

Awareness of Assam Agricultural University students regarding different Scholarship Schemes

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ABSTRACT

Various academic scholarship schemes are introduced in India with the aim of inspiring students for better academic performance. However, for availing such scholarships it depends largely on the level of awareness among the students about the scholarship schemes. Though a considerable number of scholarship schemes are available in India, level of awareness regarding scholarship among students is not known. The present study was conducted to assess the awareness of Agricultural University students on different Scholarship Schemes. Two hundred forty undergraduate students from Assam Agricultural University were included as respondents by using stratified random sample method for the study. One questionnaire was prepared on "Google Form" for online data collection. Frequency, percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation and chi square test were used for analysing the data statistically. The findings reveal that majority of the students of Assam Agricultural University had awareness on Ishan Uday Scholarship and State Merit Scholarship for Assam, while slightly more than 50.00 per cent respondents were aware about National Talent Scholarship. Only a negligible percentage of respondents were aware about other types of scholarship schemes.

KEYWORDS: *Level of Awareness, Agricultural University Student, Scholarship Scheme*

INTRODUCTION

The rising cost of higher education in India, both in the private as well as the government institutes, is a major cause of worry for Indian parents. Most middle-class families somehow manage to put their children through a decent education by sometimes spending more than half of their pay on their child's education. The students who come from low-socio economic families suffer the most in college attainment because of high fee or cost of higher education. These students look for financial assistance to pursue the higher education. Scholarship is a grant or financial aid that can be applied to educational costs, such as tuition, books, fees, etc. It is a financial award given to a student on the basis of academic achievement and other criteria. Scholarships are directed towards acknowledging exceptional students for their achievements in the fields of academics and educational competency. Unlike educational loans the scholarship doesn't have to be repaid. They act as positive reinforcements for the students which can prove to be a huge boost for the students. Students become free from financial stress if they get such scholarships and have more time to study for securing better grades. While some scholarships are for instilling academic competency, others may include need-based scholarships, which are directed towards fulfilling some particular social, psychological, physiological or even economic shortcomings. Scholarships contribute in the student success by providing financial flexibility for education and thereby making education easier and attainable. Further, getting scholarship for education can increase maximum chance to reduce the dropout rate.

Different types of scholarship schemes are available in India instituted either by government or other institutes for helping the students. Though a considerable number of scholarships are available, accessibility of such scholarship schemes to the students largely depends on the level of awareness among the students regarding such scholarship schemes. It is not known how far the scholarships are being availed by the students and how much they are aware about the scholarship schemes for which they are eligible. Review of literature reflects that unawareness regarding educational schemes is one of the factors leading to deprivation of study in spite of having many different scholarship schemes. According to report of Ministry of minority affairs (2013) more than 80.00 per cent rural students both beneficiary and non-beneficiaries, felt that there was lack of awareness about the Pre-matric scholarship schemes. Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Higher Education, Government of India (2018) reported that total 82000 number of scholarships per year are awarded in India for students of higher education in colleges and universities and also for professional courses. Awareness of the students regarding such scholarship schemes expands the opportunity for availing such scholarships. Studies on awareness of students and parents regarding different scholarship schemes were mostly found for school level and pre metric level, not many studies have been found on awareness regarding scholarships among higher education students. Moreover several studies from India and abroad reported that students face different problems in obtaining scholarships. This may be attributed by the low level of awareness regarding the existing scholarship schemes. Since Agricultural Universities accommodate sizable number of students, studying the level of awareness among the students regarding scholarship schemes will provide input for formulating strategies to make the students aware about such schemes. The strategies for awareness generation will in turn help the students in availing scholarship and will increase competitiveness among the students for higher education. Keeping all these points in mind, the present study has been designed on the topic 'Awareness of Assam Agricultural University students regarding different Scholarship Schemes'. There are several scholarships for which students of agricultural universities are eligible including *Ishan Uday Scholarship* which is a special scheme for educational development of the North East India, launched by Government of India. Similarly, *State Merit Scholarship (Assam)*, *State Merit Scholarship (Other than Assam)*, *National Talent Scholarship*, *Defense Scholarship* are some of the scholarships for which students of Assam Agricultural university(AAU) are eligible.

