

A comparative study on enrolment of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe learners in bachelor of social work programme of IGNOU in Assam before and after implementation of IGNOU fee exemption scheme under SCSP/TSP Grant

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Abstract

Education is a very important determinant of overall development of a community or a society. It is the responsibility of a state in democratic country like India to provide equal opportunity of qualitative educational development to all sections of the society. Distance education is mainly focused on democratization of higher education by providing a platform to disadvantaged section of people due to some unavoidable circumstances. It facilitated them; get the hands on training through distance mode without hampering the daily social responsibilities and activities of learners. IGNOU BSW programme is one of the important professional based programme for learners dealing with professional training/degree in Social Work. India's Northeast region is popularly celebrated for its cultural diversity with sizable number of Schedule Tribe (ST) community as inhabitant of this region. Social Work Education in the Northeast region of India began only in the year 1992. The present study is carried out on 620 learners of BSW programme enrolled at IGNOU RC, Guwahati in last ten years from 2010 to 2019 with an intention to assess the impact of IGNOU fee exemption scheme in admission of Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) learners in undergraduate programmes. This will enable us to know and assess the participation/ involvement of SC/ST learners in free admission scheme of IGNOU under SCSP/TSP Grant in Assam by examining their percent shares in annual admission. Apart from that we have also examined the overall general trends of admission on the basis of Area (Urban, Rural & Tribal), Gender, the age profile, and marital status of learners enrolled in this programme. This study is undertaken to determine and access the fulfilment of University's motto "reaching the unreached" in weaker section and scheduled communities of our society.

Keywords: Education; ODL; Free admission; IGNOU; SC/ST; BSW; Category; Women; Age profile; Assam

1. Introduction

India has a rich glorious heritage, but a sizeable part of Indian population is yet to get benefits out of it. According to Government of India Act, 1935, in section 309, some of the undefined depressed castes were listed in a scheduled in order to ensure certain concession and privilege to them because of this disadvantaged position in the social hierarchy is known as scheduled caste[1]. There are still tribal communities which are primitive and live in secluded areas [2]. The tribes in India usually reside in hill areas, forests, near the seas, and in islands. Their life style is quite different from non-tribal's [3]. The term 'scheduled tribes' first appeared in the Constitution of India, to confer certain constitutional privileges and protection to a group of people who are considered disadvantaged and backward. In the Constitution of India, Article 366 (25) defines Scheduled Tribes as "such tribes or tribal communities or part of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to the scheduled Tribes (STs) for the purposes of this Constitution". Though our national leaders and constitutional makers are committed to uplift the tribal people, a desired level of development has not been achieved yet [4].

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Education has always been looked upon as means of emancipation [5]. Education is very important determinant of overall development of a community or a society. It is also very important option for upgrading socio-economic and cultural development and status of marginalized groups such as SC and ST communities. The Dhebar Commission of 1960 identified certain specified reasons for the educational backwardness of tribals. It also touched other problems like poor economic condition and subsistence economy. In such a situation, children are seen as economic assets to supplement the family income by working with the parents and with others [6]. There is a close relationship between education, occupational achievement and income. Individual with low level of education have lower income than those with higher level of education [7].

It is a well-known fact that poverty acts an impediment for the poor to manage their day-to-day needs. They cannot afford to make good investment in educating their children, and this leads to an unproductive class of youth. Basic education can play a crucial role in bringing back the unproductive class of the society into the main stream of development. Open and distance learning (ODL) systems offer a viable and economical solution to impart basic education to the poor [8].

Open and distance learning is one of the best alternatives to satisfy the growing demand of education, especially higher education of a variety of learners [9]. ODL attempts to provide prospective for those marginalised persons and sections to join to the mainstream of society [10]. ODL also provides more access to higher education to learners with its flexible approach, wider choice of courses, qualitative instructional approach and cost effectiveness [11]. As noted by Saldanha [12], professional social workers in training offer a significant ray of hope in the face of darkness and they are the important agency contributing to major social transformation.

