



TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY: A STUDY ON CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITY IN TEA GARDEN AREAS OF ALIPURDUAR

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

Inclusive pedagogy seeks to ensure equitable learning opportunities by addressing the diverse educational needs of all learners. Children studying in the tea garden areas of Alipurduar district often experience educational disadvantages due to socio-economic deprivation, linguistic diversity, cultural exclusion, and limited access to quality educational resources. This study examines the classroom environment and analyses the role of cultural sensitivity in promoting inclusive pedagogical practices and student participation in selected primary schools located in tea garden areas of Alipurduar district, West Bengal. The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from 11 purposively selected primary schools through school surveys and institutional records, while secondary data were obtained from books, research articles, and government reports. The collected data were analysed using percentage and ratio analysis. The findings reveal that high teacher-student ratios, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate learning resources, and insufficient teacher training constrain the effective implementation of inclusive pedagogy. The study further indicates that linguistic and cultural diversity significantly influence classroom participation. Schools adopting culturally responsive, multilingual, and child-centred teaching practices demonstrate comparatively higher levels of student's engagement and participation. The study concludes that strengthening classroom infrastructure, improving teacher capacity, and integrating culturally sensitive teaching practices are essential for promoting inclusive and equitable primary education in tea garden communities. It also highlights the interrelationship between classroom environment and cultural sensitivity in fostering inclusive pedagogy.

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Introduction

Education significantly influences individual development, social advancement, and broader national progress. In addition to academic learning, education supports the development of critical thinking skills, self-confidence, democratic values, and socio-emotional abilities (UNESCO, 2017). Despite significant progress in school enrollment in India following initiatives such as the Right to Education Act (2009), disparities in educational quality and learning outcomes persist, particularly in marginalized rural and semi-rural regions.

The tea garden areas of Alipurduar district, located in the northern part of West Bengal, represent one such marginalized context. These regions are predominantly inhabited by tea garden workers and their families, who have historically faced socio-economic exploitation, poor living conditions, low wages, and limited access to healthcare and education (Bhowmik, 2015). Children from these communities are often first-generation learners and face multiple disadvantages that affect their educational participation, classroom interaction, and learning engagement.

Primary schools in tea garden areas of Alipurduar district have been suffering from inadequate infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, shortage of trained teachers, limited access to learning resources, and linguistic diversity among students (Suja & Elamaram, 2024). In addition, students come from multilingual and tribal backgrounds and often use home languages that differ from the medium of instruction in schools. This linguistic mismatch creates barriers to comprehension, classroom interaction, and effective learning.

The classroom environment plays a significant role in influencing students' engagement, motivation, and overall learning experience. It includes not only physical aspects but also social and emotional dimensions such as teacher-student relationships and participation (Fraser, 2012). A supportive and inclusive classroom environment encourages active participation, nurtures learner confidence, and fosters a sense of belonging among students, particularly those students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In this context, cultural sensitivity emerges as a key component of inclusive pedagogy. Cultural sensitivity refers to the ability of teachers to recognize, respect, and respond to students' diverse linguistic, cultural, and social backgrounds. In culturally diverse settings such as tea garden communities, the absence of culturally responsive teaching practices may lead to exclusion and disengagement. Conversely, culturally sensitive teaching enhances participation and learning (Lani Florian, 2014).

Inclusive pedagogy provides a framework for addressing learner diversity by promoting equity and flexibility in teaching methods. It emphasizes creating classroom environments where all students feel valued and supported (Ainscow, 2005). However, limited research has examined classroom-level practices and cultural sensitivity in tea garden primary schools of Alipurduar district.

Although previous studies have examined inclusive pedagogy, classroom environment, and culturally responsive teaching, very limited research has explored the combined influence of classroom environment and cultural sensitivity on inclusive pedagogical practices in tea garden primary schools of Alipurduar district. This study attempts to fill this gap by examining how these factors influence student participation and inclusive learning.

Therefore, the present study aims to examine the classroom environment and analyze the role of cultural sensitivity in shaping inclusive pedagogical practices in primary schools located in tea garden areas of Alipurduar district.

Review of Literature

Suja and Elamaram (2024) investigated the challenges of inclusive education in India and reported that issues such as insufficient teacher training, shortage of educational resources, and dependence on para-teachers creates challenges in implementing inclusive practices, particularly in rural and marginalized settings.

