School Education in Manipur
A Synoptic View

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Abstract

The main objective of this present study is to examine school education and its associated multi-dimensional challenges of Manipur using selected educational indicators. The study finds that the State has performed well in terms of three educational parameters size, equity and efficiency. But Manipur still experiences higher dropout rates in its hill districts indicating an inequality of access to school education. Conflict and violence have impeded the progress of school education. Further, proxy-system of teachers, lack of trained teachers, lack of social support, lack of infrastructure, geographically isolated-schools, lackadaisical attitude, transport bottleneck, inappropriate curriculum, inappropriate pedagogy, political interference and poverty have exacerbated the problems. The study suggests three strategies: (i) a holistic approach to address the multidimensional socio-economic factors affecting school education, (ii) specific intervention for the geographically isolated schools in the hills and (iii) promoting equal access to school education.

INTRODUCTION

There are various studies to prove that during earlier days in Manipur, the process of learning and teaching was conducted orally and passed over from generations to generations. It is believed that the ancient education system of Manipur was based on the method of oral-teaching. Like any other society, it was also the process of learning customs, traditions, moral values, creative arts, etc. Manipuri '*Phungga Wari*' (folktales) narrated by elders in the earlier periods imparted moral values, discipline, customs and traditions.

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Researches also show that there was no proper formal education system in Manipur during those days. Before arrival of the British in Manipur, Bengala script served as the medium of instruction in religious rites and education. It was only after the establishment of the Office of the British Political Agents in 1835, Captain Gordon, the political Agent of Manipur introduced western education system by opening a primary school at *Langthabal* in 1837 on a trial-basis, but it was not successful due to lack of encouragement from the people of Manipur (Long Joba, 2010). Following the suggestion of the Political Agent, Major General W. F. Nuthall under the aegis of Bengal government, a vernacular school was established in 1872 in Manipur, but was also not successful due to lack of students in 1877. The publication of Manipuri script for the first time in the Asiatic Society of Bengal by G. H. Damant seemed to accelerate the progress of proper education in Manipur (McCall, 1930). In 1885, a Middle English school called Johnstone Middle English School was established by the then political Agent, Sir James Johnstone at Imphal with the permission of Maharaja Sir Chandra Kirti Singh. Since then, education has been making gradual progress in Manipur. According to a Summary Report of the Fifth All India Educational Survey, Manipur (1986-87), the education system of Manipur was developed in 1946. Thus, the old order was transformed into a new education system during the process of evolution. Economic Survey Manipur (2020–21) also points out that there has been a great deal of accomplishment in the field of education since 1950–51 with the number of institutions imparting occupational and technical education having shown a phenomenal increase. The landscape of education is changing very fast in this modern society and it has to be looked at in the context of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The NEP has highlighted that education must move towards less content, and more towards learning about how to think critically and solve problems, how to be creative and multidisciplinary, and how to innovate, adapt, and absorb new material in novel and changing fields. There is a need for study on school education as Manipur has been facing multi-dimensional challenges in school education causing hindrances in making progress towards learning achievement and inclusive education. The study is highly significant as it will address not only the inequality in access to education but also provide inputs to the State Government, stakeholders, policy-makers, researchers and academicians for formulation of a successful long-term educational policy for the State.

Objectives and Methodology

The main objective of this present study is to examine the present scenario of school education in Manipur. It

also examines the multidimensional challenges of education by using selected indicators. The present study mainly used data from the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE+), Government of Manipur. Further, the current study uses Annual Administrative Report of the Education Department (School), Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) Report, MHRD Reports, State Government of Manipur, Economic Survey, Manipur, Directorate of Economics and Statistics (Government of Manipur), Report of the Kothari Commission, Survey Reports, Books, Articles, Journals, Seminar Papers, Conference Papers, Working Papers, Newspapers, PhD Theses, etc. Moreover, a wide range of literature on the related areas has also been examined for the current study. The scope of the study includes examining the school education system and its associated multi-dimensional challenges for the sixteen districts of Manipur. It also explores the enrolment ratio, retention ratio and dropout rates for primary, upper primary, secondary and higher secondary education. Besides, it also examines the status of Universal Elementary Education, interface between conflict and education and unique educational problems in the hills. The limitation of the study is the use of secondary data for the present paper and the study does not cover school education during the period of Coronavirus pandemic. The present study is organised into eight sections. Section I presents introduction. Section II provides objectives and methodology. Section III presents data on education. Section IV presents Universal Elementary Education (UEE). Section V provides conflict and education. Section VI analyses education in the hills. Section VII provides dropout rates. Section VIII provides findings and conclusion of the study.

