Status of Pre-primary Education in Thoubal District, Manipur: An Analytical Study

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Abstract: *Early childhood education (ECE) is critical for children's cognitive and social development. This study analytically examines the status of pre-primary education in Thoubal district, Manipur, focusing on school registration, teacher demographics, qualifications, and experience. A descriptive survey method was employed, utilizing a sample of 290 teachers from 60 pre-primary schools. Findings revealed that 78.3% of schools are registered, adhering to basic norms, but 21.7% operate without regulatory standards. Most teachers (66.6%) are located in rural areas. The workforce is predominantly young (72.1% below 30) and female (85.5%). While the majority are graduates (84.1%), 23.1% lack professional qualifications, with only 1.0% having specific ECCE training. Furthermore, 52.4% have less than 5 years of experience. These findings align with national reports on untrained educators. The study underscores the urgent need for structured teacher training, strengthened regulatory oversight, and enhanced institutional support to align local educational practices with established ECCE standards.*

Keywords: Pre-primary schools, ECCE, Education, Teachers, Thoubal District

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) is the foundational stage for a child's overall development, profoundly influencing their cognitive, emotional, and social skill. Pre-primary education prepares children for formal schooling by fostering essential learning abilities, including language, numeracy, and socio-emotional competencies. However, the quality of pre-primary education in India is inconsistent across different regions, often due to variations in regulatory compliance, teacher qualifications, and institutional support structures (OECD, 2025).

Thoubal district, located in Manipur, India, has experienced considerable growth in the provision of pre-primary education. Despite this expansion, concerns persist regarding the regulatory status of schools, the qualifications of teachers, and the adequacy of infrastructure available for early childhood learning. Unregistered pre-primary schools may operate without proper oversight, leading to inconsistent teaching methodologies and varied learning outcomes (NCERT, 2006). The quality of ECE provision is also significantly influenced by the distribution of teachers between rural and urban areas, as well as their age profiles, gender representation, and professional qualifications (Alwani, 2019).

In India, despite progressive policies such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 that emphasize Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), implementation remains uneven, resulting in persistent disparities in access and quality between rural and urban areas (SAMAGRA SHIKSHA, 2017). Like other north-eastern states, Manipur faces challenges possibly exacerbated by geographical isolation, which can impact resource availability. The ECCE curriculum framework developed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development aims to standardize early learning across India (MWCD, 2013). However, studies suggest inconsistent implementation is a challenge, often linked to inadequate teacher training and monitoring. National data indicates that socioeconomic factors and household educational status influence a substantial portion of the rural-urban gap in access to pre-primary schools (ASER Centre, 2024). Regional disparities in teacher training centers also exist, with a notable absence in Northeast India, directly affecting states like Manipur and potentially the Thoubal district.

Early childhood education quality heavily relies on trained and motivated pre-primary school teachers. However, the sector faces challenges such as diverse service providers, varying pre-primary school models, uneven salary structures, heavy workload, lack of support systems, high teacher-pupil

ratios, and an unregulated teacher preparation sector. These factors can contribute to teachers lacking motivation and adequate training, ultimately affecting the quality of educational experiences provided to young children (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

This study aims to fill some of these gaps by analyzing the status of pre-primary school education, specifically in the Thoubal district. It focuses on key factors, including school registration status, teacher demographics (age and gender), educational background, and professional training. By understanding these specific aspects within the Thoubal context, policymakers and educators can develop targeted strategies to improve the quality of early childhood education in this region.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is universally recognized as the foundational stage for a child's development, supporting critical cognitive, social, and emotional growth (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). High-quality pre-primary education improves learning outcomes, school readiness, and long-term academic success. In India, the importance of ECCE is emphasized in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It mandates the registration and regulation of all pre-primary schools to ensure uniformity in quality and access (Ministry of Education, 2020).

The regulatory framework, especially in rural and semi-urban India, often remains informal. Kaul and Sankar (2009) report that many pre-primary schools operate without recognition, undermining quality assurance. This issue is particularly evident in north-eastern states like Manipur, where school registration mechanisms are inconsistently implemented (NIEPA, 2021). The Manipur Private School (Registration and Regulation) Rules (2024) were introduced to standardize infrastructure and teaching norms. However, district-level compliance remains undocumented, necessitating local assessments like that in Thoubal (Department of Education (S), 2024).

Teacher distribution further complicates the quality landscape. Urban areas attract qualified teachers due to better pay and living conditions, while rural regions face a persistent shortage. Anganwadi workers are critical to rural ECCE delivery, yet many lack formal training in early childhood education, reducing program effectiveness (UNICEF, 2021).

