

Gender and Institutional Patterns Among Special Education Teachers in Manipur: A Cross-Sectional Analytical Study

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ABSTRACT This study examines how gender dynamics and institutional patterns shape the professional landscape of special education teachers in Manipur, India. A cross-sectional research design was employed, using a census survey of 250 teachers across 23 registered special institutions. Data collected through a structured questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics to examine professional background, qualifications, subject specialisation, institutional type, and rural-urban placement that influence educational equity. The findings highlight pronounced feminisation, with women comprising 84.8 percent of special educators, concentrated in urban areas (55.66%) and private institutions (88.7%). Gender segregation persists, with males dominating science teaching (65.8%) while females largely teach Arts (61.7%). Urban regions account for 54.8 percent of the workforce, indicating a moderate geographic imbalance. The findings suggest that gender and institutional disparities impact professional equity and educational quality, underscoring the need for targeted policy reforms to enhance training, infrastructure, and community engagement in Manipur.

INTRODUCTION

Education serves as the essential cornerstone of societal development, driving intellectual, social, and emotional growth (Turnbull et al. 2020). Within this critical sphere, special education plays a pivotal role in ensuring that children with disabilities receive equitable learning opportunities. Special teachers function as the indispensable link, translating policy commitments to inclusion, particularly those established by national legislation such as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act of 2016 (Government of India 2016), into classroom practice. Consequently, examining the existing gender and institutional patterns among special educators offers vital insights into crucial areas of Manipur. Women frequently encounter challenges related to family responsibilities, limited mobility, and safety, which are particularly critical

in regions like Manipur, which are particularly pronounced in Manipur's distinct sociocultural and institutional settings, shaping experiences that may either facilitate or hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education within specific geographic and socio-political contexts (Verma and Thomas 2021).

Manipur, a state situated in northeastern India, presents a unique educational landscape characterised by geographic isolation, limited infrastructure, and significant ethnic diversity. These complex factors have historically contributed to disparities in access to quality education, posing substantial difficulties for the effective and practical implementation of inclusive education policies (Yumnam and Khuman 2018). While national legislation, such as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act of 2016, has significantly strengthened India's legislative framework for inclusion, persistent

regional variations remain concerning, particularly in terms of teacher preparedness, levels of institutional support, and gender participation (Kumar and Tesia 2020). Special teachers in Manipur frequently operate in resource-constrained settings, where they must adapt curricula and design Individualised Education Plans (IEPs) for students with special needs. Their professional challenges are further complicated by gendered expectations that often shape career opportunities and retention patterns (National Institute of Education 2024). Previous research at the national level suggests that while women are numerically dominant in the teaching profession generally, their representation in special education varies substantially across different regions and institutional types (Sarkar and Singh 2021).

Globally, teaching, especially at the primary level, has long been recognised as a female-dominated profession, reflecting widespread societal perceptions that closely associate teaching with caregiving and nurturing traits (Lynch et al. 2019). This trend is even more pronounced within special education, where women are often culturally perceived as possessing more empathy and patience, attributes aligned with the demands of working with children who have disabilities. Despite their numerical dominance, however, female special educators frequently face structural inequalities, including lower pay, restricted access to leadership roles, and various institutional biases (Ramasamy and Das 2020). However, recent scholarship offers a critical evaluation of this demographic reality. Bettini et al. (2023) argue that the prevalent “gendered discourse about special education teachings care work” is problematic because it serves to normalise unsustainable working conditions and the expectation that educators must sacrifice their own well-being. This discourse implicitly functions to deflect responsibility from institutional leaders and policymakers for providing adequate funding, infrastructure, and support services (Bettini et al. 2023). In the Indian context, prevailing gender norms continue to influence teachers’ professional trajectories. In rural and semi-urban areas of Manipur, women frequently encounter challenges related to family responsibilities, limited mobility and safety, which hinder their participation in training and leadership roles (Singh and Deb 2022; Suja and Elamaran 2024).

