



Research Paper

Higher Education in Manipur: A Comprehensive Overview

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Abstract

This study examines the higher education structure in Manipur, India, with a focus on Manipur University's role in setting academic standards. Challenges include a teacher recruitment gap, reliance on part-time instructors, and unauthorized absenteeism affecting the teaching-learning process in government colleges. Disparities in conditions of service, retirement age, and workload persist among different teaching cadres. Private aided colleges face financial constraints, resorting to unhealthy practices for income. Private colleges show varied attitudes toward government takeovers. Despite challenges, there's openness to quality education practices.

Keywords: Manipur University, higher education, teaching staff, conditions of service, University Grants Commission (UGC),

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I. Introduction

India boasts a diverse and intricate higher education system that reflects the country's rich cultural, historical, and geographical tapestry. As the second-most populous nation globally, India recognizes the pivotal role that education plays in shaping its future. The structure of higher education in India is a complex amalgamation of various institutions, disciplines, and approaches, designed to cater to the diverse needs of its vast population (Strittmatter et al., 2014, Indian Higher Education - Study in India, n.d, India's Higher Education Landscape | NAFSA, n.d, Higher Education in India: Structure and Governance, n.d).

In the northeastern region of India lies the state of Manipur, a land known for its vibrant traditions, picturesque landscapes, and unique cultural heritage. Manipur is a crucial part of the Indian higher education landscape, contributing to the educational tapestry of the nation. As we delve into the structure of higher education in India, we will also explore the distinctive features and contributions of Manipur to this dynamic system. (Growth of Higher Education in Manipur: Status and Policy Perspectives., n.d)(Policies and Programmes of Higher Education in Manipur Since the 1990s , n.d)((PDF) Development of Higher Education in Manipur, n.d)(Devi, 2018)

The higher education system in India is broadly categorized into universities, colleges, and institutions offering specialized courses. Universities in India are either central (managed by the central government) or state (managed by the respective state governments). These institutions serve as hubs of knowledge creation, dissemination, and research across various disciplines. Additionally, colleges affiliated with these universities play a vital role in imparting education at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Manipur, with its serene landscapes and a rich cultural mosaic, is home to a growing number of educational institutions that contribute significantly to the higher education scenario in the northeastern region. Imphal, the capital of Manipur, serves as an educational hub, hosting universities and colleges that cater to the academic aspirations of the local population and students from neighboring states.

As we navigate through the labyrinth of Indian higher education, we will explore the challenges and opportunities that shape the landscape. Manipur's unique cultural identity and its educational institutions' endeavors will be woven into this narrative, providing a nuanced understanding of how the state contributes to the broader canvas of higher education in India. Join us on this journey as we unravel the intricacies of the structure of higher education, exploring the diverse facets that make it an indispensable part of India's intellectual landscape.

Structure

The Manipur University has full autonomy in academic matters. It prescribes and sets academic standards, determines academic calendar, conducts examinations. Based on UGC guidelines, it also prescribes qualifications for recruitment and for career advancement of teachers in the colleges. The Directorate of University and Higher Education is the nodal office of the State Government for higher education in Manipur. Among others, it looks after 25 government colleges imparting general education directly and seven similar Private Aided colleges indirectly. Regarding the 26 Private colleges, the Directorate's role is limited to issuing a no objection certificate at the time of establishment. These colleges offer many Honours and General courses at the degree level. However, these are the conventional courses that have been in vogue for decades, and college after college offer the same courses. Many of them also offer apparently job-oriented Vocational courses. Ten government colleges, particularly in the hill districts, are still retaining the Higher Secondary i.e. +2 courses though it should be a part of the school education system. It is also retained by 40 Private Aided and Private Colleges. Apart from the Manipur University, the D.M. College of Science also offers studies leading to Master's Degree in Anthropology, Mathematics and Life Sciences. Besides, interested students can avail themselves of post-graduate courses through the Indira Gandhi National Open University, which has opened Study Centres for distance education at six colleges.

Teaching Staff and Conditions of Service

There are norms prescribed by the Manipur University/UGC regarding the minimum number of teachers required for Honours and General courses. There is at present a big gap between the numbers of sanctioned posts and the actual number of teachers in service in government colleges because no fresh recruitment has been done to fill up vacancies. This has adversely affected teaching-learning process in all subjects in all government colleges.

The government had sought to meet the shortfall by engaging the services of 577 part-time teachers. They are paid lump sum remuneration in the most irregular manner. They are generally a demoralized and disgruntled lot, though many teaching departments in many government colleges depend solely on their services for survival.

Regular teachers of four 'original' government colleges who were in service prior to or on 20 December 1979 belong to Cadre 'A', while teachers of colleges taken over by the government prior to or on the above date belong to Cadre 'B'. Teachers of colleges taken over after this date belong to a common with no definite name, though known popularly as the 'Cadreless'.

There are also a number of fresh teachers who had been recruited on regular basis after the above date and posted to government colleges as required. These fresh recruits do not belong to any Cadre. We have therefore a situation where the strength of teachers belonging to Cadres 'A' or 'B' or 'Cadreless' is decreasing as they retire from service and that of teachers outside any Cadre system increasing proportionately. The Cadre system is having a natural death in a few years.

