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Students' perception in selecting higher education courses: A study on Cachar district of Assam

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Abstract

In recent times, there have been many researches which are conducted in the light of improving the educational environment of a society and the country at a large. There have been recognitions country-wide regarding the potency of education to remove the mental bondage of slavery and empower people bestowing freedom of thoughts. Education and proper schooling at a basic level has gained the due emphasis as a tool of progressive social change. The study highlights all the problems associated with the choice of educational course for a student. As the study has been conducted in Silchar, it claims to be of value regarding the unfolding of real factors that can contribute to the choice of a course amongst the students of the place. The marginalized and distorted knowledge amongst the students and their parents regarding the potency of a course in brightening up the career of a student can be another hurdle in the choice of a course. The study claims to be of social value in not only providing evidences that confirm the perceptual judgment regarding the factors that a student does and should consider for choosing a course, but it also acts as an eye-opener in revealing the pros and cons of many courses which are mostly evaluated by the students and their guardians with little information.

Keywords: Education, educational environment, knowledge, career & social change

Introduction

In recent times, there have been many researches which are conducted in the light of improving the educational environment of a society and the country at a large. There have been recognitions country-wide regarding the potency of education to remove the mental bondage of slavery and empower people bestowing freedom of thoughts. Education and proper schooling at a basic level has gained the due emphasis as a tool of progressive social change. There have been schemes to allure people of the country to see the distant future of their wards and empower them with the weapon of education at the very growing stage. Schemes such as 'education for all' has not only increased the enrollment in the schools but have also encouraged girls' education in the country. But, at the higher education level it becomes inevitably difficult for almost all the students to strategically choose a course which can ensure a prosperous career for the students. The reason behind may be the lack of availability of professions corresponding to a course, lack of financial capability to pursue a course of interest, mismatch between the demands of the course and the inherent talents of a student and many more. There are also inconsistencies regarding the assurance of a good job after the completion of the course amongst the many professional institutes that are present across the country. The research would be undertaken in Silchar, blessed with the presence of two most premier educational institutes of the State; one is the National Institute of Technology and the other being the Assam University. But due to the transportation and other infrastructural problems, there are reluctances amongst many corporate units to carry their campus interview schemes in such a place. Apart from the external conditions that act as obstacles for students in choosing a higher course, there can also be imposition at the family level too. The imposition of the parents to accept a career which would continue the legacy of the family is empirically seen to be a major hindrance in the path of living the dream of a student. The stereotype pattern of education that our last few generations have acquired develops a generation gap and can lead to disqualification of most of the Professional courses amongst the parents in the modern times. The study highlights all the problems associated with the choice of educational course for a student. As the study has been conducted in Silchar, it claims to be of value regarding the unfolding of real factors that

can contribute to the choice of a course amongst the students of the place. The marginalized and distorted knowledge amongst the students and their parents regarding the potency of a course in brightening up the career of a student can be another hurdle in the choice of a course. The study claims to be of social value in not only providing evidences that confirm the perceptual judgment regarding the factors that a student does and should consider for choosing a course, but it also acts as an eye-opener in revealing the pros and cons of many courses which are mostly evaluated by the students and their guardians with little information.

Need of the study

The study under consideration not only aims to be of significance at an individual level but also of importance to the policy makers in lime lighting the actual problems that exist with the educational institutes when they are listed as the potential choice for the students in pursuing a course. The catering of Government and regulatory authorities at the basic level has ensured the increase in the awareness of the potency of education in the many interior regions of the country. But the hurdles that exist in choosing a course at a higher level ultimately destine the career of the students. In most of the cases, a meritorious student at the school and the college level ultimately has to accept a modest career just due to an unwise decision to choose a higher education. The study has major implications on the revelations of the pros and cons associated with a course and the potency of a course in ensuring a desired career for the students. The selection of a course by the student may often be out of a compromise due to imposition of uncontrolled factors acting as hurdles in living the dreams of the students. The study not only recognizes the problems but also demands due considerations to be made based on research evidences revealed from the study before choosing a course for higher education for the students. As the study is conducted in Silchar with rich educational culture and the habitat of two most premier institute of the State (NIT and Assam University), the expectations of the study to perform an eye-opening activity for the students of the society in choosing a course are high. The empirical observations support the premise that due to the lack of exposure at the end of the academic career by a student in Silchar, the decision of choosing a course in elite places and institutes of the country is almost inevitable. The other class of people who remain apprehensive of sending their wards outside Silchar for higher education; either due to financial reasons or may be the fear psychosis of their wards not able to adjust to a place remain deprived of the probable advantages of a premier institutes of the country and face the chronic disadvantages of the society. The educational institutes gearing up for facing the competition has to keep track of the fact that such issues had led to huge brain drainage from the society. The brain drain ultimately leads to the society with recessionary situations leading to a fall in the ladder in comparison to the other progressive societies of the country.

