

An Approach to Education and Educational Infrastructures: A Review of Imphal West District of Manipur

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Abstract

India has been striving hard to bring about education available to all sector of the society and be at the level to be at its best to deliver exceptional education. The effort to outreach various standards practiced pre independence and adopt modern and unique techniques to transfer best of the best forms of education is still on the run. India has expressed and is continuing to fulfill its obligations towards inclusive education by agreeing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UNESCO Salamanca Statement. The state of Manipur, being one of the highest in terms of literacy with a literacy rate of 76.94 percent as per 2011 population census, is one of the state that has been practicing continuous effort to enhance the fruitfulness besides just following the education policies as rendered upon by the policy makers. Nonetheless, there has been various reports and datas collected which shows the progressive operations of education policies, yet very little is known on whether inclusive, accountable and accessible school education and educational infrastructures are available to the people or not. There is still lack of clarity and doubtful especially when rural and urban poor are taken into account.

Keywords: Education, exceptional education, inclusivity, literacy, accessibility, accountability, infrastructure..

Introduction

Infrastructures such as buildings, classrooms, laboratories, and equipment are crucial elements of learning environments in every educational institutions. Among other benefits, there are strong evidences to suggest that good infrastructure facilitates better instruction, improves student outcomes, and reduces dropout rates.

Education infrastructure includes, appropriate spaces to learn. This constitutes one of the most basic foundations necessary to permit access to education. School classrooms are the most common place in which proper learning takes place with groups of children. While learning also takes place in a variety of different types of spaces - tents, temporary shelters, plastic sheeting, shade of trees, places of worship, people's homes, and so on- families and communities expect formal education to take place in classrooms that have been designed for safety and comfort.ⁱ

Some of the characteristics of appropriate infrastructure are:

- Ample space per child, generally guided by standards set by Government of India.
- Ample space for 30-40 children per classroom, to allow well organised utilisation of teachers.
- Construction methods that guarantee the safety of children in school, convenient to natural hazards of the region.
- Appropriate separate hygienic facilities for boys and girls and for staff.
- Increasing electricity and Internet connectivity.

Facilities may be unacceptable in many ways which includes being overcrowded, which lacks in proper hygienic amenities, not enough ventilation system for circulation of fresh air inside the classrooms, lack of recreational facilities, lack of proper libraries, etc. The implications of such inadequacies are very serious. For instance, lack of proper hygienic amenities are particularly serious and cause severe inconveniences to girls, especially older

primary-age girls who are likely to miss significant amounts of school time or are unlikely to continue at school after they begin their menstrual cycle. Children may also quit coming to school after reaching the enrolment capacity due to inappropriate classroom areas.

Since independence, India's educational system was characterized with inequalities due to reasons ranging from socio-economic, socio-political, socio-cultural and geographical factors. To meet these challenges, Article 45 of the Indian constitution includes provisions for free and compulsory education for children. The preamble stated that the "State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years." This meant that every citizen should have access to primary education without discrimination. But the reality is far different. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, also known as the Right to Education Act (RTE) has not been as effective as expected due to the stubborn existence of those inequities that that were there in India's educational system since independence.

Although education policy makers in India are progressively concentrating on maintaining the at the standard of education and school learning ambience, many states within the country still use a rather gradual and staged approach to finance in educational infrastructure. For example, the resolutions pertaining to education infrastructural finances appears to have often been made undergauche effort and disseminated model, driven by impromptu needs and restricted funding availability, rather than a planned approach.

Methodology

Standard social science methodology of data collection was employed for the purpose of the research paper wherein both primary and secondary data were collected.

Primary data for the paper was collected through in-situ field visits, casual interview of parents, officials in the schools and relevant government offices.

Secondary data was collected through relevant research papers, documents and records from schools and government offices.

