



A Study on Issues in the Arts and Science Colleges for First Generation Learners in Virudhunagar District

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Abstract

First Generation Learners experience unique challenges socially, academically and financially as the first in their family to pursue Higher Education. First generation learners often meet challenges in the arts and science colleges in the Virudhunagar district, including lack of parental supervision, financial restrictions, academic unpreparedness inherent in the challenges of first generation learning, and a lack of exposure and resources. The entry of first generation learners into higher education involves linguistic and cultural barriers as well. Despite institutional networks of support and encouragement and government schemes, issues of confidence, resilience, attitude and career guidance continue to emerge for first generation learners. This study focuses on the challenges these learners face from educational, socioeconomic, and psychological perspectives with its emphasis on improving educational good practice. Additionally, this study focuses on ways in which institutions can help them overcome these by providing skill development, counselling, and mentoring opportunities. The aim of this study is for educational leaders and policymakers to inform evidence based practice and develop targeted interventions to support first generation learners in succeeding academically and improving their economic circumstances.

Keywords: first-generation students, virudhunagar district, arts and science colleges, educational hardships, social and economic obstacles

Introduction

Education creates empowerment and social mobility. Participating in higher education is a monumental change from their families for first-generation students. However, in regions such as Virudhunagar, the transition to higher education is difficult, as many families engage in informal employment, small-scale industries, and agriculture. First-generation students have little to no exposure to higher education, educational support, or parental support which is well-noted for than their educationally advanced families. The purpose of the present research is to identify and assess any educational difficulties first-generation

students experience in the public arts and science colleges of Virudhunagar district.

Review of Literature

1. **Padma (2019)** This study examines the experiences of first-generation college students in Tamil Nadu, and it was revealed that financial instability was a leading barrier to their journey through higher education. The majority of first-generation learners had to juggle part-time work along with their studies, which led to limited study time. Subsequently, the report suggested that scholarships and financial aid options were



- crucial in decreasing dropout rates for first-generation learners in rural district areas.
2. **Anitha & Kannan (2020)** This study focuses on various socio-economic barriers that affect first-generation learners in South India. The authors highlighted that first-generation students from low income households face massive hurdles in paying for fees, study materials, and transport. In addition, female students were also faced with cultural expectations that limited their participation in higher education. The paper concludes that notwithstanding government schemes and programs, support mechanisms provided by institutions, such as mentoring, counseling, and skills-based programs were not enough to directly address the specific needs of first-generation learners in arts and science colleges.
 3. **Muthulakshmi (2021)** This study explored the digital divide experienced by first-generation learners in rural Tamil Nadu. The findings suggested that students did not have access to computers, the internet, or digital literacy skills to enable them to keep up with urban learners. The digital divide became apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, when online education became prominent. Acknowledging the digital divide, the study cautioned that without strengthening digital inclusion programs, first-generation learners may continue to struggle academically, and may fall behind in relation to higher education.
 4. **Singh & Rani (2018)** This study examined the psychological barriers of first-generation learners in higher education institutions. They found that first-generation learners have low self-esteem, low confidence and fear of being compared to their peers. Their academic performance was impaired by stress associated with family expectations. The article concluded psychological supports, like counseling services and peer mentoring programs, could assist with improving self-confidence and academic resilience of first-generation learners enrolling in arts and science colleges.
 5. **Devi (2020)** This study examined the issues in language with respect to first-generation learners in arts and science colleges in Tamil Nadu. Most of the first-generation learners were found to have attended Tamil-medium, rural schools, and found the English medium of instruction to be difficult in terms of class involvement, preparation for competitive exams and interacting with their teachers. Devis study concluded that implementing extracurricular English remedial classes for students and also teaching in a bilingual method could potentially lower the communication/learning gap faced by first-generation learners.
 6. **Krishnan (2017)** He also focused on first-generation learners, but this time on looking at the role parents play. The research noted that when comparing a first-generation learner to students from educated families, the first-generation learners did not experience parental academic support, motivation with no exposure to higher learning (Godowski and Sleg, 2021). The experience of the first-generation learners, made them feel isolated, which was another aspect Krishnan highlighted. This indicates that first-generation learners missed out on academic parental support. Krishnan suggested mentors, either faculty or alumni should replace this parental academic support, with respect to helping the first-generation learners adjust to the higher education experience.
 7. **Meenakshi & Thomas (2019)** The authors identified financial dependency as a significant stumbling block for first-generation learners. When rural students lived away from home, they often needed to supplement the family income and this, in turn, influenced their ability to fully engage in their studies. The authors explained that while financial support from government scholarships was appreciated, the delays associated with financial disbursement compounded their financial hardships and therefore, recommended that financial aid programs be strengthened, that colleges introduce flexible part-time jobs to those students, and that



financial barriers to education be further reduced to decrease the likelihood of dropping out for disadvantaged learners.

