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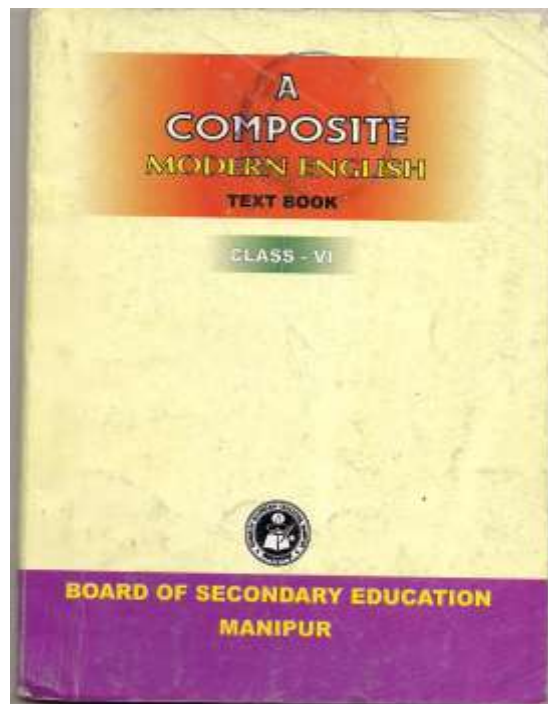
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Revisiting English Education amidst Various Local Languages: Situation in Manipur State

Thenkhogin Haokip, Ph.D. Scholar



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Abstract

Modern education started by the colonial powers during nineteenth century in the state of Manipur has made tremendous progress. It has also led to the introduction of English language and English education in the state. The present article looks into the present status of English Education in the state – the governmental as well as the private institutions, and the use of English language in the state. This paper deals with the state of English language in the state of Manipur through the study of English education along with the educational status of various languages in the state. While deeper observation revealed the pathetic conditions of some governmental schools, the gaps were mended by the private schools. English has played an important role in the written languages of the different communities in the state. It has acted as a link language for most tribals in the hills. The diversity of languages in Manipur has also favored English to be in the vital spotlight both in written and spoken. Despite many difficulties, English education is still in demand and is progressing both in the hills and the valley. English as a subject as well as a medium of instruction has gained best preference in the state. Governmental reports, articles, write-ups including the author's own personal observations and experiences beside various other secondary sources have been consulted as sources in formation and analysis of this article.

Key words: English Education, English Language, Tribal Languages and Dialects, Meiteilon, Manipur.

Introduction



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Language constitutes a basic element of Human Development. Language constitutes the common thread and means that links all the aspects of human development¹. Educational status clearly depicts the level of development of the people. Education is one of the best tools to attain language skill. This paper deals with the state of English language in the state of Manipur through the study of English education along with the educational status of various languages in the state. To Anvita Abbi (2004)², the most important language from the Socio-economic and educational point of view is English, which ironically, is not listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Cynthia Groff (2003)³ had stated that the question of which language to use for the new nation sparked much discussion during the move for Indian independence in the light of the linguistic diversity in India. Continuing the use of English for official purposes was one option and many colonized nations have chosen that route at independence.

The problem of language in India went back to 1835, when Macaulay recommended English as the main language of study and the medium of instruction after the primary stage. In 1844, knowledge of English was declared essential for entry into government services by Lord Hardinge. Thus, the reason for the introduction of English in India was purely for the convenience of the British rulers and for political loyalty. It had no ideal aim of education but the manufacture of clerks for the colonial offices⁴. So, in most part of India including the state of Manipur English language and English Education was highly esteemed and preferred.

Language Situation in Manipur

Manipur, although a very small state in the Indian Union, is having the very nature of diversity in every aspect similar to that of the whole country. Besides its flora and fauna, geographical regions and varied cultures⁵, the diversity in language is one notable character of its inhabitants, which consists of various communities and tribes speaking their own dialects and languages. The total population of Manipur according to provisional Census 2011 is registered at 27,21,756, among that males have registered at 13,69,764 and females at 13,51,992 and the Literacy rate (%) is at 79.8%, where male is at 86.49% and female is at 73.17% .⁶ The various communities of Manipur can be broadly classified into three broad categories, viz., the Kukis, the Nagas and the Meiteis. First, Kukis consist of many sub-tribes speaking their own dialects,

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who can still communicate with each other using their own dialects⁷. For instance, a Thadou-kuki⁸ man uses Thadou-kuki dialect and talk to a Vaiphei⁹ man who understands and gives the reply in Vaiphei dialect which again is understood by the Thadou-kuki man. Secondly, the Nagas consist of different tribes with completely different languages who had to either use English or Manipuri to speak to one another. Linguistically, they are not mutually intelligible to each other when they use their own Naga dialect. Thirdly, the Meiteis - Manipuri-speaking community consists of the dominant group in the state. There are different dialects in the Manipuri language as well, although the variations are only in the phonology and tones, and not in the basic lexical level. These diversifications are found among the Scheduled Castes.¹⁰

Geographically, the Meiteis who are the majority in the state occupy the central valley while the tribals occupy the hills surrounding the central valley in the state of Manipur. In some hill districts Head Quarters like Churachandpur, etc., until recently, the tribal dialects dominated the town. According to the Annual Report 2007-08 of the Tribal Research Institute Manipur, the list of recognized tribes with the number of speakers of the tribes' dialect in Manipur are given as below:

