

THE EXCLUDED VARIABLE IN QUALITY LEARNING-GENERATIONAL STATUS: A CASE STUDY OF FIRST GENERATION LEARNERS ENROLLED IN RURAL SCHOOLS, BANKURA

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ABSTRACT

The 8th AISSE (All India Survey on Secondary Education) survey has revealed that the number of recognized secondary schools in India are 1,17,25. Among them 70.33% are in rural areas and 29.67% are in urban areas. The enrolment percentages in rural and urban areas are 71.48 and 28.52 respectively. This study finds out that a huge number of first generation learners have enrolled in the secondary schools especially the rural schools and they come from all types of socio-economic statuses. The present study also finds that there is statistically significant difference between the learning outcomes of the Non –first generation learners and first generation learners after ten years of schooling. Group A (Non FGLs, Mean=315.73, SD=87) Group B (FGLs, Mean=107.07, SD=91.19). $t(98)=14.5762$, $p .05$, CI.95 -180.39 to -239.6. This study explores the in-school challenges faced by the rural first generation learners which excludes the FGLs' and impedes their access to 'meaningful learning experiences' at schools.

KEYWORDS: First Generation Learners, Learning Outcomes, Exclusion, Learning Experiences.

Introduction

The development of India's education since post- independence era has received much attention and it presents one striking feature: quantitative growth. But the over emphasis on the quantitative growth has missed the quality aspect of education in the whole of India and education has yet not provided opportunities to all to reach their potential. Moreover, the policies, legislations and schemes targeted at improving 'access' and 'retention' has brought a huge number of first generation learners in the realm of secondary education in rural schools.

This situation warrants the need to discover ways of imparting meaningful learning experiences' to all learners in schools and include all the disadvantaged learners to ensure effective participation in the process of development. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the schools to customize its role and provide a protective, moral and therapeutic environment to its students "so that recognized and measurable outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills." (The Dakar Framework for Action, 2000).

There has been a consequent number of researches about the first generation learners in higher education but a very limited number of research on the first generation learners in secondary education. A developing country like India cannot afford to overlook the presence of first generation learners in the realm of secondary education, particularly in rural areas when the 8th AISSE (All India Survey on Secondary Education) has revealed that 85% of the identified secondary and higher secondary schools are located in the rural areas. There is scarcity of research on the first generation learners whose struggles continue even within the realm of education(Deb, 2015) owing to their generational status.

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Therefore, this paper attempts to assess the in-school challenges that the first generation learners enrolled in rural schools face and how the 'shock of initial exposure'(Richardson and Skinner, 1992) to formal education excludes them from achieving 'meaningful learning experiences' at secondary rural schools.

Theoretical Framework

The social capital theory and some of the elements of the Input-environment-outcome model of Astin (1970) serve as the theoretical framework of this study. Outcomes are influenced by the social capital. The academic success of the learners varies with the variation in parental education and expectation, perception about the institutional norms and the institutional climate. The learners belonging to the first generation have lower social capital than that of the non-first generation learners(Pascarella,2004; Jenkins, Belanger, Connally, Boas,&Duro'n,2013) and also the institutional culture prevailing in the educational arena is more challenging to the first generation learners. Astin's model of college effect (1970) has two important aspects: engagement of the learners and the integration of the learners with the college environment which in turn leads to inclusion. According to Checkering (1974) learning is the holistic integration of active academic and social engagement. Research has proven that academic and social engagement combined directly or indirectly with integration affect learning and intellectual development directly or indirectly (Pike,1999,2000;Pike & Killian,2001;Pike, Kuh & Gonyea,2003).

Rationale of the Proposed Study

Secondary education promotes social mobility and success because learners mostly formalize their educational plans between 8th grade and 10th grade (Choy, 2000). The benefits of education for national development, individual prosperity, health and social stability are well known but for these benefits to accrue, children in school need to be learning.'(Towards Universal Learning; A Global Framework for Measuring Learning; July, 2013). Among the different types of schools available in India the rural first generation learner's only choice of school is the Government-aided regional medium schools. Since independence, the educational policies and schemes have been polished, sharpened and incentivized by the Government of India to meet the challenges of secondary education. It has resulted in the increased enrolment in the realm of secondary education in rural areas which is evident from the Concise report of the 8th All India Education Survey (AISES).The eighth survey has identified that in 2009, the recognized secondary schools are 1,17,257 in the country. Out of which 70.33% are in rural area and 29.67% are in urban area.

