

# A PAPER ON EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

<sup>1</sup>Ms. Meenakshi Rani, <sup>2</sup>Ms. Karamjit Kaur, <sup>3</sup>Ms. Ginni Garg

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Business Studies, <sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Management,

<sup>3</sup>MBA student, Department of Business Studies,  
Baba Farid College of Engineering and Technology, Bathinda

## Abstract

Financial constraints remain a significant barrier to equitable access to higher education, particularly in emerging economies such as India. Financial aid and scholarship programs play a vital role in reducing this barrier by enabling students to pursue academic and professional aspirations without undue economic pressure. This paper examines the impact of financial aid and scholarship initiatives on student engagement with StudentsDunia, a growing educational technology platform that provides scholarship listings, career resources, and learning support. The study employed a descriptive research design with primary data collected from 80 students (40 graduates and 40 postgraduates) through structured questionnaires distributed via Google Forms. The results demonstrate a universally positive correlation between financial aid and increased platform engagement, with 100% of respondents acknowledging enhanced activity levels after receiving or applying for aid. Merit-based scholarships emerged as the dominant form of support (72.5%), and regular scholarship updates were identified as the strongest motivator for sustained engagement (73.8%). The findings underscore the role of financial aid not only in fostering academic persistence but also in cultivating long-term loyalty towards the platform.

**Keywords:** Financial Aid, Scholarships, User Engagement, EdTech, Graduate Students, Postgraduate Students, StudentsDunia

## 1. Introduction

Education has long been recognized as both a driver of individual empowerment and a cornerstone of national development. However, access to quality higher education often depends on financial capacity, creating disparities among students from different socio-economic backgrounds. In India, where higher education costs are rising steadily, financial aid and scholarship programs act as crucial instruments to democratize opportunities. The rise of educational technology (EdTech) platforms has further reshaped the learning landscape by providing career resources, and scholarship databases. StudentsDunia is one such platform, dedicated to bridging the awareness gap in scholarship accessibility. By centralizing verified information and simplifying the application process, it seeks to empower students with financial support and career guidance. Against this backdrop, the present study investigates whether financial aid and scholarships enhance user engagement on StudentsDunia. Specifically, it compares patterns of engagement between graduate and postgraduate students. Engagement in this context is defined not only by login frequency and feature usage but also by the motivational and career-oriented behaviours that follow financial aid access.

## 2. Literature Review

Perna (2010) highlighted that financial aid plays a significant role in increasing access to higher education and improving student persistence. He argued that scholarships not only ease financial burdens but also enhance academic motivation and engagement. Castleman & Long (2016) studied the impact of need-based financial aid in U.S. colleges and found that students receiving consistent aid were more likely to participate in academic and extracurricular activities, leading to higher levels of overall engagement and retention. Dynarski & Scott-Clayton (2018) emphasized that well-structured scholarship programs improve both enrollment and completion rates. They noted that aid tied to performance standards fosters greater accountability and motivates students to stay engaged in their academic journey. Singh & Mishra (2022) examined Indian higher education institutions and reported that scholarship programs significantly reduced dropout rates and increased participation in co-curricular activities. Their findings suggest that financial support not only addresses economic barriers but also positively impacts student confidence and involvement.

## 3. Objectives of the Study

To evaluate the impact of financial aid and scholarship programs on student engagement on Ed-tech platforms

#### 4. Research Methodology

A descriptive research design was adopted to explore user behaviour and perceptions.

**Population:** Students registered with StudentsDunia.

**Sample Size:** 80 respondents (40 undergraduates and 40 postgraduates).

**Sampling Technique:** Stratified random sampling to ensure equal representation of both groups.

**Data Collection Tool:** Structured questionnaire using Google Forms.

**Data Analysis Tools:** Microsoft Excel for descriptive statistics, percentage method, and visualization through tables and charts.

**Tool of Presentation:** Pie charts, bar graphs, and tabulated data.

#### 5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

##### 5.1 Demographic Profile

The respondents were predominantly young, with 87.6% between 18–25 years of age. Gender distribution was nearly balanced (52.5% female, 47.5% male). Academic background revealed significant representation from Business Studies (26%), Engineering (23.8%), and Medical (22.5%).

##### 5.2 Awareness Channels

Social media was the dominant medium through which students discovered StudentsDunia (81.3%), while only 5% learned about it through colleges. This indicates the platform's reliance on digital marketing but also highlights an untapped opportunity for institutional partnerships.

##### 5.3 Usage Patterns

**Frequency:** 47.5% used the platform 2–3 times per week, and 45% used it weekly. Daily active users were minimal (7.5%), suggesting engagement is strong but not habitual.

**Features Used:** Scholarships were the most accessed feature (86.5%), whereas jobs (1.1%) and internships (7.9%) lagged significantly.

##### 5.4 Financial Aid Engagement

**Scholarship Access:** 51.2% were already receiving scholarships, while 48.8% had applied through StudentsDunia.

**Application Ease:** 100% rated the process as “Easy” or “Very Easy,” reinforcing user satisfaction with platform design.

**Activity Levels:** Every respondent reported increased platform activity after engaging with financial aid.

##### 5.5 Career Impact

46.3% reported being motivated to pursue higher studies. 33.8% experienced reduced financial pressure. 13.8% were motivated to apply for more internships or jobs. 6.3% gained confidence in career planning.

##### 5.6 Engagement Drivers

Regular scholarship updates were the strongest motivator (73.8%), followed by an easy-to-use interface (18.8%). Financial need and career listings were minor motivators, reflecting the centrality of scholarships to user loyalty.

