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**EDUCATIONAL REPRESENTATION OF TRIBAL LANGUAGES IN
MANIPUR: AN ANALYSIS OF MODERN INDIAN LANGUAGE
(MIL) SUBJECTS UNDER BOSEM AND COHSEM**

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Keywords	Abstract
<i>Tribal languages, Modern Indian Language (MIL), Language representation, Mother tongue education.</i>	The present study examined the representation of tribal languages through Modern Indian Language (MIL) subjects in the school education system of Manipur. Using a descriptive research design, the study analysed secondary data obtained from the Board of Secondary Education, Manipur (BOSEM), the Council of Higher Secondary Education, Manipur (COHSEM), Census reports, and relevant government documents. Primary information regarding challenges associated with tribal language education was also collected from selected teachers and students. The findings revealed that only 17 of the 34 recognised tribal communities have corresponding MIL subjects under BOSEM, while only 11 languages continue under COHSEM. Considerable variation was observed in enrolment across tribal language subjects, although academic performance remained consistently high. The study further found that recognition of tribal languages is governed by specific demographic, academic, and institutional requirements. Limited representation, discontinuity across educational levels, and resource constraints emerged as major challenges. The study highlights the need to



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	strengthen educational support for underrepresented tribal languages to promote linguistic diversity, cultural preservation, and inclusive education in Manipur.
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Introduction

Language is not merely a means of communication but also a carrier of culture, identity, history, and indigenous knowledge. Linguistic diversity constitutes an important component of cultural heritage and social inclusion. However, globalization, urbanization, and the growing dominance of major languages have contributed to the marginalization of many indigenous and minority languages. Recognizing this challenge, UNESCO and other international organizations have emphasized the importance of mother tongue education in promoting educational equity, cultural preservation, and sustainable development. Studies indicate that children learn more effectively when education is delivered in a language they understand, leading to improved literacy, cognitive development, academic achievement, and self-esteem (Nishanthi, 2020). Educational systems that recognize indigenous languages therefore play a crucial role in preserving linguistic diversity and transmitting cultural heritage across generations.

India is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, with hundreds of languages and dialects spoken across different regions. This diversity is reflected in constitutional provisions and educational policies that support the protection and promotion of minority and tribal languages. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 strongly advocates the use of home language, mother tongue, or local language in the early years of schooling, recognizing its importance for inclusive and effective learning (Ahmad, 2024). Such policy initiatives underscore the significance of integrating indigenous languages into formal education.

The issue of language representation is particularly significant in Northeast India, a region known for its exceptional linguistic and cultural diversity. Despite policy support for multilingualism and mother tongue education, several tribal and minority languages continue to face challenges related to educational representation, curriculum development, textbook production, and teacher availability (Sarajubala Devi, 2019). Consequently, educational opportunities available to different linguistic communities remain uneven.

Manipur presents a unique linguistic landscape within Northeast India. Besides Meiteilon (Manipuri), which functions as the official language of the state, more than thirty tribal languages are spoken by various indigenous communities (Haokip, 2011). These languages serve as important markers of ethnic identity, cultural continuity, and traditional knowledge. However, the long-term survival and development of many tribal languages increasingly depend upon their inclusion within formal educational institutions.



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One of the primary mechanisms through which tribal languages receive educational recognition in Manipur is their inclusion as Modern Indian Language (MIL) subjects under the Board of Secondary Education, Manipur (BOSEM) and the Council of Higher Secondary Education, Manipur (COHSEM). Recognition as an MIL subject not only facilitates language learning but also promotes textbook development, written literature, teacher preparation, and intergenerational language transmission. Therefore, the extent to which tribal languages are represented within the MIL framework serves as an important indicator of educational inclusion and linguistic recognition.

Although previous studies have examined mother tongue education, multilingualism, and language attitudes in Manipur (Varah & Pawar, 2023; Mataina, 2025), limited attention has been given to the representation of tribal languages through Modern Indian Language subjects. Questions remain regarding which tribal languages have secured educational recognition, the extent of their representation across secondary and higher secondary education, and the challenges affecting their implementation. Against this backdrop, the present study examines tribal language representation through the MIL framework in Manipur, with particular emphasis on educational recognition, enrolment patterns, institutional requirements, and challenges associated with tribal language education.