Area of Study

Imphal West district of Manipur, India was selected as the area of study. The district has 3 (three) Blocks:

1. Haorang Block
2. IMC Block
3. Wangoi Block

Twenty (30) government and privately run Lower Primary, Upper Primary, High School and Higher Secondary schools from all the three (3) blocks were selected for the purpose of the research paper.

Research Findings

Schools in marginalized and remote domains in India face the utmost financial needs in the country, which means that students who come to these schools are extradeprived of their various educational needs. These students come mostly from meagre income and rural families to attend poorly provisioned schools in suburban and municipal domains. For instance, about 62 percent of secondary schools in Imphal West district are missing a properly equipped science laboratory, nearly 40 percent do not have adequate indoor toilets to cater to the needs of their students and about 55 percent of these schools do not have or have rudimentary libraries. Furthermore, most of the schools covered by the study are extra congested. One in four students in urban domain attends an over congested schools. Over jammed classrooms, such the one below, are suboptimal for teaching and learning.

An extensive data investigation exhibited broad as well as acute challenges that varies on the basis of education level or geographic area. For example, localities with more students enrolled in over jammed schools also have higher grade repetition, age-grade distortion and dropout rates, which suggest that poor learning environments and inappropriate infrastructure adversely affects the students in on or the other way. The study found, for example, that there is a positive statistically significant correlation of 0.15 between age-grade distortion in upper secondary education and overcrowding. Let us attempt to show in the following paragraphs the status of infrastructures in schools in Imphal West district and of the accessibility of existing infrastructures by students.

Optimal size of schools

For years, the size of schools in Imphal West was mostly conditioned by the concept that considered that the larger the school, the lower the cost per student. However, there is a lot of more recent evidence that small schools yield better academic results.ⁱⁱ The study found that small schools are not effective solely by virtue of being small but rather work best when they take advantage of being small. Small schools have the advantage of offering a homely school environment.

The study found that the most common limitations of large schools are:

- Higher transportation costs
- Higher administrative overheads
- Lower graduation rates
- Higher absenteeism
- Higher rates of vandalism
- Lower teacher satisfaction.

However, in spite of several drawbacks of larger schools, many privately-owned schools are driven by the profit that accrue to them with more number of students. As such, larger schools are becoming more common. This has also led to a notable decrease in quality of education and the waning of a healthy teacher-student interactive environment.

School size has geospatial implications. In a given geographical area, providing smaller schools means that they are more locally distributed throughout the area, according to the density of demand for places. This reduces the distance that pupils have to travel to school, thereby becoming more convenient. The study found that extended travel times to get to school can have a range of negative effects on pupils and families, including the wasted time spent in transit to and from the school thereby reducing the time available to them for extra-curricular activities.

Class size and density

Overcrowding in the class can have a lot of negative impacts, especially on clean air, spreading of contagious diseases, classroom discipline and effective teaching. To really reap the benefits of reduced class sizes and to change teaching practices towards more child-centred education, classes need to consist of 20–30 students from the normal 50-70 students per classroom, but this can be quite costly for school authorities as it will mean a dip in the school's earning and profit. Most of the schools studied are therefore reluctant to accept this idea by saying that they have no option but to accept more students even after class capacity is reached because of pressures and requests from parents practically begging them to admit their wards.

From data gathered from teachers and students, both teachers and students had negative views towards school overcrowding such as being overwhelmed, argumentative and asphyxiated. The study also found that these sentiments were particularly strong in schools with a high proportion of students coming from rural areas where overcrowding is often strongly linked to lower achievement.

Reinforcing this point, a study using an experimental methodology (Griffitt and Veitch 1971)ⁱⁱⁱ demonstrated that uncomfortable environmental conditions such as high temperatures, high noise levels, and overcrowding can cause interpersonal disputes, hostility, and even violence, and this is also likely to be the case in classrooms.^{iv}

Out of the thirty schools studied for the current paper, only three (4) schools have appropriate school compound, especially classrooms. The table below shows the views of teachers and students in these schools with regard to over congestion.