Teacher demographics, including age and gender, also influence educational outcomes. Younger educators often bring fresh, innovative approaches but may lack experience. Conversely, older teachers have stronger classroom management skills but might struggle with the physically demanding aspects of pre-primary teaching (UNESCO, 2015). Gender imbalance remains a persistent issue. Women dominate the ECCE workforce due to societal perceptions of caregiving roles, limiting the diversity of role models available to children (NCERT, 2020). Calls for male inclusion in early education aim to broaden children's exposure to diverse social roles.

Pre-primary teachers' academic qualifications and professional experience are crucial determinants of educational quality. Despite the ECCE Policy (2013) setting minimum qualifications, many teachers do not meet these standards, especially in private or unregistered institutions (Sharma & Ramachandran, 2016). Experienced educators demonstrate better pedagogical adaptability and classroom effectiveness (Berliner, 2004). However, even experienced teachers may fall behind in evolving best practices without continued professional development.

Despite the national push toward standardized ECCE, including curriculum innovations such as The Zero Curriculum™, adopted by Manipur's SCERT (SCERT, 2024), delivery inconsistencies and gaps in localized data persist. Therefore, a district-level study of Thoubal's pre-primary education system is critical to bridge these knowledge gaps and inform targeted policy interventions. Existing literature emphasizes that registration status, geographic distribution, age, gender, qualifications, and teaching experience collectively shape the quality and accessibility of pre-primary education. However, there remains a need for localized analysis in districts like Thoubal and Manipur to understand specific challenges and opportunities and guide policies aimed at equitable and effective early childhood education.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design based on survey data. Data was collected from 290 teachers across 60 pre-primary schools in Thoubal district, Manipur. The primary goal was to analyse specific aspects of pre-primary education, including school registration status, teacher demographics, qualifications, and teaching experience, to assess overall quality. Data collection involved structured surveys administered directly to teachers. Secondary sources, such as educational reports and government statistics, were also used. The collected data were categorized by school registration, location (rural/urban), teacher age, gender, educational attainment, professional qualifications, and teaching experience. The analysis primarily used frequency distribution and percentage analysis to identify trends. Descriptive statistics helped interpret the findings regarding the impact of various factors on education quality.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study were:

1. To analyse the registration status of pre-primary schools in Thoubal district.

2. To examine the distribution of pre-primary teachers across rural and urban areas.

3. To assess the age composition of pre-primary school teachers and its impact on teaching quality.

4. To study the gender distribution of pre-primary school teachers and their implications.

5. To evaluate the educational and professional qualifications of teachers.

6. To analyse the teaching experience of pre-primary school educators.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Objective 1: To analyse the registration status of pre-primary schools in the Thoubal district

Table 1: Number of Registered/Unregistered Pre-primary Schools

Category	No. of Pre-primary Schools	No. of Pre-primary Teachers	Percentage
Registered	47 (78.3%)	233	80.3
Unregistered	13 (21.7%)	57	19.7
Total	60	290	100.0

Table 1 highlights the registration status of pre-primary schools in Thoubal district. Out of 60 schools surveyed, 47 (78.3%) are registered, and 13 (21.7%) are unregistered. These schools employ a combined 290 teachers. Of these, 233 teachers (80.3%) are employed in registered schools, while 57 teachers (19.7%) work in unregistered institutions. This distribution suggests that most pre-primary schools in the district are officially registered and likely adhere to regulatory standards concerning curriculum, teacher qualifications, and operational guidelines.

However, unregistered pre-primary schools in Thoubal district, employing about 20% of the teaching workforce, raise concerns due to a lack of formal oversight, leading to possible deficiencies in training, infrastructure, and educational consistency. The study highlights the need to encourage complete registration by simplifying administrative processes and offering institutional support. Achieving complete registration would help set quality standards, strengthen teacher support systems, and promote equitable early childhood education across the district.

Objective 2: To examine the distribution of pre-primary school teachers across rural and urban areas

Table 2: Location of Pre-primary Schools

Location	No. of Pre-primary schools	No. of Teachers	Percentage
Rural	34 (56.67%)	193	66.6
Urban	26 (43.33%)	97	33.4
Total	60	290	100.0

Table 2 shows the distribution of pre-primary school teachers across rural and urban areas in Thoubal district. Of the 290 teachers surveyed, 66.6% (193) work in rural areas, while 33.4% (97) are in urban schools. These teachers are distributed across 60 pre-primary schools, with 34 in rural and 26 in urban areas. This data reflects a greater concentration of schools and teaching staff in rural regions.