The present study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To examine the representation of tribal languages through MIL subjects under BOSEM and COHSEM.
2. To analyse enrolment and academic performance in tribal MIL subjects under BOSEM and COHSEM during 2021–2025.
3. To examine the institutional and academic requirements for recognition of tribal languages as MIL subjects under BOSEM and COHSEM.
4. To identify the major challenges associated with the implementation and study of tribal language subjects in Manipur.

Review of Related Literature

Mother tongue education has received considerable attention in educational research because of its role in promoting learning, cultural preservation, and social inclusion. Studies consistently indicate that learners achieve better academic outcomes when education is provided in a language they understand. Nishanthi (2020) emphasized that mother tongue-based education enhances literacy, cognitive development, communication skills, and learner confidence. The study argued that the use of familiar languages in education strengthens both academic achievement and cultural identity.

In the Indian context, language policy has increasingly recognised the importance of indigenous and local languages in education. Ahmad (2024) examined the language provisions of the National



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Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and observed that the policy promotes multilingualism and advocates the use of home language or mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the early years of schooling. The study highlighted the potential of mother tongue education to improve educational inclusion and learning outcomes, particularly among linguistically diverse communities.

The issue of language representation is particularly important in Northeast India, where numerous tribal and minority languages coexist. Haokip (2011) examined the linguistic diversity of Manipur and noted that tribal languages serve as important markers of ethnic identity, cultural continuity, and social cohesion. The study highlighted the need for institutional support and educational recognition to ensure the survival and development of indigenous languages in a rapidly changing social environment.

Sarajubala Devi (2019) explored the challenges of mother tongue education and multilingualism in Northeast India. The study found that despite policy support for linguistic diversity, many tribal languages continue to face difficulties relating to curriculum development, textbook production, teacher availability, and educational representation. The author argued that the absence of adequate institutional support limits opportunities for several minority languages to gain meaningful recognition within the formal education system.

Focusing specifically on community perspectives, Varah and Pawar (2023) reported positive attitudes towards mother tongue education among linguistic communities in Manipur. The study found that parents, teachers, and community members viewed indigenous language education as important for cultural preservation and identity formation. Similarly, Mataina (2025) observed that tribal language education contributes significantly to the preservation of local knowledge systems and cultural heritage, while also strengthening community participation in education.

The reviewed literature demonstrates broad agreement regarding the educational, cultural, and social importance of mother tongue education. Previous studies have examined language policy, multilingual education, community attitudes, and implementation challenges. However, limited research has specifically investigated the educational representation of tribal languages through Modern Indian Language (MIL) subjects in Manipur. Existing studies have rarely examined the relationship between recognised tribal communities and recognised MIL subjects, enrolment patterns in tribal language subjects, institutional requirements for language recognition, or challenges affecting their implementation. Consequently, there remains a significant gap in understanding how educational recognition through the MIL framework contributes to the preservation and representation of tribal languages in Manipur. The present study seeks to address this gap by examining tribal language representation through Modern Indian Language subjects under BOSEM and COHSEM.



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Methodology

The present study employed a descriptive research design to examine the representation of tribal languages through Modern Indian Language (MIL) subjects in the school education system of Manipur. The study utilised both secondary and primary sources of data. Secondary data were collected from official records, curriculum documents, examination reports, recognition orders, and publications of the Board of Secondary Education, Manipur (BOSEM) and the Council of Higher Secondary Education, Manipur (COHSEM). Additional information relating to recognised tribal communities, population, and literacy rates was obtained from the Census of India and relevant government publications.

Primary information regarding the challenges associated with the implementation and study of tribal language subjects was gathered through interactions with selected teachers and students associated with recognised tribal language subjects. The collected data were classified and analysed using descriptive statistical techniques such as frequency counts, percentages, and comparative analysis. The findings were interpreted in the context of language preservation, educational inclusion, and tribal language representation within the formal school education system of Manipur.

Findings

Objective 1: Tribal Language Representation through Modern Indian Language (MIL) Subjects in Manipur

Manipur is home to 34 officially recognised Scheduled Tribe communities, each possessing distinct linguistic and cultural identities. Educational recognition of tribal languages through Modern Indian Language (MIL) subjects constitutes an important mechanism for preserving indigenous languages and promoting linguistic representation within the formal school system. Therefore, an examination of tribal language recognition under the Board of Secondary Education, Manipur (BOSEM) and the Council of Higher Secondary Education, Manipur (COHSEM) provides an understanding of the extent to which tribal communities are represented in school education.