##### 5.7 Post-Academic Loyalty

An overwhelming 96.3% expressed a 5/5 likelihood of continuing to use StudentsDunia after completing their current studies. This finding illustrates the platform's ability to sustain engagement beyond immediate academic needs.

#### 6. Findings

- **Age Profile:** Majority (87.6%) of users were between 18–25 years, confirming that StudentsDunia primarily attracts young students in early academic stages.

- Gender Balance: Responses were fairly balanced (52.5% female, 47.5% male), ensuring both genders are represented in the engagement study.
- Equal Academic Representation: 50% graduates and 50% postgraduates participated, allowing reliable comparative insights.
- Fields of Study: Business Studies (26%), Engineering (23.8%), and Medical (22.5%) dominated the sample, indicating stronger engagement from mainstream professional fields.
- Awareness Channels: Social media (81.3%) was the dominant discovery source; colleges contributed only 5%, highlighting an underutilized outreach channel.
- Platform Usage: 47.5% used StudentsDunia 2–3 times a week, 45% used it weekly, Only 7.5% were daily users → reflects moderate engagement but low daily retention.
- Features Used: Scholarships were the most valued feature (86.5%), while jobs (1.1%) and internships (7.9%) received minimal engagement.
- Scholarship Access: 51.2% were receiving aid, while 48.8% had applied through StudentsDunia → very high scholarship penetration.
- Application Process: 100% rated the scholarship application process as “Easy” or “Very Easy.”
- Engagement Post-Aid: 100% confirmed increased activity after receiving/applying for aid, proving a direct correlation between financial support and engagement.
- Login Frequency: 98.8% reported increased login frequency, confirming heightened platform loyalty.
- Career Impact: 46.3% encouraged to pursue higher studies, 33.8% experienced reduced financial stress, 13.8% motivated to apply for internships/jobs, 6.3% gained career planning confidence.
- Motivators: Regular scholarship updates (73.8%) were the strongest driver of continued engagement, followed by ease of use (18.8%).
- Platform Loyalty: 96.3% rated a 5/5 likelihood of using StudentsDunia post-studies, showing long-term trust.

## 7. Discussion

**Financial Aid as a Catalyst:** The study confirms that scholarships directly enhance user activity, validating the role of financial support as both a necessity and a motivator.

**Graduate vs Postgraduate Behaviour:** Graduates showed exploratory use (browsing, sharing). Postgraduates focused on outcome-driven applications (career and higher study opportunities). **Centrality of Scholarships:** Engagement is overwhelmingly tied to scholarships rather than jobs or internships, StudentsDunia is perceived more as a “scholarship hub” than a full career platform.

**Ease of Application: Trust:** A universally smooth application process fosters credibility and reinforces brand reliability. **Career Empowerment:** Scholarships reduced financial stress and boosted academic/career confidence, showing psychological as well as financial impact. **User Loyalty beyond Academics:** Almost all respondents plan to continue using the platform even after studies, demonstrating StudentsDunia’s ability to build a sustainable user community.

## 8. Recommendations

- Introduce gamified tools and campus ambassador programs to strengthen engagement among the 18–25 age groups.
- Maintain inclusive outreach by supporting gender-sensitive scholarships, especially for women in STEM.
- Develop segment-specific features: networking and resume-building tools for graduates, advanced research and career-planning modules for postgraduates.
- Expand outreach to Arts, Humanities, and niche fields through targeted campaigns and collaborations.
- Strengthen institutional partnerships with colleges, universities, and NGOs to complement social media-driven awareness.
- Diversify platform offerings by enhancing job boards, internships, and mentorship opportunities alongside scholarships.
- Preserve and refine the easy-to-use application interface while adding AI-powered and multilingual support.
- Sustain heightened engagement through loyalty programs, exclusive content, and recognition badges for scholarship recipients.
- Link scholarships with career guidance modules, including pathways for higher education and success stories.
- Create a dynamic scholarship dashboard with filters and real-time notifications via email, WhatsApp, and push alerts.
- Establish an alumni network with lifetime access to financial literacy content, scholarship updates, and career resources.

## 9. Conclusion

This comparative study highlights the transformative role of financial aid in shaping student engagement within digital learning ecosystems. By analyzing the experiences of 80 graduates and postgraduates, the research unequivocally demonstrates that scholarships act as powerful enablers of both activity and loyalty. The fact that 100% of respondents reported increased engagement and 96.3% indicated continued platform use after their studies underscores the long-term value of financial aid as a strategic differentiator. From a graduate–postgraduate perspective, the study reveals complementary patterns: graduates demonstrate exploratory engagement, while postgraduates focus on outcome-oriented applications. This distinction suggests the need for tailored engagement strategies that reflect the academic and career maturity of different user groups.

The strongest conclusion drawn from this research is that financial aid is more than monetary support—it is a catalyst for confidence, continuity, and community building. By easing financial stress, scholarships free cognitive resources for learning, foster aspirational career choices, and reinforce trust in digital platforms. For Students Dunia, the implications are clear. To sustain its growth, the platform must continue strengthening scholarship services while diversifying into jobs, internships, and mentorship programs. Institutional partnerships should be expanded to supplement its social media reach, ensuring broader inclusivity.

In essence, this study reaffirms that financial aid is not just an enabler of access but a cornerstone of engagement and educational equity. By recognizing its dual role as both a necessity and a motivator, StudentsDunia can evolve into a holistic ecosystem that empowers students to achieve academic success and lifelong learning opportunities.

## References

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