Padhi et al. (2021) investigated inclusive education in tribal areas of Odisha. The study found that although government initiatives improved school enrolment and educational access, inadequate infrastructure, shortage of trained teachers, and limited teaching-learning resources continued to hinder the quality of education. The findings highlight challenges that influence inclusive educational practices in marginalized communities.

OECD (2018) reported that supportive learning environments and equitable educational opportunities play an important role in improving student participation and learning outcomes.

Florian (2014) emphasized that inclusive pedagogy involves extending learning opportunities to all learners by removing instructional and contextual barriers. The study highlights that teachers should design instructional practices that enable every learner to engage meaningfully in classroom activities.

Fraser (2012) stated that the physical conditions, social relationships, and emotional environment of a classroom influence students' engagement and learning. A supportive classroom environment helps increase motivation and participation among students.

Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) explore the idea of inclusive pedagogy and pointed out that teachers need to adopt flexible and learner-responsive teaching approaches. According to their study, inclusive teaching practices allow educators to address the diverse learning needs of students within a common classroom setting.

Booth and Ainscow (2011) developed the Index for inclusion, which helps schools promote inclusive practices, equal participation, and respect for diversity in education.

Ainscow (2005) discussed the development of inclusive education systems and highlighted the importance of transforming school practices to ensure that all learners can participate effectively in the learning process. The study suggests that diversity among students should be recognized as a strength that enriches classroom learning rather than as a difficulty.

Research Gap

The reviewed literature indicates that inclusive pedagogy, classroom environment, and cultural sensitivity play significant roles in promoting equitable and meaningful learning opportunities for all learners. However, limited studies have examined the combined influence of classroom environment and cultural sensitivity on inclusive pedagogical practices in primary schools located in tea garden areas of Alipurduar district, West Bengal. Most previous studies have focused on inclusive education in general or on classroom practices in other educational settings, without adequately addressing the unique socio-economic, linguistic, and cultural context of tea garden communities. Therefore, the present study attempts to fill this gap by examining how classroom environment and cultural sensitivity jointly influence inclusive pedagogical practices and student participation in selected tea garden primary schools of Alipurduar district.

Objectives of the Study

Main objective:

- To examine the impact of classroom environment and cultural sensitivity on inclusive pedagogical practices and student participation in primary schools located in tea garden areas of Alipurduar district.

Specific objectives:

- To analyze the physical, social, and emotional dimensions of classroom environments in selected tea garden primary schools.
- To identify the major challenges affecting the implementing inclusive pedagogy in these primary schools.
- To assess levels of student participation and engagement among learners in primary classroom.
- To examine the relationship between classroom resources and student attendance in selected primary schools.
- To analyse the role of cultural sensitivity in classroom teaching practices, particularly in addressing linguistic and cultural sensitivity.

Research Questions: The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What are the physical, social, and emotional characteristics of classroom environments in tea garden primary schools?
- What challenges affect the implementation of inclusive pedagogy in these schools?
- How does classroom environment influence student participation and engagement?
- What relationship exists between school resources and student attendance?
- How does cultural sensitivity influence inclusive pedagogical practices in tea garden primary schools?

Methodology

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the classroom environment and inclusive pedagogical practices in primary schools located in tea garden areas of Alipurduar district, West Bengal. The study specially focuses on understanding how classroom conditions and cultural sensitivity influence student participation and empowerment among learners from marginalized tea garden communities.

Study Areas: The study was conducted in selected tea garden areas of Alipurduar district, West Bengal. These areas are characterized by socio-economic deprivation, linguistic diversity, and cultural heterogeneity. Most students belong to tea garden worker families and are often first-generation learners. Such contextual characteristics make the study area suitable for examining classroom environment and culturally sensitive inclusive pedagogical practices.

Data Sources: The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through school-level surveys and review of institutional records to obtain information on teacher-student ratio, student attendance, and the availability of school resources. Secondary data were collected from academic journals, books, government reports, and previous research studies related to inclusive pedagogy, classroom environment, and cultural sensitivity.