India's Northeast region with sizable number of ST community is popularly celebrated for its cultural diversity and also well known for numerous of problem ranging from conflict, governance issue to insurgencies. Social Work Education was neither recognised as profession nor a professional practice like other professional course by the people in this region. Social Work Education in this region was introduced by Assam University followed by Mizoram University till late 90s and early 2000 [13]. This profession especially in the context on Northeast region is still in its cradle stage.

The present study is carried out for BSW programme enrolled at Regional centre, Guwahati as case study with an intention to understand the admission trend for learners from 2010-2019. IGNOU Fee re-imbursement scheme for SC/ST learners was started in the year 2015 for under-graduate programmes including certificate and diploma courses. And from 2017 onward, scheme was converted as fee exemption scheme with no fee have to be paid at the time of admission by SC/ST learners under undergraduate courses. This study was done to determine and access the fulfilment of University's motto "reaching the Unreached" in weaker section and scheduled communities of our society and uphold to constitutional rights of equality, equal access and opportunity to all its citizens.

Objectives

The present study is carried out with an intention to understand the admission trends of the students enrolled in Bachelor of Social work programme at IGNOU Regional centre, Guwahati in last 10 years. The prime objectives of the study are:

- To examine whether the free admission scheme for SC/ST undergraduate learners of IGNOU under SCSP/TSP Grant have impact on enrollment in BSW programme by examining the category wise and Area wise enrolment trend in last 10 years.
- And also to study general trend in admission by studying the Gender wise, the age profile of learners and Marital status enrolled in BSW programme.

2. Methodology

The present study is based on admission data of BSW programme available at Regional Centre, Guwahati. A descriptive study is used in this research covering the time period from 2010 to 2019. In this study, it is used to determine and assess admission trends based on their Category, Area wise distribution, Gender, Age profile. No sampling technique is used as all data analysed. The total sample size is 620 BSW students enrolled in IGNOU Regional centre, Guwahati. All data was obtained from Data repository of Regional centre. The age brackets of the students are divided into two categories (≤ 25 , and > 25 years) of age. Areas where students belong to are divided into three broad regions viz 1. Urban, 2. Rural and 3. Tribal areas.

The data mining and data analysis was done by using PHP, HTML and MYSQL-query based database platform.

3. Results

The analysis of admission data shows the following major findings:

Admission trends showed that a total of 620 learners enrolled in BSW programme in last 10 years with highest number of enrolment were recorded in 2018. No. of enrolment was increase from 2009 to 2015 but sudden jump in enrolment is recorded from 2016 to 2018.

3.1. Category wise status of Student admitted in BSW programme

Table 1 Number of BSW Students (Category wise)

Year	General	% share	SC	% share	ST	% share	OBC (Creamy)	% share	OBC (NC)	% share
2010	26	53	5	10	11	22	6	12	1	2
2011	21	51	2	5	9	22	9	22	0	00
2012	15	39	2	5	7	18	6	16	8	21
2013	25	68	1	3	5	14	5	14	1	3
2014	21	47	2	4	5	11	15	33	2	4
2015	11	31	2	6	9	26	9	26	4	12
2016	16	19	8	10	49	59	7	8	3	4
2017	31	47	4	6	20	30	7	11	4	6
2018	33	23	5	4	100	70	3	2	1	1
2019	29	35	7	8	39	46	4	5	5	6

