



UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSITION FROM HIGHER SECONDARY TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA: ASPIRATIONS, CONSTRAINTS, AND STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT:

The transition from higher secondary education to higher education constitutes a critical phase in students' educational trajectories in contemporary India. Despite significant expansion of higher education opportunities, a substantial proportion of higher secondary pass-out students are unable to translate their educational aspirations into actual college enrolment due to multiple structural and social constraints (Agarwal, 2019; Tilak, 2015). The present study aims to examine students' educational aspirations, identify the socio-economic and institutional barriers influencing college entry, and analyze the role of key stakeholders—teachers, parents, and community—in shaping post-higher secondary educational decisions.

Adopting a quantitative, descriptive research design, the study was conducted in PurbaMedinipur district of West Bengal, covering four administrative subdivisions—Tamluk, Haldia, Egra, and Contai. A sample of 300 higher secondary pass-out students was selected using stratified random sampling. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including ANOVA, correlation, and t-tests.

The findings reveal significant variation in educational aspirations across subdivisions and a strong negative relationship between socio-economic constraints and transition to higher education. Teacher and parental influences emerged as critical determinants of students' college-going decisions, particularly for first-generation learners (Nambissan&Rao, 2013; Batra, 2016). The study underscores the need for targeted policy interventions, strengthened guidance mechanisms, and context-specific educational planning to ensure equitable access to higher education in alignment with national policy priorities (Government of India, 2020).

KEYWORDS:

HIGHER SECONDARY EDUCATION; TRANSITION TO HIGHER EDUCATION; EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS; SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS; STAKEHOLDER INFLUENCE; PURBAMEDINIPUR DISTRICT.

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INTRODUCTION

The transition from higher secondary education to higher education represents a critical juncture in students' educational trajectories, particularly in developing countries such as India. While the expansion of higher education institutions and enrolment has been significant in recent decades, access to and participation in higher education remain uneven across regions and social groups (Agarwal, 2019; Altbach et al., 2017). Students' decisions to pursue higher education are shaped not only by academic performance but also by a complex interplay of aspirations, socio-economic realities, institutional structures, and stakeholder influences.

In the Indian context, disparities related to income, location, gender, and social background continue to

influence educational opportunities beyond the higher secondary level (Desai &Kulkarni, 2018; Tilak, 2015). Teachers, parents, and community members play an important mediating role in guiding students' post-school choices, especially for first-generation learners and students from rural or semi-urban areas (Nambissan&Rao, 2013). Understanding these dynamics is essential for addressing the persistent gap between higher secondary completion and entry into higher education.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

India has made notable progress in expanding access to schooling at the secondary and higher secondary levels; however, the transition to higher education remains a major challenge for a substantial proportion of students

(Government of India, 2020). Despite policy initiatives aimed at improving equity and inclusion, socio-economic constraints such as household income, cost of education, and employment pressures continue to limit students' participation in higher education (Choudhary & Gupta, 2020).

Research suggests that educational aspirations are socially constructed and deeply embedded within family and community contexts (Jeffrey et al., 2008). In many cases, students' ambitions to pursue higher education are moderated by parental expectations, availability of institutional support, and perceived returns on educational investment (Mukherjee & Das, 2019). Teachers often serve as key sources of information and motivation, particularly in environments where families have limited exposure to higher education pathways (Batra, 2016).

Regional variations within states further complicate the transition process. Rural and semi-urban districts frequently experience constraints related to accessibility of colleges, quality of guidance services, and awareness of higher education opportunities (Tilak, 2015). These contextual differences underline the importance of district-level studies that capture local realities while contributing to broader national discussions on educational transition and equity.

RATIONALE AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Although a growing body of literature has examined access to higher education in India, limited empirical attention has been given to the **transition phase between higher secondary education and higher education**, particularly from a stakeholder-based perspective (Nambissan & Rao, 2013; Mukherjee & Das, 2019). Existing studies often focus on enrolment patterns or dropout rates, without adequately exploring how students' aspirations interact with constraints and social influences during this critical decision-making period.

