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Determinants of Poor Educational Attainment in Minority Concentrated Districts of Assam

Ira Das*

Abstract

This paper assesses the determinants of poor educational attainments in minority concentrated districts of Brahmaputra valley of Assam. Field data reveals several reasons for dropout of students – there is need to earn and supplement family income, unaffordable fees, work at home, failure in examination, lack of interest in studies and marriages. The analysis overall reveals two dimensions in cases of dropouts – poverty and a congenial environment in the localities. In the context of female dropouts the environment the girls face in the poor development context may need detailed investigations.

Introduction

The Assam Human Development report (2003) had revealed poor ranking of the districts having concentration of religious minorities in overall human development and educational index (Government of Assam, 2003 and Table 1). Taking this co-linearity forward there is ground to argue that education is one of the prime determinants to achieve development goals (UNESCO, 2005).

This note is based on the database of the survey¹ on minority concentrated districts (MCDs) of Assam (2008), indicates significant gap in educational development. This note assesses the level of educational development in the MCDs based on indicators – literacy rate, educational attainment level,

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¹ The baseline survey of MCD, 2008 was conducted in Assam by OKD Institute of Social Change and Development on the behest of Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India. This note however takes into account only the Brahmaputra Valley districts of Assam. The author is grateful to OKDISCD to make the data available to write this note.

types of school attended, reasons for dropouts and aspiration level of parents on their wards.

Underperformance in literacy and educational attainment

The survey data reveal a clear gap in literacy level in most of the MCDs. The difference and pattern though remain the same in the 2011 census, but it shows a much lower level of literacy compared to the 2008 sample survey data. Except in few districts an improvement of female literacy is not seen and the gap with total literacy rate persists. Low level of literacy and consequent educational attainment level has bearing on the employment and livelihood opportunities. According to Sachar Committee Report, 2006, the main reason for educational backwardness of Muslims is poverty and it forces children to drop out after the first few classes. This is particularly high for Muslim girls. Little children are expected to provide support for their families by working in workshops, as domestic help or by looking after their siblings while their mothers go to work. The opportunity costs involved in sending children to school is also high for poor and illiterate parents. The community-specific factor for low educational achievement is that Muslims do not see education as necessarily translating into formal employment (Government of India, 2006).

Table 1: Literacy rate revealed by MCD survey 2008 and census 2011

	Percentage of Muslim 2001	Survey data 2008				Census 2011		
		Total	Female	Difference, male-female	Muslim women	Total	Female	Difference, male-female
Assam	30.9	-	-	-	72.2	66.3	5.9	
Barpeta	58.4	73.3	68.2	5.1	64.8	63.8	5.7	
Bongaigaon	38.5	69.0	63.4	5.6	62.8	69.7	64.4	
Darrang	35.5	74.7	67.3	7.4	65.7	63.1	58.0	
Dhubri	74.4	69.3	63.9	5.4	63.7	58.3	53.3	
Goalpara	53.7	70.0	64.8	5.2	64.7	67.4	63.1	
Kamrup	25.0	75.9	68.8	7.1	65.8	75.5	69.5	
Kokrajhar	20.0	62.8	55.4	7.4	49.3	65.2	58.3	
Marigaon	46.8	59.3	49.0	10.3	73.1	68.0	64.0	
Nagaon	57.4	74.1	68.2	5.9	70.3	72.4	68.1	

* Source: Census of India, 2001 and 2011; Base line survey of MCD, 2008

Level of educational attainment

Educational attainment level of people by the two major religions (Hindu, and Muslim) reveals that percentage of people from Muslim community completing the high school is much lower than the people of Hindu community (Table 2). Educational attainment beyond the high school level (graduation, post graduation and technical degrees) is found to be insignificant in both the communities, but the position of Hindu community is marginally better. Survey data show poor enrollment after matriculation. Overall in the MCDs of Brahmaputra valley of the state less than five per cent population is graduates (among all communities). In addition to this less than one per cent population is found to have managerial, technical or post-graduate qualification. As a whole it shows concentration of people in the primary and middle levels education.