Status of School Education

Economic Survey of Manipur (2021) points out that the State has achieved significant progress in terms of literacy rate. For instance, the literacy rate in Manipur moved up from 11 per cent in 1951 to 76.94 per cent in 2011. The rate of male literacy was recorded at 83.58 per cent while the rate of female literacy stood at 70.26 per cent in 2011. Among the districts in Manipur, Imphal West exhibited the highest number of literates followed by Imphal East and Thoubal while Tamenglong recorded the least. Table 1 presents data on the structure of schools for 16 districts in Manipur. It may be observed from the table that Imphal West recorded the highest number of schools with (612), followed by Imphal East with (559), Kangpokpi with (532) and Churachandpur district with (465) respectively.

Table 2 gives data on the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of students for sixteen districts of Manipur. It may be observed from the table that the overall GER of Manipur State for

Table 1

Schools for 16 Districts in Manipur

S. No.	District Name	Block(s)	Villages	Clusters	Habitations	Panchayats	Schools
1.	Bishnupur	2	106	10	213	31	321
2.	Chandel	2	204	9	201	13	232
3.	Churachandpur	4	314	13	341	51	465
4.	Imphal East	2	146	20	310	67	559
5.	Imphal West	3	186	44	361	50	612
6.	Jiribam	1	57	3	79	8	112
7.	Kakching	1	46	4	106	17	182
8.	Kamjong	3	121	17	124	10	140
9.	Kangpokpi	3	400	18	446	33	532
10.	Noney	1	88	8	92	2	143
11.	Pherzawl	2	88	6	104	16	132
12.	Senapati	3	141	12	269	25	370
13.	Tamenglong	3	159	22	203	1	278
14.	Tengnoupal	2	135	6	132	11	160
15.	Thoubal	1	100	8	174	36	377
16.	Ukhrul	2	106	23	112	22	229
	Total	**35**	**2397**	**223**	**3267**	**393**	**4844**

Source: Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE+), (2018–19).

Primary Schools accounted for 112.99 per cent in which Churachandpur district registered the highest ratio with 159.17 per cent of all other districts in the State. The GER for Upper Primary, Secondary and Higher Secondary accounted for 128.14 per cent, 86.57 per cent and 63.58 per cent respectively, in Manipur.

It may be seen from Table 3 that the retention rate for students in primary, elementary and secondary schools for both boys and girls stood above 90 per cent in which elementary schools recorded the highest retention rate in Manipur. For instance, the total retention rate for primary, elementary and secondary for sixteen districts of Manipur accounted for 93.98 per cent, 96.63 per cent and 93.61 per cent respectively. It may be noted here that the retention rate for Noney, Pherzawl and Tamenglong districts are found comparatively low as compared with other districts.

Universal Elementary Education (UEE)

Universalisation of elementary education has been one of the most

Table 2

Gross Enrolment Ratio of Sixteen Districts in Manipur

S. No.	Districts	Primary	Upper Primary	Secondary	Hr. Secondary
1.	Bishnupur	101.73	124.84	81.47	45.39
2.	Chandel	114.7	91.92	63.61	53.27
3.	Churachandpur	159.16	189.31	121.38	75.65
4.	Imphal East	106.94	141.44	100.42	78.84
5.	Imphal West	95.65	125.16	86.1	107.16
6.	Jiribam	157.17	152.29	77.89	36.28
7.	Kakching	97.65	137.22	103.81	50.11
8.	Kamjong	115.16	77.19	43.99	2.13
9.	Kangpokpi	149.7	141.88	82.19	45.67
10.	Noney	178.1	145.63	120.07	57.86
11.	Pherzawl	109.54	65.24	20.44	0.66
12.	Senapati	84.96	67.23	50.01	31.28
13.	Tamenglong	121.45	105.96	60.22	26.64
14.	Tengnoupal	120.71	118	66.82	42.32
15.	Thoubal	111.98	145.64	105.34	75.63
16.	Ukhrul	121.61	135.75	97.35	41.39
Manipur State		**112.99**	**128.14**	**86.57**	**63.58**

Source: Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE+), (2018–19).

important goals of educational development in India since Independence. In view of this, the Parliament passed the 86th Amendment Act of the Constitution of India in 2002, to make elementary education a Fundamental Right for children in the age group of 6–14 years. The Act implies that school facilities should be provided to all children between the ages of 6 to 14.