The institutional context has a significant influence on the structure and delivery of special education, affecting teacher training, the quality of infrastructure, and the implementation of policies (Verma and Thomas 2021). The institutional landscape comprises government schools implementing inclusive education under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) schemes, private schools with partial inclusion models, specialised institutions (such as the Spastic Society of Manipur), and home-based education programs. While national policy has shifted toward inclusion since the 2000s (IME Research 2025), government schools often face chronic shortages of teachers and resources, while private institutions, despite serving narrower socioeconomic groups, dominate teacher employment nationally. The interaction between gender and institutional environment is pivotal, as supportive institutions foster an inclusive culture and empower female teachers through mentorship, while hierarchical or male-dominated systems can reinforce gender disparities (Gupta and Mehta 2020). These intersections are complicated in Manipur by broader socio-political realities, including ethnic diversity, economic inequality, and historical conflict, which collectively impact educational access and teacher deployment. A critical inquiry into these intersecting factors is essential to understand the true state of professional equity and educational quality in Manipur.

Recent national reviews have highlighted persistent barriers to inclusive education in India, including inadequate teacher training and resource constraints (Das and Nair 2021; Suja and Elamaran 2024). However, research specifically examining special teachers in Manipur is limited, as two existing studies suggest region-specific socio-cultural constraints and gender imbalances (Devi and Singh 2019; Sarkar and Singh 2021). This study addresses these gaps by systematically analysing gender and institutional patterns among special education teachers across Manipur’s districts.

Review of Literature

The examination of gender distribution and institutional patterns among special education

teachers represents a critical yet underexplored dimension of inclusive education research, particularly in northeastern Indian states such as Manipur. This section synthesises findings across various dimensions pertinent to the study's objectives.

Research consistently highlights significant gender segregation in teaching, extending to special education contexts as well. A study by Omogo and Enyi (2023) on Nigerian secondary schools found that male teachers dominated science subjects (disparity index of 1.54), while female teachers constituted the majority in arts subjects (disparity index of 0.70). This pattern reflects societal stereotypes, contrasting the feminisation of arts-related teaching with male predominance in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields (Omogo and Enyi 2023). In the Indian context, data from the All India Survey on Higher Education indicate that female participation in university-level arts education substantially exceeds that in science disciplines, with 86 females per 100 males in Arts compared to 72.7 females per 100 males in Science. This disparity creates an educational pipeline effect that strongly influences the gender composition of the teaching workforce (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation 2017; Asok et al. 2021).

The type of institution also profoundly affects teacher demographics. A study in Bishnupur district in Manipur, found that 59.1 percent of teachers worked in government schools, while 40.9 percent served in private institutions (Asok et al. 2021). Nationally, analysis of Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE+) data reveals stark differences, wherein only 44 percent of government school teachers are women, while 63 percent of private school teachers are female, representing a 19 percent difference (Centre for Education, Training and Employment 2023; Indian Express 2025). This widespread feminisation of the private sector often relates to economic factors, including lower salary expectations, greater scheduling flexibility, and reduced job security (CETE 2023). A comparative study found significant gender differences in self-efficacy only within government institutions (female mean = 62.50, male mean = 54.25), but not in private schools ($t = -2.9892$, $p = 0.0079$), suggesting institutional contexts mediate professional confidence (Zafar et al. 2014).

Academic qualifications are intricately linked to gender and institutional affiliation. Caballero et al.'s (2023) study in the Philippines found that 90.48 percent of special education teachers were female, with a predominance of intermediate qualifications (61.90% held master's-level qualifications, but only 14.29% had completed master's degrees). Recent scholarly work from 2024 emphasises that, regardless of policy frameworks, teachers across India face implementation barriers due to a persistent lack of specialised training, insufficient support services, and inadequate teaching materials (Kaur and Salian 2024; Suja and Elamaran 2024). In India, government institutions typically mandate formal qualifications (Bachelor of Education, Teacher Eligibility Clearance Test), whereas private schools may employ less standardised requirements. While higher minimum qualifications are generally required for government employment, some affluent private sector schools can also attract highly qualified staff. However, studies suggest that investments in experiential learning and systematic training often prove more consequential for the competence of special education teachers than formal degree attainment alone.