Table 2: Percentage of population with completed level of education

	Completed high school		Graduate		Technical and post graduate	
	Muslims	Hindus	Muslims	Hindus	Muslims	Hindus
Barpeta	11.0	20.2	1.6	5.6	0.8	2.9
Bongaigaon	7.8	16.0	1.7	0.8	0.2	1.1
Darrang	12.8	24.6	0.9	2.1	0.6	0.4
Dhubri	10.5	20.0	1.5	1.1	0.3	0.2
Goalpara	6.3	21.6	1.0	1.2	0.2	0.2
Kamrup	14.1	17.1	1.0	2.2	0.2	0.5
Kokrajhar	4.1	11.0	0.8	1.3	0.1	0.4
Marigaon	5.0	16.9	0.7	1.7	0.2	0.4
Nagaon	9.2	17.6	0.9	1.0	0.0	0.2

* Source: Baseline survey of MCDs, 2008

The baseline survey data for the age group of 5-25 years show that never enrolled students are relatively higher among Muslim community in all the MCDs except in Marigaon. Survey data reveal that students left after enrollment is relatively lower in Muslim community; but among the Hindus

dropouts are more among the SC, ST and OBC communities. It may be noted that in the Muslim community many students go for informal educational institutions.

The students 'left after enrollment' and 'enrolled but does not go to school' category can be considered as dropouts. The dropout rates (dividing number of dropout students by total number of students of age 5 to 25 years) for the nine MCDs are presented in Table 3.

Table3: Dropout rates in the MCD districts of Assam, 2008

Districts	Male	Female	Total
Barpeta	8.86	2.58	5.88
Bongaigaon	17.13	9.41	13.59
Darrang	12.92	8.99	11.00
Dhubri	7.18	4.58	5.97
Goalpara	13.26	6.09	9.93
Kamrup	14.01	12.84	13.49
Kokrajhar	20.52	18.10	19.39
Marigaon	23.53	20.57	22.20
Nagaon	15.51	12.62	14.20

* Source: Baseline survey of MCDs, 2008

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2010, revealed school dropout rate at 5 percent in Assam. Field data reveal wide variations in the dropout rates across the MCDs. There could be certain locality specific reasons for wide variations in the MCDs having more or less uniform demographic characteristics. Moreover, the dropout rates by religion and caste show that it is more in case of scheduled caste (total 15.8 and female 13.6), scheduled tribes (total 15.6 and female 15.6) and Hindu backward classes (total 14.8 and female 14.8) than among Muslims (total 11.8 and female 8.7) and Christians (total 11.0 and female 9.7). The survey data also reveals that dropout rate among female is less than the total dropout in the communities. In this context some inference can be drawn that boys are dropped out because of economic compulsion to support their families².

It was also found that the students (85 to 90 per cent) across the Hindu and Muslim communities primarily attend government schools, and this proportion is marginally lower among the Christians³.

Determinants of dropouts

Field data reveals several reasons for dropout of students in the age group of 5-25 years. The need to earn and supplement family income, unaffordable fees, work at home, failure in examination, lack of interest in studies and marriages were cited as reasons. The reason 'need to earn' is more prominent among Muslim community compared to other castes in Hindu community and the Christians in most of the MCDs. Here an attempt is made to examine whether the factors behind the dropout rates are significant in the MCDs of Brahmaputra valley of Assam.

The calculation of dropout rates varies according to how the concept is defined. Studies show that a variety of definitions are used to define the concept (Lehr *et al.*, 2004). Event Rate (also referred as the annual rate or incidence rate) measures the proportion of students who drop out in a single year without completing high school. Status Rate (referred as the prevalence rate) measures the proportion of students who have not completed high school and are not enrolled at one point in time, regardless of when they dropped out. Cohort Rate (referred as the longitudinal rate) measures the case to a single group (or cohort) of students over a period of time (Lehr *et al.*, 2004). Dropout figures or rate would vary depending on use of these dropout or school completion measure. The variance occurs because local, state, and federal calculations often use different age groups, data, and definitions in classifying dropouts (Bhanpuri and Reynolds, 2003).