Socio-economic disadvantages, institutional barriers, and lack of effective guidance mechanisms continue to prevent many higher secondary pass-out students from entering higher education, even when they possess the desire and academic capability to do so (Choudhary & Gupta, 2020). Furthermore, the role of teachers, parents, and community environments in shaping students' post-school decisions remains underexplored at the micro-regional level.

In districts such as PurbaMedinipur in West Bengal, where socio-economic diversity and regional disparities coexist, understanding the factors influencing students' transition to higher education becomes particularly important. There is a clear need for systematic, quantitative research that examines **educational aspirations, perceived constraints, and stakeholder perspectives simultaneously** to generate evidence-based insights. Addressing this gap can inform educational planning, strengthen transition support mechanisms, and contribute to more equitable access to higher education in line with national policy priorities (Government of India, 2020).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the educational aspirations of higher secondary pass-out students across the four subdivisions of PurbaMedinipur district.
2. To identify the major socio-economic, institutional, and personal constraints influencing students' transition from higher secondary to higher education.
3. To analyze the role of stakeholders—particularly teachers, parents, and community influences—in shaping students' decisions regarding entry into higher education.

NULL HYPOTHESES

1. **H₀₁**: There is no significant difference in the educational aspirations of higher secondary pass-out students across the four subdivisions of PurbaMedinipur district.
2. **H₀₂**: Socio-economic and institutional constraints do not have a significant influence on students' transition from higher secondary to higher education.
3. **H₀₃**: Stakeholder perspectives (teachers, parents, and community) have no significant impact on students' decisions to pursue higher education after completing higher secondary schooling.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND TRANSITION TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Educational aspirations play a decisive role in shaping students' post-secondary educational trajectories. Agarwal (2019) emphasizes that aspirations are influenced not only by individual motivation but also by social capital, access to information, and institutional exposure. Studies indicate that students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds often aspire to higher education but face difficulties in translating aspirations into actual enrolment (Desai & Kulkarni, 2018).

Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery (2008) highlight that aspirations among higher secondary students are socially negotiated within family and community contexts. Their study demonstrates that even when students express strong interest in higher education, uncertainty regarding employment outcomes and financial feasibility may lead to withdrawal from college plans. This suggests that aspirations alone are insufficient to ensure transition unless supported by enabling conditions.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS

Socio-economic barriers such as family income, cost of higher education, and opportunity costs significantly influence students' access to college education in India (Choudhary & Gupta, 2020). Tilak (2015) argues that the rapid privatization of higher education has widened inequality by making college education less affordable for

students from lower-income households.

Mukherjee and Das (2019) observe that institutional factors—including availability of nearby colleges, quality of infrastructure, and admission procedures—act as strong determinants of post-secondary participation, particularly in rural regions. These findings reinforce the argument that structural constraints continue to shape educational outcomes despite policy efforts aimed at inclusion.

ROLE OF TEACHERS, PARENTS, AND COMMUNITY

Stakeholders such as teachers and parents significantly influence students’ educational decision-making. Nambissan and Rao (2013) note that teachers often serve as critical mediators by providing guidance, encouragement, and information regarding higher education pathways, especially for first-generation learners.

Batra (2016) stresses that teachers’ expectations and mentoring practices can either reinforce or limit students’ aspirations. Parental influence, on the other hand, is closely linked to educational background and economic security, which shape attitudes toward continued education (Desai & Kulkarni, 2018). Community norms and peer expectations further affect students’ choices by defining what is considered attainable or desirable.

POLICY CONTEXT AND EDUCATIONAL TRANSITION

The National Education Policy 2020 underscores the importance of improving access, equity, and quality in higher education, particularly for students from disadvantaged regions (Government of India, 2020). However, Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley (2017) caution that policy expansion must be accompanied by ground-level implementation strategies to address transition gaps effectively.

