



Educational Aspiration among Secondary School Students: A Review with Special Reference to the Mising Community of Assam

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores educational aspirations, particularly among secondary school students from tribal communities, with a focus on the Mising community of Assam. Educational aspiration, which refers to the level of education that individuals plan to attain, is influenced by a complex interaction of socio-economic, cultural, institutional, and psychological factors. This study combines classical and modern literature by employing key theoretical frameworks, such as Status Attainment Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Cultural Capital Theory. It underscores the impact of family background, school climate, gender, and motivational factors on the aspiration levels of students. The review demonstrates that educational aspiration is a multi-faceted concept shaped by both structural circumstances and personal attributes. Empirical research shows that socio-economic disparities, differences between rural and urban areas, and gender variations have a significant effect on aspiration levels. In tribal settings, additional challenges like economic hardship, geographic remoteness, and limited educational resources further limit students' aspirations. Nevertheless, recent findings indicate a gradual improvement attributed to heightened



awareness and policy initiatives. The paper points out a significant gap in research focused on localized, community-specific studies, especially concerning the Mising community. It concludes by highlighting the necessity for context-sensitive research and policy approaches to foster equitable educational development for marginalized groups.

1.1 Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental instrument for individual development and social transformation. It not only enhances knowledge and skills but also shapes individuals' attitudes, values, and future life opportunities. Among the various psychological and sociological constructs associated with educational outcomes, *educational aspiration* has emerged as a crucial determinant of students' academic success and socio-economic mobility. Educational aspiration refers to the level of education an individual hopes or intends to achieve and reflects a student's future-oriented goals within a specific socio-cultural context (Haller & Miller, 1963).

Educational aspiration does not develop in isolation; rather, it is shaped by a dynamic interplay of individual, familial, institutional, and societal factors. Early theoretical contributions emphasized the role of social structure and family background in influencing students' aspirations. The Status Attainment Model developed by Sewell, Haller, and Portes (1969) highlighted that parental education, socio-economic status, and the influence of significant others—such as teachers and peers—play a decisive role in shaping educational goals. Further, Sewell and Hauser (1975) demonstrated that educational aspiration functions as a mediating variable between socio-economic background and occupational attainment, thereby linking educational goals with long-term life outcomes.

Beyond structural influences, cultural and social resources also significantly contribute to the formation of educational aspiration. Bourdieu (1977) introduced the concept of cultural capital, arguing that students from socio-economically advantaged backgrounds possess greater access to linguistic competencies, educational exposure, and familiarity with dominant cultural norms, which enhances their ability to aspire for higher education. In contrast, students from marginalized communities often lack such resources, resulting in comparatively lower aspiration levels. Complementing this perspective, Coleman (1988) emphasized the role of social capital, suggesting that supportive family environments, parental involvement, and strong community networks positively influence students' educational aspirations.



In the Indian context, educational aspiration holds particular significance for marginalized and tribal communities, where education serves as a key pathway for socio-economic advancement. However, these communities often face multiple challenges, including poverty, limited access to quality education, and geographic isolation, which constrain students' aspirations (Tilak, 2002; Xaxa, 2005). Despite these challenges, recent studies indicate a gradual improvement in educational aspirations among disadvantaged groups, driven by increased awareness, government initiatives, and expanding educational opportunities (Ganie, 2022).

Assam is a multi-cultural land with various ethnic groups of people having their cultural living in the North-Eastern Region of India. So, this region is very fertile for studying cultural aspects of the ethnic groups of people. In Assam, various tribes and sub-tribes live together following their ethnic stock, traditional customs, beliefs, practices and occupations. The Mishing is a major ethnic group in Assam (Konch,2014). They are mainly concentrated in the riverine areas like Majuli, the world's largest river Island, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Sonitpur, Jorhat, Sivasagar and Golaghat districts of Assam (Konch,2014). Known for their rich culture and traditional crafts, the community still grapples with socio-economic challenges such as poverty, low literacy rates and limited access to health facilities. These issues affect not only the adults but also the mental and physical well-being of the younger generation.