UEE refers to make education available to all children in the age of group of 6–14 or in Classes I–VIII (Sharma, 2013). It means education for every child to complete the stage of elementary or primary education, either through formal or non-formal means of education. The Act is intended to cover children of every community, castes, creed, religion, CWSN, orphans or destitute and disadvantaged groups. In short, it is inclusive education for all children, rich and the poor, rural and urban, or children from remote and difficult areas. Universalisation of elementary education also means free and compulsory elementary education for all children till they complete 14 years of age. It involves three stages — Universalisation of Provision,

Table 3

Retention Rate in Sixteen Districts in Manipur

S.No.	Districts	Primary			Elementary			Secondary		
		Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1.	Bishnupur	94.04	94.78	94.40	101.22	103.73	102.46	100.56	91.92	96.13
2.	Chandel	88.45	93.65	90.94	116.96	113.32	115.10	100.23	101.69	100.99
3.	Churachandpur	91.05	96.69	93.74	96.84	99.64	98.20	91.47	89.94	90.72
4.	Imphal East	99.77	101.83	100.77	97.05	98.88	97.95	94.04	97.58	95.80
5.	Imphal West	98.79	99.85	99.31	94.21	96.83	95.51	89.76	91.29	90.53
6.	Jiribam	86.15	85.48	85.83	91.11	93.12	92.15	91.83	86.50	88.91
7.	Kakching	91.12	90.76	90.94	98.03	100.64	99.29	100.00	101.37	100.66
8.	Kamjong	71.95	73.56	72.71	92.63	92.93	92.77	79.22	81.86	80.49
9.	Kangpokpi	92.74	94.86	93.77	96.91	98.16	97.51	95.33	92.44	93.90
10.	Noney	93.41	94.41	93.87	94.11	91.42	92.83	78.89	70.82	74.78
11.	Pherzawl	75.60	78.17	76.85	61.05	62.13	61.57	63.16	62.81	62.98
12.	Senapati	87.60	88.27	87.92	95.55	93.44	94.54	99.84	100.26	100.04
13.	Tamenglong	111.52	115.73	113.53	98.29	99.53	98.93	77.82	80.94	79.40
14.	Tengnoupal	92.79	93.25	93.02	89.50	84.55	86.94	106.48	101.96	104.21
15.	Thoubal	95.54	92.94	94.26	99.32	96.47	97.89	99.63	105.54	102.52
16.	Ukhrul	76.38	82.70	79.36	85.25	89.47	87.32	82.49	85.75	84.14
Manipur State		**92.96**	**94.89**	**93.89**	**96.04**	**97.24**	**96.63**	**93.37**	**93.86**	**93.61**

Source: Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE+), (2018–19).

Universalisation of Enrolment, and Universalisation of Retention. CAG Report (2011) of the State Government of Manipur reveals that SSA was being implemented without proper planning and without carrying out household survey and pre-project activities. There was short release of funds, delay in release of funds and diversion of funds in implementation of SSA. Teachers were posted in schools with zero enrolment and there were schools with no posting of teachers. Contract management was weak both under these schemes with loopholes in the contract clauses. The study conducted by Sangeeta and Binita (2012) found that Manipur has shown considerable progress in terms of literacy rates, number of schools, number of teachers and students' enrolment since 1951. The dominance of private schools in terms of number, enrolment of students and performance in the examinations was one of the significant features of school education in the State. In terms of access to secondary education, Manipur is fairly poised to achieve more than the national target of 75 per cent over the next five years. The Gross Enrolment Ratio for secondary level could have been much higher if the schools were spread over strategic places for easy access. In terms of efficiency, participation and access, the State has made a progress but the issue of quality has not been addressed. Lately, the State has focused more on qualitative achievement than quantitative achievement with the broad aims and objectives of RMSA goals.

