

EDUCATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL EMPOWERMENT OF AN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY: AN INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE DEORI AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL IN ASSAM

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Abstract

Tribal communities constitute 8.6% of India's population and face systemic barriers in socio-economic development and cultural preservation. The Deori community in Assam utilises the Deori Autonomous Council (DAC) as a mechanism for localised self-governance. The primary objective of this research is to evaluate the DAC's initiatives in facilitating educational and vocational empowerment. Employing a descriptive-analytical research design, census sampling was utilised to interview all 22 active DAC members in 2025. Statistical analysis reveals a highly significant consensus regarding program effectiveness ($\chi^2 = 12.10$, $p = 0.002$), with 59% of members rating initiatives as highly effective. While 280 professional technical seats and civil service scholarships are successfully facilitated through urban-centric collaborations, primary data indicate a 100% absence of vocational training infrastructure within rural village boundaries.

The DAC serves as a vital institutional tool for empowerment; however, the reliance on external urban hubs necessitates out-migration for skill acquisition. Future policies should prioritise localised infrastructure and the integration of indigenous knowledge systems.

Keywords: Deori Autonomous Council, Tribal Education, Vocational Empowerment, Indigenous Communities, Assam.

Introduction

In India, 8.6% of the total population belongs to tribal communities and is distributed across diverse ecological, cultural and linguistic landscapes. They are officially recognised as scheduled tribes (Tribal people planning framework, 2017). Indigenous tribal communities in India face challenges in education, livelihoods, socio-economic development, and cultural erosion. The Deori community of Assam exemplifies these struggles (Tiwari, 2024). Within the broader context, the Deori community of Assam provides an important example for understanding how educational and vocational empowerment is achieved through the initiatives of the Deori Autonomous Council (DAC). The DAC plays an important role in promoting educational and vocational enhancement by providing policies and schemes to meet the specific needs of the Deori community. The autonomous councils, like the DAC, serve as tools for overall community development (Department of Tribal Affairs, 2026).

Education empowers tribal communities by enhancing knowledge and literacy, strengthening cultural identity, while vocational training provides practical skills that improve employability and economic independence (Mossang & Nayak, 2020). This study examines how the DAC contributes to the educational and vocational development of the Deori community of Assam. It highlights the significance of local self-governance in promoting inclusive growth and empowering tribal communities.

The Deori Autonomous Council has been recognised as a mechanism for local self-governance; however, there is limited scholarly work examining the DAC's role in educational and vocational empowerment. The following literature review outlines the existing studies and highlights the gaps this study seeks to address.

Review Literature

Structural Barriers in Tribal Education

UNESCO (2010) states that there are multiple challenges in India for tribal communities in accessing education due to reasons like linguistic

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differences, inadequate infrastructure, and programs that failed to reflect the indigenous knowledge system. Tribal students often struggle when formal schooling is not deeply connected to the cultural context. This leads to dropouts and limited conceptual understanding. This underscores the need for culturally responsive educational policies that incorporate indigenous languages and traditions into mainstream education.

Vocational Training and Economic Empowerment

Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (2017); Vocational training is considered a means to achieve economic independence for tribal communities. Initiatives at the national level, such as the Skills Strengthening for Industrial Value Enhancement (STRIVE) project, introduced frameworks to strengthen skills among the tribal population. However, there is a lack of awareness, accessibility and cultural relevance, which makes tribal communities underrepresented (Dagar, 2022).

Decentralisation and Role of Autonomous Councils in Assam

Department of Tribal Affairs (2026); In Assam, the establishment of autonomous councils for the Deori, Rabha, Mising, Tiwa, Thengal and Sonowal Kachari communities reflects the state's commitment to decentralisation and ethno-political recognition. These councils safeguard cultural identity while promoting socio-economic development.

Challenges and Policy Gaps of Tribal Education in North-East India

Baidya & Barik (2023); The study sought to identify shortcomings of the North-Eastern tribe, especially concerning education. The study also elucidates the reasons for educational backwardness, including socioeconomic conditions, academic factors, and personal factors, across basic to higher education levels. Additionally, this study offers recommendations for advancing tribal education. This underscores the need for policymakers, educational administrators, and planners to strengthen the system to ensure the quality of education for this region by providing appropriate guidelines at every educational level.

