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EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES: A CATALYST FOR UNDERDEVELOPMENT

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Keywords	Abstract
<i>Precarious, Destabilised, Systemic Issues, Socioeconomic Stagnation, Sustainable Progress</i>	Education is the genesis of development. However, the education system in Manipur is in a precarious state. Despite some efforts, the state fails to provide decent education in the government schools, particularly in the hill areas. This paper aims to investigate how persistent educational challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient human resources, declining enrollment, and poor educational outcomes, contribute to underdevelopment in low-income regions such as the Tamenglong district of northeast India. The study explores the critical intersection between educational challenges and underdevelopment, highlighting how systemic issues in the education sector contribute to persistent economic stagnation and social disenchantment in the district. Interviews and focus group discussions are used to gain an in-depth understanding of the issue and identify and analyse key challenges. Human Capital Theory is used to examine how educational gaps affect socioeconomic difficulties. The findings indicate difficulties in human capital formation, socioeconomic stagnation, inequality, limited economic growth, and destabilised social and political institutions. The paper concludes that addressing educational failure and systemic issues is paramount and suggests the extensive requirement of educational reforms to rescue the generations at stake and to enhance human capital development to break the cycle of



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	underdevelopment and achieve sustainable progress.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a systematic process of transmitting knowledge within organised settings and acquiring information that promotes personal and social growth. According to UNESCO, it is the processes by which societies deliberately transmit their accumulated information, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values, skills, competencies and behaviours across generations. Education is universally recognised as a fundamental human right and a foundational pillar in facilitating human development, social progress, and ensuring economic growth and stability in society. Compulsory basic education is considered an essential part of basic public services (McMahon & Boediono, 1992; Watkins, 2000). Kikon (2003) also pointed out that education is the most important factor for social development, meaning a better life. Nonetheless, there is a disparity in the accessibility of quality education (Qudsi et al., 2025). Efforts to improve educational quality and accessibility have been made, but inadequate infrastructure remains a significant issue in Indian schools. In particular, northeast India has a history of relative isolation, underdevelopment, poor infrastructural growth, low levels of urbanisation and industrialisation, socio-political instability, and a poor delivery system (Upadhyay, 2015).

The term underdevelopment refers to a condition in which a region lags in economic, social, and political development. It is characterised by poverty, low-income level, poor infrastructure, inadequate political representation, weak governance, and limited human capital development. Historically, the concept of underdevelopment is deeply rooted in the colonial period, wherein the Europeans exploited the resources and labour of the colonised groups, resulting in their economic and social underdevelopment. This subjugation handicapped the local populace politically and economically, coercing them to be dependent on colonial power and its allies. According to Rodney (1973), underdevelopment is a comparative one; it expresses a particular relationship of exploitation, namely, the exploitation of one country by another. All of the countries named as ‘underdeveloped’ in the world are exploited by others (p.24). In the context of Manipur, the valley-centric development was created during the colonial era, which unfortunately continues post-independence. Had the hill regions not been exploited and deprived, they would not be subordinate and underdeveloped today.

In this modern era, education is a driver and enabler of development; however, underdeveloped regions have limited access to quality education. Many families are unable to afford school fees, books, uniforms, stationery, and school project work. Additionally, the region often lacks good schools, qualified and trained teachers, and basic amenities of the modern world, like electricity, internet connectivity, clean drinking water, toilets and other basic resources. If given priority in this region and provided adequate education facilities, they could be equipped with knowledge, skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities, which increase productivity and innovation. A well-



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developed education system enhances human capital, enables better labour market participation, higher earnings, greater social well-being, and contributes to more resilient economies. For instance, countries like Finland and South Korea transformed their economies dramatically over a few decades by investing in education (Wilcox 2022).

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted at the Tamenglong district of Manipur, one of the hilly districts, located in the northwestern part of Manipur. The district is bounded by the Peren district of Nagaland in the North, Churachandpur district in the South, Senapati district in the East and the West by Dima Hasao district of Assam. The district headquarters, Tamenglong, are the farthest from the state capital, Imphal, with a distance of 147 km. Zeliangrong Naga Tribes: Zeme, Liangmai, Rongmei, and Inpui are the inhabitants of the districts. Racially and linguistically, Zeliangrongs are Tibeto-Burman (Indo-Mongoloid) of the Sino-Tibetan family of the Mongolian race. Physiographically, Tamenglong is composed of hill ranges and a few narrow valleys. Most of the geographical area is hilly except for a few pockets of flat lands such as Barak (Nbiuky), Irang (Ahangky) and Makru (Makoi) river banks, Khoupum valley, Konphung, Riangleong, Dikiuram, Katang, Namtiram and a few other villages alongside the rivers. Despite its scenic beauty, Tamenglong is the least developed, worst-performing and socio-economically the most backwards among all the districts of Manipur (NITI AAYOG, 2022).

