reporting issues to higher authorities	25	83

The leadership and management challenges faced by EMRS leaders reflect the unique complexities of operating educational institutions in tribal areas. The data reveals significant difficulties in staffing, with 83 per cent of respondents citing a scarcity of subject teachers and 73 per cent pointing to vacant teaching posts as major challenges. These gaps highlight the critical shortage of qualified educators, directly impacting the quality of education for tribal students. Similarly, 63 per cent reported issues with vacant non-teaching staff positions, emphasising the administrative strain on schools struggling to function with insufficient personnel. Teacher accountability and absenteeism remain significant concerns, with 50 per cent of respondents identifying these as barriers to effective management. These challenges are compounded by socio-cultural barriers to learning (40 per cent) and infrastructure problems (57 per cent), which create additional layers of difficulty in delivering quality education.

Managing students presents another set of challenges, particularly concerning behavioural and academic engagement. Nearly half (47 per cent) of respondents reported indiscipline as a frequent issue, while 70 per cent highlighted poor study habits and low engagement as significant barriers. Coupled with 67 per cent citing low educational backgrounds and weak foundational skills, these findings underscore the need for remedial and supportive interventions tailored to the unique circumstances of tribal students. Other issues, such as a lack of interest in studies (60 per cent) and health-related concerns (53 per cent), further complicate efforts to create a conducive learning environment. Behavioural problems, including adaptation difficulties in boarding schools (50 per cent) and occasional reports of students using intoxicants

(27 per cent), reflect the broader socio-cultural context within which EMRS operates.

Leadership also involves navigating challenges with teachers, particularly in fostering professionalism and innovation. Sixty per cent of respondents noted a lack of motivation and innovative teaching methods among educators, while 63 per cent cited reluctance to take on additional responsibilities. These factors, combined with issues like absenteeism (47 per cent) and non-cooperative behavior (33 per cent), underscore the importance of capacity-building initiatives. 83 per cent of leaders reported holding regular staff meetings and discussions to address these challenges, while 73 per cent emphasised teacher training programs. The proactive use of one-on-one counseling (67 per cent) and mentorship (50 per cent) further illustrates a commitment to improving teacher morale and effectiveness.

The data points to an overwhelming workload (80 per cent) and resource inadequacies (87 per cent) as dominant concerns in administration. Coordination with tribal departments (67 per cent) and managing parental interactions (60 per cent) add layers of complexity to administrative responsibilities. Procedural inefficiencies, such as untimely fund disbursement (83 per cent) and delayed infrastructure development (77 per cent), further exacerbate these issues. Leaders have adopted measures such as organising meetings with staff and SMCs (73 per cent) and writing proposals to higher authorities (67 per cent) to mitigate these challenges.

Challenges in Academic Leadership

Table 3: Academic and Institutional Development

S. No.	Thematic Area	Specific Issues/Actions	Frequency (N=30)	Percentage (%)
1.	Challenges in Academic Leadership	Coordination with academic bodies (DIET, SCERT, CBSE)	20	67
		Conducting student performance analysis	18	60
		Training teachers and capacity building	22	73
		Time for academic supervision and feedback	15	50
		Conducting remedial classes for slow learners	19	63
		Developing an inclusive classroom culture	17	57

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2.	Common Problems in Academic Leadership	Slow pace of teacher training programs	22	73
		Lack of professionalism among teachers	18	60
		Limited remedial teaching opportunities	19	63
		Poor communication with parents	16	53
		Difficulty in implementing modern teaching methods	14	47
3.	Strategies Implemented to Address Academic Challenges	Conducting teacher training sessions	24	80
		Encouraging teamwork among staff	22	73
		Frequent review meetings for academic performance	20	67
		Organising remedial classes for students	18	60
		Maintaining regular communication with parents	16	53
4.	Career Achievements of School Leaders	Achieving 100% board exam results	25	83
		State and national-level recognition in cultural and sports activities	20	67
		Establishing innovative programs (e.g., organic farming, awards for teachers)	18	60
		Setting up advanced infrastructure or labs	19	63
		Producing state-level toppers	21	70
5.	Administrative a Contributing Factors to Achievements	Hard work and dedication of staff	26	87
		Teamwork and community support	23	77
		Proper planning and time management	22	73
		Leadership skills and motivation	20	67

