

## **DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF FIRST GENERATION LEARNERS: A STUDY ON MUSLIM MINORITY COMMUNITY OF BARPETA DISTRICT OF ASSAM**

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### **ABSTRACT**

First generation learners are defined as the first person who pursues an education first in their family. They comprise distinct demographic characteristics. Typically, they come from the low income background, their parents are illiterate and majority of them are found in the marginalized communities. They often face unique challenges such as lack of familial guidance, financial constraints, and cultural barriers. Demographically the first-generation learners are tending to be older, maximum girl child are married and a higher proportion are from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds which separated them with the others. The condition or character of being first generation learner defines a low demographic profile of that community. Their demographic character highly impact on their lives. A demographic profile of first-generation learner highlights their problems and need for support services to promote their academic success and persistence. This paper tries to highlight the problems of first-generation learner who are pursuing higher education through analyzing their demographic characteristics. Research has been done on the first-Generation Learner pursuing Higher Education from Muslim minority community in Barpeta district, Assam. It was found that low socioeconomic status, cultural background, and a lack of educational support can indeed be significant hindrances for first-generation Muslim learners.

**KEYWORD:** Demography, First Generation Learner, Higher education, Muslim Minority Community

### **INTRODUCTION**

First-generation learners can be described as students who start their formal education journey for the first time, and their parents have not received any formal education. These students are the trailblazers in their family, being the first to pursue formal education. This exceptional nature makes them “special need children”. Illiterate parents fail in providing educational, vocational or personal guidance to their children as they have no provision of appropriate educational environment at their home. These children are faced with a multitude of academic, psychological, socioeconomic and cultural challenges. And their problem becomes more when they encounter in minority groups. A minority group refers to a category of people who experience relative disadvantage as compared to members of a dominant social group. Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains and Parsis have been notified as minority communities under Section 2 (c) of the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992. As per the Census 2011, the percentage of minorities in the country is about 19.3% of the total population of the country. The populations of Muslims are 14.2%; Christians 2.3%; Sikhs 1.7%, Buddhists 0.7%, Jain 0.4% and Parsis 0.006%. (As per Government of India, Ministry of Minority Affairs). They are living in a situation covered by poverty, deprivation, and disadvantage. But research has found that first generation

learners have desire to pursue higher education. They take education as interconnected and multidirectional where they can improve their lifestyle with the help of education. The pursuit of higher education is a critical factor in shaping the socio-economic trajectory of individual and communities. First Generation Learner (FGL) neither have congenial atmosphere at home nor receive any encouragement and guidance from parents. With the result they do not have any optimum exposure, besides failing to adjust them in the educational atmosphere at the college level, thus they lose the value of education. Thus, they face the problem of frequent absenteeism, dropout, lack of confidence and low achievement in completion of the course. Therefore, present study has been done on the first-generation learner pursuing higher education from Muslim Minority Community in Barpeta District, Assam. The research tries to investigate the factors related to the challenges of pursuing higher education by First Generation Muslim Learner (FGML).

Barpeta district is situated in the western part of Assam, bordering the Brahmaputra. And most of the part of Barpeta districts is Char areas. As per 2011 census, the population of Barpeta district is approximately 1.69 million. The total literacy rate of Barpeta district was 63.81% in 2011 which is less than average literacy rate 72.19% of Assam. Population-wise, out of total 897,058 literates, males were 499,038 while females were 398,020. Also, the male literacy rate was 9.29% and the female literacy rate was 58.06% in Barpeta district (Barpeta District, Government of Assam, India). Therefore, the study was worth to conduct in Barpeta district to analyze the first-generation learner. And it was found that most of the students are children of illiterates and pursuing higher education. But the problem is they do not have the adequate facilities to complete their education with excellence. Demographic variables intersect with the first-generation learner and impact on their successful and unsuccessful attainment of higher education. Demographic character is a variable that determine the community of individual. It includes gender, geographic location, socio economic status, family structure and size, ethnicity or minority status, parental education and occupation, etc. these demographic variables can create challenges and opportunities for first generation learner. Understanding these factors are crucial to develop effective support system and strategies for the first-generation learner. Hence, the following objectives are formulated to study-

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. To showcase the Demographic Profile of First-Generation Muslim Learner (FGML) pursuing Higher Education in Barpeta district, Assam.
2. To analyse the problems and challenges faced by First Generation Learner pursuing Higher Education in Barpeta district, Assam.

#### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Serge A. Afeli, Tynasha A. Houchins, Nieka S. Jackson & Jacqueline Montoya (2018) studied on "First generation college students demographic, socio-economic status, academic experience, success and challenges at pharmacy schools in the United States." And identify the first-generation college students who enrolled in pharmacy school and studied the demographic, socio economic status, academic performance and challenges. Research was done to investigate the perception on available resource to support their academic. Survey was conducted that evaluated first generation learner and their commitment to the pharmacy profession, strength of institutional support and school experience. Student's responses were calculated statistically. It was found that 15.5% comes from families living below the federal poverty level. Most first generation college students come from a lower socio-economic background and experience many challenges throughout their

tenure in pharmacy school. But they still work hard to achieve their academic as well as in their life.

Wilbur, T. G. And Roscigno, V. J. (2016) discussed about the patterns of academic learning in college by a first-generation learner and their limitations of contemporary college access. Researcher tried to study how family socio economic status and generational status leads to the greatest disadvantages of first-generation learner in colleges. They find out that the disadvantage occurred due to the variations in parental knowledge, resources and involvement. They highlighted inequalities in college completion due to the family stressors.

Velu, R. (2017) studied the life complexity of first-generation learner from children perspective. It studied link between academic achievement and social status Socio economic factors to underachieve. Researcher tried to find out how successful they are? Do they need additional support? Research was done by talking with students, analyzing picture cards, depicting sense from everyday situations. This study defined that a gap remains between enrollment and completion rate especially for the children with poorest household and marginalized groups. They suggested that failure of teacher to perform their duty is a serious issue. The quality of government schooling available for poor groups in India leaves much to be desired. This study highlights the difficulties that a first-generation learner have to face and suggest that discrimination in education for disadvantage people in India could further increases unless additional support and supplement is provided.

Ives, J. And Montoya, M.C. (2020) used different search procedure for the review “First generation learner as an academic learner through a systematic review. Researcher selected educational research database and snowball techniques and identified 473 articles for screening. They categorized the research article in different aspects and analyzed one by one. First group of articles pointed that first generation college student has lower performance and engagement in college activity, low academic self concept, have few interactions with teacher and an unwillingness to seek out academic resources. 24% articles positioned first generation college students in terms of how cultural context mediate learning as opposed to focusing on an individual cognitive perspective in thinking about learning. 25% articles positioned first generation college students as interconnected and multidirectional. They can be a academic learner and they connected their lives experience to subject matter and then this new learning back to lives.

Hoque, D. (2015) conducted a study to examine various sources of earning and pattern of livelihood of the inhabitants of char areas. Sample was collected through multi stage random sampling and selected two char areas of Assam, one from upper Brahmaputra valley Jorhat district and another one from lower Brahmaputra valley Barpeta district. Study found that the agriculture is the major source of income of the inhabitants of the char areas and most of the respondents are either illiterate or very less illiterate.

The study of Bhakar, S. (2020) was undertaken with the objective of finding socio demographic, economic, and health aspects of the scheduled Tribes of Purulia and Bankura district. Sample was collected through multi stage purposive Sampling technique. A comparative analysis was done through logistic regression analysis to understand the present livelihood scenario of the tribal people in the study areas. This study confirmed that all the demographic variables are responsible for creating a good social status among tribal people.

Borbora, R.D. (1997) attempted a study to find out the causes of first-generation learner dropout, enrollment, access and retention in primary school. It studied about parent’s socio-economic conditions on the basis of high-, middle- and low-income level. Researcher selected sample

through multistage stratified random sampling from Kamrup district. This study attempts to study the impact of socio-economic status on academic achievement by comparing first generation learners and non-first-generation learner. Researcher employed normative survey method and data were mainly collected through schedule, interview, observation, and attitude scale. The study found that academic achievement of the first-generation learner is low in both advance and backward classes. Again, the wastage due to stagnation is higher than the wastage due to dropout. More study on attendance and method of teaching was suggested.