² Inference is that one major reasons for higher drop out among boys than the girls is post SSA and mid day phenomenon. The wage rate for girl child worker is less than the boy child worker and hence boys are withdrawn from schools to join the labour market while girls continue in schools as they are served the mid day meal which saves food consumption for one member in the family.

³ The reason for Christians with low attendance in Govt. school is historical. The Christian missionary schools are more widespread in the Christian dominated areas and these schools offer various concessional education to the children along with other technical skills.

In our measurement categories of students ‘left after enrollment’ and ‘enrolled but does not go to school’ are considered as dropouts. Dropout rate is calculated by dividing the total number of dropout students across castes by the total number students across castes of the age between 5 to 25 years.

To test the significant reasons behind the dropouts of the students, a multiple regression model is constructed following of Bean (1980) and Hallstrand and Upadhyay (2010).

In the constructed multiple regression model⁴, dropout rate (*drop*) is considered as the dependent variable which is regressed on the explanatory variables work at home (*homework*), need to earn (*earn*), distance to school (*schooldistance*), lack of facility at School (*schoolfacility*), punishment at school (*punish*), teacher don’t teach (*teachnot*), failed in examination (*fail*), fees/expenditure cannot afford (*affordability*), not interested in study (*notinterested*), marriage (*marry*) and Others (O). The relationship between the dependent variable *drop* and each of the independent variable is expected to be positive.

The model is as follows:

$$(drop)_i = a_0 + a_1(homework)_i + a_2(earn)_i + a_3(schooldistance)_i + a_4(schoolfacility)_i + a_5(punish)_i + a_6(teachnot)_i + a_7(fail)_i + a_8(affordability)_i + a_9(notinterested)_i + a_{10}(marriage)_i + a_{11}(O)_i + U_i$$

Here, $i=61$ numbers of observations

$U = \text{Random Error}$

The estimates shown by Ordinary Least Square (OLS) method are presented in Table 4.

⁴ The model takes into account all the communities together in the MCDs. The reason is that the observation in certain categories (Christian) is low. Moreover, community subgroups in the sample of Hindu communities have dropouts higher than the Muslims in many districts. This also brings in the dimension/argument of poverty across all the communities.

The value of the adjusted coefficient of determination⁵ (R^2) of the model is found to be 0.548 indicating good fit to the data. The F-statistics for overall regression is also highly significant. Thus, on the whole, the results obtained from the analysis are convincing.

Regression results show that the variables need to earn, distance from the school, failure in examination, affordability to pay fees and expenditure, not interested in reading and marriages are positively significant; all revealing as significant determinants of dropouts in MCDs in Assam. Test of Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor of each of the coefficient (VIF) (Gujarati, 1995) reveal that there is no high multicollinearity among the explanatory variables in the model.

Table 4: Results of the multiple regression analysis of reasons for dropouts

Variables	Estimated Coefficients	t-statistic
Constant	0.117 (1.825)	0.064
homework	0.006 (0.068)	0.083
earn	0.082 (0.040)	2.031**
schooldistance	1.095 (0.310)	3.535***
schoolfacility	-0.758 (0.482)	-1.573
punish	0.225 (7.242)	0.031
teachnot	0.860 (1.149)	0.749
fail	0.286 (0.071)	4.030***
affordability	0.086 (0.029)	3.012***
notinterested	0.151 (0.040)	3.753***
marriage	0.347 (0.094)	3.724***
Others	0.376 (0.094)	4.002***
R^2	0.631	
Adjusted R^2	0.548	
F - Statistics ($n_1=11; n_2=49$)	7.606***	

Notes: Figures in the parentheses show the standard error; *** and ** indicate significant at 0.01, and 0.05 level respectively.

⁵ For a cross-section model, adjusted R^2 is used when the number of explanatory variables is not very small compared to the number of observations (Gujarati, 1995).

The result shows that highly significant factors are failure in the exam, disinterest in studies and the distance of the school. Earning is a major reason but other three factors are more significant. This shows that it is something to do with the structural system of the school education rather than the earning compulsions. It may also be the fact that as children fail and lose interest in studies the parents prefer to engage them for earning.