Although the district is underdeveloped in terms of modern standards, the indigenous local inhabitants have a traditional education system in place, like any other Naga tribe. It is generally called the morung, a youth dormitory. It serves as the cultural centre where young boys and girls are moulded to become responsible adult members of the community (Daimai, 2023). The name of the dormitory differs from tribe to tribe; hence, among the Liangmai Naga tribe, it is called Khangchiuki (Boys' Dormitory) and Liuchiuki (Girls' Dormitory). However, with the advent of colonial rule, the penetration of Christianity, and the introduction of modern education by the Christian missionaries, gradually have erased the traditional educational system. The advent of colonial rule has both dark and bright sides to it, and remains debatable. The missionary work in the Naga hills and Northeast India was partly geared towards taming the 'unruly' inhabitants by bringing 'enlightenment' and civilisation'. Not only did conversion to Christianity signal this shift, but it also aided in equipping the people with tools and resources such as mission education and schools (Longkumer, 2019).

After having been introduced to the modern education system, today, there are government-run and private-run schools in the district. This present study focuses on the government schools of Tamenglong. Being an underdeveloped district, the major population resides in rural areas with a low level of income, and is dependent on government schools. It is the least developed district in the state, and also lacks good educational institutions in the district (Panmei, 2013). Although the education quality is compromised, there are diverse range of educational institutions such as primary schools, upper primary schools, junior high schools, high schools, and higher secondary schools. There is a lone college in the entire district that offers only the arts stream. The Zonal Education



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Office (ZEO), government of Manipur and the Autonomous District Council (ADC) look after the majority of the schools in the district: 85 primary schools, 24 junior high schools, 18 high schools, 2 higher secondary schools, 17 Grant-In-Aid Schools and 1 Ashram school were found to be in existence. Altogether, the district hosts 372 educational establishments, predominantly co-educational. Despite the number of schools, many villages in the interior region still lack basic facilities and resources, let alone quality education.

According to the 2011 census, the literacy rate in Tamenglong District stands at 70.05 per cent, with male literacy at 76.09 per cent and female literacy at 63.69 per cent. It comprised 67.36% for rural and 86.95% for urban areas of the district. The gap between the male-female literacy rate at the district level is 12.4, and in rural areas, it is 13.26, whereas in urban areas, it is only 7.49. Tamenglong West (Tousem subdivision) has recorded the lowest literacy rate of 60.43 per cent. Tamenglong district falls in the very high urban-rural differential index grade (above 0.19). It can be noted that this district has the second lowest literacy rate (70.05%) in the state.

While it is important to be literate, it may be argued that the literacy rate represents only a basic level of proficiency and does not encapsulate the depth of understanding required for effective communication or critical thinking. On the other hand, quality education encompasses a system that provides students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and values for personal growth and societal development. Quality education involves not only the availability of schools but also the effectiveness of teaching, curriculum relevance, and the overall learning environment. It emphasises equity, inclusivity, and lifelong learning. Additionally, according to Hanushek and Woessmann (2008), the quality of education, more than years of schooling, is significantly correlated with long-term economic growth.

3. METHODOLOGY

This is an empirical study and employed a purposive sampling method. A total of nine villages were selected, three villages each from every subdivision, which consisted of 190 respondents. Mixed-method research of qualitative and quantitative approaches was used based on both primary and secondary data. The qualitative component uncovers deeper contextual insights, while the quantitative component provides statistical robustness. In-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders such as educators, students, parents, and education administrators. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing flexibility in exploring participants' experiences and perceptions of education and its systems. Focus group interviews were also organised to facilitate discussions among students, parents and teachers. This encouraged the sharing of diverse perspectives on academic challenges, enabling a collaborative understanding of the community's educational needs. Statistical Data were collected from the field and government sources, which help identify trends and patterns that affect educational outcomes and economic impacts. The qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, identifying key themes emerging from interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. The research adhered to ethical standards, ensuring that informed consent was obtained from all participants.



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The key objectives of the paper are: to examine educational challenges, to understand the role of community participation in education and to analyse how educational deficiencies contribute to broader socio-economic issues, which are reflected in their underdeveloped living.

This present study addresses educational challenges from the lens of human capital theory, focuses on enhancing human capital, pushing economic improvement, and increasing their productive capacity through improved education and skills training (Bio, 202; Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964). This concept suggests that the labour force is not homogeneous; rather, it is composed of individuals with varying levels of knowledge, experience, and skills, all of which contribute to the economic value they provide. To achieve this, quality education is required. The theory recognises education as a key factor in enhancing human productivity, thus linking it directly to economic outcomes. The lack of educational facilities and qualified teachers poses a significant barrier to developing human capital, leading to high unemployment and low economic productivity among youth (Neamtu, 2023).

Locating Education Scenario in Manipur

The ancient educational system of Manipur embodied the method of oral teaching and memorising the text by heart. Historically, until 1872, there was no primary school for formal education in Manipur. During 1893-95, four Lower Primary Schools, three in Imphal and one in the hill area (at Mao), were established. To cope with the expansion in all stages, the Department of Education was established in 1910 and has been functioning until today in a much greater capacity. Manipur's education system is a mix of public and private institutions. Today, there are 51 colleges, of which 37 are located in the valley and 14 are sparsely located in the hill districts, 9 universities, of which 8 are in the valley and one (private) at Churachandpur. The total number of schools and higher secondary schools is 4627 as per the UDISE report in 2022-2023. The total number of teaching and non-teaching staff of all levels is 21905 as per the CMIS database as of 6th August 2024.