Economic empowerment through Vocational Education

National Skill Development Corporation (2022); In order to promote self-reliance, local employment, and inclusive growth, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship strongly emphasises skill development for the tribal population through the Grameen Udyami Scheme, providing vocational training. These signify how vocational training can influence the livelihood pattern, income generation and the empowerment of the community

The Impact of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Educational Empowerment of Tribes of North East India

(Devi A, 2025) This research examines the diversity of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) among tribes in the Northeastern region. These tribes have a deep ecological understanding, amassed over many generations of intimate interactions with the environment. Unfortunately, the preservation of this intangible legacy is threatened by modernisation, urbanisation, and the exploitation of intellectual property. The Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL), focuses on the role of TKDL in preserving and promoting the traditional knowledge of the tribes of Northeast India by examining their distinctive contributions to agriculture, medicine, crafts, and ecological management, emerges as a significant initiative to prevent bio-piracy and to digitally safeguard India's traditional medicinal and ecological knowledge, which signifies the need to highlight multiple challenges including underrepresentation in digital databases like TKDL, limited awareness about intellectual property rights, lack of documentation in tribal dialects, and insufficient institutional support at the local level. These barriers hinder the systematic preservation and valorisation of tribal knowledge.

Policy Framework for Tribal Welfare and Vocational Empowerment in Assam

The Department of Tribal Affairs, Government of India (2025), incorporates Assam in the broader national framework for tribal welfare. The Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAAGY), is one of the major central initiatives with particular consequences for Assam. Under Article 275(1) of the Constitution, Assam receives central funding for dormitories, ashram schools, vocational training facilities, and improvements to educational facilities in tribal areas. The key state-level research organisation for recording, conserving, and promoting tribal welfare in Assam is the Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes (AIRTSC), which was founded in 1977. The institutional gap between research and programme implementation, however, remains a significant policy challenge that the literature consistently identifies as the primary reason for underperformance of tribal education and vocational schemes in Assam.

Methodology

The study utilises a descriptive-analytical research design to examine the role of the Deori Autonomous Council in promoting educational and vocational empowerment among the Deori community in Assam. This research is based on both primary and secondary data sources.

Primary data were collected from 22 active Deori Autonomous Council members using a structured

interview schedule. The present study employs a census sampling technique by including all 22 DAC members to ensure unbiased representation of institutional perspectives. This approach enables the study to capture the perspectives of the entire governing body of the DAC. SPSS and Excel were used for statistical analysis.

Objectives

- To examine the role of the Deori Autonomous Council (DAC) in promoting educational and vocational empowerment among the Deori community of Assam.
- To assess the perceived effectiveness and implementation of the DAC initiatives in enhancing educational access, skill development, and employment opportunities.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Organisational Structure of the DAC

Designation of the Members	
Chief Executive Councillor	1
Chairman	1
Deputy Chief Executive Councillor	1
Deputy Chairman	1
Executive Councillor	7
General Member	11
Total	22

Source: (DAC Assam official website)

There is a total of 22 DAC members, including Mr Bhairab Deori, CEC (Chief Executive Councillor), and other designations such as Deputy CEC, Chairman, Deputy Chairman, 7 Executive Councillors, and 11 General members from different constituencies.