The UGC scheme regarding conditions of service is a composite one and applicable equally to both college and university teachers. The government has adopted for regular teachers in government colleges the parts of the scheme relating to scales of pay and career advancement of teachers, but not the part relating to the age of retirement i.e. 62 years. So, like all other State Government employees, government college teachers retire on superannuation at the age of 58 years, though the Manipur University teachers are allowed to retire at 60 years. Government college teachers have protested against this discriminatory treatment.

The UGC also prescribes minimum 180 teaching days in an academic year and a workload of not less than 40 hours in a six-day week for college teachers. The remaining weeks of an academic year are earmarked for examinations, extra-curricular activities, vacation and holidays, etc. The teachers are also expected to be available at least five hours daily in the college. However, when the Researcher visited a number of government colleges, the general impression gathered was of unauthorized teacher absenteeism being the norm rather than an exception in most of the government colleges.

The higher education system provides the society with a variety of manpower having the knowledge and skills to sustain socio-economic development to enhance cultural awareness and regeneration of societal values, to lay the foundations of a knowledge society and, in Manipur's context, to promote harmonious relationship among different ethnic communities.

Considering the critical role that this tertiary sector of education is expected to play in our society, the outlay for higher education at just 1.84 p.c. of the Manipur Budget (2002-03) is indeed very meager.

Private Aided Colleges

Private Aided colleges (also referred to as Government Aided Colleges) are governed by grant-in-aid Rules framed by the Government. A Governing Body consisting of members not exceeding 11 in number manages the affairs of a Private Aided college. In addition to the Principal, there are representatives of the

teaching staff, the Manipur University, the parents/guardians and also nominees of the Government and of the donors in the Governing Body.

There is bifurcation of responsibilities between the Principal and the Secretary of the Governing Body. The Principal looks after academic affairs and the Secretary after administrative and financial matters. But, in case of misuse or misappropriation of funds, the Secretary cannot be held easily accountable for the actions as he/she usually happens to be a local political personality.

The Private Aided colleges depend largely on recurring grants received from the Government and the fees collected from students. The quantum of grant-in-aid is calculated on the basis of difference between what is called the 'approved income' and the 'approved expenditure'. 60 p.c. of the fees collected is credited to Government to constitute approved income and balance 40 p.c. is retained by the college for development works. Then, Government grant takes care of the salaries of 'approved' teachers and other employees, which constitute the approved expenditure.

In any Private Aided college, the number of 'approved' employees is a small minority among employees. The salaries of these 'approved' employees are the same as those of employees holding similar posts in Government colleges, including UGC scales of pay for qualified teachers. But they never get the salaries meant for them in the Government grant. In actual practice, all available funds are shared among all the employees subject to variations according to grade and seniority.

Income from fees is crucial to the Private Aided colleges. But the rules compel them to follow the same fee structure and give the same fee concessions to poor and meritorious students as in Government colleges. The grant-in-aid rules also forbid Private Aided colleges from demanding donations on compulsory basis from students or their parents, except for a nominal Rupee five at the time of admission.

Unhealthy Practices

To supplement college income and sometimes for personal gains, the college management opens as many new courses of study and appoints as many teachers as possible, much more than those in Government colleges. The management usually receives substantial sums as 'donations' from new appointees who have been led to expect a secure Government job when the college is taken over by the Government in not too distant future.

The Researcher feels that, more than anything else, the demand for Government take over of Private Aided colleges is to fulfill promises made to teachers who have 'donated' money to the college. But at the root of these pernicious practices lies the hand to mouth existence of the Private Aided colleges.

The precarious financial position of the Aided colleges also ensures that teachers and other employees retire from service literally with empty pockets. Though there is provision in the rules for Contributory Provident Fund, it is not implemented anywhere. There are no other post-retirement benefit schemes as well.

Private Colleges

The Private colleges are established and managed by private bodies. The managements of these Private colleges, unlike those in Private Aided colleges, are not so keen on takeover of their colleges by the Government. In fact, some of them were quite resourceful in mobilizing funds and materials from various sources, though a few of them also receive lump sum non-recurring Government grants for promotion of women's education. When the Investigator visited some of these Private colleges, the teachers looked definitely more enthusiastic than their counterparts in the Government and the Private Aided colleges. But the disparity in their remunerations and other service conditions, compared with teachers in the Government colleges and even with those in the Private Aided colleges, is shocking.

The Private college managements were generally found refreshingly amenable to ideas and practices pertaining to quality education. Even when the buildings and other infrastructure were inadequate, they were usually maintained neat and clean.

II. Conclusion

Manipur's higher education landscape reflects a complex interplay of challenges and opportunities. Manipur University stands as a key player, wielding academic autonomy and setting standards. However, the sector grapples with significant challenges, including a pressing teacher recruitment gap and irregularities in staffing (Strittmatter et al., 2014, Indian Higher Education - Study in India, India's Higher Education Landscape | NAFSA, Higher Education in India: Structure and Governance, n.d)

Disparities in conditions of service, retirement age, and workload among different cadres pose obstacles to a cohesive educational environment. The financial strains faced by private aided colleges result in undesirable practices and a demand for government takeovers, while private colleges navigate varied attitudes toward external interventions.

Despite these challenges, there is a commendable openness to quality education practices, particularly among private colleges. This signifies a potential for improvement and collaboration within the higher education sector in Manipur. Addressing issues such as teacher recruitment, standardized conditions of service, and financial stability will be crucial for fostering a robust and inclusive higher education system in the region. As Manipur strives for academic excellence, addressing these challenges will be imperative to ensure a harmonious and progressive educational landscape for the future.

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