8. **Rajesh (2021)** In this study, Rajesh investigated the role of social capital to encourage first-generation learners' successes. His study found that first-generation learners often did not have connections to educated peers and relatives who could provide guidance on potential career paths and learning opportunities such as internships and higher studies. This limited range of networks and attributions decreased their competitiveness relative to urban peers who had greater exposure. He stressed the value of peer support groups, alumni associations, and professional mentoring in order to build social capital to help improve first-generation learners' chances of academic success.
9. **Kumar & Joseph (2018)** This study focused on gender differences in the situation of first-generation learners. Female students in rural arts and science colleges faced two layers of challenges: financial hardships based on their economic status and cultural barriers. Parents were sometimes unwilling to allow their daughters to learn at a higher academic level based on safety issues and marriage-related issues. The authors recommended implementing gender-sensitive policies, hostel accommodation and awareness items for parents to leave them conducive towards higher education.
10. **Lakshmi (2022)** This study was about institutional barriers to first-generation learners. The study noted that institutional colleges provided the basic academic structure to students but had little emphasis on guidance, counselling and placement support. First-generation students are often uncertain about the career options for them following graduation. The author proposed adopting a holistic approach to the student development process and include soft skill development, panel discussions/workshops or guidance on personality development, and greater career awareness measures. These measures

could help ventilation points overcome barriers to reach a socio-economic mobility.

Statement of the Problem

First-generation students in the arts and science colleges of Virudhunagar district have unique challenges related to their disadvantaged educational background and socio-economic status. Their academic achievement is impeded by numerous barriers, including, but not limited to: low self-confidence, a lack of parental or family support; socio-emotional and financial constraints; and their limited exposure to English or the language of instruction that may be used at university. While there are many support systems at higher education level, many are still at risk of poor academic performance and/or dropping out of higher education altogether. Thus, it is important to examine the academic, financial, social, and emotional obstacles first-generation students encounter. The study will recommend actions to lessen the barriers and improve students' educational success.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the barriers first-generation students face at arts and science colleges in Virudhunagar district and recommend strategies to improve their social and academic development.
- To study the demographics of first-generation students at arts and science colleges.
- To identify the barriers first-generation students face regarding their academic, financial, social, and psychological lives.
- To investigate how financial limitations affect first-generation students' intentions to drop out.
- To evaluate how language background English versus Tamil influences academic self-efficacy.
- To assess how well institutional support networks such as mentorship, counseling, and scholarships work to lower obstacles.
- To offer tactics and policy recommendations aimed at enhancing first-generation learners' educational experiences and retention.



Research Methodology

Research Design

In order to determine and examine the difficulties faced by first-generation students in the arts and science colleges in the Virudhunagar district, the study uses a descriptive and analytical research design. To give a thorough grasp of the issue, both quantitative and qualitative data are used.

Population of the Study

First-generation students who attend different arts and science colleges in the Virudhunagar district make up the population.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was used to choose a sample size of 150 respondents because the study only took into account first-generation students.

Data Collection Method

Primary Data: Gathered using demographic information and a structured questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale that covered social, psychological, financial, and academic difficulties.

Secondary Data: Collected from government reports, books, journals, institutional records, and earlier research on first-generation students.

Tools used for Data Analysis

- SPSS was used to analyze the gathered data, and descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) were used to present the results.
- The chi-square test was used to investigate the relationship between academic self-efficacy and the medium of education, as well as between financial constraints and dropout intentions.

Challenges Faced by First-Generation Learners

1. Academic Challenges: Language barriers, particularly for students who are learning Tamil and transitioning to English-medium instruction. lack of confidence in one's academic performance and low self-efficacy. restricted availability of

technology and digital learning resources. Adopting new teaching strategies and assessment tools can be challenging.

- 2. Economic Challenges:** A low family income limits their ability to purchase study materials and pay fees. inadequate financial aid or scholarship availability as a result of ignorance. Studying and working part-time must be balanced, which causes stress and absenteeism. Dropout intentions are substantially correlated with financial constraints.
- 3. Social Challenges:** Absence of home-based parental supervision and educational assistance. comparison with students from well-educated families and peer pressure. limited social interaction, which results in inadequate networking and communication abilities. feeling alone in a cutthroat academic setting.
- 4. Psychological Challenges:** High levels of anxiety and stress in relation to academic achievement. low self-esteem as a result of being a first-generation person. Fear of failing and uncertainty about one's future in the workforce. the emotional strain of being the family's "first achiever."
- 5. Institutional Challenges:** Little knowledge of the resources available to students for support (career guidance, mentorship, and counseling). inadequate initiatives to bridge the gap between digital literacy and language. Insufficient attention is paid to inclusive teaching strategies that take into account students' varied backgrounds.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