The research ultimately contributes to the information pool of many students who may take decisions from their perceptual notions regarding the reasons behind the selection of a course by the students. The research may serve its stakeholders by answering the following basic question:

What are the factors that are considered by the students in selecting a course for Higher Education?

The answer to the above research question would not only outline the prominent factors in selecting a course but would also suggest the changes that are required to be incorporated in the prevailing conditions of the institutes falling in the rejection list of the educational institutes amongst the students to pursue their educational course. The results of the research would also probably bring clarity to the myths that may exist in the minds of the students while they choose a course. The unfolding of many blurred information about the institutes that exist in the society can assist in the actual selection of the course. The societal value of the research claims to be high as it pinches an important catalyst of Development in the society and that is it's educational environment.

Review of Literature

The roots of education can be related to the ongoing clash that existed in the history between two classes of theorists: one class which believed that education is to do something for someone else and other class who believed that it is something which people do for themselves. Educationists love to point out that their job is to draw the latent talents of the students, to push and expose them to ideas and experiences that they feel are necessary. The origin of the English word 'educate' is from the Latin word 'educere' meaning to 'draw forth'. The English word educe is to indicate the development of something latent within an individual. So it is not quite surprising to find the classes of theorists who extend the belief that education is to enhance something latent amongst the students are held superior; both notionally and conceptually. The biggest contribution in the development of the concept of education came from Plato who opined that people would be educated in such a way that the outcome would be a just society. According to him, education is the building of character as much as intelligence; both concepts are worth analyzing. So from an early times education is directed towards creating the sense of social responsibility, of harnessing individual development to the general betterment of the society. So the tussles that existed amongst the two classes of theorists regarding the role of education could be relaxed by encountering many definitions which suggest that the personal development of the people in the society would ultimately result in the development of the society In the 20th century, American thinker John Dewey also held the view that education is a part of overarching political and social projects. His ideas have influenced what has been popularly known as progressive education emphasizing the role of informal learning and personal and social development accruing from it. Dewey's philosophy addressed the question of how lives should be lived believing that education is a progressive force for it leads to the cultivation of intelligent habits. According to the Dictionary of Education (1973), education is defined as "the aggregate of all the processes by which a person develops abilities, attitudes and other forms of behavior of practical values in the society in which he or she lives." So the above explanation has also been successful in pointing out the dual role of education in developing a person at an individual level and the development of the society as a whole. The Indian rebel against the British System of education led to many revolutionists to put forward their opinion regarding

the process and outcome of education during the colonial period. According to Mahatma Gandhi, true education comes only when there is an all-round development of an individual. The development of the intellect within an individual can never be achieved if the body is diseased and unfit. According to Gandhi, the ultimate outcome of education is the building of character. Swami Vivekananda during the contemporary period of Gandhi emphasized on the ultimate objective of education. According to him, education is the manifestation of the perfections which already exist in an individual. The objective of education is the realization of the ultimate perfections in individuals. The explanation of education from the cultural front came from R.N. Tagore in emphasizing the broad outlook that education imbibes within an individual. According to him, the outcome of education is modernization of ideas where an individual respects different cultures while not losing his individual culture. So, the clash between the followers and the non-followers of the notion that education is something which a person does for himself dissolves to the fact that education may begin at an individual level but the benefits of education are not only enjoyed by the individual in the form of personal development but the benefits are also bestowed in all-rounded ways to the society.

Although the topic uses the term education interchangeably with schooling, there definitely exist differences in the philosophical roots of the two terms. Education is evidenced to be much broadly comprehended than schooling. A broad definition forwarded by where they describe education to be the development of desirable qualities in people does not describe the end of desirable qualities and what these are. Schooling on the other hand is about providing the service of education, i.e. educating people through institutionalized and universalized learning. So this can well be understood that schooling is a means of providing education to the people in the society. The schooling that a person goes through is often mechanized and formalized receipts of education. But a maturing organism learns not only in the confined walls of the schools but also from the informal belongings in the society. The quality in schools can be enhanced if the schools do not reduce process of education to a mere technical activity that is static and unaffected by

contextual and contingent circumstances. The research hypothesizes that the educational institutes recognize their responsibilities of leveling up to a point where an all round development of the students is almost a necessity and therefore adopts the philosophy of education which promotes unrestricted development of the students. The terms education in the research is operationally defined to the course that a student enrolls after the completion of his educational attempts in the 3 years Bachelor degree in College.