UNESCO (2017) and the World Bank (2021) emphasize that strengthening accountability, guidance systems, and institutional support mechanisms is essential for facilitating smooth educational transitions. Without targeted interventions, regional and socio-economic disparities in higher education access are likely to persist.

SUMMARY OF REVIEWED STUDIES AND KEY FINDINGS

REVIEW OF SELECTED STUDIES RELATED TO TRANSITION TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Author(s) & Year	Focus Area	Key Findings
Choudhary & Gupta (2020)	Socio-economic barriers	Income and cost significantly affect college entry
Government of India (2020)	Policy framework	Emphasis on equity and transition support

Agarwal (2019)	Higher education access	Aspirations influenced by socio-economic and institutional factors
Mukherjee & Das (2019)	Rural transition	Institutional access affects higher education participation
Desai & Kulkarni (2018)	Aspirations & inequality	Caste, class, and gender shape post-secondary aspirations
Altbach et al. (2017)	Global trends	Expansion without support deepens inequality
Batra (2016)	Teacher influence	Teacher mentoring shapes educational decisions
Tilak (2015)	Privatization	Rising costs widen access gaps
Nambissan & Rao (2013)	Stakeholder role	Teachers critical for first-generation learners
Jeffrey et al. (2008)	Youth & education	Aspirations often constrained by employment uncertainty

RESEARCH GAP

The review of literature reveals that while substantial research exists on **access to higher education, socio-economic inequality, and educational aspirations**, several gaps remain evident. First, most studies address enrolment patterns or policy frameworks at national or state levels, with **limited focus on the transition phase between higher secondary education and higher education** as a distinct analytical category. Second, existing research often examines aspirations or constraints in isolation, rather than exploring their **combined influence along with stakeholder perspectives**.

Moreover, there is a lack of **district-level, quantitative studies** that capture intra-regional variations within a single district. The role of teachers, parents, and community influences in shaping students’ decisions remains underexplored, particularly in semi-urban and rural contexts. Therefore, the present study seeks to bridge these gaps by systematically examining **aspirations, constraints, and stakeholder influences together** in the context of PurbaMedinipur district, thereby contributing context-specific and policy-relevant insights into the higher secondary-to-higher education divide.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study adopts a **quantitative research approach** with a **descriptive and analytical research**

design. This design is considered appropriate as it enables the systematic measurement and analysis of students' aspirations, constraints, and stakeholder influences during the transition from higher secondary to higher education. The quantitative framework allows for objective assessment, comparison across subdivisions, and statistical testing of hypotheses.

NATURE OF THE STUDY

The study is **cross-sectional** in nature, as data are collected from the selected respondents at a single point in time. It seeks to capture existing conditions related to educational decision-making after higher secondary education rather than tracking changes over an extended period.

VARIABLES OF THE STUDY

- **DEPENDENT VARIABLE:**
 - ❖ Transition to Higher Education (college entry decision)
- **INDEPENDENT VARIABLES:**
 - ❖ Educational aspirations
 - ❖ Socio-economic constraints
 - ❖ Institutional and infrastructural factors
 - ❖ Stakeholder influence (teachers, parents, community)
- **CONTROL VARIABLE:**
 - ❖ Administrative subdivision (Tamluk, Haldia, Egra, Contai)

STUDY AREA

The study is conducted in **PurbaMedinipur district of West Bengal**, which comprises **25 Community Development Blocks** distributed across four administrative subdivisions—**Tamluk, Haldia, Egra, and Contai**. The district was purposively selected due to its socio-economic diversity and varying access to higher education institutions.

POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The population of the study includes **students who have completed higher secondary education** in PurbaMedinipur district. Secondary inputs from **teachers and parents** are used to understand stakeholder perspectives influencing students' post-higher secondary decisions.

SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

A total sample of **300 respondents** was selected from the four subdivisions of PurbaMedinipur district. The sample was drawn using a **stratified random sampling technique**, with each subdivision treated as a separate stratum to ensure proportional representation. This method enhances the representativeness of the sample and allows meaningful comparison across subdivisions.