However, despite the higher number of teachers in rural settings, existing studies show that rural schools often face challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited learning materials, and restricted access to teacher training. In contrast, urban schools typically benefit from better facilities and development opportunities. The findings highlight the need for targeted support in rural areas through infrastructure development, improved teaching resources, and ongoing professional training to ensure equitable early childhood education across the district.

Objective 3: To assess the age composition of pre-primary school teachers and its impact on teaching quality

Table 3: Age-based Classification of Pre-primary Teachers

Category	No. of teachers	Percentage
Below 30 Years	209	72.1
30-40 Years	58	20.0
Above 40 Years	23	7.9
Total	290	100.0

Table 3 the data indicates that a significant majority of the workforce, 72.1% (209 teachers), are below 30 years of age. Teachers aged between 30 and 40 years constitute 20.0% (58 teachers) of the sample, while only a small fraction, 7.9% (23 teachers), are above 40 years. This distribution shows that the early childhood education sector in the district employs a largely young workforce. The study highlights that while the dominance of young teachers in Thoubal's pre-primary schools brings energy and adaptability, their limited experience may hinder effective classroom management and pedagogical depth. The low presence of teachers over 40 suggests retention challenges and a shortage of experienced mentors.

Objective 4: To study the gender distribution of pre-primary school teachers and its implications

Table 4: Gender-wise Distribution of Pre-primary Teachers

Gender	No. of teachers	Percentage
Male	42	14.5
Female	248	85.5
Total	290	100.0

Table 4 shows the gender distribution among the 290 teachers in Thoubal district's pre-primary schools. The data shows a pronounced imbalance, with a vast majority being female, comprising 85.5% (248 teachers), while only 14.5% (42 teachers) are male. This finding indicates that female educators predominantly lead early childhood education in the Thoubal district.

This gender distribution reflects a common national and international trend in pre-primary school teaching, where women are often more engaged in roles associated with nurturing and caregiving. The significantly lower representation of male teachers suggests a notable gender imbalance. While female dominance is usually linked to nurturing classroom environments, the literature suggests potential benefits of having male teachers, including providing diverse role models for children and challenging traditional gender stereotypes. The study implies that efforts to encourage male participation through awareness campaigns and incentives could help balance the gender ratio in the district's pre-primary schools.

Objective 5: To evaluate the educational and professional qualifications of teachers

Table 5: Educational Qualifications of Pre-primary Teachers

Category	No. of teachers	Percentage
Class 12	13	4.5
Graduate	244	84.1
Post Graduate	33	11.4
Total	290	100.0

Regarding educational qualifications (**Table 5**), a large majority, 84.1% (244 teachers), are graduates. Additionally, 11.4% (33 teachers) hold postgraduate degrees. Only a small percentage, 4.5% (13 teachers), have completed up to Class 12. It suggests a workforce with generally high academic qualifications. The presence of postgraduate teachers indicates that some educators have advanced knowledge that can potentially enhance education quality. However, teachers with only a Class 12 qualification may lack formal teacher training, potentially affecting teaching standards.

Table 6: Professional Qualifications of Pre-primary Teachers

Professional Qualification	No. of teachers	Percentage
Rhymes Training	132	45.5
ECCE	3	1.0
D. El. Ed.	108	37.2
B.Ed.	32	11.0
M.Ed.	2	0.7
NET	2	0.7
No Professional Qualifications	67	23.1

Looking at professional qualifications, **Table 6** shows a diverse landscape but highlights areas of concern. The most common professional training reported is Rhymes Training, completed by 45.5% (132 teachers), which helps engage young learners. A significant portion, 37.2% (108 teachers), holds a Diploma in Elementary Education (D. El. Ed.), considered a crucial qualification for foundational teaching. However, only a minimal percentage, 1.0% (3 teachers), have completed specific Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) training, a specialized program for pre-primary education. Higher teaching qualifications like Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) are held by 11.0% (32 teachers), and Master of Education (M.Ed.) by 0.7% (2 teachers). Notably, 23.1% (67 teachers) report having no professional teaching qualifications.

A significant concern in Thoubal district's pre-primary education is that 23.1% of teachers lack professional qualifications, potentially affecting teaching quality. The study recommends expanding training programs, particularly in ECCE, D.El.Ed., and B.Ed., to enhance teacher preparedness. Policymakers are urged to implement initiatives ensuring all educators receive appropriate pedagogical training regardless of prior qualifications.