The Northeast region of India, characterized by its ethnic diversity and unique socio-cultural landscape, provides a distinct context for examining educational aspiration. Within this region, the Mishing tribes are the second largest group of Scheduled tribes (plain) following the Bodo tribes in Assam (Bora, 2014). They have their language, religious faith, own way of life which differentiate them from other ethnic groups (Boruah and Kalita,2007; Saikia,2013), has traditionally depended on agriculture and river-based livelihoods. The community faces specific challenges such as economic instability, environmental vulnerability, and limited access to higher educational institutions. These factors significantly influence the educational aspirations of secondary school students within the community.

Secondary education represents a critical stage in the academic trajectory, as students begin to form concrete educational and career goals during this period. Educational aspirations at this level play a decisive role in determining whether students continue their education or enter the workforce prematurely. Therefore, understanding the factors that shape educational aspiration among Mising



secondary school students is essential for promoting equitable educational opportunities and addressing existing disparities.

Although a considerable body of literature exists on educational aspiration, there remains a notable lack of localized, context-specific studies focusing on tribal communities such as the Mising. Much of the existing research has concentrated on broader populations, often overlooking the unique socio-cultural dynamics that influence aspiration in specific communities. This gap underscores the need for focused research in this area.

In this context, the present review paper aims to critically examine the concept of educational aspiration, analyze its determinants, and explore its relevance in the context of Mising secondary school students. By synthesizing existing literature and identifying research gaps, the study seeks to provide a conceptual foundation for future empirical research and contribute to the development of inclusive educational policies and practices.

1.2 Statement of the study

The present paper, entitled **“Educational Aspiration among Secondary School Students: A Review with Special Reference to the Mising Community of Assam.”**

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the concept and theoretical perspectives of educational aspiration.
2. To analyze the key determinants of educational aspiration among secondary school students, with reference to the Mising community.
3. To review existing literature and identify research gaps related to educational aspiration.

2.1 Review of Related Literature

The concept of educational aspiration has been widely examined across disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and education. Existing literature reveals that educational aspiration is a multidimensional construct influenced by socio-economic, cultural, institutional, and psychological factors. The present review synthesizes both classical and contemporary studies, with a focus on their relevance to marginalized and tribal communities, particularly the Mising community of Assam.



2.2 Conceptual and Foundational Perspectives

Early studies conceptualized educational aspiration as a measurable and socially influenced construct. Haller and Miller (1963) defined it as the level of education an individual seeks to attain. Building on this, Sewell, Haller, and Portes (1969) developed the **Status Attainment Model**, which identified educational aspiration as a key mediating variable linking socio-economic background with educational and occupational outcomes.

Further, Sewell and Hauser (1975) demonstrated that educational aspiration significantly influences long-term socio-economic mobility.

2.3 Socio-Cultural and Theoretical Perspectives

Bourdieu (1977) introduced the concept of cultural capital, emphasizing that access to cultural resources enhances educational aspiration. Similarly, Coleman (1988) highlighted the role of social capital in shaping students' aspirations through family and community support.

2.4 Empirical Studies on Educational Aspiration

Several empirical studies have examined educational aspiration across different contexts.

Kaur (2010) conducted a study titled "A Study of Educational Aspirations and School Adjustment of Students in Relation to Organizational Climate." The study found that secondary school students in urban areas have significantly higher educational aspirations compared to their rural counterparts. Additionally, students attending private schools exhibit higher educational aspirations than those in government schools. The research also revealed that female students have significantly higher educational aspirations than male students. Furthermore, secondary school students who perceive a high school organizational climate characterized by creative stimulation, cognitive encouragement, permissiveness, acceptance, and low levels of rejection and control tend to have greater educational aspirations than those who perceive a low school organizational climate.

Baskey (2016) conducted a study titled "A Study on the Level of Education and Aspiration in Relation to the Socio-Economic Status of Tribal People in the District of Burdwan, West Bengal." The study found that alcohol addiction among tribal parents adversely affects their children's educational interests. Absenteeism among students in tribal areas is prevalent because many have to travel long distances to reach school. The dropout rate for tribal students is significantly higher compared to the



general population. Additionally, many tribal students work for wages during holidays, after school hours, and even on school days. Some tribal pupils lack the basic facilities needed for studying at home.