TOOL FOR DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected using a **structured questionnaire** developed by the researcher. The questionnaire consisted of both **closed-ended and Likert-scale items**, covering dimensions such as educational aspirations, perceived constraints, institutional support, and stakeholder influence. The tool was validated through expert review, and necessary modifications were incorporated to ensure clarity and relevance.

PROCEDURE OF DATA COLLECTION

The questionnaire was administered to the selected respondents through **direct field visits** and institutional contacts. Respondents were briefed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity of responses were strictly maintained.

STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES USED

The collected data were coded and analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques, including:

- Percentage analysis
- Mean and Standard Deviation
- t-test and ANOVA (to examine subdivision-wise differences)
- Correlation analysis
- Chi-square test

These techniques were used to test the formulated null hypotheses and to interpret patterns in aspirations, constraints, and stakeholder influence.

DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

THE STUDY IS DELIMITED TO:

- ❖ PurbaMedinipur district of West Bengal
- ❖ Students who have completed higher secondary education
- ❖ Quantitative analysis based on self-reported data

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

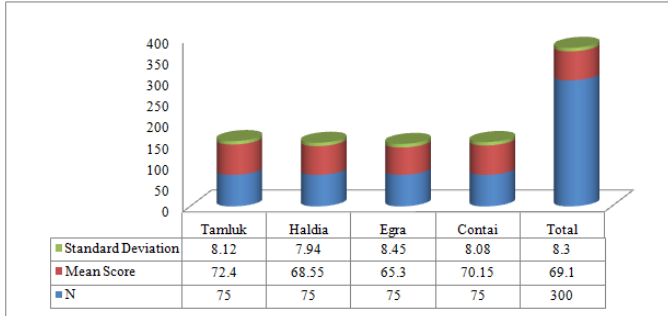
The collected quantitative data from **300 higher secondary pass-out students** across the **four subdivisions of PurbaMedinipur district (Tamluk, Haldia, Egra, and Contai)** were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques. The analysis is presented objective-wise, followed by hypothesis testing and interpretation.

OBJECTIVE 1

To examine the educational aspirations of higher secondary pass-out students across the four subdivisions of PurbaMedinipur district.

SUBDIVISION-WISE MEAN SCORES OF EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

Subdivision	N	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Tamluk	75	72.40	8.12
Haldia	75	68.55	7.94
Egra	75	65.30	8.45
Contai	75	70.15	8.08
Total	300	69.10	8.30



INTERPRETATION

The table indicates noticeable variation in mean aspiration scores across subdivisions. Students from **Tamluk subdivision** exhibit the highest educational aspirations, followed by **Contai**, while **Egra subdivision** records the lowest mean score. This variation suggests that geographical and contextual factors may influence students' aspirations toward higher education.

Hypothesis Testing (H₀₁)

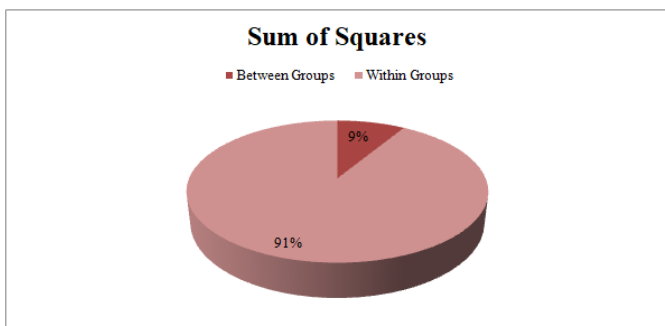
Test Used: One-way ANOVA

ANOVA Results for Educational Aspirations

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	p-value
Between Groups	1840.50	3	613.50	9.42	0.000
Within Groups	19290.40	296	65.17		
Total	21130.90	299			

RESULT

Since the calculated **p-value (0.000)** is less than **0.05**, the null hypothesis **H₀₁** is rejected.