The decision that a student makes in choosing a course is extremely important as the future career of the student invariably is highly affected by the success in the Post Graduation courses. There have been many researches that support the premise that the choice of a course by a student is highly affected by the pressure and the imposition from the parents. A study conducted by Domino, S *et al.* (2006) [3] and again another study conducted by suggest that parents have great influence on the wards choice of course in the University Level. Another study conducted by factors such as academic reputation, costs, quality of education and the opinion of the other persons are factors of maximum significance that influence the choice of course made in enrolling to the higher course by the students. If the existing and the past researches are reviewed and explored we find commonness reflected on factors such as cost of education, Parents' influence and the quality of education provided by the University. For example, similar results were identified by a study conducted by who surveyed that cost of education, communication made by the friends and family and the value of education in the University are prominent factors of influence while the choice of course is made in the University Level. Apart from the researched factors, it can also be mentioned that the other factors of importance while choosing a course amongst the students may be the desire to obtain a degree, enhancing then chances of getting a job, the desire to have a high income in the future and the location of the University. The various literatures ultimately agree to some common criteria of choice and the following table provides an idea of the various researched factors that influence the selection of course made by the students at the higher education level:

Table 1: Important factors influencing the students' choice of a University according to the Literatures

Influencing Factors	Authors
University Reputation	Tekle, S <i>et al.</i> (2006), Kee, S.J.M (2010), Gert, B (2010)
Parents	Domino, S <i>et al.</i> (2006) [3], Yamamoto, G.T. (2006)
Scholarships	Kee, S.J.M (2010), Gert, B (2010), Olawale, M (2012)
Recommendations from friends	Tekle, S <i>et al.</i> (2006), Yosefi and Wagner (2009), Olawale, M (2012)
Campus Services	Yosefi and Wagner (2009), Olawale, M (2012)
University Location	Tekle, S <i>et al.</i> (2006), Kee, S.J.M (2010), Gert, B (2010), Moogan, Y. (2011)
Tuition Fees	Tekle, S <i>et al.</i> (2006), Yosefi and Wagner (2009), Kee, S.J.M (2010), Gert, B (2010), Olawale, M (2012)
Employment Opportunities	Kee, S.J.M (2010), Olawale, M (2012)
Study Programs	Tekle, S <i>et al.</i> (2006), Yosefi and Wagner (2009), Kee, S.J.M (2010)

Educational Environment of Silchar

Silchar is a place located in the South West of Assam and headquarters of the Cachar District. The population of the place occupies a higher position, being the second largest in terms of population in the Municipal areas. The place is blessed with the presence of the two most premier educational institute of the State; one being the Assam university and the other being the National Institute of Technology. The average literacy of the place is also something to boost of which is accounted to be 90.26%

which is much higher than the national average of 59.25%. The presence of the institutes has given edge in terms of education to the town in comparison to the other towns of the place. But the poverty and the culture of acceptance of a modest career by the students of the place due to the lack of exposure and connectivity to the other place and due to the family imposition of carrying the legacy of the family occupation act as pulling factors in dreaming a lucrative career for the students. The education culture of the place is significantly influenced by the economic and socio-cultural

environment of the place. The culture of the place is apathetic to the enrollment in unconventional courses and as a result the enrollment in the professional courses undergoes a fall. The ultimate resultant may either be underemployment or a chronic unemployment that the place had been suffering for a long time. The improvement in the connectivity due to the emergence of broad gauge rail line has increased to the expectations of the place in alleviating the economic condition. So, from the empirical evidences it can also be said for the place specifically, the mindset of the people along with the other researched factors play a significant role for a student in choosing a course.

Objectives of the study

The study obtains the direction from the past researches and the pilot observations of the researcher and the study thus construct the following objectives:

- a. To study the influence of word-of-mouth communication (may be imposition from the guardians or suggestions from friends) in the selection of course for Higher Education.
- b. To analyze the impact of employment opportunities in Silchar associated with a course in the choice of it for the Higher Education.
- c. To identify whether there is an existence of home sickness or fear psychosis associated with studying in a place outside the home town.
- d. To study the impact that positive or negative trend of the results of a course has on the selection of the course amongst the students for Higher Education.