Sample and Sampling Techniques: The study covers 11 purposively selected primary schools situated in the tea garden areas of Alipurduar district. Purposive sampling was adopted because these schools represent the socio-economically disadvantages, linguistically diverse, and culturally heterogeneous characteristics of tea garden communities. The selected schools were considered appropriate for the study as they provided relevant information on classroom environment, teacher-student ratio, student attendance, school resources, and inclusive pedagogical practices, which directly relate to the objectives of the research.

Data Collection Tools: Data were collected through structured survey, institutional records, and review of relevant documents such as government reports, academic articles, and previous research studies related to inclusive pedagogy and cultural sensitivity.

Ethical Considerations: Ethical considerations were maintained throughout the study. Institutional data were used solely for academic purposes, and confidentiality of school-level information was ensured. No personal identifiers of students or teachers were disclosed.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The collected data were analyzed using simple statistical techniques such as percentage and ratio analysis. These techniques were used to compare school-level variations and identify patterns related to classroom environment, teacher-student ratio, resource availability, and student attendance.

Table 1: Teacher-Student Ratio in Selected Tea Garden Primary Schools of Alipurduar District

School No	M (Teachers)	F (Teachers)	Total (T)	Students (N)	T- S Ratio
School 1	4	1	5	185	1:37
School 2	4	2	6	288	1:48
School 3	5	1	6	285	1:48
School 4	2	1	3	131	1:44
School 5	2	2	4	69	1:17
School 6	3	0	3	71	1:24
School 7	3	1	4	148	1:37
School 8	1	1	2	63	1:32
School 9	3	0	3	80	1:27

School 10	2	2	4	133	1:33
School 11	2	1	3	56	1:19

Source: Field Survey Data (2026); School Records of Selected Tea Garden Primary Schools, Alipurduar District.

Note: M= Male Teachers, F= Female Teachers, T= Total Teachers, N= Number of Students, T-S Ratio= Teacher-Student Ratio.

Interpretation: Table 1 presents the teacher-student ratios in 11 selected primary schools located in tea garden areas of Alipurduar district. Considerable variation is observed across schools. School 2 and 3 have the highest teacher-student ratio (1:48), followed by school 4 (1:44), indicating overcrowded classrooms and increased teaching workload. Such conditions reduce opportunities for individualized instruction and limit the implementation of inclusive pedagogical practices. In contrast, school 5 and 11 maintain comparatively lower ratios (1:17 and 1: 19), creating more favourable conditions for classroom interaction and learner participation. Overall, the findings indicate that uneven teacher distribution remains a major institutional challenge affecting inclusive education in tea garden primary schools.