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6.	Challenges in Leadership Roles	Lack of adequate infrastructure	21	70
		High workload due to staff shortages	23	77
		Resistance from parents or local community	17	57
		Difficulty in balancing administrative and academic tasks	19	63
7.	Suggested Systemic Reforms	Direct fund allocation to schools	24	80
		Improved collaboration between state and central bodies	21	70
		Regular consultative meetings with principals	19	63
		Clear and timely communication protocols	18	60

A host of systemic and operational barriers challenge academic leadership within EMRS schools. Coordination with academic bodies like DIET, SCERT, and CBSE remains a significant issue for 67 per cent of respondents, signaling a need for streamlined communication and collaboration. Training and capacity building for teachers were highlighted as pressing needs by 73 per cent of respondents, while 63 per cent pointed to limited opportunities for remedial teaching as a major shortfall. Time constraints for academic supervision (50 per cent) and difficulties in fostering inclusive classroom cultures (57 per cent) were also identified, reflecting the multifaceted demands placed on school leaders.

To address these challenges, leaders have implemented several strategies, including teacher training sessions (80 per cent) and encouraging teamwork among staff (73 per cent). Regular academic reviews (67 per cent) and organising remedial classes for slow learners (60 per cent) further demonstrate a commitment to improving student outcomes. Achievements in academic leadership include a remarkable 83 per cent of respondents reporting 100 per cent board exam results and 70 per cent highlighting the production of state-level toppers. These successes, driven by hard-working staff (87 per cent) and effective planning (73 per cent), underscore the transformative potential of strong leadership in overcoming institutional challenges.

Resource Management**Table 4: Financial and Resource Management**

S. No.	Thematic Area	Specific Issues/Actions	Frequency (N=30)	Percentage (%)
1.	Financial Management Challenges	Delay in receipt of grants	26	87
		Inadequate financial resources	23	77
		Maintaining financial records and audits	18	60
		Budget planning and allocation	19	63
		Creating CSR funds for the school	15	50
2.	Common Problems in Financial Management	Untimely fund disbursement	24	80
		Insufficient grants for infrastructure	22	73
		Lack of financial autonomy at the school level	20	67
		Poor training for accountants and financial staff	18	60
3.	Steps Taken to Address Financial Problems	Writing to higher authorities for timely fund disbursement	25	83
		Training accounting staff for financial record management	20	67
		Collaborating with community organisations for CSR funds	18	60
		Prioritising essential expenditures based on budgetary constraints	19	63
4.	Infrastructure-Related Challenges	Incomplete construction of hostels	23	77
		Lack of proper kitchen and dining facilities	21	70
		Insufficient classrooms and labs	20	67
		No library or auditorium	22	73
		Poor water supply and electricity connectivity	18	60

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5.	Teacher-Related Issues	Lack of qualified teachers for specific subjects	24	80
		Inadequate teacher-pupil ratio	22	73
		Insufficient training opportunities for teachers	20	67
		Difficulty in retaining teachers due to low salaries	19	63
6.	Specific Financial Challenges	Delayed grant disbursement	26	87
		Insufficient CSR contributions for school development	15	50
		Limited funds for extra-curricular activities and infrastructure maintenance	20	67
7.	Community Participation Issues	Inadequate budget planning support from higher authorities	19	63
		Lack of active community involvement in school activities	22	73
		Resistance from local communities	18	60
		Poor participation in SMC meetings	17	57
		Need for regular parent-teacher interactions to build trust	20	67

Financial constraints represent one of the most significant hurdles faced by EMRS leaders. Nearly 87 per cent of respondents reported delays in receiving grants, while 77 per cent highlighted the inadequacy of financial resources. Budgetary planning and resource allocation challenges were cited by 63 per cent, with 60 per cent noting insufficient training for financial staff. These financial difficulties are compounded by infrastructure-related challenges, including incomplete hostel construction (77 per cent) and inadequate classrooms and laboratories (67 per cent). Limited funds for extra-curricular activities and poor community participation further strain resources.

Leaders have adopted measures such as prioritising essential expenditures (63 per cent) and collaborating with community organisations (60 per cent) to secure CSR funds. Training accounting staff (67 per cent) and writing to authorities for timely fund disbursement (83 per cent) have also been key strategies. Despite these efforts, the persistent financial autonomy and infrastructural support shortage highlight the need for systemic reforms to empower EMRS schools.