India has made education accessible through constitutional mandates and the RTE Act, and with the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act, 2009), elementary education has become a fundamental right in Manipur as well (Singh & Singh, 2016). The state government is responsible for providing primary education to all, whether economically affluent or backwards; however, failed in numerous ways. Moreover, both government and private schools often shut down, and thousands of students' lives are affected due to the turmoil in the state. The recent study has also highlighted the concern that Manipur, being a conflict-ridden state, has witnessed violence and conflict-related activities that adversely hinder students' academic lives (Karam & Somokanta, 2016).

The quality of education in Manipur has sharply declined. Since August 2020, overall performance on the central government's Performance Grading Index (PGI) has dropped by over 33%. In critical areas such as Access, Infrastructure, and Governance Processes, Manipur currently ranks among the lowest in the nation, which raises serious concerns about educational outcomes for students

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

• Key Educational Challenges Found in the District



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The educational landscape in Tamenglong faces notable challenges. There seemed to be a total absence of an educational system, particularly in rural areas, resulting in a dwindling teacher-student ratio, decreasing enrollment numbers of students, a high dropout rate and an increasing number of defunct schools. In today's modern world, education, which has become a fundamental right and a key driver to socio-economic development, has been found neglected and denied in a major part of the district. Approximately 135 out of 215 villages have government primary schools, indicating a coverage gap, particularly in rural areas. Furthermore, the integration of educational technology is minimal, leading to gaps in teaching methods and resource availability. Adult literacy programs, such as the Saakshar Bharat Mission, have been initiated to combat these challenges, but their reach and effectiveness require further assessment.

• **Inflated Student-Teacher Ratio**

For any educational institution, human resources, both teaching and non-teaching staff, are the most significant requirement besides physical, financial and technological resources. The teachers are the cornerstone for any successful school; without them, a school cannot fulfil its mission of educating and nurturing students. In the case of rural schools, there has been a persistent teacher shortage, acute understaffing, and disproportionate distribution of teachers, unequal deployment preferences and favouring valley schools. Meanwhile, the government turned a blind eye to the teacher-student ratio, though it is a critical factor in determining the quality of education.

The Student-Teacher Ratio (STR) is presented below as per the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) from the Department of School Education, Ministry of Education, and Government of India.

Table 1: State-wise Student-Teacher Ratio (UDISE) – 2021-2022

State	Pupil-Teacher Ratio - Government (2021-22)				
	Primary	Upper Primary	Elementary	Secondary	Higher Secondary
Manipur	10	12	10	7	12
India	28	24	26	19	27

Source: UDISE + 2021-22

The data suggests that the Manipur STR is satisfactory, and Manipur's government schools boast about low pupil-teacher ratios, ranging from 7 to 12 students per teacher. While Manipur's average STRs look excellent on paper, especially in official UDISE+ data, the hill districts face a critical shortage of appointed and regular teachers. Many schools with no teachers are either excluded from calculations or reported inaccurately, leading to inflated and misleading STRs. This is a classic case where data doesn't reflect ground realities. For instance, Mr. Wipobou pointed out that there is a substantial student population; however, the government high school in his village currently employs a single teacher, one matron, and one chowkidar. It is anticipated that the school will need to employ



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between 20 and 30 staff members, including both teaching and non-teaching personnel. In this scenario, hundreds of children are hindered. A similar pattern is observed in all the study areas, wherein the village children population ranges from one hundred to three hundred or above, while the number of teachers is few.

- **Mismatch Between Number of Schools and Teacher Availability**

There is a critical mismatch between the number of schools and the availability of teachers. The government established schools across the remote villages to provide education. However, the primary issues are a shortage of qualified teachers, insufficient teacher training, and a culture of proxy attendance. There are many cases of ghost teachers who draw salaries without work. All of these influence the school system. Comparatively, valley schools are better, more active and functional with excess human resources and infrastructure. Concerning the schools within the district, the district headquarters and subdivisional headquarters schools have more staff and better facilities compared to the interior far flung villages. In the absence of quality education, the chances of the younger generation anticipating a better future are in question. The district's schools and the number of teachers in the study areas are presented below:

Table 2: Total number of government schools and teachers in the study areas.

Subdivisions	Village/ Towns	Primary school	No. of staff	High School	No. of Staff	Higher Secondary	No. of Staff
Tamei	Tamei	1	12	-	-	1	30
	Lenglong	1	3	1	3	-	-
	Kuilong	1	4	-	-	-	-
Tamenglong	Tamenglong	5	32	2	29	1	37
	Dailong	2	11	1	3	-	-
	Tharon	2	19	1	6	-	-
Tousem	Tousem	4	4	1	5	-	-
	Magulong	-	-	1	2	-	-
	Mpa	1	2	-	-	-	-

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

As shown in the above table, at Tamei, there are two government schools: Tamei HQ Primary School and Langmei Government Higher Secondary School is the sole higher secondary institution within the Tamei subdivision altogether. It comprises around thirty personnel, out of which eighteen are



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teaching staff, nine are contractual workers, and three are non-teaching staff. There is an absence of instructors for physics, home science, and laboratory technicians. The school has often requested that the relevant department address these needs; nonetheless, they remain unfulfilled, and there have been numerous transfers without any replacements. The existence of a systematic government policy is unknown. Despite the theoretical manipulation at the office and headquarters, the practical implementation of educational administration at the ground level remains lacking. Tamei HQ Upper Primary School has 13 staff, including twelve teachers, one peon cum chowkidar, and some substitute teachers. Lenglong Primary School has four teachers, all of whom are substitutes except for one. Lenglong High School employs only three staff members: one teacher, a matron, and a chowkidar. Kuilong village has one primary school, which employs one chowkidar and three matrons but lacks any appointed teachers.