The objectives of *Ishan Uday Scholarship*, which is a Special Scholarship Scheme for North Eastern Region are provide equal opportunities for higher studies in NE Region, to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in NE Region, to focus more on professional education in NE Region and optimum utilization of NER Budgetary Allocation. It is envisaged to provide ten thousand (10,000) fresh scholarships every year beginning from the academic year 2014-15 for general degree courses, technical and professional courses, including medical and para-medical courses. The State Merit Scholarship is provided to the students belonging to the state of Assam shall only be entitled for the scholarship. The no. of scholarship is restricted to 20% of total no. of students belonging to Assam on roll. Amount for under graduate courses is Rs 1000.00 per month.

National Talent Scholarship is offered by (NTS) Indian Council of Agricultural Research ICAR on the bases of All India Entrance Exam conducted by ICAR, Delhi. The candidates admitted through the entrance to undergraduate programmes ((B.Sc./B.Tech./B.F.Sc. etc.) in the subjects of Agriculture, Horticulture, Agricultural Engineering, Dairy Technology, Forestry, Food Science, Fishery Sciences, Home Sciences, Sericulture and Agri Marketing Banking & Co-operation) in any Institution not falling in his/ her own home state are eligible for scholarship. Moreover AAU has provision for *Financial Support to the Economically Backward Students*. Under this there is provision of support in the form of monthly mess dues for the economically backward students admitted in AAU.

The present study explores the level of awareness among the Under Graduate students of Assam Agricultural University regarding different types of scholarship schemes for which they are eligible.

Review of Literature

Krishnan (1999) conducted a research on awareness and utilization of educational development schemes by tribes folk of Wayanad, Kerala and found that only 16.00 per cent of the respondents had high level of awareness, 70.00 per cent is moderately aware and 15.00 per cent had low awareness about the tribal educational schemes. Fund and Interactive (2003) reported that many parents had limited knowledge about financial aid. Sixty two per cent parents and children who were planning to attend college did not know the name of grants as a source of financial support whereas 58.00 per cent did not know the name of scholarships. Rosa (2006) reported that friends and class fallow were the common source of awareness on financial aid for 11th graders and 12th graders. It was reported that 62.00 per cent of respondent hear about financial aid from friends or classmates.

According to Long (2010) reported that low level of awareness and misinformation about financial aid has serious side-effect for students success. Fahimuddin (2012) conducted a research on access and impact of government scholarship scheme for India Muslim students and reported that more than 80.00 per cent rural students both - beneficiary and non-beneficiaries had lack of knowledge or information on the Pre-matric scholarship. Ministry of minority affairs (2013) in India reported that the awareness about the eligibility criteria was very low among the Buddhist students and 49.00 per cent students did not have knowledge about application procedure and required supporting documents and 48.00 per cent students were not aware of the minimum eligibility criteria for the Pre-Matric Scholarship. Mae *et al.* (2016) conducted a research at University of the East Caloocan Campus on impact of scholarship program among the grade 11 students of University and found that 18.00 per cent students were not aware about the scholarship. Radhakrishnan *et al.* (2018) in conducted a study on awareness and effectiveness of educational scheme for scheduled caste and scheduled tribes in Coimbatore district and found that parents do not have a perfect awareness about the educational scheme so they could not help their children in exploring about the scholarship.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Sampling procedure and population

The study was conducted among the undergraduate students of Assam Agricultural University, Jorhat, Assam. Two colleges i.e. College of Agriculture, Jorhat and College of community Science, Jorhat were selected purposively. Thirty students from each class of B.Sc. degree programme were selected using stratified random sample method. One hundred twenty of respondents were selected from each college and thus the total number of respondents was 240.

Research instruments

A questionnaire was prepared comprising different statements regarding awareness on scholarships and circulated among panel of experts. Suggestions from experts were incorporated in the questionnaire. The prepared questionnaire was pre-tested with forty non sample respondents for determining simplicity in understanding the content and clarity of language. After pretesting necessary modifications were incorporated and the questionnaire was finalized for data collection. The questionnaire had been converted to Google Form for collection of the data online.