Determinants of female dropouts

To examine the significant reasons behind the female dropouts, the above regression model is constructed for female dropout (61 observations). The results of the regression model are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Results of the multiple regression analysis of reasons for female dropouts

Variables	Estimated Coefficients	t-statistic
Constant	0.578 (2.201)	0.263
homework	0.037 (0.045)	0.821
earn	0.149 (0.071)	2.097**
schooldistance	-0.100 (0.285)	-0.352
schoolfacility	-0.144 (0.130)	-1.108
punish	-1.276 (3.119)	-0.409
fail	0.337 (0.068)	4.979***
affordabiliy	0.066 (0.039)	1.671*
notinterested	0.132 (0.043)	3.102***
marriage	0.162 (0.065)	2.488**
others (O)	0.112 (0.217)	0.518
R ²	0.474	
Adjusted R ²	0.369	
F - Statistics (n ₁ =10; n ₂ =50)	4.506***	

Notes: Figures in the parentheses show the standard error; ***, ** and * indicate significance at 0.01, 0.05 and 0.10 level respectively.

The value of the adjusted coefficient of determination (R²) of the model is found to be 0.369 indicating not very bad fit to the data⁶. The F-statistics for overall regression is also significant. Thus, on the whole, the results obtained from the analysis are credible. The coefficients of the variable failed in the Examination, not interested in study have come out to be statistically significant at 1 per cent level with expected positive sign. Other variables need to earn and marriage also have come out as significant factors of dropout. Study by Kotwal *et al.* (2007) found that reluctance of parents and participation in domestic activities, problem of financial constraints are the significant reasons of dropouts. After Testing VIF for each of the coefficient, it is found that there is no high multicollinearity among the explanatory variables in the model.

Since the results for the females show no variability than the total in case of most significant factor, this implies that structural system of school education is what effects the dropout rate and for females dropout due to marriage is an observed phenomenon and have been confirmed by different studies at different points of time.

Concluding remarks

The analysis reveals two dimensions in cases of dropouts – poverty (need to earn, affordability) and environment (not interested in study, failed in the examination) in the localities. In the context of female dropouts the environment the girls face in the poor development context (as indicated by the Human Development Report) may need detailed investigations. Failure in examination, not interested in the study and marriage as factors of dropout in case of girls indicate lack of appropriate attentions and motivational supports on the need of basic as well as higher education. In this context infrastructure facilities at schools (including sanitations), efforts of the teachers and curriculum may also come to the fore. The baseline survey (2008) data indicate significant gender differences in parental preferences as percentage of parents aspiring for completion of graduation of their boys is higher than that for the females in all the religious groups. Across the religious group aspiration of Hindu parents also found to be

⁶ If a high adjusted R² is obtained, well and good; however, if adjusted R² is low, it does not mean that the model is necessarily bad (Gujarati, 1995).

higher (about 40 percent parents aspire) among the religious communities (about 30 percent Muslim parents aspire) that their children complete graduation. One of the reasons for gender biasness in respect of higher education may be attributed to the geographical distances in accessibility to institutions of higher education for girls. However, it cannot be singled out to accessibility alone. Higher education is also an investment for future flow of earning and in patriarchal societies consideration is that the benefit of investing in males for higher education result in net inflow of income to the family. The gender biasness for higher education is a social process and is not specific to Assam alone.

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The journal Social Change and Development intends to provide an academic platform to scholars belonging to the northeastern region of India as well as outside to project issues focused particularly on the region, express their views and analyse the issues putting them in proper perspective, both historically and as guidelines for the future. However, issues cutting across the region's border are also welcome.

The unique diversity of the region in terms of ethnicity, culture, language and social institutions makes the region a challenging area of study for the researchers. Although, there has been a prolific growth of literature on the region, it is still lacking discussions with academic rigour. It is therefore, strongly felt that the social scientists would take up issues for academic debate and the journal acts as a platform for the exercise. This is expected to create a better understanding amongst the people of the region and the rest of the country. The geographical seclusion of the region from the rest of the country is sought to be broken through vibrant academic interactions.

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