Tamenglong Town comprises primary schools and one higher secondary school. The higher secondary institution employs thirty-seven staff members, comprising thirty-four instructors, one lower division clerk (LDC), one upper division clerk (UDC), and one grade IV staff member. The district headquarters has more staff compared with the villages. There is only one Government College in the district; however, it does not offer important social science disciplines such as sociology. Dailong village has two primary schools, with Old Dailong PS employing nine teachers and one non-teaching staff member, although most are substitutes. Jaolangpangpaeng Primary School employs a single staff member, while Dailong High School has only three teachers and one non-teaching staff member. In the past, Dailong Junior High School employed two graduates and one undergraduate teacher in science and one graduate teacher in Hindi. The majority consisted of Meitei individuals, accompanied by a small number of local educators. Ultimately, all the Meitei educators departed, resulting in the school's eventual obsolescence. Local teachers have reached retirement age and have retired; however, no replacements have been appointed to date. Tharon (Thalon) village contains one government high school, 2 primary schools, and one aided school. The Tharon High School comprises only six teachers: one graduate teacher, four primary teachers, and one chowkidar. Rather than improving, Tharon's education deteriorated significantly; consequently, the students' union undertook steps to participate in the process of education by volunteering and serving as substitutes in place of absent government-appointed teachers to rejuvenate the school. The village has a robust population of approximately 300 pupils.

The above table 2 shows that Tousem has six government schools, out of which only two are operational: Tousem High School and Primary School. Previously, the student's enrolment was usually around 110–120; however, since COVID-19, it has decreased by approximately 90 students. Only six government-appointed teachers are working at Tousem High School, with one being employed elsewhere (utilised), three teachers are absent from their posting place and are substituted, and two serve as permanent teachers who are soon retiring. The teachers are not sufficient to cover classes 1 to 10; therefore, the school board (SMDC) of the village engaged the educated youth volunteers of the village for a few thousand (2500-3000 per month) . Similarly, Magulong village



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has a government high school; it has two appointed teachers without a headmaster, nor does it have subordinate staff such as a peon, nor does it have the required number of teachers. Further, adding salt to the wound, neither teacher is stationed in the place of posting. The village of Mpa has one government primary school with two government-appointed teachers; however, they do not fulfil their duties, instead engaging a proxy teacher.

Sialak Panme asserted that the education system in the Tamenglong district is regressive. Comparatively, the teacher recruitment and appointment were better in the 1980s than today. The school has lacked qualified and sufficient teachers since its establishment, and the number of teachers has declined year after year. No retired teachers are replaced. Despite several petitions to the relevant department to deploy more teachers, it remained a failure. Moreover, the concerns were raised to the district's Deputy Commissioner, Autonomous District Council members, and Legislative Assembly members representing the district, but, with little success.

• The Fall of Student Enrolment Number

Concerning students' enrollment, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) for 2022 indicates a positive trend in the enrollment of children aged 6 to 14 in government schools in Manipur, increasing from 28% in 2018 to 32.8% in 2022. Comparatively, the state still has the lowest percentage of enrollment among other northeastern states, indicating a pressing need to enhance educational engagement in the region (Leivon, 2023). While the overall state enrollment number increases, the data from the Tamenglong district shows otherwise.

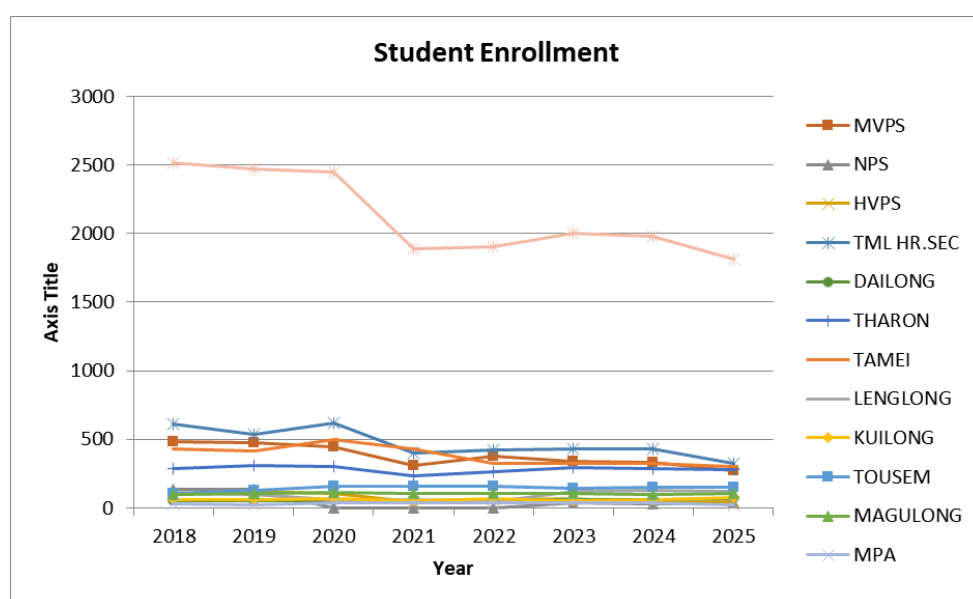


Chart 1: Student Enrollment Number of the Study Area (2018-2025)