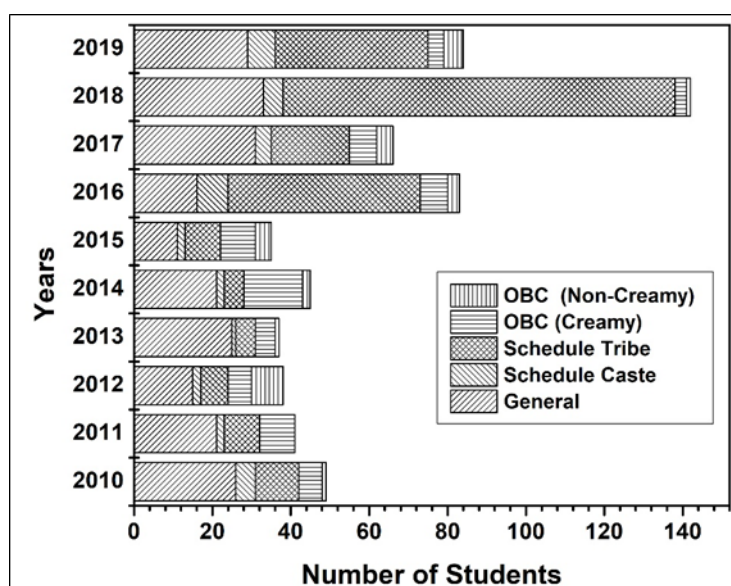


Figure 1 Category wise number of students admitted in BSW programme

The category wise distribution of learners showed that highest share of enrolment was recorded for General category from 2010 to 2014 with highest share 68% in the year 2013. Enrolment trends for Schedule Caste and OBC (creamy and non-Creamy) were low to very low in each year of study. There is no significant change in enrolment of SC category learners even though the free admission scheme is applicable for them also. Interestingly, Schedule Tribe (ST)

enrolment increases from 11% in 2014 to 70% in 2018. The sudden jump in enrolment of ST learners was recorded in the years when IGNOU free admission scheme started viz. year 2016 to 2019 (Table 1, Fig 1)

3.2. Area wise distribution of learners enrolled in BSW programme

There are significant changes in area wise distribution of learners after implementation IGNOU fee exemption scheme in admission of SC/ST learners under SCSP/TSP Grant with learners belong to urban areas dominated the enrolment from 2010 to 2015 and sudden decrease in the year 2017-19. Learners belong to rural areas were ranges from 20% to 39%. But learner belongs to Tribal belt were 2% to 11% till 2015 and recorded sudden increase to 34 -62% from 2016-2019.

Table 2 Number of BSW Students (Area wise)

Year	Urban	% share	Rural	% share	Tribal	% share
2010	31	63	14	26	4	8
2011	23	56	14	34	4	10
2012	19	50	14	37	5	13
2013	23	62	13	35	1	3
2014	30	67	14	31	1	2
2015	21	60	10	29	4	11
2016	21	25	19	23	43	52
2017	12	18	13	20	41	62
2018	38	27	56	39	48	34
2019	30	36	25	30	29	35

