

Best Practices, Student Aspirations, And Policy-Level Recommendations For Inclusive Development In Government-Aided Ashram Schools: A Study From Satara District

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Abstract : Inclusive education in Ashram schools should transcend mere enrolment to empower marginalized students with holistic development opportunities. This 2017 study from Satara district identifies best practices and examines the aspirations of students in government-aided Ashram schools. It critically analyzes infrastructural and systemic gaps that hinder inclusive growth. Based on field observations, stakeholder interviews, and comparative data, the study proposes targeted policy recommendations, especially regarding physical infrastructure, student well-being, and modern educational resources, to create equitable, aspirational environments.

Keywords: Inclusive education, Ashram schools, student aspirations, infrastructure improvement, best practices

Introduction Ashram schools have historically served as a bridge between marginalized tribal communities and formal education. Despite decades of operation, many institutions remain under-resourced and unable to nurture student aspirations beyond basic education. The year 2018 marked a shift in state and national focus towards aspirational districts and inclusive growth indicators.

This study investigates positive practices observed in select Satara-based Ashram schools while mapping student goals and infrastructural expectations. It provides a framework for what an inclusive, aspiration-focused Ashram school should look like.

Review of Literature UNICEF (2016) noted that student voice and vision are often excluded in rural education planning. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2016) emphasized "model Ashram schools" but lacked clear standards. Research by Kulkarni (2015) and Deshpande (2016) shows that infrastructural dignity (clean spaces, learning tools, sports) significantly impacts retention and performance.

Best practices documented in other tribal districts (e.g., Nandurbar, Gadchiroli) include student clubs, use of solar energy, library corners, and peer mentoring. However, replication remains low.

Objectives

1. To identify best practices adopted by government-aided Ashram schools in Satara.
2. To assess student aspirations regarding academics, career, and quality of life.
3. To highlight gaps between current infrastructure and aspirational needs.
4. To recommend policy changes for long-term inclusive development.

Methodology

- **Design:** Qualitative exploratory study
- **Sample:** 3 model and 2 underperforming Ashram schools
- **Participants:** 65 students, 10 teachers, 3 principals, 2 education officers
- **Tools:** Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), aspiration mapping forms, infrastructure audit checklist
- **Analysis:** Comparative thematic analysis

Key Findings

Best Practices Observed

- Morning self-governance assemblies led by students (Jakatwadi)
- Peer tutoring groups for weaker students (Padegaon)
- Solar-powered lighting in dormitories (Shere)
- Library reading hours implemented through rotation system
- Active sports club with weekend tournaments

Student Aspirations

- 72% aspired to pursue higher education in science, nursing, or technical trades
- 60% expressed desire for computer training and digital literacy
- 45% wished to prepare for civil services or police recruitment

Gaps Identified in Infrastructure and Resources

- Inadequate science labs, library books, and multimedia content
- No access to computers in 4 out of 5 schools
- Lack of hygiene in kitchen/dining areas
- No dedicated space for indoor games or physical fitness

Table 1: Aspirational Needs vs Current Availability

Resource	Available (out of 5 schools)	Desired by Students (%)
Computer Lab	1	94%
Science Lab	0	76%
Library with Cabinets	2	80%
Dining Tables and Chairs	0	85%
Gym/Sports Equipment	1	70%
Solar Water Heaters	1	60%
Solar Power Generators	0	52%
Industrial Washing Machine	0	48%

Case Study A: Jakatwadi : This school empowered students through self-governance councils. Students set classroom discipline rules and maintained suggestion boxes. A student-led cleanliness campaign improved hygiene standards. Teachers reported higher engagement and leadership traits among students.

Case Study B: Aundh : Despite good academic performance, the school lacked basic dining infrastructure. Girls sat on floors during meals and washed uniforms manually. One student noted, “I want to become a nurse, but here we eat like beggars.” The absence of dignity in facilities contrasted sharply with their aspirations.

Policy Gaps and Administrative Insights

- No fixed budget for technological upgrades in Ashram schools
- Poor maintenance of donated or one-time funded infrastructure
- Existing grants do not prioritize aspiration-linked amenities
- Block-level monitoring teams focus on enrolment, not quality or vision

Discussion There is clear alignment between students’ ambitions and what is missing from their environment. Most want to learn, grow, and serve their communities, but are constrained by outdated facilities and low-expectation ecosystems.

Best practices observed in some schools demonstrate that change is possible with leadership and localized innovation. However, scaling these requires systemic support, regular funding, and participatory planning involving students and teachers.

Recommendations

1. Provide computer labs with internet access in all Ashram schools.
2. Build science laboratories with experiment kits for classes 6–10.
3. Develop modern libraries with lockable cabinets and updated resources.
4. Equip dining halls with tables and chairs to ensure dignified eating spaces.
5. Install gym and sports equipment to support physical development.
6. Implement solar water heaters and solar power generators to reduce utility gaps.
7. Set up industrial washing machines for hostel hygiene.
8. Create a permanent infrastructure improvement grant under Social welfare Department.
9. Involve students in annual planning through “Aspirational Vision Workshops.”
10. Launch a model Ashram school scheme with transparent quality benchmarks.

Conclusion If Ashram schools are to become engines of equity and empowerment, they must match student aspirations with real resources and respectful environments. Satara’s students envision futures in healthcare, engineering, and public service — the system must support that vision with dignity, technology, and opportunity.

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