Source: Fieldwork, 2022 and latest data collected from the respective schools in 2025



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The graph illustrates the ongoing decline in student enrolment numbers. There was a significant decline during the COVID pandemic; nevertheless, enrolment continued to decrease post-COVID. The decline in student enrolment is attributed to inadequate infrastructure and facilities, insufficient and absenteeism of teaching staff, inadequately trained educators, and the prevalence of proxy culture by unqualified individuals. The inadequate performance of government schools compels parents to transfer their children to private institutions, despite financial constraints. Additionally, government schools struggle due to a lack of resources, connectivity, and digital training, creating the digital divide and the remote learning gap. Consequently, parents' trust in the government school system eroded due to a lack of accountability and longstanding issues combined with pandemic-era shortcomings.

The decline in school enrollment in Tamenglong District is a significant concern, reflecting broader issues within the education system. At the same time, some of the factors contributing to low enrollment include families' economic difficulties forcing children to contribute to household income or work to support themselves or siblings. The perceived value of education in comparison with immediate economic benefits from children keeps many parents from sending their children to school for further studies. Additionally, poor school infrastructure and insufficient learning materials deter parents from enrolling their children. Schools lacking essential resources, technology, and proper facilities directly impact students' motivation and performance, and most importantly, hinder students' retention.

- **Dropout Dilemma with Declining Student Retention**

Dropout rates in Manipur have been alarming, particularly in primary education levels (Classes 1-5). In 2021-22, the dropout rate reached 13.3%, a significant uptick from 8.6% in the preceding year. This rate was the highest in India for primary education, according to Kalita (2022). The increase in primary grade dropout rates surged from 8% in 2020 to 13.3% in 2021, making it one of the highest dropout rates in India. The quality of education has deteriorated, with significant discrepancies in literacy rates observed between government and private school students. The dropout rate in Tamenglong is alarmingly high, particularly at the secondary level, due to economic hardship, lack of motivation, and the need for children to support their families through early labour. In many cases, children, especially girls, drop out to help with household chores, to care for younger siblings, and to help parents in agricultural activities, thus paving the way for perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

- **Corruption and the Decline of Educational Integrity**

Corruption is another form of challenge that slowly paralyses the education system. The democratic Students' Alliance of Manipur (DESAM) has raised concerns about the inflated student enrollment figures in government schools. About 45,000 fake entries were claimed to secure additional funding. This mismanagement has resulted in a loss of approximately Rs. 118 crores, which comprises nearly 20% of the total budget for the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan in the state. Ghost teachers are given payment, leading to a shortage of actual educators in schools. Funds allocated for educational



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infrastructure, teacher salaries, or student scholarships are often misused and diverted for personal gain. Bribery and nepotism are prevalent, and they influence the hiring of teachers and staff, leading to the appointment of unqualified individuals and compromising educational quality. As pointed out by Newme and Scaria (2025), the rush for government employment has had the unintended consequence of fostering bribes for recruitment. Generally, it is discussed in private conversation about the rate for government jobs in Manipur, ranging between five hundred thousand to six hundred thousand for a primary teacher, 1.5 million to 2 million for a Post Graduate Teacher, or even higher for a state civil services post. This predicament is worse than high inflation or any other catastrophe since prices are constantly rising.

- **Non-Functional School Becoming the New Normal**

When it comes to functioning and continual maintenance of schools, the district has long been grappling with systemic neglect. Although the state government established schools in several villages over the years, there has been a rising number of defunct government schools. Numerous schools exist in papers, but are non-functional or severely underperforming. The defunct schools in the hills reflect a broader pattern of marginalisation and neglect. It is considered a direct discrimination against the minorities and hill indigenous people of their rights. For many decades, poor governance, with its chronic administrative failure, left the schools unfunded, with insufficient infrastructure and limited human resources. All the schools, except for the few in district headquarters, are either running for name's sake or are already defunct. For instance, one such school among many is discussed here.



Image 1: The Ashram School at Tousem, Tamenglong District.



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Source: Fieldwork, 2022

The Ashram school at Tousem was founded in 1982 and launched by the then local representative, Lt. I.D. Dijuanang (MLA). This is the sole Ashram school in the Tamenglong district, run by the Tribal/Social Welfare Department; nonetheless, it has now been classified as non-functional. The rusted tin covering the roof and wall is on the verge of collapse. The school verandas provide shelter for animals such as goats and cows. The school had been defunct for about a decade, whereas a few teachers continue to draw salaries to this day. The residents are unaware of the reasons why the school is dysfunctional. Meanwhile, the government and the relevant department bear no culpability for the malfunctioning school.

• **Linguistic Barrier in the Multilingual Education System**

There is a fundamental structural division in Manipur: geographically, politically, economically, socially and also in provisions and opportunities. Among these, language in education has become an outright monopoly of the dominant ethnic majority, which certainly makes it an interesting case to understand the perspective of the minority community today. The existing gap in education persists in the hill and valley districts of the state, and the emerging issue of curricular and linguistic discontent among minority tribals, as well as their assertion and struggle to claim their space and representation in education (Chawang, 2023). Similarly, Devi & Choksi (2022) pointed out that, in the hill regions, dominated by communities of ethnic Naga and Kuki-Chin, the decision to uniformly implement the Meitei script led to widespread resistance.

