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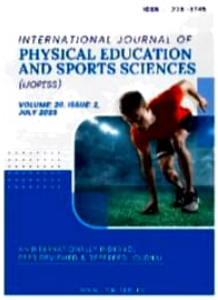
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# Management Practices and Co-Curricular Participation in Successful Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the management practices and co-curricular participation patterns in academically successful Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNVs). In-depth case studies of three high-performing JNVs situated in geographically and socio-economically diverse settings were conducted during 2023–2025. Schools were identified using a composite index combining academic pass percentage at national examinations and student participation in regional and national co-curricular competitions. Data were gathered through a triangulation approach encompassing personal interviews, direct observation, document analysis, and structured questionnaires administered to principals, teachers, students, parents, and alumni. Findings reveal that successful JNVs consistently employed participative management, delegated authority with accountability, embraced democratic decision-making, fostered supportive interpersonal relationships, promoted value-based education, deployed innovative pedagogical strategies, and formally recognized teacher performance. Co-curricular participation was embedded organically within the school's house system, daily routine, and community culture rather than treated as a peripheral add-on. The study has implications for school administrators, educational policymakers, and the Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS) in scaling effective management practices across all JNVs.

**Keywords:** School management, participative management, co-curricular activities, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, school effectiveness, residential schooling, India.

## INTRODUCTION

School effectiveness has long been associated with the quality of leadership and management rather than merely the availability of financial or material resources. Decades of research from the United Kingdom, North America, Australia, and New Zealand have consistently established that strategic leadership, shared vision, staff participation, collegial working relationships, and robust home-school partnerships are critical determinants of school performance (Rutter & Maughan, 2002). However, a major gap exists in the literature: the majority of these findings originate from developed, industrialized nations. Research on school management practices in developing-country contexts including India remains sparse, making

the generalizability of findings from Western contexts uncertain (Simkins, Sisum, & Memon, 2003).

India presents a particularly rich and complex setting for studying school management. The country hosts a wide spectrum of school types: government schools, government-aided private schools, English-medium public schools, minority-run institutions, alternative schools, Kendriya Vidyalayas, and the Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNVs). Among these, the JNVs occupy a unique position. Established under the Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS) an autonomous body under the Ministry of Education, Government of India these fully residential, co-educational schools are designed to identify and nurture talent among predominantly rural children who might otherwise lack access to quality education. By 2024, the NVS had established over 650 JNVs, one in nearly every district of the country, admitting approximately 45,000 students annually across grades 6 to 12.

The word 'Navodaya' in Hindi connotes a new dawn or new rising, and 'Vidyalaya' refers to a school. Together, JNVs embody a progressive educational vision that geography and socio-economic background need not determine a child's academic destiny. Admission is purely merit-based, through a nationally standardized selection test, with all costs of tuition, learning materials, board, and lodging borne by the Government of India. The schools serve not only their enrolled students but also function as resource hubs for neighboring district schools, strengthening regional educational ecosystems.

Despite their distinctive mandate and structural strengths, very little systematic inquiry has examined what specific management practices distinguish the most successful JNVs from others. The question of how leadership behaviors, organizational culture, teacher-student relationships, and co-curricular integration together contribute to institutional effectiveness in these residential schools remains underexplored. This study addresses that gap by presenting in-depth case studies of three high-performing JNVs, using a triangulated methodology to capture the multi-dimensional nature of school management.

The central focus of this paper is the intersection of management practices and co-curricular participation a dimension often treated as secondary in effectiveness research but, as this study argues, integral to the holistic educational mission of the JNVs. By examining how principals structure authority, build relationships, promote participative governance, and embed co-curricular activities within the institutional culture, this paper offers evidence-based insights

for improving school management not only within the JNV system but across residential and government schools in India more broadly.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The relationship between school leadership and school effectiveness has been extensively documented. Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) argue that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors influencing student outcomes. Effective school leaders establish clear goals, create supportive conditions for teaching, and promote distributed leadership across staff findings broadly consistent across national contexts, including emerging economies.

In the Indian context, studies of school effectiveness have often focused on infrastructure deficits, teacher absenteeism, and examination outcomes, while largely neglecting the role of organizational management (DISE Reports, 2022). The few studies that have examined school management in India suggest that principal leadership is a critical but frequently underutilized lever for school improvement (Bandyopadhyay, 2020; Ramachandran, 2018). Residential schools, in particular, present a distinctive management context: principals must oversee not only academic functions but also hostel welfare, mess administration, health monitoring, and extracurricular programming responsibilities far broader than those of a typical day-school head.