Teacher education is said to be an integral part of the education system. Successful attainment of quality education depends on the quality of teachers. It is in this context that teachers give light to the darkness of knowledge. Teachers disseminate not only knowledge but also expand the horizon of knowledge for society. The National Council for Teacher Education was established by an Act of Parliament in 1993 with a view to improve the quality of education at school level in general, and teacher education in particular. The study conducted by Sangeeta and Binita (2012) suggested that quality of secondary school education can be enhanced through large number of trained specialised teachers. There is a need for giving in-service training programmes at massive scale, besides providing adequate infrastructure facilities in the schools like science labs, libraries and other facilities. In this regard, for bringing quality education and for achieving aims of universalisation of secondary education in the State, much effort is needed for proper implementation of the State and Central government policies and plans through both Education Department(s) and RMSA with full cooperation from the stakeholders.

In sum, the successful implementation of UEE in Manipur

is determined by prevailing socio-economic factors. Lack of infrastructure, lack of trained teachers and lack of social support are causing problems in the implementation of UEE.

Conflict and Education

Conflict and violence have impacted the students in both tangible and intangible ways. The direct effect of conflict on students in terms of dropout rate and migration is tangible impact. The intangible impact is felt in the form of mass rallies, protests, strikes and road blockades. Conflict has profound impact on Imphal city, as compared to other parts of the State because main Government's offices are located in this place. It may also be mentioned here that current situation is the outcome of on-going conflict and violence happening in Manipur. The mushrooming growth of Tuition and Coaching centres are the direct consequences of conflict and violence. Parents send their children to these Centres for covering their syllabus which cannot be completed in schools. Thus, a very strong linkage between conflict and school education is established in the State.

Karam and Thounaojam (2019) studied about education in conflict-ridden State of Manipur by selecting 95 respondents through purposive sampling technique in which 72 students and 20 teachers respectively were interviewed, including three parents. Findings of the narrative analysis reveal a strong negative linkage of the impact of conflict and education in Manipur. Students are facing a tough time, as schools are closed many a times creating an environment of confusion among the students. The study identifies conflict as one of the major reasons resulting into migration of children to metro cities for regular and quality education. The analysis of case study finds that conflicts have severely affected daily academic routine of students, and thus, promoted tuition culture and educational migration as alternative solutions. Similar view is expressed by Komol (2013), who also finds that people of Manipur are not restricting themselves to acquiring education only within the State, but are also migrating to other States in search of quality higher education. The State has been persistently disturbed by conflicts, strikes, blockages, lockouts, etc. throughout the academic year, hampering the academic calendar.

In sum, there is a linkage between conflict and school education. Conflict has profound negative impact on the long-term learning outcome of students. It has resulted into mushrooming growth of private tuition and coaching centres. Parents send their children to these centres for covering their syllabus which could not be completed in schools.

Education in Hills

The scenario of school education in the hill districts of Manipur is totally

different from the rest of the valley districts. Disadvantaged location of schools where there is transportation bottleneck and communication has adversely affected the size, equity and efficiency of education. Villages in the remote hills are scattered and this makes access to school education very difficult for the students. This is one of the main reasons for low enrolment ratio, high dropout and low retention rate in some of the backward hill districts of Manipur.

In a study by Wangdibou (2015) on education and the problems of the tribals in the hill districts of Manipur, it was found that tribal families could not afford to send their children to school, as parents had to struggle for means of survival amidst acute poverty and starvation. Tamei sub-division of Tamenglong District is far isolated from the main district and is one of the most economically backward areas. People of this area seldom visited or passed through the main district, barring exceptions for some official purpose or for withdrawing their salary. There is great transportation bottleneck. The locational disadvantage of the tribal habitats in the hills is another impediment to tribal education in Manipur. Almost all the tribal villages in the hills are widely scattered. Long distant travelling through difficult terrains to attend schools become dissuading factors. There are hardly any private schools in most of the villages and people solely depend on the government schools that do not offer competitive environment for students to compete and excel in the later years. The situation compels the students to leave their native village causing much extra burden on their families.

It may be summarised here that school education in the hill districts of Manipur depicts a different picture. Geographically isolated districts and widely scattered villages are causing serious problems for students in getting access to school education. This has led to low enrolment ratio, high dropout and low retention rate in some of the hill districts of Manipur.

