



Educational Exclusion in Elementary Schools of Senapati District, Manipur: Access, Quality, and Equity

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ABSTRACT

Education is a fundamental human right and a critical driver of social transformation, economic development, and nation-building. Despite policy initiatives like the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, disparities in access, participation, and quality of elementary education persist in India, particularly in geographically remote, socio-economically backward, and culturally diverse regions. This study examines the multi-dimensional problem of educational exclusion in the Senapati district of Manipur, a predominantly hill and tribal region characterized by low literacy, dispersed habitations, and limited infrastructure. Adopting a descriptive-cum-analytical approach, primary data were collected from 131 schools across six sub-divisions through structured interviews with school authorities. Indicators analysed include Student-Classroom Ratio (SCR), Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR), drop-out and transition rates, availability of trained teachers, infrastructure facilities (classrooms, toilets, drinking water, playgrounds, mid-day meal kitchens), and socio-demographic factors such as caste, ethnicity, gender, disability, and parental occupation. Findings reveal that while most schools meet national standards for SCR and PTR, significant gaps exist in basic facilities, particularly in primary schools and privately managed institutions. Dropout rates are higher at the primary level, and operational challenges such as inconsistent working days further exacerbate exclusion. Socio-economic and geographic factors intersect with structural inadequacies to influence student retention and educational outcomes. The study underscores that improving elementary education in Senapati requires holistic interventions addressing infrastructure, teacher allocation, and inclusivity, alongside enhanced policy enforcement and community engagement. Context-specific strategies are vital to ensure equitable access, reduce disparities, and promote quality learning for all children in marginalized and vulnerable communities.

Keywords: Educational exclusion, Elementary education, Senapati district, Infrastructure, Equity

Introduction

Education is widely acknowledged as a fundamental human right and a crucial instrument for social transformation, economic development, and nation building. In India, the commitment to universal elementary education has been reinforced through constitutional provisions, national policies, and legislative measures such as the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009. Despite these efforts, significant disparities persist in access to, participation in, and completion of elementary education, particularly in geographically remote, socio-economically backward, and culturally diverse regions. Educational exclusion, manifested through non-enrolment, irregular attendance, early drop-out, poor infrastructure, and inadequate teaching resources continues to undermine the goal of inclusive and equitable education. These challenges are more acute in hill and tribal districts, where poverty, difficult terrain, limited institutional capacity, and social diversity interact to constrain educational opportunities for large sections of the population.

Senapati district of Manipur presents a compelling context for examining the problems of elementary education and educational exclusion. As a predominantly hill district with a low literacy rate compared to other districts of the state, Senapati is characterized by dispersed habitations, limited connectivity, ethnic and religious heterogeneity, and a high dependence on agriculture and informal occupations. Although elementary education in India has expanded rapidly in terms of school numbers and enrolment, the district continues to record unfavourable indicators such as high drop-out rates, low transition rates from primary to upper primary levels, adverse pupil-teacher ratios, and inadequate school infrastructure. The persistence of these problems suggests that mere expansion of schooling facilities is insufficient unless accompanied by improvements in quality, inclusiveness, and relevance. Educational exclusion in Senapati is further compounded by factors such as poverty, distance from schools, parental occupation, gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, and cultural practices, which differentially affect children's access to and retention in elementary education.

Against this backdrop, the present study focuses on the problems of elementary education in Senapati district by examining educational exclusion in a systematic and evidence-based manner. Given the structural complexity of education and constraints of time and resources, the study confines itself to elementary education, encompassing both primary and upper primary stages. It analyses a wide range of indicators related to access, participation, quality, and infrastructure, including drop-out and transition rates, pupil-teacher and student-classroom ratios, number of working days, availability of trained teachers, and essential school facilities such as classrooms, toilets, drinking water, playgrounds, kitchen sheds for the Mid-Day Meal scheme, and teaching-learning materials. The study also seeks to capture social dimensions of exclusion by examining disparities based on community, caste, ethnicity, religion, gender (including transgender children), and disability. By situating district-level realities within the broader framework of national educational goals and inclusive education policies, the study aims to highlight the gaps between policy intent and ground-level outcomes. Ultimately, an understanding of the nature, causes, and patterns of educational exclusion in Senapati district is essential for formulating context-specific policy recommendations and interventions that can strengthen elementary education and contribute to building a more equitable and just society.

