



Research Article

Career Preference of Rural Students Toward Government and Private Sector Jobs: A Study in Nagaon District, Assam

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Abstract

This study examines the career preferences of rural students in Nagaon district, Assam, with a focus on their inclination toward government and private sector employment. Using primary data from 120 respondents, the study reveals a strong preference for government jobs due to perceived job security, stable income, and social prestige. Private sector opportunities, although growing, are viewed as less stable and less desirable. Socio-economic background, family influence, and limited career awareness significantly shape students' career decisions. The study highlights the need for improved career counselling, skill development, and awareness programs to broaden rural students' understanding of diverse career options.

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KEYWORDS: Career preference; Rural students; Government jobs; Private sector; Nagaon district; Employment aspirations; Career guidance

1. INTRODUCTION

Career choice represents a pivotal developmental milestone in a student's life as it shapes not only their future economic security but also their social identity, professional trajectory, and overall life satisfaction. For students residing in rural regions, career decision-making becomes more complex due to structural disadvantages such as limited access to information, inadequate educational resources, and constrained socio-economic conditions. In the Indian context, particularly in states like Assam, the preference for government employment has historically been dominant. This inclination is largely derived from the perceived advantages of public sector jobs, including employment security, predictable income, pension benefits, and high social prestige. Although significant economic reforms and private sector expansion have created new opportunities in information technology, services, and digital industries, rural students often continue to view government jobs as the most desirable career path. As a result, the competition for government posts remains disproportionately high, frequently overshadowing the growing range of private-sector opportunities.

Nagaon district, one of the largest and most demographically diverse districts in Assam, presents a relevant context for examining rural students' career aspirations. Despite improvements in educational infrastructure, growing digital penetration, and initiatives aimed at skill development, many rural students in Nagaon still face challenges in accessing career guidance, exposure to competitive job markets, and awareness of contemporary employment trends. Private sector employment is frequently perceived as unstable, stressful, and less respectable compared to public sector roles, reflecting deep-rooted cultural and familial expectations prevalent in the district's rural communities. These perceptions influence career choices, often limiting students' willingness to explore evolving career paths that emphasise adaptability, innovation, and skill-based growth.

Recent shifts in India's employment landscape, characterised by privatisation, digital transformation, and the proliferation of skill-driven industries, have diversified job opportunities available to rural youth. Private sector roles today offer competitive remuneration, career mobility, flexible working arrangements, and skill enhancement prospects. However, government job availability has declined relative to demand, making public sector employment increasingly uncertain and highly competitive. In this context, examining how rural students navigate career decisions—and the factors driving their preferences—becomes crucial for understanding regional disparities in employability and labour market participation.

Existing literature highlights substantial differences in career preferences between urban and rural youth, with rural students demonstrating a stronger inclination toward government employment due to socio-cultural influences, parental expectations, and limited occupational awareness. However, empirical studies focusing specifically on rural Assam remain sparse, and district-level evidence on Nagaon is significantly lacking. Given the unique socio-economic and cultural

characteristics of the district, localised research is essential to capture the specific motivations, constraints, and perceptions shaping career choices among rural students.

Against this backdrop, the present study investigates the career preferences of rural students in Nagaon district, with particular emphasis on their inclination toward government versus private sector employment. The study further analyses the socio-economic, motivational, and informational factors influencing these preferences. By generating empirical evidence, this research aims to contribute to the growing discourse on youth employment in India and provide actionable insights for policymakers, educational institutions, and career development practitioners seeking to enhance career awareness and improve employability among rural youth.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Career preference among students has been widely examined across social science, education, and labour market research, with scholars consistently highlighting the influence of socio-economic, familial, cultural, and psychological variables on career decision-making. In rural contexts, these factors operate with heightened intensity due to structural constraints and differential access to opportunities. The literature broadly demonstrates that rural students' career aspirations are shaped by limited exposure to diverse employment pathways, constrained access to career information, and cultural expectations that prioritise job security over professional mobility.