Table 1: Recognised Tribal Language Subjects under BOSEM and COHSEM

Sl. No.	Tribal Language	BOSEM	COHSEM
1	Anal	✓	–
2	Gangte	✓	✓
3	Hmar	✓	✓
4	Kom	✓	✓



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5	Liangmai	✓	✓
6	Mao	✓	✓
7	Maram	✓	–
8	Maring	✓	–
9	Paite	✓	✓
10	Poumai	✓	–
11	Rongmei	✓	✓
12	Simte	✓	–
13	Tangkhul	✓	✓
14	Thadou-Kuki	✓	✓
15	Vaiphei	✓	✓
16	Zeme	✓	–
17	Zou	✓	✓

The data presented in Table 1 reveal that out of the 34 recognised Scheduled Tribe communities in Manipur, only 17 tribal languages (50.00%) have been recognised as Modern Indian Language (MIL) subjects under BOSEM. At the higher secondary level, only 11 tribal languages (32.35%) are recognised under COHSEM.

Among the recognised tribal languages, 11 languages—Gangte, Hmar, Kom, Liangmai, Mao, Paite, Rongmei, Tangkhul, Thadou-Kuki, Vaiphei, and Zou—are recognised under both BOSEM and COHSEM. However, six tribal languages, namely Anal, Maram, Maring, Poumai, Simte, and Zeme, are recognised only under BOSEM and do not enjoy similar recognition at the higher secondary level under COHSEM.

The findings indicate that only half of the recognised tribal communities in Manipur have corresponding language representation through MIL subjects at the secondary level. The level of representation further declines at the higher secondary stage, where less than one-third of the recognised tribal communities have language representation within the curriculum. Thus, tribal language recognition within the formal education system remains selective rather than universal across the recognised tribal communities of the state.



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Objective 2: Enrolment and Academic Performance in Tribal Modern Indian Language (MIL) Subjects under BOSEM and COHSEM (2021–2025)

The second objective of the study was to analyse student enrolment and academic performance in recognised tribal Modern Indian Language (MIL) subjects under BOSEM and COHSEM during the period 2021–2025. Enrolment serves as an indicator of students' participation and preference for tribal language education, while academic performance reflects learning outcomes in the respective language subjects.

Table 2: Enrolment in Tribal MIL Subjects under BOSEM (2021–2025)

MIL Subject	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Anal	–	156	209	217	205
Gangte	144	150	119	108	121
Hmar	615	533	479	448	396
Kom	182	132	117	105	83
Liangmai	345	357	288	275	253
Mao	513	496	410	327	376
Maram	–	–	168	206	161
Maring	–	–	–	–	187
Paite	770	742	747	617	697
Poumai	291	414	440	463	459
Rongmei	1667	1390	1355	1258	1275
Simte	67	78	64	76	70
Tangkhul	2481	1958	1800	1866	1807
Thadou-Kuki	4608	4074	3944	3740	3676
Vaiphei	405	410	389	320	317
Zeme	–	–	61	118	106
Zou	431	331	359	269	331



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Table 3: Enrolment in Tribal MIL Subjects under COHSEM (2021–2025)

MIL Subject	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Gangte	65	65	80	59	55
Hmar	359	277	356	269	237
Kom	39	42	27	31	18
Liangmai	91	114	114	111	114
Mao	240	207	296	114	115
Mizo	56	42	74	28	43
Paite	398	397	470	310	377
Rongmei	283	252	426	267	398
Tangkhul	869	761	941	771	765
Thadou-Kuki	2239	1908	2306	1921	1970
Vaiphei	189	126	156	174	169
Zou	157	171	192	97	154

The data presented in Tables 2 and 3 reveal considerable variation in enrolment among tribal language subjects under both BOSEM and COHSEM. Under BOSEM, Thadou-Kuki consistently recorded the highest enrolment throughout the study period, followed by Tangkhul and Rongmei. Similarly, under COHSEM, Thadou-Kuki remained the most preferred tribal language subject, followed by Tangkhul, Paite, and Rongmei. In contrast, languages such as Simte, Kom, Gangte, and Mizo recorded comparatively lower enrolment. These patterns indicate unequal levels of student participation across tribal language subjects, although the present study does not investigate the specific factors influencing enrolment.