Table-1. Views on over jammed classrooms.

Sl. No.	No. of Respondents	Are you alright of over congestion in the classroom? Kindly elaborate on your answer	What is the reason for over congestion in schools?
Teacher	50	5/ 50: Yes. Most frequently given answer: • I have no problem teaching in an over congested classroom.	Most common answer:

		- I am agreeable with more students in the room. - If the school authorities approves , I have no problem.	Profit-intended school authority/ owner.
		45/50: No. Most frequently given answer: Difficult to maintain discipline. Difficult to make myself heard and understood. Creates plenty of mental and physical strain to the teacher. Builds plenty of disruption and most of the times , fights and arguments among students Particularly post Covid-19, Applying social distancing will be total inconvenient in this over congested schools. Students with low self esteem tends to suffer a lot in such situation of over congestion in classroom and school . Difficult for the teacher to construct a healthy interactive environment with students in an overcongested classroom.	Increasing number of children going to school for education. Improved economic condition of families. Increment in number of children from other domains coming to study in schools located in Imphal West. Lack of strong and effective government rules of monitor and regulations.
Students	100	10/100: Yes. Most frequently given answer : I prefer more friends in the classroom. I prefer to be among more students. Students are able to escape the sight of the teacher and meanwhile enjoy time of mischief.	Most common answer:
		90/100: No. Most frequently given answer : I am unable to listen to the teacher's lecture as the classroom is too much crowded. It unpleasant during summer because of lack of ventilation, fan and fresh air in the room. There are arguments over the seats in the classroom most of the time with my friends.	Profit-intended school authorities/ owners. No idea.

Source: Fieldwork

Availability of laboratories and libraries

The most important criteria for a good operated school, is to have a laboratory and a library for students to easily access and exhibit their skills and knowledge apart from classroom lectures. Absence of these amenities and infrastructures may led to students being deprived of greater knowledge and skills. Regrettably, most of the schools in India are not equipped with the necessary infrastructures although government is trying its best by introduction of several schemes and program of development. Schools in Imphal West are no different in this respect as the study found that were many schools under the study which neither have science laboratories nor libraries . Temporarily , many schools did not have any laboratories or libraries. When enquired about the reasons for their total absence of laboratories and libraries, it was informed that the school lacks the finances and also cannot accomodate such amenities .Most of the government programmes and schemes which were present to such mentioned provisions were lost in innumerable loopholes and thus do not reach the schools.

Moreover not only students, but also teachers do not even have basic foundational facilities such as a separate room equipped with computers and printers, libraries or even reading materials. Teachers alone need to purchase these items themselves as the school does not provide them any. Post Covid-19 and the emphasis of more on online classes, the teacher themselves needs to arrange electronic gadgets such as computers, smart phones and internet data in their own expenses to take classes with. The table below indicates the availability status of laboratories and libraries and of the issues thereof.

Table-2. Availability of laboratories and libraries in the twenty (30) schools studied