Geographic distribution is a critical equity issue, especially in diverse countries like India. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (2021-2022) data for India indicates that 58.59 percent of government teachers work in rural areas, compared to 38.04 percent of private sector teachers. Specifically, for special education, 46.15 percent of government special educators serve rural communities, in contrast to 36.84 percent of private special education teachers (CETE 2023). This rural-urban divide exacerbates challenges such as professional isolation and limited specialised resources (Iverson 1997). Furthermore, professional experience patterns reveal concerning attrition trends. Billingsley (2004) identified that 15 to 20 percent of special education teachers leave annually, compared to 8 to 10 percent of general education teachers (CETE 2023). Retention is largely dependent on job satisfaction, support and workload. Gender differences in these patterns may exist, as women often experience interrupted careers due to caregiving responsibilities (Singh and Deb 2022). These documented issues underscore persistent challenges in inclusive education efforts across India.

(Suja and Elamaran 2024). The persistent lack of qualified special educators nationally, with over 1,50,000 posts vacant as of late 2024, confirms the systemic failure to adequately invest in this essential workforce (IME Research 2025).

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives addressed in this analysis are:

1. To examine gender-wise distribution of special teachers across subject specialisation (Arts and Science) subjects, qualification levels, and by types of institutions.
2. To analyse the location-wise (rural-urban) distribution of special teachers and their teaching experience in relation to gender.
3. To examine the distribution of special teachers by institution type, subject taught, and gender across government and private institutions.

METHODOLOGY

This research was structured as a cross-sectional analytical study, adopting a descriptive survey method to systematically examine the existing relationship between gender and institutional patterns among special teachers across Manipur, India. Utilising a census survey method (complete enumeration), the study included all 250 special teachers, comprising 146 teachers (58.4%) from valley districts and 104 teachers (41.6%) from hill districts, who served in 23 recognised institutions across the state, ensuring a broad geographical scope. The sample provides a comprehensive representation across variables, including gender, location (urban/rural), types of institution, subject taught, and teaching experience. Data were gathered systematically using a validated structured questionnaire, 'Special Teachers' Competency Scale (STCS)'. Instrument validity was established through expert review, and reliability was confirmed through high internal consistency measures, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha of $\alpha=.767$, and a validity coefficient of $r=0.741$ (significant at the 0.01 level). This instrument captured key demographic and professional variables, including gender, subject specialisation (Arts or Science), type of institution (government or pri-

vate), qualifications, location (rural or urban), and teaching experience. Data collection spanned five months, from February 2024 to June 2024. It was collected directly for the valley districts of Kakching, Chandel, Imphal East, Imphal West, Bishnupur, Tamenglong, and Thoubal, and for remote areas, such as Churachandpur, Jiribam, Kangpokpi, and Senapati, using a Google format questionnaire, and was conducted with ethical approval (Manipur University IHEC) and informed consent from all participants. Quantitative data from the survey instrument were subsequently analysed using descriptive statistics and interpreted accordingly.

RESULTS

The analysis utilises cross-sectional data collected from 250 special teachers across Manipur to examine gender and institutional patterns based on the specified objectives.

Objective 1: To examine gender-wise distribution of special teachers across subject specialisation (Arts and Science) subjects, qualification levels, and by types of institutions.