Table 2: Institutional Framework for Educational and Vocational Empowerment provided by the DAC

Category	Specific Scheme / Initiative	Target Criteria / Scope
Merit Financial Aid	HSLC & HS Scholarships	>60% in HSLC; >80% in HS examinations
Advanced Research	Ph.D. One-Time Scholarship	Financial support for doctoral candidates
Academic Awards	Dr. Ram Prasad Deori Award	Recognition of outstanding academic excellence
Civil Services	Indibor Deori Scholarship	Fully funded UPSC/APSC

		coaching for 30 graduates
Technical Training	Downtown University Collaboration	280 seats in Radiology, GNM, Hotel Mgt, D.Pharm
Local Infrastructure	Physical Training Centres	0% (100% absence in surveyed villages)

Source: (Primary data collected from the DAC members, 2025)

The DAC provides merit-based financial incentives at the secondary level, rewarding students who achieve above 60% in HSLC and 80% in HS examinations. A One-time scholarship is provided to encourage scholarly pursuits at the highest academic echelons. The framework includes civil service preparation through the 'Indibor Deori' Scholarship, which provides fully funded UPSC/APSC coaching to thirty graduates of the Deori community in Guwahati. The collaboration with Downtown University, offering 280 seats across technical and paramedical disciplines such as Radiology, GNM, Hotel Management and D. Pharm, reflects a pragmatic recognition of vocational diversification as a pathway to economic mobility. There is no vocational training centre in villages because it is provided free of cost in Guwahati in collaboration with the SPM academy.

Table 3: Perceived Effectiveness of DAC Programs

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Highly Effective	13	59%
Moderately Effective	9	41%
Less Effective	0	0%

Source: (Primary data collected from the DAC members, 2025)

Table 3 shows that a majority of DAC members (59%) perceive the programs as highly effective, while 41% consider them moderately effective. This indicates an overall positive perception of DAC initiatives in education and vocational empowerment; however, there is scope for improvement in their implementation.

Table 4: Statistical Analysis of Perceived Effectiveness of the DAC Educational Programs

Category	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	(O-E)2/E
Highly Effective	13	7.33	4.39

Moderately Effective	9	7.33	0.38
Less Effective	0	7.33	7.33
Total	22		$\chi^2=12.10$

Source: (Primary data collected from the DAC members, 2025)

Note: df = 2; p = 0.002.

The results of a one-sample chi-square test show a statistically significant difference in the distribution of responses regarding the perceived effectiveness of DAC educational programs ($\chi^2 = 12.10$, df = 2, $p < 0.002$). This result indicates that the responses are not evenly distributed across categories but are significantly concentrated in the “highly effective” category. The finding reflects a strong and consistent institutional perception among DAC members regarding the effectiveness of educational and vocational initiatives. However, the presence of moderately effective responses suggests that certain aspects of program implementation may still require improvement. This suggests that the DAC's internal leadership perceives the current educational and vocational frameworks as successful in achieving their stated developmental objectives.

Conclusion

The present study examines the role of the Deori Autonomous Council in promoting educational and vocational empowerment among the Deori community of Assam. The study's findings show that the Council has developed an organised institutional framework comprising merit-based scholarships, higher education support, academic recognition and vocational training initiatives. These programs replicate a focused approach towards enhancing educational fulfilment and skill development within the Deori community.

The analysis reveals a positive institutional perception regarding the effectiveness of these initiatives by the DAC, as evidenced by the majority of the DAC members rating the programs as highly effective. The results of the chi-square test further confirm that this perception is statistically significant, indicating a clear inclination towards the success of the DAC-led interventions in education and vocational empowerment.

However, the study also identifies implementation gaps, particularly in accessibility and infrastructure in the Deori villages under the DAC. The complete absence of localised vocational training centres in Deori villages highlights a structural limitation of the DAC, as Deori beneficiaries are required to rely on external institutions in Guwahati. This may restrict participation, especially for economically and geographically marginalised sections of the community.

In conclusion, while the Deori Autonomous Council has made praiseworthy efforts to design and implement educational and vocational programs for

the community, there remains a need to strengthen grassroots-level delivery mechanisms. Addressing infrastructural gaps, improving outreach, and ensuring equitable access will be key to enhancing the overall impact of these initiatives.

Scope for Future

Future research may focus on a comparative analysis of different autonomous councils in Assam to evaluate variations in performance and effectiveness. Longitudinal studies assessing the long-term impact of the DAC programs on employment and socio-economic mobility would provide deeper insights. Additionally, incorporating beneficiary-level data could offer a more comprehensive understanding of ground-level outcomes and policy effectiveness.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest in conducting this research.

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