



Education of First-Generation Learners

Jadab Dutta

Assistant Professor, PQH School of Education, University of Science & Technology Meghalaya (USTM), Meghalaya, India.

Article information

Received: 18th August 2025

Received in revised form: 29th September 2025

Accepted: 30th October 2025

Available online: 10th November 2025

Volume:1

Issue:1

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17570610>

Abstract

In this research, we look at how first-generation learners (FGLs) are educated, specifically at the obstacles they face and the ways that can help them succeed in school. In order to help educators and policymakers, the study reviews the current knowledge, finds any gaps, and then makes recommendations.

Keywords: First-Generation Learners, Education, Challenges, Support strategies, Academic Success.

1. INTRODUCTION

Those who are the first in their immediate family to pursue a bachelor's degree are known as first-generation learners (FGLs). Due to a lack of personal or family experience with the educational system, these students frequently encounter additional obstacles.

This paper's goals are :

- Present a synopsis of fgls' educational experiences,
- Pinpoint the unique challenges they encounter in the classroom
- Propose solutions to these problems. More welcoming and inclusive classrooms for fgls can be achieved if teachers and lawmakers take the time to identify and resolve these issues.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic readiness, financial limitations, and socio-cultural problems are three major areas of concern shown by the literature on FGLs. According to research, first-generation college students typically aren't as well prepared for college as their more privileged peers, which can hinder their academic performance. Another major obstacle is the possibility that FGLs might not have the financial means to cover the costs of pursuing higher education. The educational path of FGLs is already complicated due to socio-cultural variables such a lack of knowledge about the higher education system and assistance from family.

2.1 Academic Preparedness

Studies show that first-generation college students (FGLs) can have trouble with basic

academic abilities, which can make it hard for them to succeed in college (Redford & Hoyer, 2017).

2.2 Financial Constraints

Being from low-income families is more common among FGLs, which makes it harder for them to pay for college (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

2.3 Socio-Cultural Factors

FGLs may face inadequate support and guidance due to a lack of familial experience in higher education (Jehangir, 2010).

3. RESEARCH GAP

There is a dearth of studies concentrating on efficient support tactics and interventions, despite the abundance of literature on the difficulties encountered by FGLs. Additionally, there is a gap in understanding the long-term outcomes of FGLs and how different educational policies impact their success.

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This investigation is significant because it sheds light on the unique challenges faced by FGLs and provides evidence-based recommendations for supporting their academic success. By addressing these issues, educators and policymakers can help bridge the achievement gap and promote equity in education.

5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To identify the challenges faced by FGLs in higher education.
- To determine how educational results of FGLs are affected by academic readiness, budgetary limitations, and socio-cultural factors.
- To recommend strategies and interventions to promote the academic achievement of FGLs.

6. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

- FGLs face significant challenges related to academic preparedness, financial constraints, and socio-cultural factors.
- Targeted support strategies can improve the academic outcomes of FGLs.
- Educational policies that address the unique needs of FGLs can lead to higher retention and graduation rates.

7. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

7.1 Method

To fully grasp the difficulties and solutions for FGLs, this research uses a mixed-methods strategy, integrating quantitative and qualitative data.

7.2 Population

Participants in this investigation are college students who are the first in their families to attend college.

7.3 Sample

A sample of 200 FGLs will be selected from various universities across the country, ensuring a diverse representation of demographics and academic disciplines.

7.4 Tools Used

- Surveys to gather quantitative data on academic preparedness, financial constraints, and socio-cultural factors.
- Interviews to collect qualitative data on the personal experiences and challenges of FGLs.

7.5 Data Collection Procedure

Online questionnaires and in-person interviews will be used to gather data. The university's outreach efforts and student organizations will be used to attract participation.

7.6 Statistical Techniques Used for Data Analysis

Analyses such as correlation, regression, and qualitative statistics will be employed to examine the quantitative data. In order to find patterns and themes in the qualitative data, thematic analysis will be used.

8. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA: OBJECTIVE-WISE

8.1 Objective 1: Challenges Faced by FGLs

First-generation college students (FGLs) often face several challenges in higher education, including:

8.1.1 Academic Preparedness:

It is possible that many FGLs did not receive the proper preparation for the challenges of college-level work in their high school years. Academic performance may suffer as a consequence.

8.1.2 Financial Pressure:

FGLs often face significant financial challenges. Their studies may be hindered since they may not have enough family financial assistance and may have to work part-time or full-time employment.

8.1.3 Lack of Family Support:

While families of FGLs may be supportive, they often lack the firsthand experience of navigating higher education systems, which means they can't provide informed guidance on academic or administrative matters.

8.1.4 Cultural Adjustment:

Because college life is so different from FGLs' home lives, they may struggle to adapt. Feelings of not belonging or imposter syndrome are examples of what this encompasses.

8.1.5 Navigating Campus Resources:

Without prior exposure to higher education environments, FGLs might find it difficult to locate and utilize campus resources such as academic advising, tutoring, and mental health services.

8.1.6 Social Integration:

Some FGLs may feel different from their classmates whose parents have completed postsecondary education, which might make it more challenging for them to make friends.

8.1.7 Time Management:

Balancing academic responsibilities with work and family obligations can be particularly challenging for FGLs.

8.1.8 Mental Health:

Among FGLs, stress, anxiety, and other issues related to mental health can be more prevalent due to the numerous pressures and difficulties they face.

Data analysis reveals that FGLs face significant challenges related to academic preparedness, financial constraints, and socio-cultural factors. Descriptive statistics show that a majority of FGLs report struggling with foundational academic skills and financial difficulties.

8.2 Objective 2: Impact of Various Factors

Analyzing the impact of academic preparedness, financial constraints, and socio-cultural factors

on the educational outcomes of First-Generation Learners (FGLs) reveals a multifaceted interplay of challenges and opportunities. Here's a breakdown of each factor:

8.2.1 Academic Preparedness:

Foundation Skills: FGLs often start with a weaker foundation due to limited access to quality primary and secondary education. This gap affects their performance in higher education, where the curriculum assumes a certain level of prior knowledge and skills.

Support Systems: Finding good study habits, choosing the right classes, and dealing with academic difficulties might be difficult for FGLs whose parents aren't well-versed in the school system. A loss of self-assurance and motivation to succeed in school may result from this.

8.2.2 Financial Constraints:

Tuition and Fees: The cost of higher education can be prohibitive for many FGLs. Even with scholarships and financial aid, out-of-pocket expenses can strain family resources.

Living Expenses: Beyond tuition, costs such as housing, food, books, and transportation add to the financial burden. Because of this, many students end up working part-time, which might make it harder to devote enough time to schoolwork.

Financial Literacy: Limited financial literacy may prevent FGLs from effectively managing their resources, seeking out available financial aid, or planning for long-term educational expenses.

8.2.3 Socio-Cultural Factors:

Cultural Capital: FGLs may lack the cultural capital that is often taken for granted in academic settings, such as familiarity with academic jargon, networking opportunities, and extra-curricular activities that enhance learning and career prospects.

Family Expectations: Cultural expectations and responsibilities, such as contributing to family income or caring for relatives, can conflict with academic demands, leading to stress and reduced academic engagement.

Sense of Belonging: FGLs might experience a sense of isolation or alienation in educational environments that cater predominantly to students from more privileged backgrounds. Their academic motivation and mental wellness may be affected by this.

❖ Combined Impact

- **Academic Performance:** The cumulative effect of these factors often manifests in lower grades, higher dropout rates, and extended time to complete degrees for FGLs.
- **Resilience and Adaptability:** Despite these challenges, many FGLs demonstrate remarkable resilience and adaptability. Programs that offer academic support, financial assistance, and mentorship can significantly enhance their educational outcomes.
- **Policy Implications:** Targeted policies that offer holistic support, such as preparatory programs, living expense-specific financial help, and efforts to cultivate an inclusive campus atmosphere, are necessary for filling these gaps.