Objective 6: To analyse the teaching experience of pre-primary school educators

Table 7: Teaching Experiences of Pre-primary Educators

Category	No. of teachers	Percentage
Below 5 Years	152	52.4
5-10 Years	112	38.6
Above 10 Years	26	9.0
Total	290	100.0

Table 7 displays the distribution of teaching experience among the 290 surveyed teachers in Thoubal district. The data indicates that a majority of the teachers have relatively limited experience. Specifically, 52.4% (152 teachers) have less than 5 years of teaching experience. Another substantial group, 38.6% (112 teachers), has between 5 and 10 years of experience. Only a small percentage, 9.0% (26 teachers), have taught for over a decade.

This high percentage of teachers with less than 5 years of experience indicates a relatively young and inexperienced workforce. It may also suggest a growing interest in early childhood education as a profession, potentially linked to increasing employment opportunities. However, the study notes that having many inexperienced teachers implies that many of the workforce may still be developing their teaching skills, classroom management techniques, and understanding of child psychology. The small number of highly experienced teachers could also affect the availability of mentorship opportunities and overall teaching quality. To enhance the effectiveness of early childhood education, the study suggests prioritizing training programs and professional development workshops, particularly for newer teachers. Encouraging experienced educators to mentor younger ones is recommended to help bridge the experience gap.

DISCUSSION

The study on pre-primary schools in Thoubal district, Manipur, highlights critical gaps in infrastructure, teacher training, and school regulation, aligning with national education research. Of the 60 schools surveyed, 78.3% were registered, while 21.7% operated without recognition, raising concerns about quality assurance, consistent with findings by Kaul and Sankar (2009) and NIEPA (2021).

Most schools (56.7%) and teachers (66.6%) are in rural areas with inadequate infrastructure and limited resources. This finding mirrors NCERT's (2018) and UNESCO's (2019) findings. A significant issue is educators' lack of professional qualifications; 23.1% of teachers were untrained, and only 1% had specific ECCE training. It aligns with the ASER (2020) report, emphasizing the need for structured teacher education programs in early childhood.

The teacher workforce is predominantly young (72.1% under 30), with 52.4% having less than five years of experience. While youthful energy can be positive, lack of experience may affect pedagogical quality, echoing observations by Patel and Joshi (2014). The small proportion of experienced teachers over 40 years may suggest poor retention and limited mentoring.

Gender imbalance is stark, with 85.5% female teachers. Although this may foster nurturing environments, the absence of male role models is a concern echoed by Bhatty (2014), NCERT (2020), and Blaise & Ryan (2011). The study also found low parental awareness and minimal community participation, underscoring the need for targeted policy actions in training, infrastructure, regulation, and community engagement in ECCE.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on these findings, the following suggestions are made for improvement:

1. Mandatory Registration of Pre-primary Schools: Authorities should strictly enforce regulations to ensure all pre-primary schools are registered and comply with quality standards.

2. Professional Training for Teachers: Encourage and facilitate comprehensive training programs focused on ECCE and D. El. Ed. to improve teaching quality.

3. Infrastructure Development in Rural Areas: Invest in improving infrastructure in pre-primary schools to help bridge the urban-rural gap in resources and facilities.

4. Retention of Experienced Teachers: Implement incentives and provide career growth opportunities to retain experienced educators and leverage their knowledge for mentorship.

5. Encouraging Male Participation: Conduct awareness campaigns, improve job security, and provide incentives to attract more male teachers to early childhood education to promote gender balance.

CONCLUSION

The analytical study on pre-primary education in Thoubal district, Manipur, presents a mixed scenario. While most surveyed schools are registered and compliant with regulatory norms, unregistered institutions raise concerns about quality assurance and oversight. The teaching workforce is predominantly young and female, reflecting national trends. However, many lack professional qualifications for early childhood education, negatively affecting instructional quality. Additionally, many teachers have limited teaching experience, highlighting the urgent need for continuous professional development and support systems.The findings emphasize critical gaps in rural infrastructure, teacher preparedness, and workforce diversity. To improve ECCE outcomes in Thoubal, the study recommends targeted policy interventions, expanded access to

ECCE-specific training programs, investment in rural educational infrastructure, and strategies to enhance teacher retention and recruit male educators. Such initiatives are essential for raising the district's overall standard and effectiveness of early childhood education.

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