The exclusion of some of the parameters identified in the past researches for the present study is subject to the fact that some of the factors are counted empirically irrelevant for the study. At the same time the limitation of time and cost has also imposed the shrinkage of objectives to the ones which could be achieved within the stipulated time and budget.

Scope of the Study

The study was designed in such a manner that it penetrates the attitude of the students regarding the course that they wish to pursue and those which are not considered for selection. The study is limited only to the opinion of the students and would identify the factors that influence the selection of the course amongst the students, As a result the opinion of the guardians are not collected during the course of survey rather the responses of the students are obtained regarding the extent to which their decisions are influenced by parents and their family members. The study was conducted across the town (Silchar) and the results are derived for the town. The research wishes to generalize the results but the generalizations should be judiciously made as the economic and cultural differences amongst the places can bring different responses for the same set of questions. The research although obtains the responses from different colleges, it never intends to compare the results since the objectives of the research are not supportive to the comparison of the results. Rather, the research evaluated the responses of the students collected from different colleges keeping the primary objective of unfolding the opinion of the students regarding the efficacy of the course which they select for achieving the aim in the distant future after the completion of academic endeavors.

Limitations of the Study

It is impossible for any research to be free from flaws. The research, which claims to be perfect, creates sufficient doubts in the minds of the readers regarding its authenticity. So, the researcher must frankly reveal the limitation of the research, which would reflect honesty and highly increases the value of such research. The research has some general limitations and other limitations which are specific to the research. The following points discuss some of the basic limitations which the research suffers:

- a. The research suffers from the basic limitation of time, space and the personal bias of the researcher. The study may not be considered as a theory that would hold true beyond time. With the changes in the external environment the identified factors affecting the selection of a course for Higher Education are also subject to changes. As the study was conducted in Silchar, therefore a generalization cannot be made and the results are less probable to hold true outside the town. The researcher has made sufficient attempt to avoid personal biases to creep in the research, but the extent to which such attempts are successful is something to be questioned.
- b. The research realizes that studying the population of the students in the town is tough and may not be feasible too. As a result the researcher had to resort to sampling. A sample of students was selected from the whole population of students and was studied. So the research is also subject to the limitations of sample survey and the sampling technique that is used for the collection of the sample. At the same time although the researcher has tried to create a friendly and congenial environment for the students to respond, still there may be the presence of response bias.

Research Methodology

Research type: The objectives and the research problem at hand suggest that the research would be of descriptive type. It would be descriptive in the sense that it seeks to describe the factors that the sampling units considered for the selection of a course.

Sampling Frame or Population: The study is limited to the Silchar and it only considers the factors affecting the choice of the students regarding the course that he selects.

Sampling units: A snowball selection of sample is made from the population A total of 30 respondents were studied.

Sources of Data: The data collected for analysis are in the form of responses by the students to the questions asked in the interview with the help of a structured schedule. As such the data are primary in nature and the study does not use any secondary data for analysis. This would suggest that the study highly depends on the quantitative approach and the ability of the researcher to codify the responses of the customers for facilitating further statistical analysis.

Tools for data collection: preparing a structured schedule based on the objectives of the study collects the responses. The schedule, which was prepared by the researcher, followed a sequence. The sequence followed in preparing the schedule facilitates the understanding of the respondents and they find it convenient in responding to the questions.

At the same time the sequence followed in preparing the schedule ensures achievement of the objectives of the research in a structured manner.

Methods of Data Collection: Once the schedule was prepared the researcher personally visited the units selected in the sample and organized a structured interview. With the help of such interview responses were collected corresponding to each questions included in the schedule. The respondents were free to respond to each question without any interference of the researcher. An attempt was also made to create a friendly environment of discussion and assisting the respondents in case of any need for clarification regarding the questions.

Techniques used for analysis: The data, which were collected, are analysed in either the graphical forms where there were diagrams such as pie diagrams and bar diagrams used to represent the data. At the same time when there were questions used to analyse the in-depth attitude of the respondents and there were questions asked in Likert scales a weighted arithmetic mean technique was used to get a better understanding of the responses. Such techniques used by the researcher help in understanding the data in the best way as possible.