Alam (2018) conducted a study on ‘Study of Education Aspiration and Socio-Economic Status’. A representative sample of 250 class 10th secondary school students was randomly selected from government and private schools, which were located in rural and urban areas of Sambhal District of U.P., and found that educational aspiration is significantly and positively related to socio-economic status. The study also observed differences in educational aspirations across genders and types of schools.

Salgotra & Kumari (2018) examined the relationship between educational aspirations and socio-economic status among secondary school students in Jammu District in their paper titled “Educational Aspiration and Socio-Economic Status among Secondary School Students” and concluded that socio-economic status significantly influences adolescents' educational aspirations, with a direct correlation between the two.

Rawat (2019) carried out a study on the topic “Effects of Socio-Economic Status on Level of Educational Aspirations and Academic Achievement of Higher Secondary Students”, revealing that female students performed academically better than their male counterparts. It was noted that female students from socio-economically stronger backgrounds outperformed male students in Government Schools, and that socio-economic status has a notable impact on educational aspirations, with female students in private schools exhibiting higher aspirations than males.

Sen (2019) conducted an analysis titled “Academic Involvement and Educational Aspiration Among Domestic Workers of Kolkata for the Education of Their Children” and found that the educational level of parents significantly affects the academic involvement of Domestic Workers concerning Teaching Activities of Academic Involvement. Furthermore, it was found that supervisory activities were also significantly affected by the education level of parents regarding academic involvement.

Devi (2020) conducted a study titled *A Study on Academic Achievement and Educational Aspirations of Secondary School Students in Udalguri District of Assam* to examine variations in academic performance and educational aspirations among students. The findings revealed that male students demonstrated higher academic achievement than female students based on percentage scores. The study also found that a greater proportion of urban students achieved higher academic success compared to their rural counterparts. Furthermore, a significant difference in academic achievement was



observed based on location, along with a notable disparity in educational aspirations between urban and rural secondary school students. These findings indicate that both gender and locality play an important role in shaping students' academic outcomes and future educational goals.

2.5 Determinants of Educational Aspiration

Socio-Economic Status

Socio-economic status is a major determinant of educational aspiration (Sirin, 2005; Tilak, 2002). Students from higher SES backgrounds have greater access to resources and opportunities.

Family and Parental Influence

Parental education and expectations significantly influence aspiration (Eccles, 2009). However, in tribal communities, limited parental literacy may restrict this influence.

Psychological Factors

Motivation and self-concept are strongly associated with aspiration (Changkakoti & Baishya, 2021; Rai & Jha, 2024).

School Environment

Institutional support, teacher encouragement, and school climate play a crucial role (Rosenbaum, 2001; Hashmi & Shakir, 2023).

Peer Influence

Peers and role models significantly shape students' aspirations, especially during adolescence.

2.6 Educational Aspiration among Tribal Students

Studies by Tilak (2002) and Xaxa (2005) highlight structural barriers faced by tribal students. However, recent studies (Das et al., 2021; Ganie, 2022) indicate improving aspiration levels due to increased awareness and policy support.



2.7 Regional Studies: Assam and Northeast India

Studies conducted in Northeast India provide important contextual insights. Gohain (2023) found that educational aspiration among adolescents in Assam is improving, with minimal gender differences. This suggests a positive shift in educational attitudes in the region.

Similarly, Meinam et al. (2023) reported that educational aspiration among students in Manipur is influenced by career awareness and exposure to higher education opportunities. These findings indicate that increasing access to information and guidance can significantly enhance aspiration levels.

2.8 Recent Studies on Educational Aspiration (2020–2025)

Ganie (2022) conducted a systematic review of factors influencing students' educational aspirations by analyzing 26 peer-reviewed studies. The findings revealed that educational aspiration is shaped by both individual characteristics—such as gender, academic performance, and peer influence—and family-related factors, including socio-economic status, parental education, and cultural capital. The study emphasized that educational aspiration is a multidimensional construct influenced by interacting variables rather than a single dominant factor. However, the review also highlighted a significant limitation in existing research, noting the lack of robust causal evidence and the need for more empirical and longitudinal studies to better understand the dynamics of aspiration formation (Ganie, 2022).