The introduction of Meitei Mayek has indeed exacerbated divisions in the multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic region. The state has a diverse ethnic and linguistic composition, which adds complexity to the education system. Many students face difficulties in accessing education in their mother tongue. The compulsory imposition of Meitei Mayek till class 8/10 in educational institutions caused hindrances to the Indigenous groups in the past and present. The older generation had painstakingly learned Manipuri to read the bible and sing Christian hymns. Mrs. Bailungliu recalled her education at night school, having no privilege to directly access modern education from her dialect, Roman script or English. It was mandatory to learn Manipuri, which was a Bengali Script in those days, only after which one could learn desired lessons. Likewise, Ms. Ariliu expressed that Meitei mayek was the least favourite subject, utmost disinterested in learning weird patterns; however, compelled to study as it is a mandatory subject. Scoring hardly passing marks in every exam, which consequently affects the overall grade and performance.

• **Disparity in employment and Establishment**

The number of employees in the public sector in Manipur is 56064, including both state group and quasi-government. Employees from the hill areas constitute only 29% (approx.), although the hill population is about 40.88% according to the 2011 census. Tamenglong district has the lowest number of employees, i.e. 2457, while Imphal West district has the highest number, which stands at 18049. Concerning faculties in institutes of national importance and universities, centres in Manipur,



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for instance, faculties in Manipur University, 14 (5%) faculties of Scheduled Tribe (ST), 27 (9%) faculties of others and 264 (86%) faculties are exclusively from the dominant community of the state. A similar pattern is observed in the number of doctors and faculty at the Regional Institute of Medical Science (RIMS) and Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Science (JNIMS), Manipur. At RIMS: ST 13 (5%), Others 13 (5%), and General (valley) accounts for 240 (90%). At JNIMS: ST 31 (16%), Others 5 (3%) and General (valley) stands at 154 (81%). Amongst all the social groups, the ST has the least number of employees in the state.

A poor education system produces fewer skilled and trained individuals, making it unattractive for employers and investors, resulting in fewer establishments. With fewer establishments, there are fewer job opportunities, particularly formal sector jobs. Moreover, low- and poor-quality education limits entrepreneurship, contributing to lower employment rates. According to the 6th Economic Census (EC), 2013, Manipur, the percentage of establishments and persons employed district-wise is given in the table below:

Table 3: Percentage of Establishments and Persons Employed on the last working day

Districts' Name	Establishment %	Employed %
Senapati	4.15	5.66
Tamenglong	1.59	2.67
Churachanpur	9.8	9.66
Chandel	4.4	4.48
Ukhrul	3.96	4.65
Imphal East	19.73	18.35
Imphal West	22.53	24.43
Bishnupur	13.85	11.69
Thoubal	19.99	18.42

Source: Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Manipur

The above table shows that the Tamenglong district has the lowest percentage of establishments and persons employed, while Imphal West has the highest number in the state of Manipur. The statistics suggest the long-standing negligence of the state government, geographical isolation, and economic risk aversion. Despite receiving huge budget allocations, hill districts are discriminated against with delays and clouded execution of infrastructural projects. The most significant barrier is the human capital challenges. The district faces talent gaps due to a lack of quality education, vocational training, and professional development infrastructure, limiting the potential of the local populace



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The premise is that an educated workforce is essential for fostering economic development, particularly in underprivileged regions. The human capital theory highlights the positive correlation between educational attainment and economic growth, making it relevant to the challenges. No doubt, the educational challenges in Tamenglong are not merely academic shortcomings but significant impediments to economic development. The Theory supports this link by indicating that investments in education can yield substantial economic returns by enhancing workforce, skills, thereby increasing opportunities for employment, entrepreneurship, and overall economic growth.

• **Community Participation in the Process of Education**

As a result of the government's failure, inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the education system, there is another agency called the community filling the gap to provide education. The studies carried out by Ozukum (2015) explained that the communitisation of elementary education in Nagaland appeared to have created a radically new option for the village communities by instilling a sense of ownership in them, thereby generating a renewed interest in the development of educational institutions. The concept of 'communitisation' started to transfer certain management responsibilities to the community to involve them in educational management and seek their support for greater student retention in school. Similarly, in the context of Tamenglong District, empirical data shows that most of the government schools are non-functional; therefore, the village authorities, churches, or volunteer individuals help support the schools. At Rianglong village, due to the improper functioning of the government schools, Rianglong Baptist Church established a school called the Baptist Mission School in 2020 to bridge the gap. Additionally, Magulong, Mt. Kisha, a school was founded by the village in 1979. The practices of community participation in education were identified throughout the schools in the district. It plays a vital role in improving the quality and effectiveness of schooling. With community members being actively involved, schools become more accountable, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of children. Under the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009, School Management and Development Committees (SMDCs) were set up in every village, monitoring school functions and development within their capacity.