Support and Governance**Table 5: Support and Governance**

S. No.	Thematic Area	Specific Issues/ Recommendations	Frequency (N=30)	Percentage (%)
1.	Support Required from Tribal Development/ Directorate of School	Timely release of funds	27	90
		Teacher recruitment drives	25	83
		Capacity-building workshops for leaders and teachers	23	77
		Guidelines for uniform policies across EMRS schools	21	70
		More autonomy in decision-making	18	60
2.	System-Level Challenges	Procedural delays in fund disbursement	26	87
		Lack of coordination between state and central departments	23	77
		Political interference	18	60
		Unrealistic policy expectations	20	67
3.	Additional Challenges Specific to EMRS	Geographical constraints and poor connectivity	22	73
		Lack of coordination between state and central bodies	19	63
		Resistance from local communities	18	60
		Difficulty in achieving equitable admissions	20	67
4.	Suggestions for Systemic Reform	Direct management of EMRS schools by NESTS (like JNV structure)	25	83
		Clear policies on admissions, teacher recruitment, and resource allocation	22	73
		Regular workshops for knowledge sharing among EMRS principals	20	67
		Timely allocation of funds and infrastructure development	24	80

Support from the Tribal Development Department and the Directorate of School Education is critical for addressing systemic challenges in EMRS schools. Ninety per cent of respondents emphasised the need for timely fund disbursement, while 83 per cent highlighted teacher recruitment drives as a priority. Capacity-building workshops for leaders and clearer policy guidelines were also identified as essential support mechanisms. At the system level, procedural delays (87 per cent), lack of coordination between state and central bodies (77 per cent), and political interference (60 per cent) were major concerns. Respondents also noted geographical constraints (73 per cent) and inequitable admissions processes (67 per cent) as barriers to effective governance.

To address these systemic issues, respondents suggested reforms such as direct management of EMRS by NESTS (83 per cent) and clearer policies on admissions, recruitment, and resource allocation (73 per cent). Regular consultative meetings (67 per cent) and timely infrastructure development (80 per cent) were also emphasised as critical steps towards creating a more efficient and equitable system. These recommendations underscore the need for a collaborative and transparent approach to governance, ensuring that EMRS schools can fulfil their mission of empowering tribal students through education.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the multifaceted challenges faced by principals and administrators of Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) in fulfilling their leadership and management roles. These challenges are deeply rooted in systemic, institutional, and socio-cultural issues that significantly impact the delivery of quality education in tribal regions. The analysis reveals that leadership in EMRS is characterised by a delicate balance of addressing infrastructural deficiencies, teacher shortages, financial constraints, and community resistance while focusing on academic and holistic development. For instance, the data highlights that 83 per cent of respondents identified the scarcity of subject teachers as a critical issue, reflecting the systemic problem of inadequate human resources that hampers the operational efficiency of these schools. Furthermore, vacant teaching and non-teaching posts, coupled with a high workload among existing staff (80 per cent), amplify administrative challenges and contribute to burnout and inefficiency among school leaders. The socio-cultural barriers, such

as students' low educational backgrounds and weak foundational skills (67 per cent), and behavioural challenges like indiscipline (47 per cent) and poor adaptation to the boarding system (50 per cent), reveal the complexities of managing students in tribal contexts. These findings are consistent with previous research that underscores the importance of culturally sensitive and inclusive education in marginalised settings (Karmakar, 2024). The emphasis on integrating traditional knowledge and fostering cultural pride within the EMRS curriculum is crucial. Still, these efforts must be supported by targeted interventions, such as remedial classes and capacity-building programs, to bridge educational gaps and enhance student engagement. Leadership strategies, including one-on-one counseling (67 per cent), mentorship programs (50 per cent), and regular staff meetings (83 per cent), demonstrate a proactive approach by principals in mitigating these challenges. However, the need for more robust training and professional development for educators (73 per cent) highlights a gap in existing support systems that systemic reforms need to address. Financial and resource management emerge as another significant area of concern, with 87 per cent of respondents reporting delays in grant disbursement and 77 per cent highlighting insufficient financial resources. These issues directly impact infrastructural development, as evidenced by challenges such as incomplete hostel construction (77 per cent) and the lack of adequate kitchen, dining, and laboratory facilities (70 per cent). The lack of financial autonomy at the school level (67 per cent) further exacerbates these problems, as principals are unable to prioritise expenditures effectively. Previous studies have emphasised the importance of timely and transparent fund allocation to ensure the smooth functioning of educational institutions (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2018). The study also identifies potential solutions, such as leveraging community resources through CSR contributions (60 per cent) and streamlining financial management processes through training for accounting staff (67 per cent). However, these measures require sustained support and policy interventions from higher authorities to be truly effective.