Co-curricular activities in Indian schools are often relegated to a secondary status, viewed as detracting from academic preparation rather than contributing to it. However, international literature consistently finds that structured participation in sports, cultural programs, literary activities, and community service is positively associated with student well-being, civic engagement, and even academic motivation ( Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, 2003). In the JNV framework, the house system institutionalizes co-curricular participation as a core organizational feature rather than an optional supplement.

Participative management involving teachers, students, and parents in decision making has been identified as a key correlate of school effectiveness across diverse settings (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Bush & Middlewood, 2013). The NVS system structurally enables such participation through Vidyalaya Management Committees (VMCs), subject committees, Parent-Teacher Associations, and student house governance. Whether and how these structural

provisions translate into genuine participative practice in the most successful JNVs is the empirical question this study investigates.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The specific objectives of this study were:

1. To examine the role and functions of principals, teachers, and other stakeholders in planning and implementing curricular, co-curricular, administrative, and financial activities in successful JNVs.
2. To analyze the management of relationships between and among principals, teachers, students, parents, and the NVS in high-performing schools.
3. To document and evaluate the management of teaching-learning processes, including innovative pedagogical strategies adopted in these schools.
4. To assess the nature and extent of co-curricular participation and its integration with the overall management ethos of the school.
5. To identify transferable management practices that may improve effectiveness in other JNVs and government residential schools.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Selection of Schools

Three JNVs were selected for in-depth case study using a two-stage composite selection framework. In the first stage, a Pass Percentage Index (PPI) was computed for all JNVs (N = 652) based on the proportion of students passing the Class 10 and Class 12 national examinations (CBSE Board) during academic years 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25. A ranked list of the top 30 schools was generated. In the second stage, a Co-curricular Index (CI) was computed for these 30 schools, based on institutional records of student participation in sports and games, cultural events, literary competitions, and community-based activities at regional and national levels. The PPI and CI were pooled with weightages of 70% and 30%, respectively, and schools were rank-ordered on the composite score.

From this ranking, two schools JNV Pune (Rank 1) and JNV Thiruvananthapuram (Rank 3) were selected, as the top two ranked schools were located in the same NVS region. The third

school, JNV Ri Bhoi (Rank 14), located in a scheduled tribal area of Meghalaya, was deliberately included to examine whether effective management practices could transcend severe socio-economic disadvantage. JNV Ri Bhoi ranked first among all JNVs situated in tribal districts a significant achievement meriting deeper investigation.

**Research Design**

A qualitative, interpretive case study design was employed. The study adopted a triangulation approach in which data were gathered through multiple methods and from multiple sources to enhance validity and credibility. The researchers resided in the school campuses during the study visits at JNV Ri Bhoi (September 1–10, 2023), JNV Pune (December 3–12, 2023), and JNV Thiruvananthapuram (February 8–18, 2024) enabling continuous, immersive observation from 5:30 a.m. through 11:00 p.m. Researchers were introduced to students and staff by principals during morning assembly and a dedicated staff meeting on the first day of each visit.

**Data Collection Methods**

Data were collected through the following strategies:

- **Personal Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals (one per school), teachers (approximately 10–12 per school), students (9–20 per school), parents and community members (5–9 per school), and Chairpersons of the Vidyalaya Management Committees. Each principal interview was conducted in two sessions of approximately 90 minutes each. Teacher interviews lasted 60–90 minutes; parent interviews approximately 60 minutes.
- **Direct Observation:** Researchers systematically observed principals, teachers, and students across diverse settings morning assembly, classroom instruction, hostel and mess, PT sessions, cultural programs, library and laboratory activities, and examination halls. Detailed field notes were recorded daily and discussed among the research team each evening.
- **Document Analysis:** School profile schedules, office records, examination results, co-curricular participation certificates, attendance registers, and institutional plans were analyzed.

- **Schedules and Questionnaires:** Structured instruments were administered to elicit teachers' professional profiles, students' perceptions of school management, and alumni perspectives on long-term impacts.