Figure 1: Teacher-Students Ratio in Selected Tea Garden Primary Schools

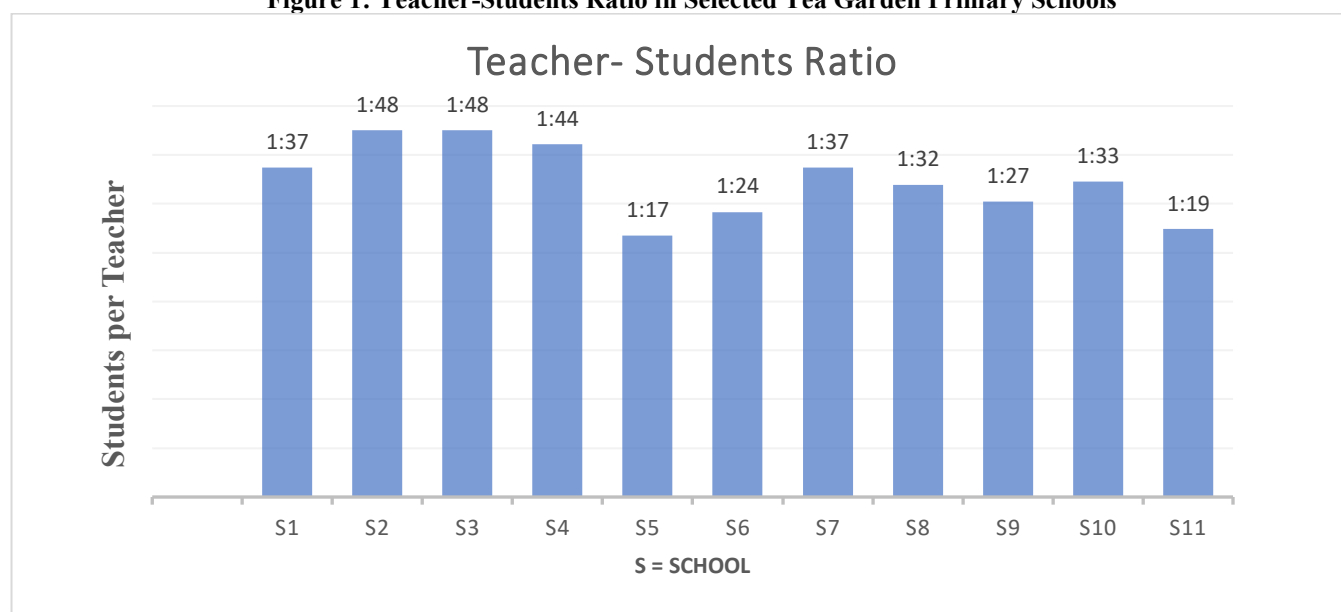


Table 2: Student Attendance and Availability of Resources

School number	Attendance Percentage	Available Resources
School1	80%	Low
School2	85%	Moderate
School3	75%	Moderate
School4	70%	Low
School5	65%	Low
School6	85%	Moderate
School7	90%	Low
School8	60%	Low
School9	55%	Moderate
School10	85%	Moderate
School11	60%	Moderate

Source: Field Survey Data (2026); School Records of Selected Tea Garden Primary Schools, Alipurduar District.

Interpretation: Table 2 illustrates the relationship between student attendance and the availability of educational resources in selected tea garden primary schools. Schools with moderate resource availability generally report higher attendance rates, ranging from 80% to 85%. Conversely, schools with limited resources often exhibit comparatively lower attendance levels. An exception is school 7, which records the highest attendance (90%) despite having low resource availability, suggesting that teacher commitment, effective school leadership, and community participation may also contribute to regular attendance. Overall, the findings suggest a positive relationship between resource availability and student attendance, although contextual factors also influence student's participation in schooling.