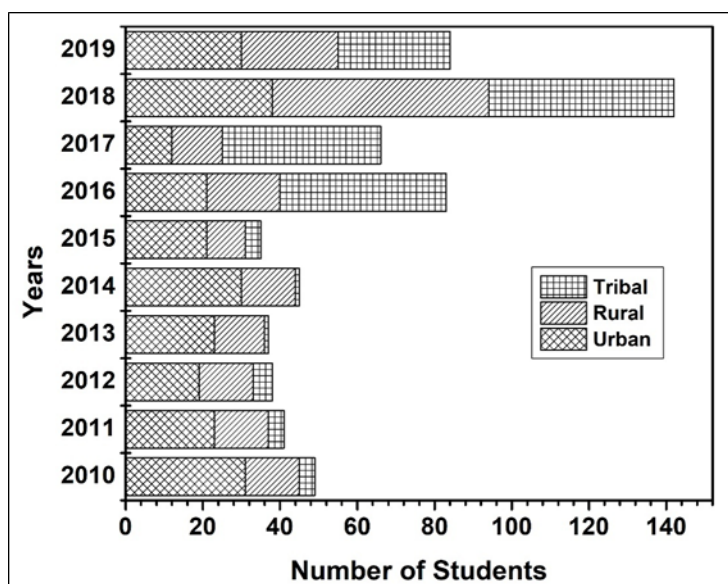


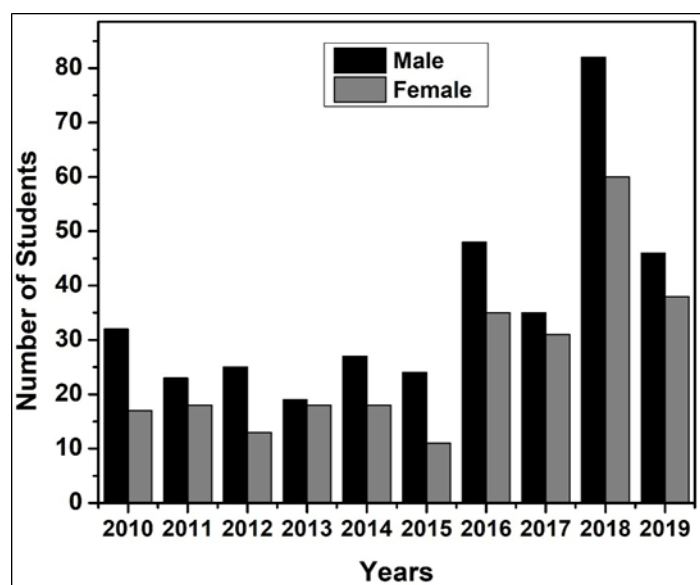
Figure 2 Area wise number of students admitted in BSW programme

3.3. Gender wise learners enrollment in BSW programme

This finding showed that gender wise enrollment with females represent good no's with 31-49% were enrolled in all years. Except 2010, 2012 & 2015 percent share of Female admission was significant with difference of 1-10% less from male learners with very thin margin was recorded in the year 2013(1% less) and 2017 (3% less) as compare with male learners enrolled in BSW programme.

Table 3 Number of BSW Students (Gender wise)

Year	Male	% share	Female	% share
2010	32	65	17	35
2011	23	56	18	44
2012	25	66	13	34
2013	19	51	18	49
2014	27	60	18	40
2015	24	69	11	31
2016	48	58	35	42
2017	35	53	31	47
2018	82	58	60	42
2019	46	55	38	45

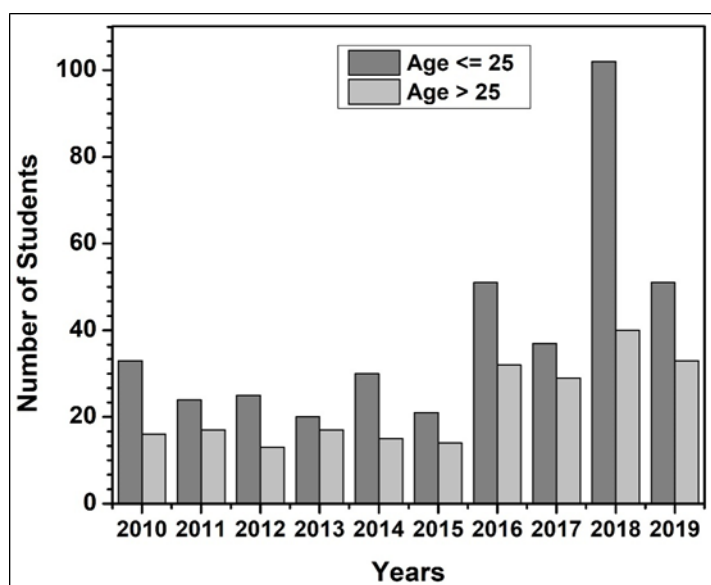
**Figure 3** Gender wise number of students admitted in BSW programme

3.4. Age distribution of learners enrolled in BSW programme

The present study categorised age profile of learners into two categories viz., age brackets, Age $\leq$ 25 and Age $>$ 25 in enrolment. This study revealed that maximum learners enrolled 54%-72% under Age $\leq$ 25 in this programme with highest enrolment were recorded in the year 2018. The learner under age bracket of Age $>$ 25 showed 28-46 % range with highest enrolment was recorded in the year 2013.

Table 4 Number of BSW Students (Age wise)

Year	Age <= 25	% share	Age > 25	% share
2010	33	67	16	33
2011	24	59	17	41
2012	25	66	13	34
2013	20	54	17	46
2014	30	67	15	33
2015	21	60	14	40
2016	51	61	32	39
2017	37	56	29	44
2018	102	72	40	28
2019	51	61	33	39