Table 1 highlights gender-based patterns among 250 special education teachers in Manipur, showing that females dominate the workforce with 212 (84.8%) teachers, while males account for only 38 (15.2%). Subject-wise, male teachers show a preference for Science, with 25 (65.8%) teaching Science and 13 (34.2%) teaching Arts, whereas female teachers favour Arts, with 130 (61.7%) teaching Arts and 82 (38.3%) teaching Science. This distribution reflects broader sociocultural associations linking women with creative and nurturing roles and men with analytical disciplines. The strong female presence in Arts teaching may influence peda-

Table 1: Gender and subject cross-sectional distribution of special education teachers

	Subjects taught		Total
	Arts	Science	
Male	13 (34.2%)	25 (65.8%)	38 (15.2%)
Female	130 (61.7%)	82 (38.7%)	212 (84.8%)
Total	143 (57.2%)	107 (42.8%)	250

Source: Author (June 2024)

gical styles and subject diversity. Promoting gender balance across disciplines could enrich teaching quality, foster inclusivity, and broaden learning perspectives in Manipur's special education system.

Table 2 presents the distribution of 250 special education teachers in Manipur by gender and educational qualification, revealing apparent disparities in academic attainment. A large majority, 217 teachers (86.8%), are graduates, while only 33 (13.2%) hold postgraduate degrees, indicating limited progression to higher education levels. Gender-wise, females dominate the workforce but have a lower proportion of postgraduates. Among males, 8 (21.1%) are postgraduates, and 30 (78.9%) are graduates. Among females, 25 (11.8%) are postgraduates, and 187 (88.2%) are graduates. This pattern suggests that men pursue advanced studies more often, despite being fewer in number. Expanding postgraduate and professional development opportunities could enhance instructional quality and teacher competency in Manipur's special education sector.

Table 2: Educational qualification of special education teachers by gender

	Educational qualification		Total
	Postgraduate	Graduate	
Male	8 (21.1%)	30 (78.9%)	38
Female	25 (11.8%)	187 (88.2%)	212
Total	33 (13.2%)	217 (86.8%)	250

Source: Author (June 2024)

Table 3 shows the distribution of special teachers in Manipur by educational qualification and type of institution, highlighting clear differences in academic attainment across sectors. Out of 250 teachers, 217 (86.8%) are gradu-

Table 3: Educational qualification by types of institution

Types of institution * Educational qualification Crosstabulation			
	Educational qualification		Total
	Postgraduate	Graduate	
Govt.	13 (17.8%)	59 (82.2%)	72 (29.2%)
Private	20 (11.3%)	158 (88.7%)	177 (70.8%)
Total	33 (13.2%)	217 (86.8%)	250

Source: Author (June 2024)

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ates, while only 33 (13.2%) hold postgraduate degrees, indicating limited advancement to higher education levels overall.

Within government institutions, 13 of 72 teachers (18.1%) hold postgraduate degrees, and 59 (81.9%) have graduate degrees. In private institutions, 20 of 177 teachers (11.3%) are postgraduates, and 158 (88.7%) are graduates. This suggests that government schools have a relatively higher proportion of postgraduate-qualified teachers compared to private institutions.

The predominance of graduate-level teachers across both sectors implies that most special educators possess foundational qualifications rather than advanced specialisation. The slightly higher postgraduate representation in government institutions may reflect stricter recruitment standards or better access to professional development. Expanding postgraduate training opportunities could further enhance the quality and effectiveness of special education across Manipur.

Objective 2: To analyse the location-wise (rural-urban) distribution of special teachers and their teaching experience in relation to gender.

Table 4 shows the spatial distribution of 250 special education teachers in Manipur, revealing a moderate urban-rural imbalance. Of the total, 137 teachers (54.8%) work in urban areas, while 113 (45.2%) serve in rural regions, indicating a slight concentration in cities due to better infrastructure and institutional availability. Gender-wise, male teachers are evenly distributed, with 19 (50%) in urban areas and 19 (50%) in rural areas. In contrast, female teachers are more urban-focused, comprising 118 (55.66%) in urban areas and 94 (44.34%) in rural areas. This pattern suggests that urban environments offer

Table 4: Location-wise distribution of special education teachers

	Location		Total
	Urban	Rural	
Male	19 (50.0%)	19 (50.0%)	38
Female	118 (55.66%)	94 (44.34%)	212
Total	137 (54.8%)	113 (45.2%)	250

Source: Author (June 2024)

more favourable employment conditions for women. The lower rural representation highlights the need for equitable teacher deployment, rural incentives, and improved access to special education services throughout Manipur.