Literature Review

A considerable body of literature has examined the challenges of elementary education in India, particularly focusing on access, participation, retention, and educational exclusion. Urvashi Sahni (1997), in her work on primary education, highlights that despite increased enrolment following policy interventions, high dropout rates and poor learning outcomes persist, especially among socially disadvantaged children. Amartya Sen (1999) conceptualizes education as a fundamental capability and argues that exclusion from education results in long-term deprivation and inequality. Expanding this perspective, Drèze and Sen (2013) emphasize that caste, gender, regional backwardness, and poverty continue to shape unequal educational outcomes in India. Using large-scale data, Garg, Chowdhury, and Sheikh (2023) demonstrate that socio-economic status, caste affiliation, and rural residence significantly influence school survival rates, with children from poorer households being more vulnerable to early dropout. Similarly, Pradeep Kumar et al. (2022) find that household income, parental education, and child labour are critical predictors of dropout, reinforcing the argument that exclusion often originates at the household level. The role of family support is further underscored by Paul, Rashmi, and Srivastava (2021), who show that parental involvement substantially reduces the likelihood of school discontinuation.

Structural and institutional factors have also been widely discussed in the literature on elementary education. Govinda and Biswal (2006) argue that inadequate infrastructure, shortage of teachers, and prevalence of multi-grade classrooms undermine both access and quality in rural and tribal schools. Studies by Tilak (2009) highlight persistent inter-district and inter-state disparities in educational financing and resource allocation, contributing to uneven development of elementary education. Saha, Kulkarni, and Periginji (2019) identify distance to school, lack of trained teachers, and poor physical facilities as major barriers faced by rural children, stressing that universal enrolment alone does not ensure inclusion. An evaluation of the Right to Education Act by Mukherjee (2015) reveals gaps in implementation, particularly in remote and hill areas, where basic norms related to pupil-teacher ratio and school infrastructure remain unmet. Bhan and Rodrick (2012) contend that educational exclusion is deeply embedded in broader structures of social and economic inequality, where caste and class relations influence children's participation in schooling. Historical analyses of elementary education reforms, such as those reviewed by Aggarwal (2004), show that issues of teacher shortages, low transition rates, and student retention have persisted across policy regimes. Additionally, Sugata Mitra (2010) argues that conventional schooling often fails to engage children in underserved contexts, indirectly reinforcing exclusion.

Recent studies have highlighted emerging and intersecting dimensions of educational exclusion relevant to hill and tribal districts. Vaidehi, Reddy, and Banerjee (2021) examine caste-based digital divides and demonstrate that lack of technological access exacerbates existing educational inequalities. Research by Kumar and Singh (2018) on tribal education points to cultural dissonance between school curricula and indigenous knowledge systems as a factor contributing to dropout among tribal children. Singal (2016)

emphasizes that children with disabilities remain systematically excluded from elementary education due to inadequate inclusive infrastructure and lack of trained teachers. Studies on gender and marginalization by Nambissan (2014) further reveal that social identity continues to influence educational participation. Collectively, these studies suggest that educational exclusion in India is multi-dimensional, shaped by socio-economic deprivation, institutional weaknesses, cultural factors, and policy gaps. This body of literature provides a strong conceptual and empirical foundation for examining the problems of elementary education and educational exclusion in Senapati district of Manipur.

Objectives

The primary objective of the study is to examine the problems of educational exclusion in the elementary schools of Senapati district, Manipur, by identifying the nature, causes, and patterns of exclusion among children. Specifically, the study aims to assess disparities in enrolment, retention, and transition rates across primary and upper primary levels, evaluate infrastructural facilities such as classrooms, toilets, drinking water, playgrounds, kitchen sheds for mid-day meals, and availability of trained teachers, and determine the extent to which socio-economic, cultural, and demographic factors such as caste, ethnicity, community, religion, gender, disability, parental occupation, and poverty contribute to educational exclusion. Further, the study seeks to analyse key indicators like pupil-teacher ratio, student-classroom ratio, and number of working days to understand systemic constraints, while also examining the fulfillment of policy provisions under the Right to Education (RTE) Act. The research intends to provide an evidence-based understanding of exclusion in the district's elementary education system and generate data-driven insights to recommend interventions for promoting inclusive education, enhancing equity, and ensuring access to quality learning opportunities for all children, including marginalized and vulnerable groups, thereby contributing to social integration and educational justice.