**Table 1: Categories and Numbers of Respondents Interviewed**

| S. N. | Category of Respondent | JNV Ri Bhoi | JNV Pune | JNV Thiruvananthapuram |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Principal | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2 | Teachers | 11 (28) | 12 (26) | 10 (24) |
| 3 | Students | 20 | 15 | 12 |
| 4 | Parents / Community Members | 9 | 6 | 5 |
| 5 | VMC Chairperson | 1 | 1 | 1 |

### Data Analysis

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Two investigators independently coded transcripts, identifying recurring patterns across schools. Categories were progressively abstracted into broader themes through iterative discussion among all researchers. An interpretive, emic approach was adopted, constructing meaning from the actors' own perspectives. Draft case reports were shared with respective principals for member-checking before finalization. The analysis presented here synthesizes findings across the three schools to identify common and distinctive patterns.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### School Profiles

The three sampled schools differed considerably in their geographic, demographic, and socio-economic contexts, offering a comparative lens on how effective management operates across varied conditions (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Profiles of Selected Schools**

| Feature | JNV Ri Bhoi, Meghalaya | JNV Pune, Maharashtra | JNV Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala |
|---|---|---|---|
| Year Established | 1987 | 1993 | 1987 |
| District Literacy Rate | ~68% (F: 61%) | ~82% (F: 75%) | ~96% (F: 95%) |
| Socio-economic Context | Hilly; tribal; ~65% BPL; NE India | Semi-urban; industrially developed | Affluent; high Gulf diaspora |
| Total Enrolment (Grades 6–12) | 438 | 452 | 556 |
| Class 10 Pass Rate (3-yr avg.) | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| % Distinction (75%+) | 62% | 74% | 81% |
| Class 12 Pass Rate | 100% (2023–25) | 100% | 100% |
| Teacher Profile (Mean Age) | 35.4 years | 33.8 years | 29.2 years |
| Postgraduate Teachers (%) | 78% | 71% | 65% |

Despite their different socio-economic surroundings, all three schools achieved 100% pass rates in national board examinations across 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25 — a remarkable outcome that points to the presence of consistently effective management and pedagogical practices.

**Profiles of the Principals**

The three principals presented varied but complementary leadership profiles. The principal of JNV Ri Bhoi a soft-spoken, empathetic leader in his early forties demonstrated a profound concern for student welfare from the outset of his tenure, beginning with improving the quality and service of food in the school mess. He recalled:

> *"When I joined, students collected their food from counters in a disorganized queue. I introduced a system where selected students from each house, on rotation, would serve food at the tables. Before eating, all students stand and offer a brief prayer. The change was small but it shifted the entire culture of the mess.'*

His concern for student welfare extended to preventing food wastage. Rather than simply lecturing students, he chose to sit with them during dinner and declare that he would himself eat whatever was discarded. Not a single student left food on the plate that evening and the habit persisted.

The principal of JNV Pune was an energetic, academically driven leader who placed co-curricular excellence on equal footing with examination results. His approach to building a competitive but collaborative culture was captured in what he called the 'Technique of Positivity' when conflicts arose between colleagues, he would meet each party separately, highlight the positive qualities the other had expressed, and gradually dissolve tensions through appreciative framing.

The principal of JNV Thiruvananthapuram was a seasoned educationist with over two decades of experience in residential schools. A visionary who operated by the principle 'Think big, think fast, think ahead ideas are no one's monopoly,' he consistently set escalating goals and trusted his staff and students to meet them. His non-interfering but deeply principled style created an atmosphere of professional autonomy and mutual accountability.

**Key Management Practices**

***Participative Management***

Participative management was the most consistently observed feature across all three schools. Rather than centralizing decision-making, principals systematically involved teachers, students, and community representatives in planning and executing the school's activities.

Various standing committees academic, cultural, sports, hostel, mess, library were constituted with teachers as chairs and student representatives as members. The annual institutional plan was not a top-down document but an emergent product of collective deliberation involving all departments.

The principal of JNV Thiruvananthapuram described his planning process: department-wise meetings were first convened; subject teachers discussed curriculum coverage, remedial needs, and examination calendars; then outcomes were consolidated in a whole-staff meeting to produce the institutional plan. This ensured that every teacher had a voice in shaping priorities and, consequently, a sense of ownership over their implementation.

***Delegation with Accountability***

Participative management was paired with clear accountability. Principals delegated authority to committee chairs and individual teachers with explicit expectations, monitored progress through regular check-ins, and ensured that incomplete or poor-quality execution was addressed without blame-shifting. The principal of JNV Pune articulated this philosophy directly: accepting a valid reason for inability to complete a task in advance was entirely reasonable; failing to execute after accepting the responsibility without notice was not.

At JNV Thiruvananthapuram, a 'Teaching Profile of the Day' system required every teacher to submit a brief daily plan to the principal each morning after assembly. The principal periodically made unannounced classroom visits and occasionally asked randomly selected students what topic they were studying that day a low-key but effective accountability mechanism that prevented syllabus rushing and kept teaching aligned with institutional plans.