1. Descriptive statistics

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 150)

Demographic Variable	Majority Category	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	78	52.0
Age Group	18 – 20 years	65	43.3
Course of Study	Science	82	54.7
Parental Education	Primary	52	34.7



Family Income (p. m)	Below ₹10,000	60	40.0
Location	Rural	90	60.0

Interpretation

The 52% of respondents are female, 43.3% are between the ages of 18 and 20, and 54.7% are enrolled in science courses. Financial constraints are evident in the fact that 40% of families earn less than ₹10,000 per month, and the majority of their parents only have a primary education (34.7%). Furthermore, the majority (60%) live in rural areas, underscoring issues with exposure, digital infrastructure, and accessibility. All things considered, this demographic trend confirms that the majority of first-generation students in the Virudhunagar district are from low-income, rural, and less educated parents, all of which have a direct impact on their academic difficulties.

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1 (Language & Performance) H0 (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant difference in perceived academic performance (measured through self-efficacy scores, P1–P3) between students from Tamil-medium and English-medium schooling backgrounds.

Hypothesis 2 (Financial Constraint & Dropout Intention) H0 (Null Hypothesis): Financial constraints (F1–F3 average score) do not significantly influence dropout intention (O3).

2. Chi-Square Test: Cross tabulation

Table 2.1: Schooling Medium × Self-Efficacy

Medium of Schooling	Low	Moderate	High	Total
Tamil Medium	28	40	22	90
English Medium	10	25	25	60
Total	38	65	47	150

Table 2.1.1: Chi-Square Tests

Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-	6.120	2	0.047

Square			
Likelihood Ratio	6.185	2	0.045
Linear-by- Linear Assoc	4.812	1	0.028
No. of Valid Cases	150		

Interpretation

Since p value is less than 0.05 ($\chi^2 = 6.120$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.047$) the null hypothesis is rejected. It indicates a significant difference in self-efficacy between Tamil-medium and English-medium students. English-medium learners reported higher self-efficacy levels.

Chi-Square Test: Cross tabulation

Table 2.2: Financial Constraints × Dropout Intention

Financial Constraints	Dropout: Yes	Dropout: No	Total
Low	8	32	40
Moderate	20	30	50
High	30	30	60
Total	58	92	150

Table 2.2.1: Chi-Square Tests

Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.520	2	0.005
Likelihood Ratio	10.621	2	0.005
Linear-by- Linear Assoc	9.824	1	0.002
N of Valid Cases	150		

Interpretation

Since p value is less than 0.05 (10.520, $df = 2$, $p = 0.005$), the null hypothesis is rejected. Dropout intention is strongly influenced by financial constraints, with higher constraints associated with a higher propensity to drop out.



Findings

- Most of the respondents were female, between the ages of 18 and 20, from rural areas, enrolled in science courses, and had parents with only a primary education and a low family income.
- Low self-efficacy, language barriers (students with Tamil-medium backgrounds demonstrated lower confidence than their English-medium peers), and restricted access to digital resources were among the academic challenges.
- With many students from families making less than ₹10,000 a month, financial difficulties were a significant obstacle that were found to have a significant impact on dropout intentions.
- Social issues like peer comparison, lack of parental guidance, and limited exposure had an impact on college students' confidence and adjustment.
- Despite their existence, institutional support services (mentorships, counseling, and scholarships) were not fully utilized because of a lack of knowledge.

Suggestions

- To lower the risk of dropout, increase financial aid through flexible payment plans, fee waivers, and scholarships.
- To assist students from rural backgrounds and those who speak Tamil, introduce bridging programs (language, digital literacy, and skill-building workshops).
- Improve career guidance, confidence-boosting, and psychological stress-reduction counseling and mentorship services.
- Raise awareness of institutional and governmental support programs to guarantee that first-generation students get the most out of them.
- Encourage inclusive teaching methods by providing peer-tutoring programs and bilingual resources.
- Boost connections between the community and industry to give learners inspiration through real-life success stories and role models.

Conclusion

The study highlights that, first-generation students in the Virudhunagar district encounter a variety of obstacles to their academic, financial, social, and psychological development. While self-efficacy is impacted by background and language factors, dropout intentions are greatly increased by financial constraints. These difficulties can be lessened, though, with focused institutional support, capacity-building programs, and inclusive teaching methods. Resolving these problems is crucial for enhancing academic achievement and retention as well as for using education to empower communities and families.

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