Table 5 provides the distribution of 250 special education teachers in Manipur by gender and teaching experience, highlighting clear trends in professional tenure. Most teachers (104, 41.6%) have 6-10 years of experience, followed by 71 (28.4%) with up to 5 years, 39 (15.6%) with 11-15 years, and 36 (14.4%) with over 16 years of experience. This suggests a predominantly mid-career teaching workforce with stable experience levels. Females dominate across all experience ranges, consistent with the overall gender imbalance in the field. Among teachers with 6-10 years of experience, 89 are female, and only 15 are male. In contrast, the 16+ years category records 20 females and 16 males, indicating longer male retention. The data reflect ongoing recruitment and increasing demand for special educators, underscoring the need for professional development, incentives, and career progression measures to strengthen retention and expertise in Manipur's special education system.

Objective 3: To examine the distribution of special teachers by institution type, subject taught, and gender across government and private institutions.

Table 6 illustrates the distribution of Manipur's 250 special education teachers by institutional type and subject taught, revealing notable disparities. A majority, 178 teachers (71.2%), are employed in private institutions, while only 72 (28.8%) work in government schools, indicating a heavy dependence on the private sector for special education delivery. Subject-wise, both sectors show a preference for Arts over Science.

In government institutions, 42 teachers (58.3%) teach Arts, and 30 (41.7%) teach Science. In private institutions, 101 teachers (56.7%) teach Arts, and 77 (43.3%) teach Science. Overall, 143 teachers (57.2%) specialise in Arts compared to 107 (42.8%) in Science. This Arts dominance reflects the alignment of creative and communicative subjects with the needs of inclusive education. The data highlight the expanding role of private institutions and the limited recruitment capacity of government schools, underscoring the need for policy reforms to strengthen staffing, training, and subject balance across Manipur's education system.

Table 6: Distribution of teachers by types of institutions and subject

<i>Institutions * Subjects taught crosstabulation</i>			
	<i>Subjects taught</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Arts</i>	<i>Science</i>	
Govt.	42 (58.3%)	30 (41.7%)	72 (28.8%)
Private	101 (56.7%)	77 (43.3%)	178 (71.2%)
Total	143 (57.2%)	107 (42.8%)	250

Source: Author (June 2024)

Table 7 highlights a clear gender imbalance among special education teachers in Manipur. Of the total 250 teachers, 212 (84.8%) are female, and only 38 (15.2%) are male, indicating a strong feminisation of the workforce. In government institutions, 18 males (24.7%) and 55 females (75.3%) are employed, whereas in private institutions, the gap is even wider, with 20 males (11.3%) and 157 females (88.7%). The dominance of female teachers, especially in private schools, suggests greater accessibility, flexible work conditions, and societal norms that link teaching with caregiving. The low male representation

Table 5: Year-wise gender and teaching experience of teachers

	<i>Category of teaching experience</i>				<i>Total</i>
	<i>5 years and below</i>	<i>6-10 years</i>	<i>11-15 Years</i>	<i>16 years and above</i>	
Male	3 (7.9%)	15 (39.5%)	4 (10.5%)	16 (42.1%)	38
Female	68 (32.1%)	89 (42.0%)	35 (16.5%)	20 (9.4%)	212
Total	71 (28.4%)	104 (41.6%)	39 (15.6%)	36 (14.4%)	250

Source: Author (June 2024)

points to barriers such as social attitudes and limited incentives. Promoting gender inclusivity through awareness, recruitment, and professional support is crucial to fostering diversity and enhancing the quality of special education in Manipur.