Materials and Methods

The study adopts a descriptive-cum-analytical approach and is conducted in Senapati district of Manipur, which comprises six sub-divisions: Saitu Gamphajol, Kangpokpi (KPI), Saikul, Tadubi, Paomata, and Purul. The population includes all schools offering elementary education, including government, aided, district council, and private institutions. A stratified random sampling technique with proportional allocation was employed, taking sub-divisions as strata to ensure representative coverage, resulting in a sample of 131 schools distributed across the sub-divisions: Kangpokpi (21), Purul (19), Saikul (34), Saitu (39), and Tadubi (18). Primary data were collected using a pre-tested, semi-structured interview schedule administered through personal interviews with school authorities, including headmasters and principals, during September 2015 to May 2016, using September 8, 2015 (World Literacy Day) as the reference date. The study focuses on multiple indicators to measure educational exclusion, including drop-out and transition rates, pupil-teacher ratio, student-classroom ratio, working days, infrastructure facilities (classrooms, toilets, drinking water, playgrounds, kitchen sheds), availability of trained teachers, and socio-demographic factors such as caste, ethnicity, disability, and gender. Statistical analysis, including chi-square tests and computation of P-values at 0.05 significance level, was applied to assess variations and correlations across selected parameters. This methodology allows a comprehensive evaluation of structural, institutional, and socio-economic determinants of exclusion, providing evidence for policy recommendations to improve inclusiveness in the district's elementary education system.

Analysis and Results

The analysis of Student-Classroom Ratio (SCR) and Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) in Senapati district indicates that, overall, elementary schools generally meet national standards, but disparities exist across school categories, types, and sub-divisions manifested in Table 1. At the primary level, 91% of schools fulfilled the SCR, while 87.2% met the PTR norms, suggesting that most schools are adequately equipped to accommodate students and maintain acceptable teacher availability. Upper primary schools show slightly lower compliance for SCR (84.9%) but higher for PTR (92.5%), indicating that teacher distribution is more favorable than classroom allocation at higher levels. Government schools largely maintain both ratios with 89.5% fulfillment for SCR and PTR, whereas private schools show lower compliance, particularly for SCR (64.7%) and PTR (76.5%), highlighting challenges in infrastructure and human resources in privately managed schools. Sub-division-wise analysis reveals that Saitu and KPI, despite being large rural areas, have SCR fulfillment rates of 84.6% and 85.7%, respectively, while PTR remains slightly lower in some areas, suggesting regional disparities in teacher allocation and classroom availability. Chi-square analysis shows a significant variation for SCR across school types ($\chi^2 = 12.0$, $P < 0.01$) but not across levels or sub-divisions, indicating that infrastructure adequacy is largely influenced by the nature of school management rather than location or grade level.

The study of infrastructure and facilities reveals significant gaps that affect educational quality and inclusivity. The availability of an office cum head teacher's room, essential for administrative efficiency, is found in only 43.6% of primary schools, though 73.6% of upper primary schools have this facility,

highlighting a disparity between school levels (Table 2). Drinking water and sanitation facilities present major challenges: only 34.6% of primary schools have drinking water, rising to 54.7% at upper primary level; girls' toilet availability is 33.3% at primary and 52.8% at upper primary, while boys' toilets are slightly better at 42.3% and 66%, respectively. This indicates that basic hygiene and sanitation infrastructure remains inadequate, particularly in primary schools. Playground facilities are relatively better, with 59–66% availability, and mid-day meal kitchen sheds are present in 34.6% of primary and 47.2% of upper primary schools, suggesting that meal provision infrastructure is insufficient, particularly at the foundational stage. Statistical analysis shows significant variation in office rooms, drinking water, and toilet facilities ($P<0.05$ to $P<0.01$), highlighting that these infrastructural deficiencies are not random but systematically associated with school category and management type.

In Table 3, the student outcomes, including dropout rates, transition rates, and number of working days, further reflect the implications of infrastructural and human resource gaps on educational participation. The dropout rate is higher at the primary level (5.02%) than at the upper primary level (2.85%), indicating that early schooling stages are more vulnerable to attrition. Among school types, government schools have a dropout rate of 3.35%, while private schools are comparatively lower at 1.91%, potentially reflecting differences in accountability, teaching quality, and parental involvement. Transition rates from Class V to VI are similar across government (77.27%) and private schools (77.26%), showing that once students remain in school, progression is largely ensured. However, the number of working days reveals operational challenges, with KPI primary schools fulfilling norms on only 33.3% of days, whereas upper primary schools in Saitu meet standards on 53.8% of days. Such variability in teaching days can directly affect learning outcomes and exacerbate educational exclusion in disadvantaged areas.