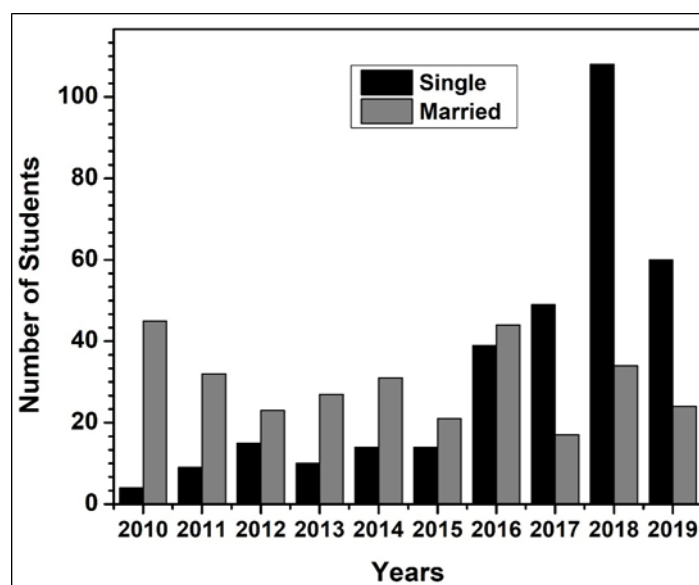
**Figure 4** Age group of students admitted in BSW programme

3.5. Marital status of learners enrolled in BSW programme

Very interesting result is recorded in marital status of learners enrolled for Bachelor in social work programme with highest percent share of married learners recorded in the year 2010(92%) and continuously dominated till 2016 with the range of 53%-92%. But suddenly reduced to the range of 24-29% from the year 2017-2019. Single learners dominated the enrolment 2017-2019 with percent share of 71-74%

Table 5 Number of BSW Students (Marital status wise)

Year	Single	% share	Married	% share
2010	4	8	45	92
2011	9	22	32	78
2012	15	39	23	61
2013	10	27	27	73
2014	14	31	31	69
2015	14	40	21	60
2016	39	47	44	53
2017	49	74	17	26
2018	108	76	34	24
2019	60	71	24	29

**Figure 5** Marital status wise number of students admitted in BSW programme

4. Discussion

The present study revealed that there is significant increase in enrolment of Scheduled Tribe learners as well as participation of students belong to tribal areas after implementation of IGNOU free admission drive. This finding is in agreement with Hasnain, 2004 observation that Poor economic condition and subsistence economy is one of the important deterrent factors in Educational development of Schedule Tribe learners. But there is no significant change in enrolment of SC category learners even after launching free admission, of which SC is one of the categories applicable for availing the facility.

There is no significant difference in gender wise enrolment of learners as female enrolment in BSW programme is nearly half in all with percent share of 40-49% range except in 2010, 2012 & 2015 where nearly about one-third as compare with male counterparts in enrolment. This result showed significant role of female learners in social work study in distance mode in the state of Assam which is in agreement with Pradeep Kour [14] observation that in post-independence period, women of North East India enjoying greater freedom with respect to their mobility compared with their counterparts with mainland India. But this finding contradicts earlier findings of Sangita Kalita [15] and Baniyamuddin et.al. [16] regarding women education in Higher education. Though IGNOU students are very

heterogeneous with different age groups, the maximum number of learners enrolled in BSW programme is age group below 25years. This showed that there is some correlation with either, their economic status that make them to opted the distance learning mode for "learning while earning principle" or lack of /less number of Institutions in the area as these age groups are generally preferred regular mode of learning. Very interesting result is recoded in marital status of learners enrolled for Bachelor in social work programme with highest percent share of married learners dominated with the range of 53%-92%. . But suddenly reverse trend was recorded with Single (unmarried) learners dominated the enrolment with percent share of 71-74% from 2017 to 2019.

5. Conclusion

This study has concluded that IGNOU free admission scheme under SCSP/TSP Grant have significant impact on enrolment of ST learners as well as successful in reaching the tribal areas, but no remarkable change are recorded in enrollment of SC category learners. The ODL system provided many flexible approaches in learning, the participation/enrollment of female learners in BSW programmes are very encouraging with more participatory role of females in Social structure of North east India especially in Assam. We also require arranging awareness programmes in SC dominated areas so that the maximum number of learner avail the facility in future.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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