Table 7: Gender-wise distribution of teachers in government and private institutions

<i>Types of institution * Gender crosstabulation</i>			
	<i>Gender</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	
Govt.	18 (24.7%)	55 (75.3%)	73 (29.2%)
Private	20 (11.3%)	157 (88.7%)	177 (70.8%)
Total	38 (15.2%)	212 (84.8%)	250

Source: Author (June 2024)

DISCUSSION

The cross-sectional analysis of special teachers in Manipur clearly demonstrates a workforce profoundly influenced by intersecting gender and institutional forces, reflecting complex national and global dynamics. A primary finding is the significant feminisation of the special education workforce, with 84.8 percent of surveyed teachers being female, a pattern that mirrors both national and international trends. This numerical dominance aligns with international trends, where female representation in special education ranges from 75 percent to 84 percent in developed countries, and supports the scholarly perspective that special education roles are culturally associated with caregiving and nurturing traits (Lynch et al. 2019). However, a critical evaluation must acknowledge the structural implications of this gender imbalance. Contemporary scholarly work, such as that by Bettini et al. (2023), argues that the pervasive framing of special education as gendered “care work” is harmful because it inherently normalizes unsustainable working conditions and the expectation of personal sacrifice among educators. In the resource-constrained environment typical of many Northeast Indian states (Yumnam and Khuman 2018; National Institute of Education 2024), this normalization becomes structurally detrimental. The expectation that a predominantly female workforce should compensate for systemic dis-

investment, such as inadequate teaching aids and limited funding (IME Research 2025), effectively deflects institutional responsibility onto individual teachers (Bettini et al. 2023). This professional pressure can contribute to the high attrition rates observed nationally in special education (Billingsley 2004). Similar patterns have been documented within the Indian context, where women’s numerical dominance in teaching is especially pronounced in private and special education settings (Sarkar and Singh 2021; CETE 2023). The findings, therefore, move beyond a simple description of demographics to reveal deep-rooted structural inequities that may constrain the effective and sustainable implementation of inclusive education mandates, particularly under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act of 2016 (Verma and Thomas 2021).

The study revealed strong occupational segregation based on subject specialisation. While 61.7 percent of female teachers are concentrated in Arts-related subjects, 65.8 percent of male teachers predominantly teach Science, indicating a clear gendered division of academic labour. This pattern is consistent with broader educational trends, where men often dominate science disciplines, and while female overrepresentation in Arts and Humanities reflects higher education pipeline effects and persistent gender stereotypes, indicating that inclusive education has not fully challenged subject-based segregation. Consequently, the predominantly female special education workforce in Manipur likely bears disproportionate, often unrecognised emotional and relational labour (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation 2017; Omogo and Enyi 2023; Gan et al. 2025).

The institutional context underscores a critical dependence on the private sector, which employs 71.2 percent of the special teachers in Manipur. The gender disparity is most acute in private institutions, where 157 (88.7%) of the workforce are female, compared to 55 (75.3%) in government institutions. This finding corroborates national data, which show higher female employment rates in private schools (63%) compared to government schools (44%) (Centre for Education, Training and Employment 2023; Indian Express 2025). This heavy reliance on the private sector raises structural questions concerning adherence to standardised quality and

consistent implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act of 2016, especially in regions already facing infrastructural and administrative constraints (Kumar and Tesia 2020; Verma and Thomas 2021).

Regarding qualifications, the majority (86.8%) hold graduate-level qualifications. Notably, government institutions exhibit a slightly higher proportion of postgraduate-qualified teachers (17.8%) compared to private institutions (11.3%), likely reflecting stricter recruitment standards, as highlighted in earlier studies (Das and Nair 2021; Kaur and Salian 2024). Additionally, although fewer in number, males achieve postgraduate degrees more frequently than females proportionally, suggesting potential gendered differences in career trajectories. This disparity may be influenced by socio-cultural constraints faced by women, including family responsibilities and limited mobility, particularly in semi-urban and rural areas of Manipur (Singh and Deb 2022; Suja and Elamaram 2024).