Overview of the related studies reflected that most of the study was done on the socio-economic condition, academic challenges, enrollment and retention of first-generation learner. But less study was done on the first-generation learner from Muslim minority community and in higher education. Having majority of Muslim minority and low in literacy rate Barpeta district need to be studied their first-generation learner. Therefore, it is worth to conduct the study on demographic factors related as hindrance in pursuit of education.

**METHODOLOGY**

The researcher adopted descriptive survey method that comes under the category of descriptive research. For collecting the required data an information sheet and interview was used as a tool. And researcher analyzed the data quantitatively with percentage. For the present study, the population included all the first-generation Muslim learners studying 5<sup>th</sup> semester in undergraduate provincialized colleges in the academic year 2023 - 2024 in Barpeta district. As the population is not recorded anywhere and we cannot find a definite size of the population, therefore all those First-generation Muslim learners found in college are recorded. Three provincialized college of Barpeta district was considered as the sample college for the study. As maximum required numbers of FGML were found in these three colleges, researcher stopped data collection after done with these three colleges.

Researcher used purposive sampling method for collecting data. Total 88 FGML were found in three colleges. Among these 88, 54 FGML were selected for the study. There are 18 provincialized colleges in Barpeta district. Among those Mandia Anchalic College, Sankar Madhab College and M.C. College were selected for the study. Total 88 first generation Muslim learner (FGML) was found with the help of an information sheet. The information sheet collected data on their age, gender, address, family income, religion, and their guardians' educational qualifications. Procedure of collecting data is given in the following table:

**Table 1: Collected data with total number of FGML and chosen sample**

<b>College Name</b>	<b>Total enrollment in 5<sup>th</sup> semester</b>	<b>Total FGML found in 5<sup>th</sup> semester</b>	<b>Chosen Sample</b>
Sankar-Madhab college	150	13	10
M.C. college	260	22	15
Mandia Anchalic College	163	53	29
<b>Total</b>		<b>88</b>	<b>54</b>

**DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

Demographic variables are characteristics or factors used to describe and categorize populations, groups, or individuals in a society based on various social and demographic attributes. A first-generation Muslim learner is an individual who is the first in their family to pursue education and also identifies as a Muslim from Muslim Minority Community. First-generation learners often face unique challenges and experiences, and these challenges can intersect with their socio-demographic status. First Generation Learners have their own unique problems and they also differ from other Subsequent Generation Learners. Demographic factors appear to make great contribution in deciding the status of First-Generation Learners.

In the present study, researcher try to collect the information of demographic factors related to the first-generation Muslim learners through an information sheet including all the variables. These factors are mentioned in the following table with the total numbers and percentage.

**Table 2: Demographic variables of FGML and total number and percentage**

Socio demographic Variables		N	Percentage
Gender	Male	29	53.7%
	Female	25	46.3%
Place of residence of learner	Urban	0	0
	Rural	54	100%
Stream of the study	Arts	48	88.9%
	Science	6	11%
	Commerce	0	0
Father's occupation	Government	0	0
	Private	0	0
	Self employed	14	25%
	Cultivation	40	74%
Mother's Occupation	Government	0	0
	Private	0	0
	Housewife	19	35%
	Cultivation	35	64%
Parental income	Below 20000	54	100%
	20,000-50000	0	0
	50,000 –1,00,000	0	0
	Above 1,00,000	0	0

Marital status	Married	10	18%
	Single	42	77%
	Divorce	2	3.7%
Family Size	less than 4 or 4 members	0	0
	4-7	10	18%
	Above 7	44	81%
Family Type	Joint Family	46	85%
	Nuclear Family	0	0
	Separated Family	8	14%
Spoken Language	Assamese	54	100%
	Bengali	0	0
	Hindi	0	0
Access to educational facilities	Separated study room	10	18%
	Availability of smart phones	11	20%
	Available reading books	26	48%
	Tuition from elder	7	12%