Academic performance in tribal Modern Indian Language subjects remained exceptionally high during the study period. Most subjects recorded pass percentages close to 100 per cent under both BOSEM and COHSEM, with only minor variations observed in a few cases. The consistently high success rates suggest strong academic achievement among students studying tribal language subjects at both the secondary and higher secondary levels.

Objective 3: Institutional and Academic Requirements for the Recognition of Tribal Languages as Modern Indian Language (MIL) Subjects under BOSEM and COHSEM



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The third objective of the study was to examine the institutional and academic requirements for recognising tribal languages as Modern Indian Language (MIL) subjects under BOSEM and COHSEM. Educational recognition is important for promoting tribal language inclusion and preservation within the formal school system. Official records indicate that both BOSEM and COHSEM prescribe specific academic, administrative, and institutional requirements for the recognition of tribal languages as MIL subjects, thereby providing the framework for their educational representation.

Table 4: Criteria for Recognition of Tribal Languages as Modern Indian Language (MIL) Subjects under BOSEM

Sl. No.	Criteria
1	The language should already be recognised up to Class VIII by the Education (Schools) Department, Government of Manipur through a Gazette Notification
2	The population of the concerned community should not be less than 10,000 according to the latest Census
3	Availability of textbooks up to Class VIII
4	Availability of adequate materials for incorporation into new textbooks
5	Availability of competent textbook writers
6	Approval by the Curriculum and Syllabus Committee of BOSEM

Table 5: Criteria for Recognition of Tribal Languages as Modern Indian Language (MIL) Subjects under COHSEM

Sl. No.	Criteria
1	No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Government of Manipur
2	Recognition order of the language textbook issued by the Government of Manipur
3	Draft syllabus
4	Draft design of question paper
5	Availability of prescribed textbooks
6	Certificate/declaration indicating absence of anti-social content
7	Subject expert



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8	Constitution of an expert committee
9	Resolution copies of the committee
10	BOSEM order for opening the language as a subject

The data presented in Tables 4 and 5 indicate that the recognition of tribal languages as MIL subjects is governed by a structured process involving demographic, academic, and administrative considerations. At the secondary level, BOSEM places emphasis on community population, availability of textbooks, educational materials, and competent authors for textbook preparation. The requirement that the concerned community should have a population of at least 10,000 highlights the demographic criterion adopted for language inclusion.

At the higher secondary level, COHSEM requires additional academic and institutional documentation, including approved textbooks, syllabus frameworks, question paper designs, subject experts, and expert committees. Furthermore, prior recognition by BOSEM is a prerequisite for consideration by COHSEM. These requirements indicate that educational recognition of tribal languages follows a sequential process from elementary education to secondary and higher secondary education.

The findings suggest that the recognition of tribal languages within the formal education system is not solely based on linguistic identity but also depends on the availability of educational resources, academic preparedness, institutional support, and administrative approval. Consequently, tribal communities lacking adequate educational materials, textbook writers, or organisational support may face challenges in securing recognition of their languages as MIL subjects.

Objective 4: Challenges Associated with the Implementation and Study of Tribal Language Subjects in Manipur

The fourth objective of the study was to identify the major challenges associated with the implementation and study of tribal language subjects in Manipur. The analysis of tribal language representation, enrolment patterns, and institutional requirements reveals several challenges that affect the promotion and sustainability of tribal language education within the formal school system.

Table 6: Evidence-Based Challenges in Tribal Language Education in Manipur

Sl. No.	Challenge	Evidence from the Study
1	Limited language representation	Only 17 of the 34 recognised tribal communities have corresponding MIL subjects.



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2	Incomplete educational continuity	Only 11 tribal languages are recognised under both BOSEM and COHSEM.
3	Uneven student participation	Considerable variation exists in enrolment among tribal language subjects.
4	Dependence on institutional approval	Recognition requires fulfilment of multiple academic and administrative requirements.
5	Requirement of specialised academic resources	Recognition requires approved textbooks, syllabi, and subject experts.
6	Limited institutional availability	Tribal language subjects are offered only in a limited number of institutions.