All the policies and schemes, with their best of intentions have not made its necessary impact and succeeded in erasing disparities from the realm of education. The secondary classrooms in rural areas now have learners with two distinct statuses -the first generation and the non-first generation. This study examines the in-school challenges faced by the first generation learners enrolled in rural schools and ensure for them:

- Engagement in 'meaningful learning experiences'
- Deeper understanding of the experiences of the first generation learners who are attending the arena of formal learning for the first time.
- Implementation of appropriate instructional strategies and developing need based curriculum.

Objectives

- To identify the in-school challenges that hinder the first generation learners' access to 'meaningful learning experiences' in rural schools.
- To ensure that the in-school stakeholders of education are responsive to the inclusion of the FGLs in school

Literature Review

The review of literature will include the following:

- Quality education of rural learners in India
- Generational status of learners
- Inclusive education policies and programmes in India

Quality Education of Rural Learners in India

The focus on quantitative expansion since post-independence era has drawn the attention of experts, researchers and policy makers. Qualitatively, secondary education has suffered from the lack of a clear definition of objectives and scope. Treated either as a mere continuation of primary education or only a preparation for higher education it cannot at present be regarded as a definite stage making the end of formal education of a specified standard.Planned to cater only for those who have an intellectual bent of mind even its emphasis on intellect is one sided: it tends to test memory at the cost of reasoning and judgment..... is modeled primarily to serve the needs of urban life. (Dr. Humayun Kabir, 1955) In the present context of globalization and internationalization when India is striving for the Education For All (EFA)goals, secondary education has become very important and the purpose of secondary education and its social, political, cultural and training role has undergone a sea-change in the contemporary advanced technological society. It has become imperative for secondary education to provide each and every learner 'meaningful learning experiences' to ensure that each individual acquires a repertoire of life skills and becomes an integral part of national development.

According to the World Bank Report 2015, the rural population in India is 67.25%.For India to succeed , it is imperative that the educational policies should be aligned with the needs of the rural learners who are enrolled in the 70.33% recognised schools situated in the rural areas of the country. Therefore, the 'straight –jacketed' educational policies with urban inclination need to be remodelled for the benefits of the rural learners.

Generational Status of Learners

The definition of First generation learners in the literatures available gives us many definitions. According to researchers' first-generation students mostly belong to a back ground with racial and ethnic minority backgrounds (Bui, 2002; Pike and Kuh,2005).Jamshidi (2013) asserts that identifying learners on the basis of generational status delineates their level of motivation, self-efficacy, formation of their language learning beliefs and their acculturation. For the purpose of our study we shall consider those learners as first generation learners for whom neither parents have enrolled in the secondary education or have passed the Class X board examinations and therefore are not aware of the in-school processes.

There is scarcity of research on the first generation learners enrolled at the elementary stage and secondary stage of education; both at international and national level. This is perhaps owing to the fact that a lot of research has been conducted separately on the educational achievement of the Scheduled castes, the Scheduled tribes and the minority community learners. Policies and schemes have been made for the inclusion of those "disadvantageous groups" into the realm of secondary education. But the neglect of the generational status of learners has denied access to 'meaningful learning experiences' for both the socially disadvantaged groups and the socially privileged groups in rural areas. The increase in enrolment at the secondary level and higher secondary level (8th AISES provisional data) is clearly visible, especially in rural areas. With the surge in enrolment in rural schools (8th AISES, 2009) there are first generation learners from all social groups. Entering the school means for them that they are entering into an alien physical and social environment which they, their family and their peers have never experienced (Shovan, 2014).

There is an abundance of research related to the first generation learners in higher education at the International level. In higher education first generation learners are those whose parents have never enrolled for the post-secondary education (U.S.DepartmentofEducation,1997).Parental education is directly related to the child's achievement. Research has shown that first generation learners generally belong to the low income group, have poor pre-college preparation, less or no knowledge about higher education and have significant difference in non-cognitive variables(Deb,2015).