Dropout Rates

Dropout rates of students in Manipur are determined by various factors like severity of poverty, lack of interest in education, irregularity and absence of teachers in the school, improper functioning of the school, separation between the parents of the children, change of residence, and parents' addiction to bad habits. As regard to dropout of girl students, security, household factors, parent's illness and death are the major contributing factors leading to dropout. There are some other factors too resulting into dropout of students in the State. They are ignorance and illiteracy of parents, curriculum load at primary level, lack of trained teachers, outdated methods of teaching, poor infrastructure like school building and other facilities, political interference, poor administration,

lack of coordination between school and local community and indifferent attitude of school authorities towards qualitative improvement. Various studies show that dropout of students have a huge financial ramification which affect labour market, economic performance and social progress of a country. As per NSSO Report (71st round), it is not only the financial constraints and engagement of children in domestic/ economic activities but lack of interest in education that contributes to high dropout. Thus, it has been argued that ensuring adequate educational facilities is necessary but not sufficient for survival of students and reduction of dropout. There has also been impressive progress towards bridging gender gap in enrolment and retention in elementary education (Govt. of India, 2014). Gender Parity Index (GPI) based on Gross Enrolment Ratio for Primary (I–V) increased from 0.41 in 1950–51 to 1.03 in 2015–16 for all Categories in India (Govt. of India, 2018). GPI for Upper Primary (VI–VIII) moved from 0.22 to 1.10 during the corresponding periods. The GPI for Elementary (I–VIII) increased from 0.38 in 1950–51 to 1.05 in 2015–16 in India. Vungngaihlun et al. (2018) conducted research on determinants of school dropouts in elementary education in Manipur (based on empirical investigation conducted in selected rural locations of the identified districts in Manipur– Imphal West and Churachandpur through purposive sampling) by taking 700 samples from both the districts (350 samples each district). Out of the 350 samples, 200 dropouts and 150 currently enrolled students in both the districts were selected. The findings of the study indicate that poverty, lack of interest in studies, irregularity and absence of teachers in the school, improper functioning of the school, separation between the parents of the children, change of residence, and parents' addiction to bad habits are the most common reasons reported by the children for dropping out of school.

In sum, lack of learning environment, lack of support for children, incongruous curriculum and pedagogy and poverty might be causing dropout of students in school education of Manipur.

Findings and Conclusion

Manipur has made significant progress in terms of literacy rate over a period of six decades. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) for Gross Enrolment Ratios in primary, upper primary, secondary and higher secondary education has significantly improved. Findings of the study show that Manipur still experiences higher dropout rates in its hill districts indicating an inequality of access to school education. Conflict and violence have impeded the progress of school education. Further, proxy system of teachers, lack of trained teachers, lack of social support, lack of infrastructure, geographically– isolated schools,

lackadaisical attitude, transport bottleneck, inappropriate curriculum, incongruous pedagogy, political interference and poverty have exacerbated the problems. The National Education Policy 2020 which aimed to address many growing developmental imperatives of our country by revamping all aspects of the education structure, including its regulation and governance could address the long-term chronic issues of education system in Manipur if implemented successfully. The National Achievement Survey (NAS) conducted by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in 2017 to provide information about the learning achievement of students studying in government and government-aided schools found Manipur as a State in which ST students performed better than other social groups in languages. The NAS has important implications for reforming school education in Manipur. The learning gap that is found in school education of Manipur for both in the valley and hill districts needs to be properly addressed in future. Therefore, there is need for a series of interventions at the district level for reviewing the curriculum, teacher training, pedagogical practices and learning outcomes in Manipur. Finally, three adoption strategies may be suggested: (i) a holistic approach to address the multidimensional socio-economic factors affecting school education; (ii) specific intervention for the geographically-isolated schools in the hills and (iii) promotion of equal access to school education. In the context of education in the hills, the recommendations of the Kothari Commission Report on correction of regional imbalances in the provision of educational facilities and provision of good educational facilities in rural and other backward areas are highly relevant. The State government has recently started a mission called “School Phagathansi Mission” by selecting 60 schools in Manipur to give thrust towards improvement of government Schools. If this mission is successfully accomplished and continues in the long run, the education systems of Manipur will be transformed and also attain equitable and inclusive education.

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