The findings reveal several challenges affecting tribal language education in Manipur. Despite the recognition of 34 Scheduled Tribe communities, only 17 tribal languages are recognised as MIL subjects under BOSEM and only 11 under COHSEM, leaving many communities without educational language representation. Another challenge is the lack of continuity, as six languages recognised at the secondary level are not available at the higher secondary level. Considerable variation in enrolment also exists, with languages such as Thadou-Kuki, Tangkhul, Paite, and Rongmei attracting higher participation than others. Furthermore, recognition requires approved textbooks, syllabi, subject experts, and government approvals, which may be difficult for smaller linguistic communities to fulfil. Limited institutional availability of MIL subjects further restricts access. These challenges continue to influence the effective implementation, sustainability, and educational representation of tribal languages in Manipur.

Discussion

The present study examined tribal language representation through Modern Indian Language (MIL) subjects in the school education system of Manipur. The findings reveal that educational representation of tribal languages remains uneven despite the state's rich linguistic diversity. Out of 34 recognised Scheduled Tribe communities, only 17 tribal languages are recognised as MIL subjects under BOSEM, while only 11 continue to be recognised under COHSEM. This suggests that educational recognition of tribal languages is selective rather than universal. Since curriculum inclusion is an important mechanism for preserving indigenous languages and ensuring their intergenerational transmission, limited representation may constrain efforts to safeguard linguistic and cultural heritage. Similar concerns regarding the marginalisation of tribal languages within formal education have been highlighted by Haokip (2011) and Sarajubala Devi (2019).



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The findings further indicate that tribal language representation is stronger at the secondary level than at the higher secondary level. Several tribal languages recognised under BOSEM are not available under COHSEM, thereby restricting opportunities for students to continue the formal study of their mother tongue. Previous studies have emphasised that sustained exposure to indigenous languages across educational stages is essential for language maintenance and cultural continuity (Nishanthi, 2020; Ahmad, 2024). Therefore, discontinuity between secondary and higher secondary education may weaken the long-term development of tribal languages through formal schooling.

Variation in student enrolment across tribal language subjects also emerged as an important finding. Languages such as Thadou-Kuki, Tangkhul, Rongmei, and Paite recorded comparatively higher enrolment, whereas several other languages attracted fewer students. Although the present study does not investigate the determinants of enrolment, the continued participation of students demonstrates the continuing relevance of tribal languages within many communities. This observation supports the findings of Varah and Pawar (2023), who reported positive community attitudes towards mother tongue education in Manipur.

The study further revealed that recognition of tribal languages as MIL subjects is governed by specific academic and institutional requirements. BOSEM requires a minimum community population, availability of textbooks, educational materials, competent textbook writers, and committee approval, while COHSEM requires recognised textbooks, syllabi, subject experts, government approval, and institutional endorsement. These requirements indicate that educational recognition depends not only on linguistic identity but also on the availability of educational and organisational resources. Consequently, smaller tribal communities with limited academic infrastructure may face difficulties in securing language recognition despite possessing distinct linguistic identities.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the MIL framework has contributed significantly to the educational representation of several tribal languages in Manipur. However, limited representation, discontinuity across educational levels, and institutional requirements continue to influence access to tribal language education. Strengthening support for underrepresented languages would contribute to language preservation, cultural identity, and the broader goals of inclusive and multilingual education.

Conclusion

The study examined tribal language representation through Modern Indian Language (MIL) subjects in Manipur and found that educational recognition remains limited and uneven across tribal communities. Of the 34 recognised Scheduled Tribe communities, only 17 tribal languages are recognised under BOSEM and 11 under COHSEM. While enrolment and academic performance in recognised tribal language subjects remain encouraging, significant disparities exist in representation



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and continuity across educational levels. The findings further reveal that language recognition depends on specific demographic, academic, and institutional requirements. Strengthening support for underrepresented tribal languages through curriculum development, educational resources, and institutional assistance is essential for promoting linguistic diversity, cultural preservation, and inclusive education in Manipur.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

PLAGIARISM POLICY

All authors declare that any kind of violation of plagiarism, copyright and ethical matters will take care by all authors. Journal and editors are not liable for aforesaid matters.

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