A dominant theme in the literature is the persistent preference for government sector employment among Indian youth, particularly in rural areas. Research by Sharma (2015) and Gupta (2016) establishes that government jobs are associated with high job security, stable income, pension benefits, and long-term social respect. These studies argue that, in rural India, public sector employment is often inherited as an aspirational norm, deeply embedded within socio-cultural belief systems. Reddy and Raj (2017) further note that government employment is frequently perceived not merely as a job but as a symbol of social mobility, reflecting both economic safety and familial prestige. Such perceptions contribute to a strong and sometimes exclusive aspiration for government positions, despite limited availability and growing competition.

In contrast, literature examining private sector employment indicates that although private jobs offer competitive salaries, skill-based growth, and diverse career pathways, they are perceived by rural youth as insecure and demanding. Thomas (2019) notes that the absence of long-term job security and performance-driven evaluation systems in private organisations creates apprehension among rural students, who often prioritise stability over career progression. Studies by Verma and Sen (2020) also highlight that inadequate soft skills, lower confidence levels, and limited exposure to corporate environments act as barriers preventing rural students from engaging with private sector opportunities. These barriers reinforce the existing preference for government jobs, even

when private sector employment provides greater upward mobility and learning potential.

Socio-economic background emerges as another critical determinant of career preference. Singh and Kaur (2018) found that students from low-income rural households are more likely to prefer government employment due to its predictable income and perceived stability. Family occupation and parental education significantly shape students' attitudes toward career choice, with educated and economically stable families encouraging exploration of private sector roles, while economically constrained families push for secure government jobs. This aligns with research by Barman (2022), who noted that in Assam, socio-economic vulnerability strongly correlates with a narrow focus on public sector employment.

Awareness and information availability have also been identified as substantial influencing factors. Das and Mishra (2021) emphasise that rural students often lack access to systematic career counselling, leading to a limited understanding of evolving job markets and skill-based employment opportunities. Digital literacy gaps further inhibit rural students' ability to explore online career platforms, thereby narrowing their career consideration set. These findings are consistent with broader research suggesting that improvements in access to information can significantly diversify career aspirations among rural youth.

Studies focusing on the Northeast region of India reveal distinctive socio-cultural influences on career choice. Borah (2020) notes that the preference for government employment in Assam is deeply rooted in historical state-dependence for livelihood security and limited exposure to industrial growth. Ahmed and Hussain (2021) observe that rural students in districts such as Nagaon encounter specific challenges, including weak linkages between educational institutions and industry, limited employability training, and the absence of structured career guidance programmes. Consequently, even as private sector opportunities expand through digitalisation and service-sector growth, rural students remain inclined toward government roles due to habitual preferences and perceived risk associated with private employment.

The literature collectively suggests that career preference among rural students is shaped by an interplay of socio-economic factors, cultural norms, educational exposure, perception of job characteristics, and availability of career information. While government employment continues to dominate as the preferred option, the private sector remains underutilised due to misconceptions and structural barriers rather than a lack of opportunities. Although available research provides valuable insights, empirical studies that focus specifically on Assam—and particularly on district-level dynamics such as those in Nagaon—remain limited. This highlights a clear research gap and underscores the need for localised studies that capture the unique socio-economic and cultural determinants influencing rural students' career preferences.

The present study builds upon these insights by examining the relative preference for government and private sector

employment among rural students in Nagaon district. It also explores the underlying factors shaping these preferences, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on rural youth employment and informing policy interventions aimed at improving career awareness and employability in the region.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- i. To examine the career preference of rural students toward government and private sector jobs in Nagaon district, Assam.
- ii. To identify the key socio-economic, personal, and motivational factors influencing their job preferences.
- iii. To compare the level of preference between government and private sector employment among rural students in the study area.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the career preferences of rural students in Nagaon district, Assam. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to a sample of rural higher secondary, undergraduate, and postgraduate students selected through purposive sampling. Secondary data were obtained from scholarly articles, government reports, and academic publications. The sample size consisted of 120 respondents. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, percentage analysis.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This section presents the analysis of the collected data and interprets the key findings related to the career preferences of rural students in Nagaon district. Descriptive statistics, percentage analysis, and simple comparative assessment were used to examine students' inclination toward government and private sector employment.