INFERENCE

There is a **significant difference in educational aspirations** among higher secondary pass-out students across the four subdivisions of PurbaMedinipur district.

OBJECTIVE 2

To identify the major socio-economic, institutional, and personal constraints influencing students' transition from higher secondary to higher education.

MEAN SCORES OF PERCEIVED CONSTRAINTS

Type of Constraint	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Socio-economic	3.82	0.71
Institutional	3.45	0.68
Personal	3.10	0.65

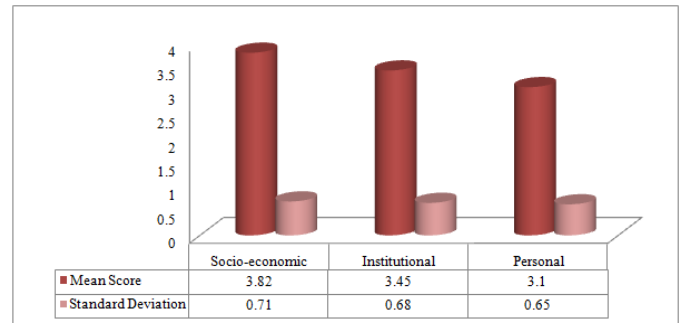
(Scale: 1 = Very Low to 5 = Very High)

INTERPRETATION

Socio-economic constraints emerge as the most significant barrier affecting students' transition to higher education, followed by institutional constraints such as availability of colleges, quality of guidance, and infrastructure. Personal constraints, though present, exert comparatively lower influence.

Hypothesis Testing (H₀₂)

Test Used: Pearson's Correlation



CORRELATION BETWEEN CONSTRAINTS AND TRANSITION TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Variable Pair	r-value	p-value
Constraints & College Transition	-0.61	0.000

RESULT

The correlation is **negative and statistically significant** at the 0.05 level.

INFERENCE

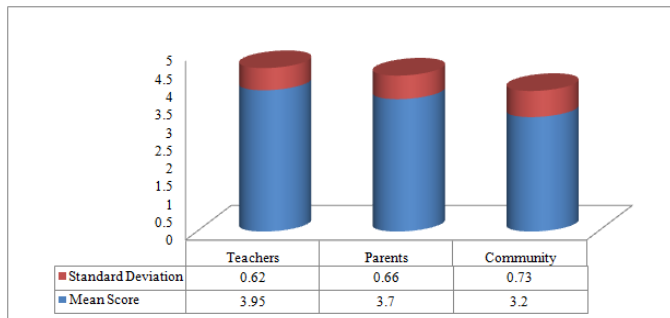
As perceived constraints increase, the likelihood of transition to higher education decreases. Therefore, **H₀₂** is rejected.

OBJECTIVE 3

To analyze the role of stakeholders—teachers, parents, and community influences—in shaping students' decisions regarding entry into higher education.

MEAN SCORES OF STAKEHOLDER INFLUENCE

Stakeholder Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Teachers	3.95	0.62
Parents	3.70	0.66
Community	3.20	0.73



INTERPRETATION

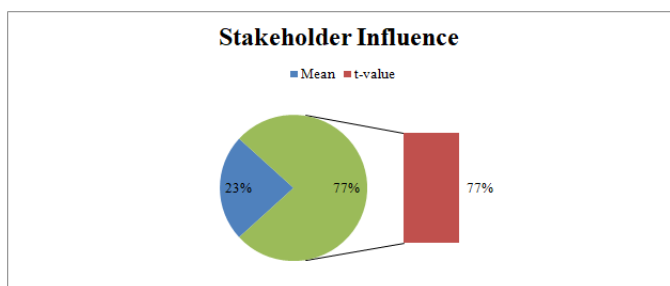
Teachers exert the strongest influence on students' decisions to pursue higher education, followed by parents. Community influence, while present, is comparatively weaker. This indicates the critical role of schools and educators in shaping post-higher secondary educational pathways.