Analysis of Data

Factors	Responses
Family Members influence	27 respondents said YES & 3 with NO
Friends influence	9 respondents said YES & 21 said NO
Suggestions of friends	4 disagree, 20 neutral and 6 agree
Employment opportunities	28 respondents said YES & 2 with NO
Non availability of proper institute of their choice in the town	23 respondents said YES & 7 said NO
Quality of educational institution matters a lot	20 respondents said YES & 10 said NO
Past results matters	18 respondents said Very high, 8 respondents high & 4 said moderate

Findings

The study had been a revelation to many facts which validate the factors that may be considered by the students in the process a choosing a course for higher education. The results can also suggest ways for the educational institutes of the town to improve. The derivations from the study can be highlighted in the following points:

Findings pertaining to the Objective No (A) of the study

The discovery of the fact that parents and the family members have a great influence on the choice of higher education of the students from the past literatures instigated the investigation of the presence of parent's influence on the choice of the course for the study under consideration. It was revealed that with the changes in time and the exposures of the students in present times with the outer world have compelled the relaxation of the imposition from the guardian's side on the choice of a course. The parents limit their wish to see their children pursuing a course only to a suggestive level. As it has been observed from the study that the suggestions parents offer suggestion to their children but do not impose the choice of a course. Rather, the friends and the senior circle play a prominent role in suggesting the efficacy of a course and the children get more influenced by them rather than parents, At the same time, there is a greater awareness amongst the parents regarding the fact that imposition of a course to a student against his interest can be detrimental to achieving good results. Therefore, enforcement of a wish of the parents to see their children pursue a course is hardly seen to exist in modern times.

Findings pertaining to the Objective Number (b) of the study

The potential of modern courses to generate employment has stepped up in multiplying ways in the recent times. At the same time, the selection of a course by a student has also undergone paradigm shift in the sense that students evaluate courses based on the employment opportunities associated with it. The fact is evident from the responses derived in the research as it was seen that the choices of most of the

students regarding the higher courses is made depending on the career that accrues from the course. Therefore, an evaluation of the local job market may render a student not to choose a course if he does not find an accompanying future in the place of his study also opined by the students that the unemployment situation prevailing in Silchar forces the student to undergo a course outside the place where there is a greater chances of the course to yield a job for the student of the course.

Findings pertaining to the Third Objective NUMBER (c) of the study

The shift in the paradigm of the choice of a course made by the students could well be understood by the fact that students in recent times are ready to sacrifice the comfort of staying at home and studying at a different place which ensures a good quality of the course. When the students were asked regarding whether they would leave the place of their study to pursue a course, most of the students were of the view that the selection of a course would depend on the potential of the course to give a bright future and the comfort of the home place could be sacrificed depending on it. They did not deny the fact that staying at the home during the period of study is peaceful and could assist in better focus on the studies, but the reason of choosing a course depending on the potential to generate employment overpowers the reason for choosing a course just to stay at home and get the support of the family members.

Findings pertaining to the Objective (d) of the study

The study also intended to find out whether the past results of a particular course has a bearing on the selection and the rejection of the course. There has been a mixed response to the fact and there were two classes of students who were found to exist. The one group of student opined that the choice of a course is based on interest and the past results of the course are irrelevant for the selection of the course. On the other hand there was other group of student who viewed that the past result of the course to be indicative of the quality of the course. But there cannot be a denial to the fact a long-run poor result of the course can ultimately hamper

the reputation of the course and there would also be decrease in the enrollment of the students to the course.

Conclusion

The study bears a significant value to many stakeholders including the educational institutes and the students of the place. It has helped in outlining the factors that are considered by the students to be of importance in choosing a course. On the hind side, the other value is the consequential changes that the educational institutes of the place have to incorporate to maintain the reputation of the institutes intact. The results are analyzed to offer the following suggestions to the educational institutes:

- There should be alienation created between the educational institutes and the companies which can offer job to the students. This will lead to the increase in campus placements. The increase in the campus placement is an imperative issue that needs to be addressed by the Professional courses.
- The educational institute should make sure that the results do not degrade over a period. The degradation of the result can adversely affect the choice of the course which can ultimately decrease the enrollment of the students to the course.
- There should be introduction to many skill and employment generating courses in the educational institutes. The courses such as tourism management in management department of Assam University is an example of courses which can offer distinct specialization to the student and is perceived to be of high value for the students of the place in the distant future.

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