In India, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act was enacted on 4th August 2009, with commencement made on 1st April 2010. It was enshrined as a legal framework under Article 21A of the Indian Constitution to ensure that all children in the age group of 6-14 received elementary education without any fees. However, when the government failed in its responsibility, the community or the church stepped up to safeguard the schools from disappearing and help provide education to the students whose futures are at stake. The community engages some educated youth in teaching with payment of a meagre honorarium. Minimum admission and monthly school fees are usually collected from all students to compensate the volunteer instructors. In essence, it was the community that operated the institution rather than the government, as responsibilities were administered by the community. Responding to the government's failure in school management, the community obtained funds from grants like MGNREGA, village development funds, willful



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donators, etc, to run the schools. Nevertheless, the scheme and several sponsors from the hamlet could hardly meet the requirements.

Saming Riame is one of the volunteers, teaching at Tousem High School, which consists of only 6 government-appointed teachers. He, along with other like-minded volunteers, committed to working for the betterment of the forthcoming generation. The job is far beyond teaching, as they are obligated to arrive early in the morning to execute the duties of a chowkidar or attendant, as the government has not appointed one. They endure hardships every day, out of affection for the younger generation to attain education and live a better life. The government is oblivious to the efforts of the community and volunteers.

• **Reflection on Reform Initiatives and Government Interventions**

Over the past decades, education reform has undergone numerous policy shifts in Manipur and today, the educational framework is still believed to be undergoing significant reform to improve access to quality education across the state. Some government initiatives and policies have been implemented to enhance educational infrastructure, teaching quality, and student enrollment. Key initiatives include the NEP 2020, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan scheme and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), designed to provide holistic education from pre-nursery to class 12th. The education program, Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results (STAR) for the state, was also launched to revolutionise the quality of education in government schools. All the initiatives focus on a top-down approach, largely driven by the state government, power held by the dominant community, which means valley-centric. As a result, the implementation mainly targets the valley and its surrounding regions.

The state introduced the School Fagathansi Mission in 2019, aimed at rebuilding the physical and manpower infrastructure of government-run schools. This mission brings no changes to the rural schools. SFM remained as an empty slogan rather than an action. The government also ordered a biometric attendance system for fostering a more accountable and structured educational environment; however, the government was not aware that the Tamenglong district, especially the interior villages, did not have access to electricity, and therefore, implementation of biometrics became a total failure. Integration of ICT in schools and upgrading the ICT skills of teachers and employees are supposed to enrich the teaching and learning experience beyond the traditional textbook methods. But the digital learning tools and smart board concepts are largely urban-centric and remain impossible for remote hills without electricity and internet connectivity. Which, in other words, further widens the hill-valley or rural-urban divide in education.

Vocational Education was also introduced in 12 Higher Secondary Schools in the state, and a scheme like Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) and Skill India, but they are usually concentrated in the valley. The locals in the periphery are unaware of such schemes and institutions. Moreover, vocational courses often lack local contextualization and do not align with job opportunities available in the region. It also creates a mismatch between their skill and the job



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market. Also, due to a lack of robust higher education institutions, which eventually drives the youth to migrate to metropolitan cities for higher studies and employment, resulting in brain drain.

There have been some efforts and commitment to improve education; however, one of the biggest issues in Indian schools in general is the lack of adequate infrastructure, where students have no books, benches, toilets, proper roofs, and sometimes no teachers. Jha and Parvati (2010) argued that after several rounds of drafting and redrafting that went into the Rights of Children for Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009, they hoped the Act would be an effective instrument for any child to demand basic entitlement. Yet a closer look at the provisions revealed disconcerting features. Unfortunately, short-term political gains and poor judgment on the part of politicians and policymakers, negligence of the concerned department, with a spineless education system continue to be the major roadblocks to accomplishing educational goals.

The only interventions by the government in the education sector are the construction or renovation of buildings of the government educational institutions with substandard qualities, and the inadequate recruitment and unsystematic posting/transfer of teachers. Some of the government schools have very few or no teachers, as no care has been taken for several years. The crisis of education in the state has many agencies; the blame starts from the highest level of political leaders, they direct the blame upon the negligence of the concerned department, and teachers blame the concerned leaders of a state government and irregularity of student, student blames teacher, and the state government blame a concerned department of the Union government for allocating limited finance in education sector. The blame game is cyclical, with no interest in identifying the root cause and bringing a solution. Education in Manipur suffers from several inadequacies, and the state lags far behind the rest of the states in the country.

There are many instances of schools with no teachers, or mostly substitute teachers, rusty buildings on the verge of collapse, and some buildings are used as animal shelters. In such conditions, the question of infrastructural gaps like classrooms, a decent school campus, laboratories, smart classrooms, provision of comfortable and sufficient school furniture, outdoor gymnasium, separate toilets for boys and girls, drinking water facilities, electrification, etc. meeting basic standards as per RTE and other relevant norms as per Indian government policy are far-reaching. The role of the community plays a very crucial part. It is observed in this study that community leaders, particularly student leaders, have volunteered to teach the pupils in the school either for a meagre honorarium or, in some cases, for free, in which the role of the Tharon village students' union is a clear example where student leaders take initiative to teach in the school.