Here researcher tries to find out the status of demographic variables of FGML. The study revealed the following key findings:

- The entirety of FGML, constituting 100 percent, hails from rural areas.
- Among FGML, 88 percent are pursuing the Arts stream, while 11 percent have chosen the Science stream. Interestingly, there were no FGML students enrolled in the Commerce stream.
- The parental incomes of FGML were consistently below 20,000.
- FGML typically come from larger families, with household sizes ranging from 5 to 7 members or exceeding 7 members. Many FGML reside in joint family arrangements, while 14 percent belong to separated families.
- A notable aspect is that some FGML students are married, with 3 percent having experienced divorce.
- A significant proportion of FGML's fathers are engaged in farming occupations, while their mothers primarily fulfil the role of homemakers, often participating in agricultural activities.

The study revealed that 100 percent of first-generation learner from Muslim minority hails from rural areas in higher education. This demographic face creates a distinct set of challenges. They face limited access to the resources and opportunities with low-income backgrounds. They have poor communication infrastructure for connectivity. Again, as first generation they encounter unique obstacle in achieving academic excellence. They need to navigate their unfamiliar

education by themselves. They balance their family responsibilities and expectation with personal aspiration. They do not have adequate educational facilities and creates absenteeism in class, inactive in participation and sometime dropout from the colleges.

The majority of parents of first-generation learner are engaged in agriculture and their children are expected to assist in farm related responsibilities. Balancing the family responsibility with their academic curricula become great challenges for first generation learner. The study found a large number of first-generation Muslim learner in three colleges only. It indicated a positive attitude of parents and child towards pursuing higher education. While these parents value education and desire for their children to pursue it, they face significant challenges in providing adequate support. From the study 81 percent of first-generation learners come from joint families with more than 7 members, posing significant challenges for their parents to afford education for their entire child. Large family size and combined with limited resource makes difficult to achieve the full potential.

A significant gender disparity exists among first generation learners with 53 percent being male enrolled in higher education and smaller being female. This disparity is the societal barriers that hinder girl's access to education, particularly in families where parents are illiterate. In such cases girls are often expected to priorities marriage and household responsibilities over educational pursuit. A notable aspect is that some FGML students are married, with 3 percent having experienced divorce. So, child marriage is become a significant problem that hinder girl's child to get education. Furthermore, it was revealed that 88 percent of the FGML are enrolled in the Arts stream and 11 percent enrolled in science streams. This demography also revealed their lack of awareness about various career fields and the corresponding educational requirement and financial constraint that limit access to specialized courses.

Low socioeconomic status, cultural background, and a lack of educational support can indeed be significant hindrances for first-generation Muslim learners. These factors can create various challenges that affect their ability to access, succeed in, and complete their education. Therefore, it can be concluded that the status of demographic variables of FGML is low for pursuing a higher education among Muslim minority community in Barpeta district.

## **CONCLUSION**

The demographic profile of first-generation learner reveals a complex and dynamic landscape. There are dominance of rural residence and joint family structures. They have low socio-economic status and limited access to quality education, resource and guidance. From the observation of the study following strategies can be recommended for the first-generation learner-

- As first-generation learners are from low economic backgrounds, scholarship, grant and financial aids for especially first-generation minority learner should be granted.
- In rural areas career counseling should be organized for career path, internship and job opportunities.
- Teachers should make group of first-generation learners and connect them fellow first-generation learner for sharing experiences and encouragement
- Pairing them with non-first-generation learner for collaborative learning
- Summer bridge program should organize for academic preparation and socialization in rural areas.

A special care or treatment is required to address their problems and find out the way for their development. By providing mentorship, financial aid, inclusive learning environments, and opportunities for personal and academic growth, we can empower first-generation Muslim learners

to reach their full potential. Their successes not only benefit them individually but also contribute to the enrichment and progress of our educational institutions and society as a whole.

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