Figure 2: Student Attendance in Selected Tea Garden Primary Schools

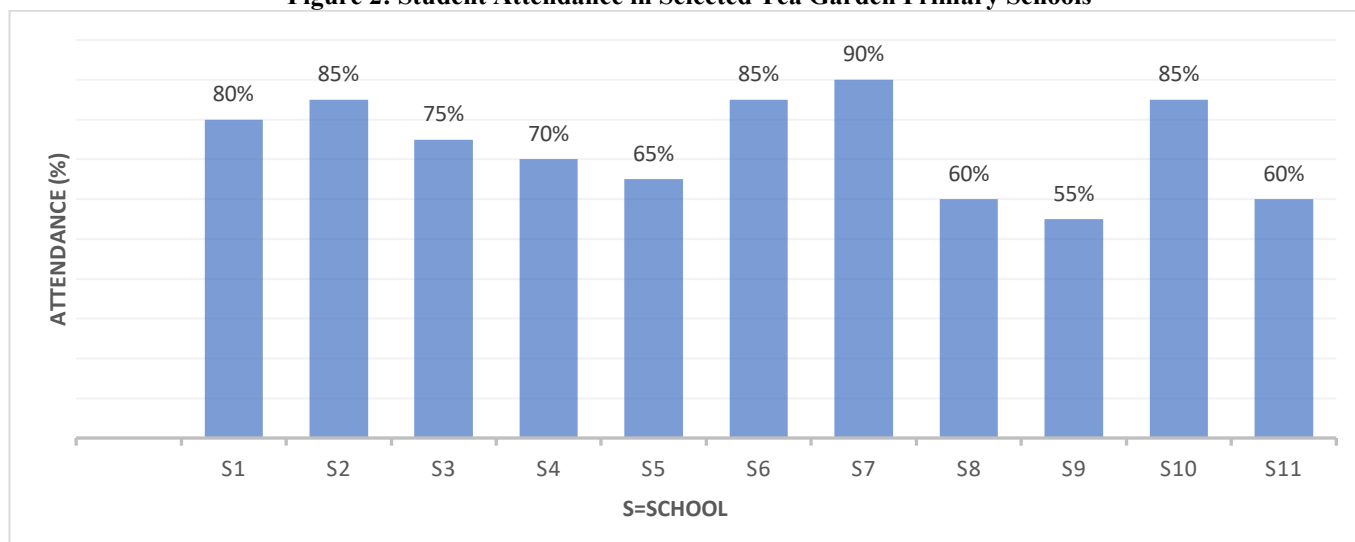


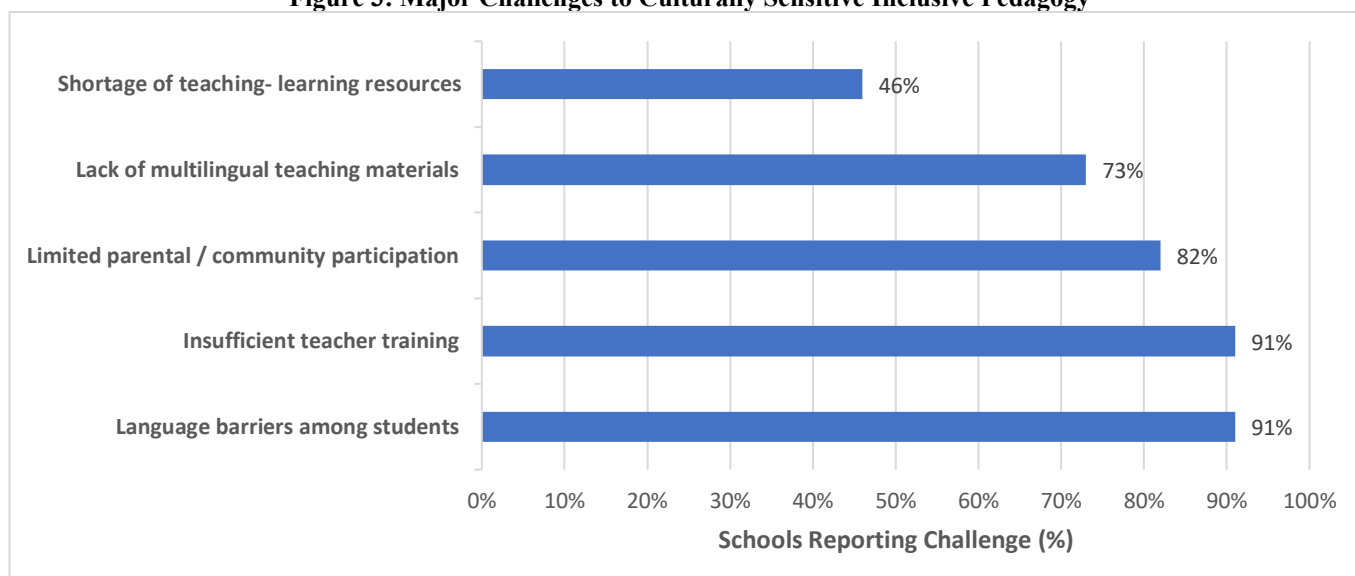
Table3: Challenges to Culturally Sensitive Inclusive Pedagogy in Selected Tea Garden Primary Schools

Challengers	Number of Schools	Percentages (%)
Languages barriers among students	10	90.9%
Lack of multilingual teaching materials	08	72.7%
Shortage of teaching-learning resources	05	45.5%
Insufficient teacher training in inclusive pedagogy	10	90.9%
Limited parental or community participation	09	81.8%

Source: Field Survey Data (2026)

Interpretation: Table3 indicates that several challenges hinder the implementation of culturally sensitive inclusive pedagogy in the selected tea garden primary schools. The most commonly reported challenges are languages barriers among students and insufficient teacher training in inclusive pedagogy, each reported by 90.9% of the schools. Limited parental and community participation was also identified as a major challenge by 81.8% of the schools, while 72.7% reported a lack of multilingual teaching materials. Comparatively fewer schools (45.5%) identified a shortage of teaching-learning resources as a major challenge. These findings suggest that improving teacher capacity, promoting multilingual instructional support, and strengthening school-community partnerships are essential for implementing culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogical practices in tea garden primary schools.