Graham and Pozuelo (2023) examined the relationship between educational aspiration and adolescent behavioral outcomes and found that students with higher aspirations are more likely to invest in their education and avoid risk-related behaviors. The study further indicated that educational aspiration is closely associated with psychological traits such as self-efficacy and life satisfaction, suggesting its relative stability over time. However, the study was conducted within a specific socio-economic and cultural context, which may limit its generalizability to marginalized populations such as tribal communities in India (Graham & Pozuelo, 2023).

Gong and Toutkoushian (2024) investigated the disparity between students' educational aspirations and expectations. Their findings revealed that although many students aspire to pursue higher education, a considerable proportion do not expect to achieve these goals due to socio-economic constraints, limited access to resources, and perceived structural barriers. The study highlights the critical distinction between aspiration and expectation, arguing that high aspirations alone are insufficient without enabling conditions that support their realization .



Hou (2024) conducted a systematic review focusing on rural students' educational aspirations and identified that social, economic, institutional, and cultural contexts collectively shape aspiration levels. The study emphasized the role of policy frameworks, school structures, and individual habitus in influencing students' educational goals. It further suggested that aspirations are dynamic and evolve through continuous interaction with environmental factors and cost-benefit considerations (Hou, 2024).

Kumari, Saxena, and Suman (2024) examined the influence of parental aspirations on students' educational aspirations and found a strong positive relationship between the two. The study highlighted that students whose parents hold higher educational expectations tend to develop stronger aspirations. However, the research did not sufficiently address how socio-economic constraints may hinder the translation of parental expectations into actual educational attainment (Kumari et al., 2024).

Das and Rajesh (2024) conducted a study among undergraduate students and found no significant differences in educational aspiration across demographic variables such as gender, religion, or family background in certain institutional contexts. This suggests that exposure to higher education environments and academic resources may reduce disparities in aspiration. However, these findings may not be applicable to rural or tribal populations, where socio-economic inequalities and limited access to educational resources remain significant barriers (Das & Rajesh, 2024).

Abbas et al. (2025) conducted a survey among secondary school students to examine the relationship between educational aspiration and perceived social mobility. The study found that students from higher socio-economic backgrounds demonstrated significantly higher aspirations and stronger belief in education as a means of upward mobility. Parental education was also identified as a significant influencing factor.

Zhuang and Tong (2025) explored the mediating role of educational aspiration between caregiver expectations and academic performance. The study found that educational aspiration serves as a key psychological mechanism through which external influences affect academic outcomes. Additionally, emotional factors such as depression were found to moderate aspiration levels, indicating a complex interaction between psychological well-being and social influences.

Masinga (2025) investigated the role of self-concept in shaping educational aspiration and academic performance among adolescents. The findings revealed that self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-regulation significantly influence students' aspirations and academic success. The study emphasized that



psychological empowerment is essential for enhancing educational aspiration, particularly among students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Masinga, 2025).

Zhou and Shirazi (2025) conducted a systematic review on career aspirations in STEM fields and found that educational aspiration is influenced by exposure to role models, access to information, and socio-economic background. The study highlighted that aspirations are shaped through the interaction of internal motivation and external opportunities, underscoring the importance of integrated support systems in fostering higher educational goals (Zhou & Shirazi, 2025).

3.1 Implications for the Mising Community

The literature suggests that educational aspiration among Mising students is influenced by:

- Low socio-economic status
- Limited parental education
- Rural and riverine geography
- Cultural practices

Despite these challenges, increasing awareness and policy interventions are contributing to gradual improvements.

4.1 Research Gap

The reviewed literature demonstrates that educational aspiration is a **multidimensional and dynamic construct** shaped by the interaction of socio-economic, familial, psychological, institutional, and cultural factors. Foundational frameworks, particularly the status attainment model advanced by Sewell, W. H., Haller, A. O., and Portes, Alejandro (1969), established that educational aspiration functions as a key mediating variable linking family background with educational and occupational outcomes. This perspective was further reinforced by Sewell, W. H. and Hauser, R. M. (1975), who highlighted its long-term implications for socio-economic mobility. Complementary theoretical contributions, including Bourdieu, Pierre's (1977) concept of cultural capital and Coleman, James S.'s (1988) social capital theory, expanded the understanding of how access to cultural resources and social networks shapes aspiration levels.