Research findings have also shown that the non-first generation college students are more well –adjusted in regards to social and academic adjustment in colleges (Mehta,,2011) and are more prepared for the college(Bui,2002;Mehta,2011) than the first generation learners. The problems faced by the first generation learners in schools regarding social and academic adjustment in no different than that of the first generation learners in colleges. The present study is based on the review of the literature regarding the first generation college goers and aims at filling the gap regarding first generation learners in secondary schools.

Inclusive Education Policies, Programmes and Legislations in India

With the global commitment' to Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education For All (EFA) the government policies and schemes shifted towards the issues of equity and inclusion along with quality. 'Government has an important role to play in improving equity of secondary education. The bulk of the growth in secondary education over the last ten years has been financed by households for private schooling, such that the typical secondary school student is male, urban and middle class. Whether because of poverty, credit constraints, lack of information about perceived benefits of schooling, cultural norms or other factors, access to secondary education by girls and by children from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, rural and poor households is significantly lower than state and national averages. Indicators of internal efficiency and quality of learning among these groups are also well below average. Targeted, supply- and demand side programs for these groups are called for...' (*Secondary education in India: Universalizing Opportunity*, Human Development Unit, South Asia Region, 2009). The Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education drafted by UNESCO (2009) has iterated the need of improving educational and social frameworks to cope with the new demands in education structures and governance. The reciprocal link between inclusion and quality has drawn the attention of EFA movement. The Policies of Inclusion in India targets only the children with disabilities- both physical and mental. The rural learners and the First generation learners are left outside the purview of the policies of inclusion though they too are the 'disadvantaged groups'. The present research aims to find out the in-school challenges faced by the first generation learners and addresses the following questions.

RQ1) Are the in-school stakeholders of education responsive to the needs of the FGLs'?

RQ2) Is there a significant difference in the academic achievement at school between the FGLs' and non-FGLs'?

Methodology

• **Participants**

The research participants were first generation learners and non-first generation learners. The criteria for being chosen as a participant in the study were:

- Studying in the secondary section of the school (including the higher secondary section)
- Enrolled in the same rural institution
- Between 14 and 19 years of age.

• **Instruments**

Demographic questionnaire and a questionnaire

The demographic questionnaire was designed to obtain the relevant data about the Participants

- Age
- Gender
- Caste
- Parental education level
- Number of siblings enrolled in a school
- Annual household income

The methodology is precisely a mixed methodology to understand from the first generation learners' perspective the in-school challenges that impede their access to 'meaningful learning experiences' and their inclusion in the secondary level of education. Qualitative methods used are classroom observations and FGDs. Quantitative instruments used are the questionnaire and the t-test to analyse the summative evaluation results. Based on the:

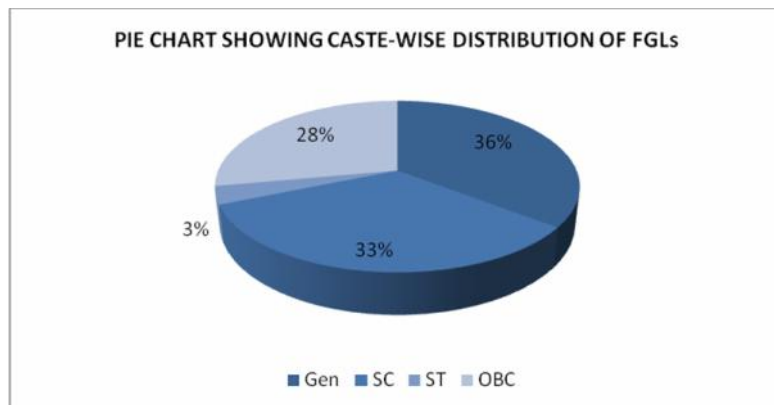
Non- Participant Observation

• **Classroom Observation:** The teachers' activities were observed in the duration of the forty five and the forty minutes class. The teacher activities consisted of 'lecturing and explaining verbally', 'replying questions and providing clarification', 'asking questions and providing feedback', 'demonstration and use of TLM', 'interacting with the students', 'paying individualized attention to backward children and maintaining discipline' (VijayKumar, Venkatesan, Kannappan & Sekhar, 2009) and the transition time of the teachers. Student activities column had the following criteria-Active, passive, mechanical, distracted, engaged in off task activities. A total of 200 observations were done. Three classroom observations were conducted daily for a period of six months.