Measurement of variable

Awareness

The dictionary meaning of awareness is the state or condition of being aware; having knowledge and consciousness. In the present study it is operationally defined as consciousness of undergraduate students about the selected scholarships. In the present study respondents were asked whether they were aware about scholarship schemes and responses were recorded as “Yes” and “No” with code 1 and 0 respectively. Further level of awareness was asked in three point scale i.e. “fully aware”, “partially aware” and “not aware” with assigned score 2, 1 and 0. The total score of individual respondent was calculated. Based on mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation (SD) of the obtained scores, the respondents were categorized into three categories as below:

Category	Score range
Low	$< \bar{x} - SD$
Medium	$\bar{x} - SD - \bar{x} + SD$
High	$> \bar{x} + SD$

Statistical analysis

To interpret the data effectively the following statistical techniques and test were used for analysing the data.

- a) Frequency
- b) Percentage
- c) Mean
- d) Standard deviation
- e) Chi-Square test

Statistical formulae

Formula used for calculating mean

$$\text{Mean } (\bar{x}) = \frac{\sum fx}{N}$$

Where, $\sum fx$ = Total scores

N = Total number of respondents

Standard deviation was calculated by the formula

$$SD = \sqrt{\frac{\sum (Xi - \bar{X})^2}{N}}$$

Where,

X_i = Raw score

\bar{X} = Mean

N = Total respondents

Chi- Square test

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$$

Where, O_i = Observed frequency

E_i = Expected frequency

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Background information of the respondents

Data presented in Table 1. indicate that highest percentage (59.20%) respondents were in the age group of above 20 years and majority (70.40 %) were female. It is observed that 42.50 per cent respondents belonged to general caste while 40.50 per cent belonged to OBC and 10.40 per cent respondents were from schedule tribe. Regarding religion, a large majority of the respondents (90.00%) were Hindu, 6.20 per cent were Muslim, 2.10 per cent of them were Christian and remaining were Buddhist and Sikh. Slightly more than 50.00 per cent respondents were from rural area and majority (75.80%) had their mother tongue Assamese. Data (Table 1) reflects that majority of the respondents (79.60%) belonged to nuclear family and most of the respondents (69.16 %) had family size up to 4. Around 57.00 per cent respondent had government service while 17.50 per cent had business and 10.50 per cent had farming as the primary occupation of their family. Less than one third (28.40 per cent) respondent had annual income above Rupees five lakhs (\square 5,00,000) followed by 27.00 per cent between Rupees one lakh to three lakhs(\square 1,00,000- \square 3,00,000). Regarding medium of education, the data reveals (Table 1) that large percentage (73.90%) respondents had English as their medium of instruction in schooling; while 22.00 per cent respondents had Assamese

followed by 4.10 per cent from Hindi medium. Regarding the academic performance of the respondents, it was found that 47.50 per cent respondents scored marks between 80-90 per cent whereas, 29.60 per cent scored above 90.00 per cent in class X final examination. Similarly 47.40 per cent respondents obtained marks between 80-90 per cent followed by 38.80 per cent between 70-80 per cent in class XII final examination. In Assam Agricultural University 45.00 per cent respondents scored CGPA above 8.0 which was followed by 41.10 per cent between 7.0- 8.0 CGPA. In the University, more than 50.00 per cent respondents got admission in 1st counselling, followed by 30.80 per cent in 2nd counselling and rest 16.30 per cent in 3rd counselling for their degree programme.

Table 1. Background profile of the respondents

N= 240

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	Below 18 years	4	1.60
	18-20 years	94	39.20
	Above 20 years	142	59.20
Gender	Male	71	29.60
	Female	169	70.40
Caste	General	102	42.50
	OBC	97	40.50
	ST	25	10.40
	SC	14	5.80
	MOBC	2	0.80
Religion	Hindu	216	90.00
	Muslim	15	6.20
	Christian	5	2.10
	Buddhism	3	1.20
	Sikh	1	0.50
Permanent residence	Urban	119	49.60
	Rural	121	50.40
Mother tongue	Assamese	182	75.80
	Hindi	35	14.60
	Bengali	10	4.20
	Others- Manipuri, Naga, Karbi and Tiwa	13	5.40
Type of family	Nuclear	191	79.60
	Joint	46	19.20
	Extended	3	1.20
Size of family	Up to 4	166	69.16
	5-7	44	18.34
	8 and above	30	12.50
Primary occupation of the family	Government job	131	54.60
	Private job	22	9.20
	Business	42	17.50
	Farmer	25	10.50
	Self-employed	13	5.40
	Others	7	2.90
Annual income of family	<1 lakh	51	21.20
	1-3lakh	65	27.00
	3-5lakh	56	23.40
	>5lakh	68	28.40