No. of School	Are there libraries and laboratories available in your school? If No, how do you manage?	What are the discomforts for not having proper laboratory and library?	What are disadvantages of not having laboratory and library facility?
1	No. We illustrate in the classroom as best as we could or give certain tasks that involves practical works/readings as assignments. The students have to find the means to do them at home or with the help of tutorials available in the internet.	The school do not have enough space and also finances for a laboratory and library. Financial assistance from government agencies for creating necessary infrastructures and purchase of materials for laboratory and library is almost non-existent even though in paper, they may exist. Unenthusiastic attitude of government officials and agencies to complete process of sanction of the necessary provisions.	Teachers are often forced to be satisfied with illustrations and lectures in the classrooms. Students and parents are unduly burdened. Lack of these amenities promotes expensive home tuition culture.
2	Yes and our laboratory and library is well equipped.	Though there is availability of a proper laboratory and library, maintenance cost is high and therefore often very hard to keep up.	Without a laboratory and library, students and teachers are deprived of a huge chunk of quality education receiving and delivering opportunity.
3	Yes but minimal. Only very basic instruments for the laboratory and just a few volumes of book in the library.	The school do not have suitable space and also proper funding for a proper and full equipped laboratory and library. Financial assistance from government agencies for creating necessary infrastructures and purchase of materials for laboratory and library exist only in papers as the process is not properly executed. Unenthusiastic attitude of government officials and agencies to complete process of sanction of the necessary provisions	Teachers are often forced to be satisfied with illustrations and lectures in the classrooms. Students and parents are unduly burdened. Lack of proper learning and teaching materials promote expensive home tuition culture.
4	No. We illustrate in the classroom as best as we could		
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6	or give certain tasks that involves practical works/readings as assignments. The students have to find the means to do them at home or with the help of tutorials available in the internet.	The school do not have suitable space and also proper funding for a proper and full equipped laboratory and library. Financial assistance from government agencies for creating necessary infrastructures and purchase of materials for laboratory and library exist only in papers as the process is not properly executed. Unenthusiastic attitude of government officials and agencies to complete	Teachers are often forced to be satisfied with illustrations and lectures in the classrooms. Students and parents are unduly burdened. Lack of these amenities promotes expensive home tuition culture.
7	Yes but minimal. Only very basic instruments for the laboratory and just a few volumes of book in the library.	The school do not have suitable space and also proper funding for a proper and full equipped laboratory and library. Financial assistance from government agencies for creating necessary infrastructures and purchase of materials for laboratory and library exist only in papers as the process is not properly executed. Unenthusiastic attitude of government officials and agencies to complete	Teachers are often forced to be satisfied with illustrations and lectures in the classrooms. Students and parents are unduly burdened. Lack of these amenities promotes expensive home tuition culture.
8	Yes and our laboratory and library is well equipped.	Though there is availability of a proper laboratory and library, maintenance cost is high and therefore often very hard to keep up.	Without a laboratory and library, students and teachers are deprived of a huge chunk of quality education receiving and delivering opportunity.
9	No. We try to show/ illustrate in the classroom as best as we could or give certain tasks that involves practical works/readings as assignments. The students have to find the means to do them at home or with the help of home tutors or through tutorials available in the internet.	The school do not have suitable space and also proper funding for a proper and full equipped laboratory and library. Financial assistance from government agencies for creating necessary infrastructures and purchase of materials for laboratory and library exist only in papers as the process is not properly executed. Unenthusiastic attitude of government officials and agencies to complete	Teachers are often forced to be satisfied with illustrations and lectures in the classrooms. Students and parents are unduly burdened. Lack of these amenities promotes expensive home tuition culture.

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Source: Fieldwork

From the above table, it is observed that out of the thirty (30) schools visited, five (5) schools are without any laboratory or library, twenty three (23) schools with inconsiderably functioning laboratory and library and only two (2) with a properly equipped laboratory and library. The data vividly indicates that students are deprived of in terms of education and knowledge enhancement. There remains the scenario of poor investments in such schools for the progressive development of the graded education quality.

Besides science labs and libraries, another important issue that was found during the analysis was also that of absence of computer labs where students can learn various information technology related skills. It is astonishing to observe that while Computer is an necessary part of the schools' curriculum, more than 80 percent of the schools visited have no computer lab where students can be taught first-hand on the use of computer and related computer skills. It is therefore not surprising to find 90 percent of the students spoken to have some theoretical knowledge about computer but cannot operate in practical even the most basic but crucial components.

Availability of enjoyable facilities

As the saying "Working without a rest makes Jack a boring boy" goes, children require both studies along with recreational activities at the same time to enhance their productivity. Without which children have become less sociable, stressed and machinated. Their devotion only in academic learning and less time in socializing and engaging in creativity, physical fitness, fun knowledge enhancing activities, are one of the reason for the various deteriorating mental as well as physical health conditions. In addition to the above cited situations, the increasing trend of small nuclear families with both parents working has diminished the devotion of recreational time to be accounted through parents too.