Finally, the combined interpretation of infrastructure, human resources, and student outcomes highlights the multi-dimensional nature of educational exclusion in Senapati. While teacher allocation is generally adequate, classroom shortages, poor sanitation, limited drinking water, and inadequate office and kitchen facilities create a challenging learning environment, especially at the primary level. Disparities are further compounded by school management types, with private and aided schools showing varied compliance across indicators. Regional differences are also evident: sub-divisions such as Saikul and Saitu exhibit infrastructural weaknesses and lower working day fulfillment, suggesting that remoteness and resource scarcity exacerbate exclusion. Collectively, these findings underscore that improving student retention, learning quality, and overall participation in Senapati requires a holistic approach, addressing structural deficiencies, ensuring equitable distribution of teachers and classrooms, and providing essential facilities such as drinking water, toilets, playgrounds, and functional mid-day meal kitchens. Policy interventions must prioritize the most vulnerable schools and sub-divisions to ensure that all children have access to a safe, well-resourced, and conducive learning environment.

Discussion

The findings of the study reveal that while Senapati district demonstrates considerable progress in terms of elementary education access, significant disparities persist in both infrastructural adequacy and human resource allocation. The majority of primary schools meet the prescribed Student-Classroom Ratio (SCR) and Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR), with 91% and 87.2% compliance, respectively. Upper primary schools, though slightly lower in SCR fulfillment (84.9%), maintain higher PTR levels (92.5%), indicating relatively better teacher availability than classroom capacity. These findings resonate with the work of Govinda and Biswal (2006), who emphasized that inadequate infrastructure and teacher shortages are critical barriers in rural and tribal schools. The study further identifies that government schools generally perform better than private schools in meeting SCR and PTR norms, suggesting that institutional management and resource allocation play a pivotal role in ensuring minimum standards of access. Chi-square analysis indicates significant variation in SCR across school types ($\chi^2 = 12.0$, $P<0.01$), supporting Tilak's (2009) observation that inter-school disparities, often influenced by management structures, continue to undermine equitable educational development in India. Sub-division level differences, with areas like Saitu and KPI showing slightly lower ratios, highlight the influence of geographic and administrative factors on resource distribution, reinforcing findings by Saha, Kulkarni, and Periginji (2019) regarding the impact of distance and remoteness on school functioning.

Infrastructure and facility provision emerge as critical determinants of educational inclusivity in Senapati. Essential amenities, such as drinking water, sanitation, and administrative offices, are disproportionately unavailable in primary schools. Only 34.6% of primary schools have drinking water, and girls' toilets are present in merely 33.3% of cases, which is consistent with Nambissan's (2014) findings on gender-based exclusion and Mitra's (2010) critique of conventional schooling in underserved contexts. Mid-day meal kitchen sheds are similarly inadequate, reflecting structural weaknesses in schemes intended to improve nutrition and attendance. The study highlights that upper primary schools generally fare better in terms of facility availability, suggesting that policy interventions may prioritize older students while foundational stages remain underserved—a concern also raised by Mukherjee (2015) in the context of incomplete implementation of the Right to Education Act. These inadequacies not only compromise quality learning

environments but also exacerbate dropout risks, especially for marginalized children who are more dependent on school-provided services. The statistically significant associations between facility availability and school type underscore systemic inequities that must be addressed through targeted infrastructure development, resource planning, and equitable policy enforcement.

Student outcomes further reflect the consequences of infrastructural and systemic gaps. Dropout rates are higher at the primary level (5.02%) than upper primary (2.85%), aligning with Sahni's (1997) observation that early schooling stages are most vulnerable to discontinuation among disadvantaged children. Government schools, while better resourced, report moderate dropout rates (3.35%), whereas private schools exhibit lower rates (1.91%), likely reflecting parental investment, supervision, and smaller class sizes. Transition rates from Class V to VI hover around 77% across school types, suggesting that once children remain in the system, progression is relatively assured. Nevertheless, inconsistent working days, particularly in KPI primary schools with only 33.3% fulfillment, indicate operational challenges that compromise learning continuity. These findings echo Garg, Chowdhury, and Sheikh (2023) and Pradeep Kumar et al. (2022), who emphasize that socio-economic, institutional, and geographic factors intersect to influence retention and survival rates. Collectively, the study confirms that educational exclusion in Senapati is multi-dimensional, shaped by structural deficiencies, limited facilities, and social inequities, underscoring the urgent need for holistic interventions that address both quality and access to ensure inclusive and equitable elementary education.