Figure 3: Major Challenges to Culturally Sensitive Inclusive Pedagogy



Findings of the study: Based on the analysis of primary data collected from selected schools and relevant secondary sources, the following major findings have emerged:

1. Structural and Institutional Factors:

The study reveals several structural constraints affecting classroom environment and inclusive pedagogical practices:

- **High Teacher-Student Ratios:**

The data show that most schools have relatively high teacher-student ratios, remaining from approximately 1:32 to 1:48 in several cases. Such ratios indicate overcrowded classroom, which limit opportunities for individualized attention and hinder the effective implementation of inclusive pedagogical practices.

- **Variation in Classroom Conditions:**

There noticeable variation in teacher-student ratios across schools. While some schools demonstrate comparatively lower ratios (e.g., around 1:17 and 1:19), other reflect significantly higher ratios, suggesting uneven distribution of teaching resources.

- **Relationship Between Resources and Attendance:**

Schools can be broadly categorized into low and moderate levels of resource availability. A general pattern can be observed where schools with moderate resources tend to report higher attendance levels (around 80-85%), while some schools with low resources show comparatively lower attendance (around 55-60%).

- **Challenges in Policy Implementation:**

Although inclusive education policies exist, their effective implementation in tea garden schools remains limited. Factors such as lack of resources, insufficient teacher training, and limited institutional support create barriers to the successful application of inclusive practices.

- **Overall Institutional Variation:**

The data reflect differences among schools in terms of teacher availability, student attendance, and resource levels, suggesting that classroom conditions are not uniform across the study area.

2. Students Participation and Socio-Economic Context:

The study also highlights factors related to student engagement and background conditions:

- **Student Attendance Patterns:**

Attendance levels vary considerably, ranging from about 55% to 90%. This variation indicates differences in student participation, school environment, and contextual factors influencing

- **Socio-Economic Challenges of Students:**

Many learners in tea garden areas face socio-economic difficulties such as poverty and lack of educational support at home, which negatively affect their attendance and participation in primary education.

- **Exceptions in Pattern:**

In certain case, schools with limited resources demonstrate relatively high attendance (e.g., around 90%), indicating that factors beyond resource availability may also influence student attendance.

3. Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusive Practices:

This study identifies cultural sensitivity as a critical dimension influencing inclusive pedagogy:

- **Language and Cultural Barriers:**

Linguistic diversity in tea garden communities, where students often speak regional, tribal, or indigenous languages, creates comprehension challenges in classrooms where the medium of instruction is different. This can hinder classroom instruction, peer collaboration, and meaningful learning. Context-specific inclusive strategies, such as multilingual teaching support and culturally relevant materials, are essential to overcome these barriers.

- **Limited Teacher Training in Inclusive Practices:**

Most teachers in tea garden schools lack formal training in inclusive pedagogy, multilingual teaching, and child-centred instructional strategies. The absence of regular training programs makes it difficult for teachers to use effective teaching methods and address the diverse learning needs of students.

- **Weak Community and Parental Engagement:**

Parental involvement in schooling remains limited in tea garden areas due to low literacy levels, long working hours, and economic constraints. This weak school-community linkage reduces student motivation, continuity in learning, and reinforcement of inclusive practices beyond the classroom.

These findings collectively indicate that both classroom environment and cultural sensitivity significantly influence the effectiveness of inclusive pedagogical practices in the study area.

Discussion of the Study

The findings of the study indicate that classroom conditions in tea garden primary schools of Alipurduar district are influenced by structural and institutional factors such as high teacher-student ratios and limited resource availability. These conditions restrict opportunities for individual attention and reduce the effectiveness of classroom interaction. This observation aligns with earlier research emphasizing the importance of classroom environment in shaping student engagement (Fraser, 2012).

This analysis further suggests that schools with relatively better resources tend to demonstrate higher student attendance, indicating that supportive learning environments contribute positively to student participation. This is consistent with the view that equitable and inclusive educational settings enhance learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2017).

Similarly, the findings related to culturally responsive classroom practices are consistent with Byrd (2019), who argued that culturally inclusive learning environments enhance students' participation, sense of belonging, and overall engagement in classroom activities.

In addition, the study indicates that inclusive and participatory teaching practices can improve student engagement and confidence. However, challenges such as limited teacher preparedness and diverse classroom needs continue to affect the consistent implementation of inclusive pedagogy, as also noted in previous studies (Florian, 2014).