Empirical studies consistently affirm the **central role of socio-economic status (SES)** in determining educational aspiration (Sirin, 2005; Tilak, 2002; Xaxa, 2005). However, recent research



(2020–2025) moves beyond a deterministic view of SES, emphasizing its interaction with school environment, parental expectations, and psychological factors (Ganie, 2022; Hou, 2024). Similarly, family-related variables—particularly parental education and expectations—have been identified as strong predictors of aspiration (Eccles, 2009; Kumari et al., 2024), although their influence varies across socio-cultural contexts. Psychological dimensions such as motivation, self-concept, and self-efficacy have also gained prominence in recent studies, highlighting the internal processes through which aspirations are formed and sustained (Changkakoti & Baishya, 2021; Masinga, 2025).

Institutional and contextual factors further shape educational aspiration. Research indicates that a supportive school climate, teacher encouragement, and access to information significantly enhance students' aspirations (Rosenbaum, 2001; Hashmi & Shakir, 2023; Segovia et al., 2025). In addition, peer influence and exposure to role models play a critical role, particularly during adolescence, by reinforcing or reshaping students' educational goals (Zhou & Shirazi, 2025). Importantly, recent studies also highlight the distinction between *aspiration* and *expectation*, demonstrating that high aspirations do not necessarily translate into achievable outcomes in the presence of structural constraints (Gong & Toutkoushian, 2024).

Despite these advances, the literature reveals several **critical limitations**. First, a significant proportion of theoretical frameworks and empirical studies are grounded in Western or urban contexts, limiting their applicability to rural and tribal settings. Second, many studies adopt a **single-variable or correlational approach**, focusing on isolated determinants such as SES or parental influence, without adequately capturing the complex interactions among variables. Third, although recent research acknowledges the importance of psychological and institutional factors, there remains a lack of **integrated, multidimensional models** that explain how these factors jointly shape educational aspiration over time.

Most importantly, there exists a **substantial contextual gap** in the Indian and particularly Northeastern literature. While studies have examined educational aspiration among general and marginalized populations, there is a marked absence of **community-specific, primary data-based research** focusing on tribal groups such as the Mising. Existing research often treats tribal communities as a homogeneous category, thereby overlooking intra-community variations, cultural practices, and localized constraints such as riverine geography, seasonal displacement, and limited institutional access. Furthermore, the unique socio-cultural dynamics of the Mising community—shaped by traditional



livelihoods, evolving educational awareness, and changing socio-economic conditions—remain largely unexplored in relation to educational aspiration.

Another important gap lies in the **limited examination of the aspiration–action divide**, particularly among disadvantaged students. While many studies report high levels of aspiration, few investigate whether these aspirations are realistic, attainable, or sustained over time. This gap is especially relevant in tribal contexts, where structural barriers may constrain the translation of aspiration into educational attainment. Additionally, there is insufficient attention to **gendered and location-specific variations** within tribal communities, as well as the role of emerging factors such as digital access, policy interventions, and career awareness.

In light of these gaps, the present study seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by adopting a **context-specific, multidimensional approach** to examine educational aspiration among Mising secondary school students. By integrating socio-economic, psychological, institutional, and cultural variables within a localized framework, the study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of how aspirations are formed, sustained, and potentially transformed within this community. Such an approach is expected to not only fill existing research gaps but also inform more inclusive and context-sensitive educational policies and practices.

5.1 Conclusion

The review demonstrates that educational aspiration is a complex and multidimensional construct influenced by socio-economic, psychological, cultural, and institutional factors. While existing studies provide valuable insights, they are often limited by their generalized approach and lack of contextual specificity. In particular, there is a significant gap in research focusing on tribal communities such as the Mising.

The present study is therefore justified in seeking to examine educational aspiration within this specific socio-cultural context. A deeper understanding of the factors influencing aspiration among Mising secondary school students can contribute to more effective educational policies and interventions aimed at promoting equity and social mobility.



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