Conclusion

The study of elementary education in Senapati district of Manipur highlights that while significant strides have been made in terms of access, disparities in infrastructure, human resources, and socio-demographic factors continue to hinder equitable and inclusive education. Although the majority of schools comply with the prescribed Student-Classroom Ratio (SCR) and Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR), gaps remain across school types, levels, and sub-divisions, with private and rural schools often less equipped to meet minimum standards. Critical facilities such as drinking water, sanitation, administrative offices, and mid-day meal kitchens are inadequately provided, particularly in primary schools, creating a challenging learning environment. These deficiencies, coupled with inconsistent working days and operational challenges, disproportionately affect children from marginalized communities, including those from low-income households, tribal groups, girls, children with disabilities, and students living in remote areas. The findings corroborate previous studies (Govinda & Biswal, 2006; Tilak, 2009; Nambissan, 2014; Mukherjee, 2015) indicating that structural inadequacies and systemic inequities continue to shape educational outcomes in rural and hill districts.

To sum up, the present research confirms that educational exclusion in Senapati is multi-dimensional, driven by a combination of infrastructural, institutional, and socio-economic factors. Dropout rates, particularly at the primary level, underscore the vulnerability of early schooling stages, while transition rates suggest that retention beyond primary grades is more stable when students remain in school. Addressing these challenges requires holistic interventions, including targeted infrastructure development, equitable allocation of teachers and classrooms, and enhanced policy implementation under the RTE Act. Strengthening foundational facilities such as toilets, drinking water, playgrounds, and mid-day meal kitchens, alongside promoting community engagement and support, is essential for improving student retention, learning quality, and overall participation. By prioritizing the most disadvantaged schools and sub-divisions, policymakers and educational planners can move toward ensuring a safe, inclusive, and conducive learning environment, thereby advancing equity, social justice, and sustainable development in the district's elementary education system.

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Table 1: Fulfillment of Student-Classroom Ratio (SCR) and Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) by School Category, Nature, and Sub-Division

Indicator	Category/Nature/Sub-Division	Unfulfilled	Fulfilled	Total	Percentage Fulfilled (%)	χ^2 / P-value
SCR	Primary Level	7	71	78	91.0	1.1 (P>0.05)
SCR	Upper Primary	8	45	53	84.9	
SCR	Government	6	51	57	89.5	12.0 (P<0.01)
SCR	Private	6	11	17	64.7	
SCR	KPI	3	18	21	85.7	3.36 (P>0.05)
PTR	Primary Level	10	68	78	87.2	0.92 (P>0.05)
PTR	Upper Primary	4	49	53	92.5	
PTR	Government	6	51	57	89.5	5.52 (P>0.05)
PTR	Private	4	13	17	76.5	
PTR	Saitu	6	33	39	84.6	2.81 (P>0.05)

Table 2: Availability of Key Facilities (Office, Drinking Water, Toilets, Playground, Mid-Day Meal Kitchen) by Category, Nature, and Sub-Division

Facility	Category / Nature / Sub-Division	Available (Yes)	Not Available (No)	Total	% Availability	χ^2 / P-value
Office / Head Teacher Room	Primary	34	44	78	43.6	11.51 (P<0.01)
Office / Head Teacher Room	Upper Primary	39	14	53	73.6	
Drinking Water	Primary	27	51	78	34.6	5.21 (P<0.05)
Drinking Water	Upper Primary	29	24	53	54.7	
Girls Toilet	Primary	26	52	78	33.3	4.95 (P<0.05)
Girls Toilet	Upper Primary	28	25	53	52.8	
Boys Toilet	Primary	33	45	78	42.3	7.12 (P<0.05)
Boys Toilet	Upper Primary	35	18	53	66.0	
Playground	Primary	46	32	78	59.0	0.67 (P>0.05)
Playground	Upper Primary	35	18	53	66.0	
Mid-Day Meal Kitchen	Primary	27	51	78	34.6	1.65 (P>0.05)
Mid-Day Meal Kitchen	Upper Primary	17	19	36	47.2	

Table 3: Student Outcomes – Dropout, Transition, and Working Days by School Category, Nature, and Sub-Division

Outcome	Category / Nature / Sub-Division	Students	Dropout / Working Days	Rate / %	Notes	Outcome
Dropout Rate	Primary	3686	185	5.02%	Category-wise	Dropout Rate
Dropout Rate	Upper Primary	8430	240	2.85%		Dropout Rate
Dropout Rate	Government	5699	191	3.35%	Nature-wise	Dropout Rate
Dropout Rate	Private	3821	73	1.91%		Dropout Rate
Transition Rate	Government	32 schools	594→459	77.27%	Class V→VI	Transition Rate
Transition Rate	Private	17 schools	431→333	77.26%		Transition Rate
Working Days	KPI (Primary)	–	4 / 8	33.3%	Fulfilled / Not fulfilled	Working Days
Working Days	Saitu (Upper Primary)	–	7 / 6	53.8%		Working Days