These findings are further supported by Finkelstein et al. (2019), who emphasized that teachers' inclusive classroom practices and continuous professional development are essential for addressing learner diversity effectively.

The findings also reveal that cultural sensitivity plays a crucial role in shaping inclusive classroom practices. In the context of the garden communities, where students come from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds, the absence of culturally responsive teaching approaches may lead to barriers in comprehension, participation, and classroom interaction. A mismatch between the language of instruction and students' home languages further limits meaningful engagement in the learning process. Overall, the discussion highlights that improving classroom conditions, strengthening teacher capacity, and adopting context-sensitive inclusive practices are essential for enhancing student participation and empowerment in tea garden primary schools. Furthermore, Jia & Nasri (2019) emphasized that continuous professional development enhances teachers' competence in culturally responsive pedagogy and supports inclusive classroom practices.

Limitations of the Study

1. **Limited Sample Size:** The study is based on only 11 selected primary schools located in tea garden areas of Alipurduar district, which may not fully represent the situation of all tea garden schools in the region.
2. **Restricted Geographical Areas:** The research focuses only on tea garden areas of Alipurduar district, so the findings may not be generalized to other tea garden regions of North Bengal or India.
3. **Limited Data Sources:** The study mainly relies on school records and survey-based data and does not include detailed classroom observation or interviews with students and parents.
4. **Limited Indicators of Analysis:** The analysis considers general indicators such as teacher-student ratio, attendance, and resource availability.
5. **Time and Resource Constraints:** Due to limited time and resources, the study does not assess the long-term impact of inclusive pedagogical practices on students' academic achievement and participation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen inclusive pedagogy and student participation in primary schools located in tea garden areas of Alipurduar district:

1. **Reduction of Teacher-Student Ratio:** Recruitment of an adequate number of trained teachers is essential to reduce overcrowded classrooms and ensure individualized attention to learners.
2. **Teacher Training and Professional Development:** Continuous in-service training programmes should be organized to strengthen teachers' competencies in inclusive pedagogy, multilingual instruction, and participatory classroom practices.
3. **Improvement of Infrastructure and Learning Resources:** Schools require improved classroom space, seating arrangements, teaching aids, and learning materials to create a supportive and engaging learning environment.
4. **Promotion of Multilingual and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy:** Bilingual or multilingual instructional support should be encouraged to address linguistic diversity and enhance comprehension and participation.
5. **Strengthening School Community Linkages:** Greater involvement of parents and community members can improve student attendance, motivation, and continuity in learning.
6. **Effective Policy Implementation and Monitoring:** Inclusive education policies must be supported through adequate funding, monitoring, and school-level support to bridge the gap between policy intentions and classroom practices.

Overall, these recommendations align with the objectives of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the Right to Education Act (2009), which emphasize equitable access, inclusive classroom, teacher capacity building, and quality learning for children from marginalized and disadvantaged communities.

Conclusion

The present study titled "Towards an Inclusive Pedagogy: A Study on Classroom Environment and Cultural Sensitivity in Tea Garden Areas of Alipurduar" examined how classroom environment and cultural sensitivity jointly influence inclusive pedagogical practices in primary schools of tea garden regions in Alipurduar district.

The of the study clearly indicate that classroom environment, especially factors such as teacher-student ratio, availability of resources, and overall learning conditions, has a significant influence on student participation and engagement.

At the same time, cultural sensitivity emerges as a crucial dimension of inclusive pedagogy in tea garden areas. Linguistic diversity, socio-cultural background of learners, and lack of culturally responsive teaching practices often create barriers to meaningful classroom participation. However, classrooms that adopt multilingual support, child-centred approaches, and culturally responsive teaching practices show comparatively higher levels of student engagement and participation.

The study further establishes a strong interrelationship between classroom environment and cultural sensitivity in promoting inclusive pedagogy. A supportive and resourceful classroom environment, when combined with culturally sensitive teaching practices, enhances learners' confidence, participation, and sense of belonging.

In conclusion, the study emphasizes that achieving inclusive pedagogy in tea garden primary schools of Alipurduar requires both structural improvement in classroom conditions and strengthening of cultural sensitivity among teachers. These combined efforts are essential for ensuring equitable, participatory, and meaningful learning experiences for children from marginalized tea garden communities.

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