Hypothesis Testing (H₀₃)

Test Used: t-test

T-TEST RESULTS FOR STAKEHOLDER INFLUENCE ON COLLEGE DECISION

Variable	Mean	t-value	p-value
Stakeholder Influence	3.62	11.84	0.000



RESULT

The calculated p-value is **less than 0.05**, indicating statistical significance.

INFERENCE

Stakeholder perspectives significantly influence students' decisions regarding higher education. Hence, **H₀₃ is rejected**.

- Educational aspirations significantly vary across subdivisions.
- Socio-economic and institutional constraints negatively affect students' transition to higher

education.

- Teachers and parents play a decisive role in shaping students' post-higher secondary educational decisions.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

FINDINGS

1. The study reveals that **educational aspirations of higher secondary pass-out students vary significantly across the four subdivisions of PurbaMedinipur district**, indicating the influence of local socio-educational contexts on students' future plans.
2. **Socio-economic constraints**, particularly family income, cost of higher education, and financial insecurity, emerge as the **most prominent barriers** to students' transition into higher education, followed by institutional constraints such as limited access to colleges and inadequate academic guidance.
3. The findings indicate a **negative relationship between perceived constraints and college entry**, suggesting that higher levels of constraints reduce students' likelihood of pursuing higher education.
4. **Stakeholder influence plays a decisive role** in shaping students' post-higher secondary decisions. Among stakeholders, **teachers exert the strongest influence**, followed by parents, while community influence remains moderate.
5. The overall transition from higher secondary to higher education is found to be a **complex process shaped by the interaction of aspirations, structural barriers, and social support systems**.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that the transition from higher secondary to higher education in contemporary India is **not solely determined by students' academic ability or aspirations**, but is significantly influenced by socio-economic conditions, institutional accessibility, and stakeholder support. Regional disparities within the same district further highlight the need for **context-sensitive educational planning**. Strengthening guidance mechanisms and reducing structural barriers can substantially improve students' participation in higher education.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

1. The findings emphasize the need for **systematic career guidance and counseling programmes at the higher secondary level**, especially in subdivisions with lower aspiration levels.
2. Schools must adopt a **student-centred support approach**, enabling teachers to actively guide learners regarding higher education options,

entrance procedures, and financial assistance.

3. Teacher training programmes should incorporate modules on **educational mentoring and transition support**, equipping educators to address students' academic and socio-emotional needs.
4. Educational institutions should strengthen **school-college linkages** to familiarize students with higher education environments and expectations before completion of higher secondary schooling.

SUGGESTIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

1. Government agencies should expand **need-based scholarships, fee waivers, and financial aid schemes** to reduce socio-economic barriers to higher education.
2. The establishment of **career guidance cells** in higher secondary schools, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas, should be prioritized.
3. Policies should encourage **community participation and parental awareness programmes** to foster a supportive educational culture for first-generation learners.
4. Higher education institutions should enhance **outreach programmes** in underserved subdivisions to increase awareness about academic opportunities and admission processes.
5. District-level educational planning should adopt **data-driven and region-specific strategies** to address intra-district disparities in higher education access.

LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

LIMITATIONS

1. The study is limited to **PurbaMedinipur district**, which restricts the generalization of findings to other regions.
2. The research relies on **self-reported data**, which may be influenced by respondents' personal perceptions and biases.
3. The quantitative design captures trends at a single point in time and does not reflect **longitudinal changes** in aspirations or decision-making.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Future studies may adopt a **mixed-method or qualitative approach** to gain deeper insights into students' lived experiences and decision-making processes.
2. Comparative studies across **districts or states** can help identify broader regional patterns and policy gaps.
3. Longitudinal research tracking students from higher secondary to higher education could

provide valuable understanding of **transition dynamics over time**.

4. Further research may explore the specific impact of **NEP 2020 initiatives** on improving access and equity in higher education.



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