Therefore, enjoyable and recreational activities are very needed to be introduced in school hours for children to develop their mental as well as physical well being.

It is a worrisome scenario that out of the thirty schools visited, only seven schools have enough space for a playground but with only minimal facilities. Again, none of the schools visited have a any sort of recreational facility. When students from these schools were contacted and asked about the absence of proper recreational facilities, 90 percent of them replied that the absence of such facilities makes school life very boring and that if they had enough money, they would move to more expensive schools such as UNNACO where such facilities are available. Several students even remarked that the absence or poorly equipped recreational facilities makes schools more like prisons rather than a place of learning; that education is not only about learning lessons from textbooks but honing their skills in other things like sports, physical education which are not part of the school's curriculum.

Safe and healthy school buildings

Threats to the safety of schools and students can both be external and internal. It is easy to imagine how unnerving and distracting it would be for students, teachers, and parents if, for instance, the school's structure is suspected to be not able to withstand an earthquake or if its electrical wiring is faulty, toilets are unhygienic and so on. If school buildings are prone to floods, exposed to hazardous materials or decaying due to lack of maintenance, it hinders both teaching and learning, making it harder to produce good academic results that are only possible in a safe and healthy building.

The study found that 60 percent of the schools visited for the purpose of study have very poor infrastructure and are prone to regular flooding, cracks in the walls and decaying building due to lack of maintenance, very dirty and dilapidated toilets poor lighting system and exposed wirings in some schools. In an earthquake-prone area like Manipur, poor and dilapidated school buildings pose a huge risk to both students and teachers. This condition is more common in government and government-aided schools while privately owned schools happen to have better building infrastructures and facilities. One plausible reason for the condition of government and government-aided schools may be due to neglect and corruption rampant in government departments or simply due to lack of enough funds. This issue needs to be addressed and given priority.

Concluding remarks

From the above findings and discussions, there is strong evidence that majority of students studying in the schools studied for the purpose of the present paper are mostly deprived of access to basic infrastructures and facilities required for quality education. In this regard, it was also realised that the following factors all positively impact students:

- Spacious and uncramped classrooms designs with good acoustic that also take into account local climatic and cultural conditions.
- Age-appropriate learning spaces enabling flexible learning opportunities that students can adapt to.
- Proper and sound school buildings.
- Access to laboratories, libraries, computers, water, sanitation, electricity and communications.
- Good indoor environmental quality.
- Access to recreational facilities- both indoor and outdoor.

The study shows that many of the schools studied often fall short and that, when they do, it is often the most disadvantaged students who get the worst provision.

The range of issues covered in this study also highlighted the need for further research covering, even though not limited to the following areas:

- In relation to spaces, cross-cultural, comparative impact evaluation studies are required to explore the issue of optimal provision of spaces.
- Evidence for the importance of safe and healthy schools is strong, but investigations are urgently needed into how to make this happen.
- More case studies are required to show the importance of appropriate pedagogy in relation to cross-cultural environment and spaces available.

- Technology plays an important role in education. Therefore, more research needs to be done to align the use of technology with the needs of schools.
- There is a need to carry further researches to show the crucial importance of and the impact that recreational activities within the school has on the quality of life of students.

In summary, there are several chinks in the educational scenario of Imphal West Manipur. However, as compared to the educational status about a decade ago, the scene is now much better and vibrant with a much better future prospect. However, to achieve a standard in education that is at par with the rest of the country and even globally, there is an urgent need for collective efforts from both the people and the government coupled with the need to shed certain lingering colonial-era inhibitions that still remains in Manipur's education system. There is also an urgent need for a more accountable, transparent and inclusive system in the education department so that funds and other provisions with regard to infrastructure and facilities reach its intended target and population.

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