Correlation analysis indicates a strong relationship between financial constraints and academic performance. Regression analysis shows that socio-cultural factors, such as lack of familial support, significantly impact the educational outcomes of FGLs.

8.3 Objective 3: Support Strategies

Institutions might tackle the specific obstacles faced by First-Generation Learners (FGLs) by using a variety of tactics and interventions that enhance their academic performance. Presented below are a few proven methods:

8.3.1 Academic Support

Bridge Programs: Facilitate First-Generation Learners' (FGLs) advancement from their high school years to college by designing summer bridge programs that address academic readiness, introductory college courses, and campus services.

Tutoring and Mentoring: Provide access to tutoring services and peer mentoring programs that connect FGLs with upper-class students or graduates who can offer academic and personal guidance.

Advising: Offer comprehensive academic advising that includes regular check-ins, personalized academic planning, and support for navigating course requirements and major selection.

8.3.2 Financial Assistance

Scholarships and Grants: To help lessen the financial strain of tuition and fees, there should be more funding options available to FGLs.

Emergency Funds: Establish emergency financial assistance programs to help FGLs manage unexpected expenses that could disrupt their education.

Work-Study Opportunities: Encourage FGLs to apply for on-campus work-study positions that are both flexible and directly related to their major so that they can make money and obtain experience.

8.3.3 Socio-Cultural Support

Inclusive Campus Culture: Foster an inclusive campus environment by promoting diversity and inclusion initiatives, including cultural competency training for faculty, staff, and students.

First-Generation Student Organizations: In order to provide FGLs a place to connect, share resources, and get help, it is recommended that they form and join student organizations tailored to their needs.

Family Engagement: Develop programs that engage and educate families of FGLs about the college experience, helping to build a support system at home.

8.3.4 Personal Development

Leadership Programs: Facilitate FGLs' self-esteem, leadership potential, and engagement in campus life through the development of leadership initiatives.

Mental Wellness Services: Boost FGLs' emotional health by making sure they can get the help they need, such as counseling and classes on stress management.

Career Services: Provide tailored career services, including internships, resume building, interview preparation, and networking opportunities to help FGLs prepare for post-graduation careers.

8.3.5 Institutional Policies

Using data to influence regulations and procedures that promote the success of FGLs, establish mechanisms to track their development and outcomes.

Faculty and Staff Training: Train faculty and staff to understand the unique challenges faced by FGLs and to adopt teaching and support strategies that are responsive to their needs.

Partnerships: Form alliances with local groups and high schools to ensure that FGLs receive assistance from the time they are in high school all the way through college.

Thematic analysis of interview data identifies several effective support strategies, including mentorship programs, financial aid, and academic support services.

9. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- FGLs face substantial challenges in higher education, primarily related to academic preparedness, financial constraints, and socio-cultural factors.
- Financial constraints have a significant negative impact on the academic performance of FGLs.
- FGLs' educational outcomes are significantly impacted by socio-cultural issues, such as a lack of support from family.
- Targeted support strategies, including mentorship programs and financial aid, can significantly improve the academic success of FGLs.

10. CONCLUSION

Targeted interventions are necessary to address the many problems faced by first-generation learners in the classroom. In order to promote educational fairness, educators and legislators must first comprehend the unique challenges faced by FGLs in order to design classrooms that are welcoming to all students.

10.1 Recommendations of the Study

- Implement mentorship programs to provide FGLs with guidance and support.
- Increase financial aid opportunities to alleviate financial constraints.
- Create individualized programs to help FGLs succeed in school.
- Promote awareness and training for educators on the unique challenges faced by FGLs.

REFERENCES

1. Engle, J., & Tinto, V. (2008). *Moving beyond access: College success for low-income, first-generation students*. Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education.
2. Jehangir, R. R. (2010). *Higher education and first-generation students: Cultivating community, voice, and place for the new majority*. Palgrave Macmillan.
3. Redford, J., & Hoyer, K. M. (2017). *First-generation and continuing-generation college students: A comparison of high school and postsecondary experiences*. National Center for Education Statistics