Percentage in Class 10th examination	60-70	14	5.80
	70-80	41	17.10
	80-90	114	47.50
	>90	71	29.60
Percentage in Class 12th examination	60-70	12	5.00
	70-80	93	38.80
	80-90	109	47.40
	>90	26	10.80
Present Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA)	<6.0	2	1.10
	6.0-7.0	23	12.80
	7.0-8.0	74	41.10
	>8.0	81	45.00
Status of admission (In which counselling student got admitted)	1 st counselling	127	52.90
	2 nd counselling	74	30.80
	3 rd counselling	39	16.30
exposure to orientation after admission	Yes	181	75.40
	No	59	24.60
Information on scholarship in orientation	Yes	133	55.40
	No	107	44.60

Awareness of students on scholarship

The study reveals that majority of the respondents (88.75 %) were aware about *State Merit Scholarship (Assam)* while 83.75 per cent respondents had awareness about *Ishan Udyia Scholarship* and 53.00 per cent respondents were aware about *National Talent Scholarship*. Only 2.91 per cent respondents were aware about the provision for *Financial Support to the Economically Backward Students of AAU (Figure 1)*. The data reflects that there is variation in awareness about different types of scholarship schemes. Similar studies were conducted by Rosa (2006), and found that majority i.e. 62.00 per cent respondents were aware about financial aid whereas Fahimuddin (2012) found that 80.00 per cent students had lack of knowledge or information on the Pre-matric scholarship.