Finally, the location-wise distribution reveals a concentration in urban areas (54.8%) compared to rural areas (45.2%). This uneven spatial deployment echoes national patterns of rural-urban disparities in teacher allocation, where rural regions face persistent shortages of specialised educators and limited access to professional support services (Iverson 1997; CETE 2023). These findings collectively demand targeted policy interventions to promote gender balance, enhance professional qualifications, and ensure equitable teacher deployment across Manipur's diverse landscape, which collectively intensify the marginalisation of children with disabilities in rural and hill districts (Yumnam and Khuman 2018; Devi and Singh 2019).

In summary, the findings underscore the need for targeted, context-specific policies to enhance gender balance, institutional accountability, professional capacity, and equitable rural-urban distribution of special educators, all of which are crucial for achieving inclusive and equitable education in Manipur.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that Manipur's special education workforce is overwhelmingly female, with women constituting 84.8 percent of special

educators. Women dominated teaching in Arts subjects, while men were more likely to teach Science. Private schools employed 71.2 percent of the teachers, resulting in a higher female representation (88.7%) in private institutions compared to government schools (75.3%). Urban areas accounted for 54.8 percent of teachers, indicating a moderate rural-urban imbalance (45.2% rural). These findings underscore significant gender and institutional disparities that influence the quality and equity of special education in Manipur. Policy reforms are necessary to address these gaps. For example, targeted recruitment and incentives could encourage a more balanced gender mix and enhance subject diversity, while investments in rural infrastructure and teacher training could help mitigate geographic imbalances. Enhancing professional development and postgraduate opportunities for all special educators would further improve the quality of instruction. By addressing the identified disparities and supporting all segments of the special education workforce, Manipur's educational system can move toward more inclusive and equitable learning environments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of the present cross-sectional study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the quality and equity of special education in Manipur. Firstly, there is a need to strengthen teacher training programmes by expanding their scope and quality, with particular emphasis on inclusive pedagogical practices and continuous professional development to address the diverse and evolving needs of learners with special needs. Secondly, efforts should be made to promote gender balance in the profession by introducing targeted initiatives and incentives that encourage greater male participation in special education teaching, thereby fostering diversity and balanced representation. Thirdly, structured professional development measures, including mentorship programmes, recognition mechanisms, and clearly defined career advancement pathways, should be implemented to retain experienced special educators and reduce workforce attrition. Fourthly, substantial investment in educational infrastructure, especially in rural and under-re-

sourced areas, is essential to minimise disparities and ensure equitable access to appropriate facilities and resources for children with special needs. Fifthly, school curricula should be revised to fully integrate inclusive education principles, incorporating creative, scientific, and adaptive approaches tailored to support diverse learners. Sixthly, government policies must be strengthened to support effective recruitment, equitable deployment, and long-term retention of special educators, particularly in government and rural school settings. Seventhly, increased access to postgraduate education and meaningful incentives should be provided to special educators to enhance professional standards and teaching quality. Eighthly, active involvement of families and local communities should be encouraged to support inclusive practices and promote the de-stigmatisation of special education. Ninthly, continuous empirical research and systematic data monitoring should be undertaken to track trends and support evidence-based policy formulation. Finally, equitable allocation of teaching aids, assistive technologies, and support staff across all institutions should be ensured to create uniform and inclusive learning environments.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

- ♦ Study conception: Thongam Binita Devi and Dr Shubhaarati Oinam
- ♦ Study design: Thongam Binita Devi and Dr Shubhaarati Oinam
- ♦ Data collection: Thongam Binita Devi
- ♦ Analysis and interpretation: Thongam Binita Devi, Akoijam Pete Meitei, Naorem Ingochouba Singh, and Dr Shubhaarati Oinam
- ♦ Manuscript preparation: Akoijam Pete Meitei, Naorem Ingochouba Singh, Thongam Binita
- ♦ All authors reviewed the findings and results and approved the manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest relevant to the content of this article.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The author obtained ethical clearance from the Institutional Human Ethics Committee, Manipur University, Canchipur.

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