***Democratic Decision-Making***

The three case studies revealed a consistent pattern of democratic governance embedded in the everyday life of the schools. Staff meetings were held at least monthly and more frequently at JNV Thiruvananthapuram to deliberate on academic and administrative matters. When programs were organized, pre-event and post-event staff meetings were held to plan collaboratively and to debrief constructively. Subject committees met monthly to identify weak students, analyze patterns in examination papers, discuss hard spots in syllabi, and distribute teaching responsibilities equitably.

This culture of structured dialogue reduced professional isolation, built a shared knowledge base, and created the conditions for genuine collective responsibility. As one teacher at JNV Pune observed, 'Even while walking in the corridor, the principal reminds us what is to be done and encourages us. He never sits in his office alone.'

***Relational Quality: Principal, Teachers, Students, Parents***

The quality of relationships in all three schools was a recurring theme across all categories of respondents. Principal-teacher relationships were characterized as supportive, respectful, and professionally encouraging. Teachers reported feeling genuinely heard on academic concerns as well as personal matters (leave, health, family). The principal of JNV Ri Bhoi was particularly noted for his approachability staff described him as someone who would always help find a workable solution without passing judgment.

Teacher-student relationships were observed to blend academic mentorship with pastoral care. Teachers lived on campus and were accessible to students in hostels and at the mess, not only in classrooms. Students reciprocated this care with remarkable loyalty: at JNV Ri Bhoi, a teacher who had applied for transfer to be closer to her spouse chose to withdraw her application after students expressed how much her presence meant to them.

Parent engagement, while constrained by geographic and socio-economic barriers, was actively managed. JNV Pune and JNV Thiruvananthapuram organized monthly PTA meetings with 60–80% attendance. JNV Ri Bhoi where tribal communities in remote villages could rarely travel mailed monthly progress reports to each family, ensuring no parent was entirely uninformed about their child's academic standing.

***Setting and Pursuing Escalating Goals***

In all three schools, the principal consistently communicated a culture of upward aspiration. 'Sky is the limit' was the recurring refrain of the JNV Ri Bhoi principal. The principal of JNV Thiruvananthapuram set annual performance targets higher than the previous year's achievements, and publicly celebrated in morning assemblies and staff meetings students and teachers who exceeded expectations, using their accomplishments as motivational benchmarks for others.

At JNV Pune, this competitive culture was structurally embedded. Inter-house competitions in sports, literary events, elocution, folk dance, drama, and quizzes created layered levels of

aspiration. Being selected for a regional NVS competition or a national championship carried enormous prestige, and the competitive energy of the house system channeled this ambition productively.

***Formal Recognition of Teacher Performance***

Teacher recognition was a deliberate and systematic practice in all three schools. Internally, principals issued appreciation letters, publicly acknowledged outstanding performers in staff meetings, and personally congratulated teachers when their students achieved distinction-level results. Externally, NVS awards — Guru Ratna (class average above 90%), Guru Param (80–90%), Guru Shrestha (70–80%), and Guru Praveen (60–70%) — provided structured recognition linked to measurable outcomes.

These awards generated both positive pride and healthy competitive motivation among staff. The non-performing were equally aware that persistent underperformance carried consequences including transfers to less desirable postings or financial penalties. This two-sided accountability reward and consequence reinforced a professional culture of sustained effort.

**Co-Curricular Participation as a Management Priority**

***The House System as an Organizational Engine***

The house system dividing students into four houses (Aravali, Nilgiris, Shivalik, and Udayagiri) was the institutional backbone of co-curricular participation in all three schools. Each house was subdivided into senior and junior wings, supervised by a designated housemaster or housemistress. Students elected from each house filled roles of Captain, Vice-Captain, Sick Captain, and Cleanliness Captain. On a weekly rotational basis, one house was designated 'House on Duty,' responsible for conducting morning assembly, managing the cultural program of the week, organizing the All-Faith Prayer (Sarva Dharma Prarthana Sabha), maintaining campus cleanliness, monitoring the mess, and attending to the health of unwell students.

This rotation created a living laboratory of leadership development. Every student, regardless of academic ability, was expected to serve in organizational roles and manage real responsibilities. The sense of belonging 'My house won the inter-house debate' generated authentic pride, team cohesion, and an organic motivation to participate.