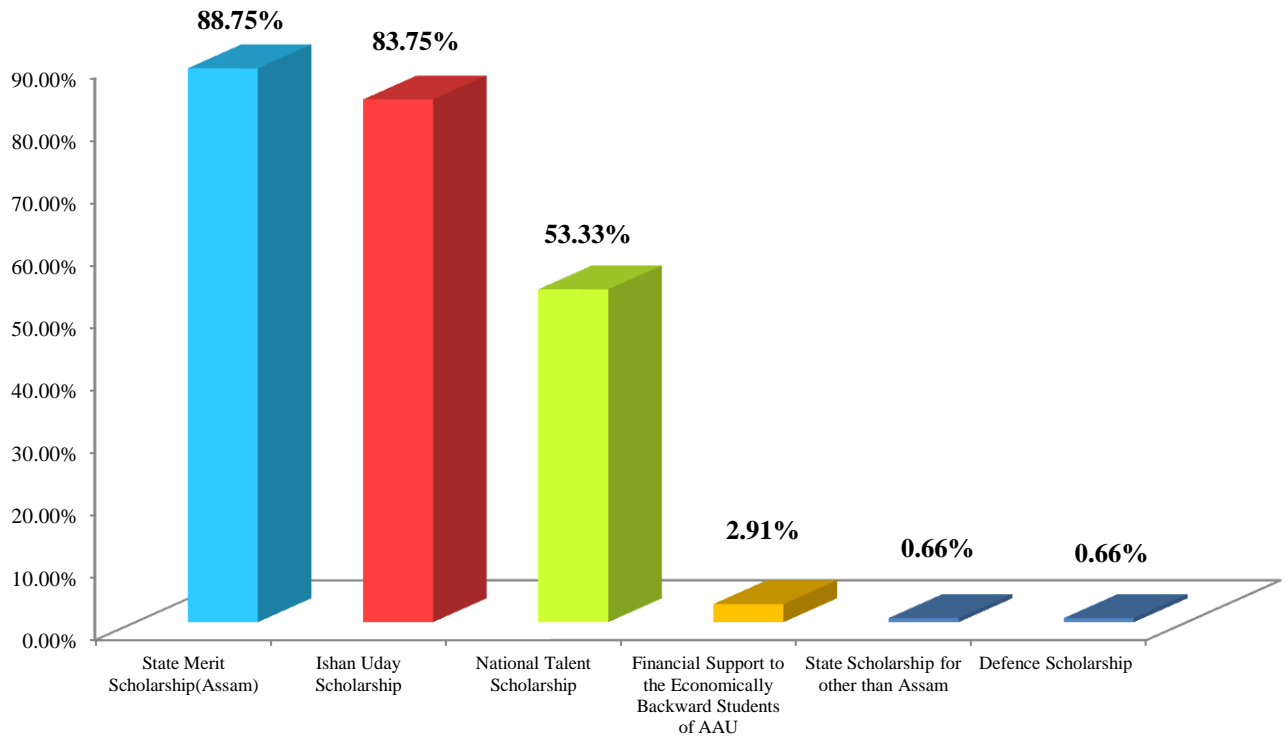


Fig. 1. Distribution of respondents according to awareness about selected scholarship

Level of awareness of students on selected scholarships

Results in Table 2 revealed that highest 67.08 per cent respondents had medium level of awareness regarding *State Merit Scholarship* followed by 45.83 per cent respondents with medium level of awareness regarding *Ishan Uday Scholarship*. Around 47.00 per cent of respondents had low level of awareness regarding *National Talent Scholarship*. Almost all the of the respondents (99.16 per cent) had medium level of awareness on Financial Support to the Economically Backward Students of AAU with a very less mean and standard deviation 0.18 and 2.00 respectively reflecting very poor awareness about the financial aid among the students. The findings are in line with Long (2010) where it was found that low level of awareness among the students and misinformation about financial aid.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to level of awareness regarding different Scholarship (N= 240)

Scholarship schemes	Category	Score range	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean	Standard deviation

State Merit Scholarship	Low	<4.14	39	16.25	7.99	3.86
	Medium	4.14 to 11.85	161	67.08		
	High	>11.85	40	16.67		
Ishan Uday Scholarship	Low	< 6.08	57	23.75	17.72	11.64
	Medium	6.08 to 29.36	110	45.83		
	High	> 29.36	73	30.42		
National Talent Scholarship	Low	<0.28	112	46.67	7.48	7.2
	Medium	0.28 to 14.68	55	22.91		
	High	>14.68	73	30.42		
Financial Support to the Economically Backward Students of AAU	Low	< - 0.82	0	0	0.18	2.004
	Medium	-0.82 to 2.19	238	99.16		
	High	>2.19	2	0.84		

Association of awareness with selected background characteristics of the respondents

Result of the chi square test indicated the association between awareness of respondents regarding *Ishan Uday Scholarship* with class of respondents was highly significant ($p < 0.01$). Hence it may be interpreted that there is association between level of awareness of students regarding *Ishan Uday Scholarship* and the class they were studying. On the other hand no association was found between the independent variables with *State Merit Scholarship* and *National Talent Scholarship*. (Table 3)

Table 3. Association between selected independent variables with awareness regarding scholarship of the respondents

Sl. No.	Independent variable	Degree of freedom	State Merit Scholarship		IshanUday Scholarship		National Talent Scholarship	
			Chi square value	p-value	Chi square value	p-value	Chi square value	p-value
1.	Gender	1	0.912	0.339	0.391	0.531	0.009	0.924
2.	Class	3	3.798	0.284	16.502**	0.000	0.268	0.965

3.	Status of admission	2	1.795	0.407	1.741	0.418	0.408	0.815
4.	Exposure to orientation after admission	1	0.091	0.762	0.426	0.518	0.026	0.872

*Significant at 0.05

**Significant at 0.01

CONCLUSION

The results indicate that students had medium level of awareness on different scholarship schemes. Majority of the respondents were aware about *Ishan Uday Scholarship* and *State Merit Scholarship* however only half of the respondents were aware about *National Talent Scholarship* and only a very small percentage respondents were aware about other scholarship schemes for which they are eligible. A very few respondents were aware about the Financial Support to the Economically Backward Students of AAU. It can be concluded that awareness among the students regarding different scholarship varies considerably and there is need for increasing awareness on scholarship schemes among the students, especially, about *National Talent Scholarship* and *Financial support to economically backward students of AAU*. Formulating strategies for providing necessary information regarding scholarship at right time is recommended by the study. Similar study across different educational institutes including colleges and universities is recommended for encouraging higher education among students.

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