Table 1: Preference for Government vs. Private Sector Jobs

Job Preference	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Government Sector	78	65%
Private Sector	42	35%
Total	120	100%

Source: Primary Data

Interpretation: The data indicate a strong preference for government sector employment among rural students, with 65% expressing a desire for government jobs compared to only 35% preferring private sector opportunities. This highlights the continuing dominance of public sector aspirations, driven by perceptions of security, stability, and social prestige. The lower inclination toward private employment suggests limited awareness, perceived job insecurity, or lack of exposure to private sector opportunities.

Table 2: Key Factors Influencing Career Preference

Influencing Factor	Government Job (%)	Private Job (%)
Job Security	72%	18%
Salary & Career Growth	15%	55%
Work-Life Balance	8%	14%
Social Status	5%	13%

Source: Primary Data

Interpretation: Rural students overwhelmingly associate job security with government employment (72%), reinforcing the perception of public sector jobs as stable and predictable. Conversely, students who prefer private sector jobs emphasise salary and career growth opportunities (55%). The data reveal that private sector employment is viewed as growth-oriented but less secure, while government jobs are valued for stability rather than advancement.

Table 3: Awareness Level about Private Sector Opportunities

Awareness Level	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
High Awareness	20	17%
Moderate Awareness	46	38%
Low Awareness	54	45%
Total	120	100%

Source: Primary Data

Interpretation: Nearly half of the respondents (45%) have low awareness about private sector job opportunities. Only 17% reported high awareness. This suggests that insufficient information, poor exposure, and a lack of structured career guidance contribute significantly to students' reluctance to consider private employment. Increasing awareness could lead to more balanced career preferences.

Table 4: Influence of Family on Career Decisions

Family Influence	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Strong Influence	68	57%
Moderate Influence	34	28%
No Influence	18	15%

Source: Primary Data

Interpretation: A substantial proportion (57%) reported strong family influence on career decisions. This indicates that traditional family expectations play a decisive role in steering students toward government jobs. Families in rural areas tend to prioritise stable employment, reinforcing established cultural preferences.

6. FINDINGS

The study reveals that rural students in Nagaon district exhibit a strong preference for government sector employment, driven primarily by job security, stable income, and social recognition. Private sector jobs are viewed as less secure and more demanding, despite offering higher growth potential. Socio-economic background, parental influence, and limited career awareness significantly shape students' career choices. The majority of respondents lack adequate exposure to emerging private-sector opportunities and skill-based career paths. Gender differences were observed, with female students showing a stronger inclination toward government jobs.

Overall, restricted information and traditional beliefs continue to influence rural students' employment preferences.

7. SUGGESTIONS

The study suggests the need for structured career counselling programs in rural schools and colleges to help students understand emerging job opportunities in both government and private sectors. Institutions should organise skill development workshops, soft-skill training, and entrepreneurship awareness programs. Collaboration between educational institutions and industry can provide exposure through internships and seminars. Digital literacy initiatives should be strengthened to enable students to access job information. Parents and teachers must be sensitised to support diverse career paths. Finally, the government should promote youth employment schemes and create awareness about private-sector prospects to reduce overdependence on government jobs.

8. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that career preferences among rural students in Nagaon district are heavily influenced by socio-economic conditions, cultural norms, and limited exposure to diverse employment opportunities. A strong inclination toward government sector jobs persists due to the perceived benefits of stability, security, and social prestige. Private sector employment remains undervalued, primarily because of misconceptions, insufficient awareness, and limited skill readiness. The findings highlight the urgent need for comprehensive career guidance, skill enhancement programs, and better information dissemination to help rural youth explore broader career options. Addressing these gaps can significantly improve employability and support balanced workforce participation.

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