Data Analysis and Results

Analysis of demographic data shows that among the 850 students studying in the secondary section (it includes XI-XII) 70% are first generation learners. First generation learners belong to all categories of caste-the general caste, the scheduled caste, the other backward classes and the scheduled tribe.(Fig:1)

Figure 1



Source : Single institution survey by researcher(Banerjee, J. ,2017)

The research questions in this study deals with the in- school challenges faced by the First generation learners enrolled in rural schools.

RQ1) Are the in-school stakeholders of education responsive to the inclusion of the FGLs in school?

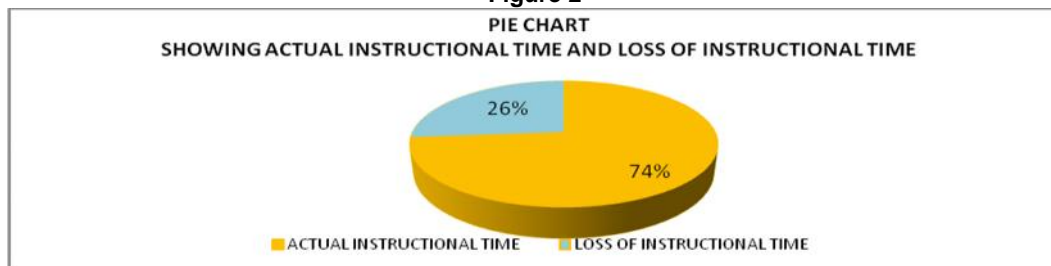
In education, the term **stakeholder** typically refers to anyone who is invested in the welfare and success of a school and its students, including administrators, teachers, staff members, students, parents, families, community members, local business leaders, and elected officials such as school board members, city councillors, and state representatives. (<http://edglossary.org/hidden-curriculum>)

The stake holders of education in school are the teachers, the Headmaster and the non-teaching staff of the school. In order to find out how responsive the in-school stakeholders classroom observations were made which were later collated with the responses from the questionnaire provided to all the learners. One of the factors influencing the learning of the learners is the teachers and they are an integral part of the classroom activities. The classroom activities are essential in reinforcing a child's validation as a learner. It is created by the classroom experiences. The classroom experiences are the academic factors that are responsible for the inclusion of the learners in the learning process. The participation in co-curricular activities that are non-academic factors is also vital for the 'successful school performance' which is an essential component of quality education. Therefore, this research question was analyzed using classroom observation.

Teachers' Activities

The teachers mostly followed the traditional method of 'chalk and talk'. 45% of the teachers sat on the chairs and read out from the books and explained only when interrupted by the learners. Only 10% of the teachers use ICT to explain a lesson. Individual attention to the backward learners was not provided in the class. 10% teachers spent out of class time to help the learners lagging behind in the classroom. The analysis of the teacher related activities also showed that the transition time from one class to another is 10 minutes on an average. If a school loses $7 \times 10 = 70$ minutes of intended instructional time regularly then it amounts to a yearly loss of $236 \text{ days} \times 70 \text{ minutes} = 16520 \text{ minutes} (275 \text{ hours})$ of intended instructional time yearly. According to the Annual Academic Calendar 2016 for all recognized secondary schools in West Bengal, the total teaching-learning hours for secondary schools amount to 1045 hours. The estimated loss of teaching-learning hours due to teacher transition from one class to another amount to 275 hours which is 26% of the intended teaching-learning hours (Banerjee, 2017)