***Integration of Co-Curricular Activities in the Daily Timetable***

The daily schedule of the JNVs embedded co-curricular activities structurally rather than treating them as optional extras. Rising at 5:00 a.m., students participated in morning physical training (PT) from 5:30 to 6:30 a.m. Evening games ran from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. Weekly cultural programs, inter-house competitions, and special events were allocated dedicated time in the institutional calendar. Unlike in many regular schools, where sports and cultural activities are compressed into an annual 'cultural day' or sports meet, the JNVs treated co-curricular engagement as a daily and weekly institutional rhythm.

***Student Participation in Regional and National Competitions***

All three sampled schools had a strong record of student participation and achievement at NVS regional and national competitions in sports (athletics, kabaddi, volleyball, kho-kho), literary events (debate, elocution, quiz), and cultural programs (folk dance, drama, music). This external participation served multiple purposes: it validated the school's co-curricular culture, provided students with exposure beyond their local context, and built reputational pride that reinforced participation culture among junior students.

Importantly, preparation for these competitions was managed collaboratively. Teachers with relevant expertise voluntarily coached teams in evenings and weekends — a visible expression of the care and investment in student holistic development that characterized these schools. Principals recognized and publicly honored teachers who contributed to co-curricular achievements, not only those who produced top academic results.

**Innovative Pedagogical Practices**

The sampled schools distinguished themselves not only by their management culture but also by their adoption of innovative, student-centered pedagogical strategies that enhanced both learning outcomes and student engagement.

- **Cooperative Learning:** Students were organized into mixed-ability groups to complete assigned tasks in both formal class settings and informal study periods. Group learning reduced dependency on teacher-directed instruction and built collaborative skills.

- **Peer Teaching:** At JNV Pune, groups of 5–6 students were formed with academically stronger students assigned to support and teach peers within the group. This approach

benefited both the learner (who received peer explanation) and the teacher-peer (who deepened understanding through articulation).

- **Slip Tests:** After completing a unit, the teacher at JNV Thiruvananthapuram administered a brief test of 5–8 questions. Students exchanged papers and self-corrected collaboratively under the teacher's guidance building both metacognitive awareness and assessment literacy.

- **Monday Tests:** JNV Pune held weekly tests in all subjects every Monday, maintaining a continuous formative assessment rhythm that prevented last-minute cramming and kept students regularly accountable for their learning.

- **Teach and Test Methodology:** After each unit, JNV Ri Bhoi teachers assessed comprehension through daily or weekly tests, with immediate feedback creating a cycle of teaching, assessment, and remediation that minimized undetected learning gaps.

- **Seminar and Project Methods:** Students at JNV Thiruvananthapuram were frequently assigned topics to research and present to their class, with peers posing questions developing communication skills, independent inquiry, and mutual learning.

These practices were sustained by a system of continuous and comprehensive evaluation, with principals maintaining records of each student's performance trajectory and deploying targeted remedial programs for students identified as at risk.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined management practices and co-curricular participation in three high-performing Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, situated across vastly different socio-economic and geographic contexts. Through intensive, immersive case study research combining personal interviews, systematic observation, document analysis, and structured questionnaires a coherent and transferable portrait of successful JNV management emerged.

Effective management in these schools was not reducible to any single charismatic individual or material resource. Rather, it was the product of an interlocking set of practices: participative governance that cultivated collective ownership; democratic decision-making that respected every voice; delegation of authority paired with clear accountability; warm and professionally

supportive relationships across the principal-teacher-student-parent continuum; a relentless culture of aspiration; and formal systems for recognizing and rewarding performance.

Equally significant was the finding that co-curricular participation was not treated as peripheral to the educational mission but was integral to it. The house system, the daily timetable, the rotating responsibilities of 'House on Duty,' the inter-house competitions, the All-Faith Prayer these were not ceremonial rituals but genuine organizational mechanisms that developed leadership, teamwork, civic responsibility, and a sense of collective identity in students. The 'Navodaya Family' students of different castes, regions, languages, and genders living together as siblings represents an extraordinary lived experiment in national integration, quietly enacted in school campuses across India.

The findings also underscore that successful management practices are not the exclusive preserve of well-resourced, urban, or socially advantaged schools. JNV Ri Bhoi, located in a hilly, predominantly tribal district in the northeastern region of India, characterized by low female literacy and limited connectivity, achieved outcomes indistinguishable from its urban counterparts. This finding is among the most important of the study: it demonstrates that leadership quality, relational culture, and organizational commitment can compensate for and even partially transcend severe contextual disadvantage.

These insights hold implications not only for the NVS but for the broader enterprise of school improvement in India. As the country pursues the aspirations articulated in the National Education Policy 2020 equitable, holistic, and high-quality education for every child the management lessons embedded in successful JNVs offer a practical and evidence-grounded starting point.

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