The analysis of governance and systemic support further highlights procedural inefficiencies, with 87 per cent of respondents citing delays in fund disbursement and 77 per cent pointing to a lack of coordination between state and central authorities. These findings align with broader critiques of bureaucratic hurdles that

impede the timely implementation of policies and programs in tribal education (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2020). The respondents' suggestions for systemic reforms, such as direct management of EMRS by NESTS (83 per cent) and clearer policies on teacher recruitment and resource allocation (73 per cent), reflect a need for centralised oversight and streamlined governance structures. Additionally, the call for regular consultative meetings (67 per cent) and capacity-building workshops (77 per cent) underscores the importance of fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing among stakeholders to address shared challenges and develop best practices. Despite these challenges, the study highlights notable achievements among EMRS leaders, including achieving 100% board exam results (83 per cent), state-level recognition in extra-curricular activities (67 per cent), and the establishment of innovative programs (60 per cent). These successes are attributed to staff's hard work and dedication (87 per cent) and the effective leadership skills of principals (67 per cent). These findings reinforce the critical role of strong leadership in transforming educational outcomes and creating resilient school ecosystems, as noted in global literature on educational leadership (Stronge et al., 2011; UNESCO, 2014). This study provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and strategies in EMRS leadership, offering valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders. It highlights the need for systemic reforms to address infrastructural and financial constraints, enhance professional development opportunities, and streamline governance processes. By aligning these efforts with inclusive and equitable education principles, as outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (United Nations, 2015), EMRS can serve as a model for empowering tribal communities through education. The findings emphasise the importance of collaborative and adaptive leadership in navigating the complexities of tribal education and underscore the transformative potential of targeted interventions in achieving sustainable development. It is essential to recognise that the opinions of other important stakeholders, especially parents and students, were not directly recorded, even though this study offers insightful information about the management and leadership difficulties EMRS principals face. The viewpoints of students and their families are crucial in tribal residential schools, where cultural context, trust, and home-school dynamics significantly impact student engagement. Their

personal experiences can provide valuable insights into the efficacy of inclusiveness, leadership techniques, and school climate. To provide a more comprehensive understanding of how EMRS institutions serve tribal communities, future research should include participatory approaches that involve these groups.

Conclusion

The study underscores the complexities of leadership in Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS), emphasising the systemic, infrastructural, and socio-cultural challenges that principals and administrators navigate. Key issues include teacher shortages, resource constraints, financial inefficiencies, and limited community engagement, all of which significantly impact the quality of education. Despite these challenges, the achievements of EMRS, such as high board exam success rates and recognition in extra-curricular activities, demonstrate the potential of adaptive and effective leadership. The research highlights the importance of targeted systemic reforms to address procedural delays, improve resource allocation, and streamline governance. Specifically, timely fund disbursement, enhanced professional development opportunities, and centralised management through NESTS are proposed as critical measures to strengthen the operational efficiency of EMRS. Capacity-building workshops, inclusive policy frameworks, and collaborative stakeholder engagement are essential to empower school leaders and foster resilience within the educational ecosystem. By aligning efforts with Sustainable Development Goal 4, emphasising equitable and quality education, EMRS can serve as a transformative model for tribal communities. The integration of traditional knowledge, coupled with innovative teaching and leadership strategies, can bridge educational disparities and promote holistic development. This study contributes valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders, advocating for a sustainable and inclusive approach to tribal education that ensures no community is left behind in India's pursuit of educational equity. Although the results emphasise how vital school leadership is in determining institutional outcomes, greater involvement from parents and students as key stakeholders is necessary for long-lasting effects. Their voices are crucial to co-create inclusive, culturally relevant, and responsive learning environments in EMRS schools.

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