3. CONCLUSION

This article encapsulates the relationship between education and socioeconomic development in Tamenglong, Manipur. Accessing the educational system and assessing its problems, such as topography, cultural and linguistic hurdles, corruption, declining education quality, high dropout rates, and low enrolment. It examined government policy and highlighted community involvement in delivering education to locals. Poor infrastructure, amenities, and teacher absenteeism continue to be



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the obstacles that impede educational progress and socioeconomic advancement. These difficulties are structural and sustain poverty and underdevelopment. Education drives progress; thus, undermining and disregarding it causes stagnation, limiting individual and collective growth. Government agencies, local communities, and civil society groups can work together to establish a strong educational ecosystem that meets students' needs and boosts social growth. Policies should improve educational infrastructure, teacher training, and inclusive education with the targeted needs of locals. Tamenglong District's educational issues go beyond resource access and affect Manipur's socio-political scenario. When educational systems are marred by systemic issues, they can become liabilities rather than assets. Education drives society's development, hence it must be prioritised. Tamenglong may overcome its underdevelopment and succeed by investing in education and removing systemic hurdles. Thus, education correlates with development.

NOTES

International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011. It's a framework developed by UNESCO to categorise and compare education systems across different countries. <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standa>. Accessed on 12 June, 2025
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/overview> accessed on 12 June, 2025

"Zeliangrong" is a collective term for the cognate Naga tribes: Zeme, Liangmai, Rongmei and Inpui. They inhabited the contiguous areas, which are now divided into three states: Assam, Manipur and Nagaland of Northeast India. The term Zeliangrong was coined on 15 February 1947 at the first Zeliangrong Conference, where the Zeliangrong Council was founded at Imphal.

The term Morung refers to the Naga's traditional youth dormitory, which serves as a cultural, social, educational and military institution.

Retrieved from Zonal Education Office (ZEO), Tamenglong <https://tamenglong.nic.in/zeo/> accessed on 25th September, 2024

What is the literacy rate of the Tamenglong district of Manipur in the 2011 census? (2024). census2011.co.in. <https://www.census2011.co.in/questions/371/district-literacy/literacy-rate-of-tamenglong-district-2011.html>

Development of Elementary Education in Manipur. (n.d.). <https://ssamanipur.nic.in/ElementaryEducation.htm>

Retrieved on <https://ssamanipur.nic.in/ElementaryEducation.htm> accessed on 26th September, 2024. Data furnished under RTI Act 2005 by the Directorate of Education (S) and the Directorate of Univ. & Higher Education, Government of Manipur, dated 24th June, 2024.

Extract from a personal interview with Mr. Wipobou Nkhapuina, a 59-year-old headmaster in charge of the Lenglong Junior High School, Tamei Sub-division. The interview was conducted on 14th October, 2022.

A focus group discussion was conducted with 10 teachers at Magulong Government High School on 9th November, 2022.



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A 61-year-old man from Tousem who is the convenor of the School Management and Development Committee (SMDC), also a former government teacher, Tousem High School, Tousem subdivision. Manipur records increased enrolment in government schools, but the lowest in the Northeast. (2023). Imphal Free Press. <https://www.ifp.co.in/manipur/manipur-records-increased-enrolment-in-government-schools-but-lowest-in-northeast>

Meitei Mayek is the indigenous script used for writing the Meitei language, also known as Manipuri. The script is unique to the Meitei language, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family and is spoken predominantly in Manipur, having around 1.8 million speakers

Excerpt from a personal interview with Mrs. Bailungliu, a 71-year-old woman from Rianglong village under Tamei subdivision on 18th October, 2022.

Excerpt from a personal interview with Ms. Ariliu (Pseudonym), an 11-year-old girl of class six from Tamei. The interview was conducted on 30th August, 2022.

Directorate of Employment, Government of Manipur as on 31st March 2016

Manipur University Annual Report, 2020-21

RIMS overall rank 1 in NE (National Institutional Ranking Framework, NIRF 2021). 100-MBBS, 145-PG, 1074 Bedded Hospital

Education in Breaking the Cycle of Poverty | Noble Nonprofit. (2024). [noblenonprofit.org. https://www.noblenonprofit.org/education-in-breaking-the-cycle-of-poverty/](https://www.noblenonprofit.org/education-in-breaking-the-cycle-of-poverty/) (accessed on 15th October, 2024)

How does education affect poverty? It can help end it. (2024). [concernusa.org. https://concernusa.org/news/how-does-education-affect-poverty/](https://concernusa.org/news/how-does-education-affect-poverty/) (accessed on 15th October, 2024)

Excerpt from the Focus Group Discussion conducted with Tousem High School teachers on 24th September 2022, the participants included two government-appointed teachers, the SMDC convenor and four teachers who were volunteers appointed by the school board of the village.

STAR Education is the flagship programme of the Government of Manipur to transform the education system of Manipur through excellence in teaching and learning in classrooms, ensuring strong learning outcomes for children and better growth for the state.

Retrieved from IT Desk. (2023). STAR Education Transforming Manipur Government Schools with Technology and Real-Time Data - News from Manipur - Imphal Times. News from Manipur - Imphal Times. <https://www.imphaltimes.com/news/star-education-transforming-manipur-government-schools-with-technology-and-real-time-data/> (Accessed on 27th September, 2024) published on December 26, 2023

The School Fagathansi Mission was introduced vide order no. 21, on 31st March, 2019, by the government of Manipur, Secretariat: Education (S), to give thrust towards improvement of government schools, both in terms of physical and manpower infrastructure and performance of students towards learning outcomes. To provide better educational opportunities in government schools across Manipur. This initiative was aimed at ensuring that every child receives a quality education, which is fundamental for personal, social, and professional development



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