Figure 2

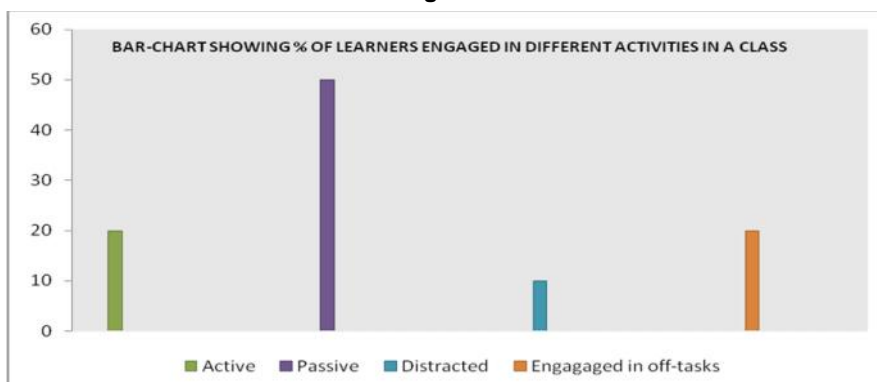


Source: Single institution survey by researcher

Students’ Activities

Another important factor affecting the learning of the students in the classroom is the engagement of the learners in the learning related activities. The academic engaged time is often measured by the learners’ use of time and the appropriateness of the curriculum as well as it serves as a means to measure effective instruction (Johns,Beverly,Crowley,Paula,Guetzloe,Eleanor;2008). The learners sitting on the first two benches (both boys and girls) that constitute the 20% of the students in the class are actively engaged in learning. The remaining learners are either engaged in talking among themselves in a low voice, or scribbling on the chits and circulating them among themselves. Even when the teacher corrected the homework or the test papers, the learners sitting on the last or the penultimate benches showed reluctance in submitting their copies or test papers. The learners’ activities can be categorized into-active, passive, distracted, engaged in off task activities.(Figure: 2)

Figure 3



Source: Single institution survey by researcher

The classroom observation was collated with the data obtained through the questionnaires given to 850 learners of the secondary section including both non-first generation learners and first generation learners. According to the attendance registers the learners attending school for 100 days is 35%. Surprisingly, the 22.5% learners attending schools for 100days are the first generation learners. The reason for higher attendance rate among the first generation learners is owing to their greater dependence on the school and the teachers at the school as they do not get parental support at home. The reason of absence varied from house hold chores to private tuitions. One of the main reasons of early departure from school among 90% learners is their schedule of private tuitions. 100% of the learners take private tuitions for all subjects. 5% of the non-first generation learners seek help from teachers at school if they do not understand what is being taught at school. Only 10% of the non- first generation learners complete their class works and get their notebooks corrected by the teachers at school whereas 90% of the learners mentioned that their private tutors regularly checked their notebooks at private tuitions. 90% non-first generation learners communicate with the teachers or non- teaching staff more often whereas only 10% of non- first generation learners communicate with the teachers and other non-teaching staff only when they have to. Two FGDs were conducted-one among the First generation learners and one among the teachers. The summary of the FGDs bring forth the following:

The First generation learners enrolled in rural schools do feel a sense of alienation with the curriculum at the school. They feel that they are not at par with the non-first generation learners in regards to the 'cognitive skills' and 'learning strategies'. Surprisingly, the first generation learners are more active in their co-curricular engagements at school. The status of first generation learners creates in them a sense of inferiority because the non-first generation learners of the class are prompt and articulate; therefore, they get more attention from the teachers. The first generation learners cannot comprehend the process of evaluation. They do not understand the necessity of submitting the projects and are not confident if they can secure 'C' grade in at least one subject among seven subjects.

The teachers mentioned about the large classes creating difficulty in providing special attention to first generation learners. The lack of motivation among the learners, the Continuous and comprehensive Evaluation, and the doing away with the pass-fail have contributed to the degradation in the 'quality learning' among learners in general which has affected the first generation learners more as they perceive learning in terms of pass or fail only.

RQ2) Is there a significant difference in the academic achievement at school between the FGLs' and non-FGLs'?

The t-test was done to find out if there was any statistically significant difference in the means of aggregate of scores of the two groups of learners with different generational statuses.

H₀: There is no difference in the means of aggregate of scores between the non-FGLs and the FGLs.

H_a: There is difference in the means of aggregate of scores between the non-FGLs and the FGLs.

The t-test was done to find out if there was any statistically significant difference in the means of aggregate of scores of the two groups of learners with different generational status.

Using the Graph pad software the t-test was done. The result shows that: The two –tailed P value is less than 0.0001. By conventional criteria this difference is considered to be extremely statistically significant.

Therefore, among the Xth grade non-First generation learners and first generation learners taking the pre board test (N=176) there is statistically significant difference between the aggregate of scores of the two groups. Group A (Non FGLs, Mean=315.73,SD=87) and Group B (FGLs, Mean=107.07,SD=91.19).t (98)=14.5762, p .05,CI.95 -180.39 to-239.6.

Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference in the aggregate of scores between the Non- FGLs and the FGLs.

Table 1: Comparison of Xth grade aggregate of scores by generational status (Based on non-standardized test)

Generational Status	N	Mean	SD	t	df	P	95%CI
Non- FGL	62	315.73	87.00				
FGL	107	107.07	91.19				
Total	169	208.65		14.5762	167	.0001	-180.39 to236.91

There is a huge gap in the aggregate of scores between the Non-first generation learners and first generation learners after ten years of formal schooling. The 107 learners who could not even score 30% in aggregate are falling far from the target of 'Mastery learning' spelled out by the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE).

Discussions

There has been marked improvement in awareness among the parents regarding their wards' transition from the elementary to secondary grade. But the first generation learners do not have the necessary support and encouragement from their families and other stake holders of formal education. Choy, (2000) has explicitly mentioned that the education plans of the high school students are formalized in the secondary stage. The high dropout rate of the first generation learners testifies that the arena of formal education has failed to equip the first generation learners with the necessary academic skills.

The major dimension of 'meaningful learning experience' is the **classroom experience**. The classroom experiences of the first generation learners (as per observation) are not satisfactory. The teachers, the content, the pedagogical practices and the classroom climate play a vital role in creating an

alienating effect on the learners. The accountability of teachers is yet another significant issue. The loss of teaching –learning time due to teacher transition surely gives less time to the teachers to pay attention to the first generation learners particularly. The components of formal education – the teachers, the curriculum, the learners and the institution itself do not accommodate learners with first generation status by creating circumstances for access to 'meaningful learning experiences, Therefore, the first generation learners enrolled in rural schools are' excluded from the educational arena silently'(Shovan,2015)

Conclusion

Spectacular increase in access to educational opportunities in India for the children from age six to fourteen has been ensured by "Education for All" and "Right to Education". It seems that secondary education is within the reach of everyone. But a glaring disparity still prevails regarding access to quality education, particularly for the first generation learners enrolled in rural schools. There is an urgent need to define learners on the basis of their generational status so that information can be gathered about their manners of motivation, their self-efficacy, the formation of language learning beliefs and their acculturation. (Jamshidi,2013) and proper help can be offered to improve their school engagement and achieve 'meaningful learning experiences' so that they can cope with the inflexible syllabus, examination oriented learning and adapt culturally to academic life so that ultimately they have increased ability to integrate themselves (Machon,Diaz,Muldoon,Cullen,2012) with the arena of formal learning. In light of this study the following recommendations are made:

Recommendations

The following major recommendations arise out of this study:

- The curriculum of the schools needs to be aligned according to the needs of the learners.
- The curriculum which has an alienating effect on the first generation learners has to become more responsive in order to facilitate those learners who have entered the arena of education as 'doubly disadvantaged' group, one owing to their rural background and another owing to their generational status in schools. The curriculum should utilise the local knowledge base and the cultural knowledge as a foundation for the rest of the curriculum.
- The in- school climate should be more inclusive for the first generation learners.
- This is an important step towards mainstreaming of the learners from first generation who are hitherto unfamiliar with the system of formal education. The climate of an institution has a negative impact on the in-school experiences. The perception of the first generation learners their learning environment is less favorable which has a consequential influence on their sense of satisfaction and belonging to an institution. (Pike & Kuh, 2005,Soria& Steblton, 2012)
- The teachers should be sensitized about the inclusion of the learners with different generational status. The teachers play an important role in creating a sense of belongingness among the learners who are in a disadvantageous position because the sense of belongingness has a reciprocal impact on the 'academic engagement' of the learners (Soria and Stebleton, 2012).
- The SEMIS (Secondary Education Management Information System) can easily identify the generational status of the learners in secondary education if the schools incorporate in their admission form the column in which the school has to mention the level of parental education. A national level database should be maintained regarding the number of first generation learners in each state.

Limitations of the Study

- This study encompasses the first generation school learners enrolled in the government managed rural schools but there are many private schools too and the challenges faced by the learners owing to their generational status has not been reviewed so far.
- This is a single institution study. Multi institutional study is required to find out if there is in-groups variation according to the rural or urban location of the schools.
- This study does not include any of the differently-abled children who are first generation learners.

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