Sl No.	TRIBE	POPULATION	Sl No.	TRIBE	POPULATION
1	Aimol	3,643	18	Monsang	1,635
2	Anal	13,853	19	Moyon	1,710
3	Angami	650	20	Paite	44,861
4	Chiru	5,487	21	Purum	503
5	Chothe	2,675	22	Ralte	111
6	Gangte	15,100	23	Sema	25
7	Hmar	42,690	24	Simte	7,150
8	Kabui	62,216	25	Sukte	311
9	Kacha Naga	20,328	26	Tangkhul	1,12,944
10	Koirao	1,200	27	Thadou	1,15,045
11	Koireng	1,056	28	Vaiphei	27,791
12	Kom	15,467	29	Zou	19,112
13	Lamgang	4,524	30	Poumai	78,249
14	Mao	38,350	31	Tarao	600
15	Maram	10,510	32	Kharam	1,000
16	Maring	17,361	33	Any Kuki Tribe	
17	Any Mizo	10,520			

Source: Annual Report 2007-08, TRI Manipur

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Looking at the above table, one can imagine what difficult thing it is to let the mother tongue of each tribe be the medium of instruction even at the primary level. Since, the tribal population does not definitely concentrate each tribe in a particular region or division or district, it is a hard thing to make one particular tongue to be the medium of instruction. In such situation, Manipuri can be an option but the tribal people do not prefer it. So, English became the final and binding option accepted by all the tribes.

The state of Manipur has approved nine tribal languages to study as Modern Indian Languages (MIL) up to the tenth standard. They are: 1. Hmar 2. Kom 3. Mao 4. Mizo 5. Paite 6. Tangkhul 7. Thadou-Kuki 8. Vaiphei and 9. Zou. Besides the above 9 tribal languages, Manipuri, Hindi, Bengali and Assamese are also offered as Modern Indian Languages (MIL) in the state.

In the Eleventh and Twelfth standards, six tribal languages have been introduced. They are 1. Hmar 2. Mizo 3. Paite 4. Tangkhul 5. Thadoou-Kuki and 6. Zou. Besides these tribal languages, Manipuri, Hindi, Nepali, Assamese and Bengali are also included totaling the number to eleven.

It would be worthwhile to mention that all these tribal languages have no written script of their own so far. Therefore, they all depend on the English Roman Script for their written language.

Manipuri (Meiteilon)¹¹ has its own script and has been included in the Eight Schedule of the Indian Constitution. An organization called ‘MEELAL’¹², has been striving to popularize Meitei script by propagating it that it should replace the Bengali script textbooks in the schools. It has been taking strong steps to promote the script among the masses. And it was a success in the valley districts where the majority communities speak the language. However, the imposition of Meitei script is not accepted in the hill districts among the tribals.¹³ They prefer English education in all its forms rather than either Bengali or Meitei-Mayek (Meitei script). As such many free textbooks distributed under SSA are lying in the hill districts headquarters because the medium of the book is Manipuri (Meiteilon). This has always made division between the tribals Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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and the non-tribals and a source of contention bringing in even political interference sometimes. However, in recent developments, the authorities have modified their attitude to provide education according to the local needs and preferences of the people concerned. Mother Tongue, being considered as the best medium of instruction in primary education, could not materialize in many areas of Manipur; neither could the three language formula work. The probable reasons are lack of sufficient teachers, appropriate students' strength, textbooks in the mother tongue and many different languages with small number of users at a school. When the students are mixed-up in the classes, English or Manipuri serves well as the medium of instruction. This is one good reason why Private schools thrive well in Manipur despite Governmental persuasion through free textbooks, mid-day meals, etc. It is said that Multilingual Education is distinctly seen as offering an effective and innovative alternative to the current submersion forms of early education that involves neglect of the home language and cultural experiences of children, subtractive language learning, large scale school failure and high 'push out' rate. The urgent need for revitalization of endangered languages also compels a rethinking of our current educational practices in imposed dominant languages.¹⁴ Multilingual education may seem to solve the problem but sufficient numbers of teachers with multilingual capacity to teach still remain as a major problem in Manipur.

The Annual Report 2007-08 of the Tribal Research Institute (TRI), Manipur stated that the Commission of Linguistic Minorities, Government of India is pressing the TRIs to take up necessary measures to develop tribal languages. The TRI, Manipur is taking up the job of publishing approved textbooks in the tribal languages. So far, 192 text books in different tribal languages had been published for use as textbooks in Schools. The tribes of Manipur adopted Romanized script as none of them presently possessed scripts of their own. Roman Script is used to suit their language needs. The writing system in most of the tribal languages has not yet been systematized except that of the Paite till 2007-08.¹⁵ More efforts are being made to systematize the writing system of the languages of the tribes in order to inculcate knowledge and help to improve reading habits of the people. Efforts are still on to prepare primer books in the tribal dialects. The languages in Manipur except Manipuri (Meiteilon) are in very delicate state of existence, some may be even at the point of extinction due to less number of users and speakers.

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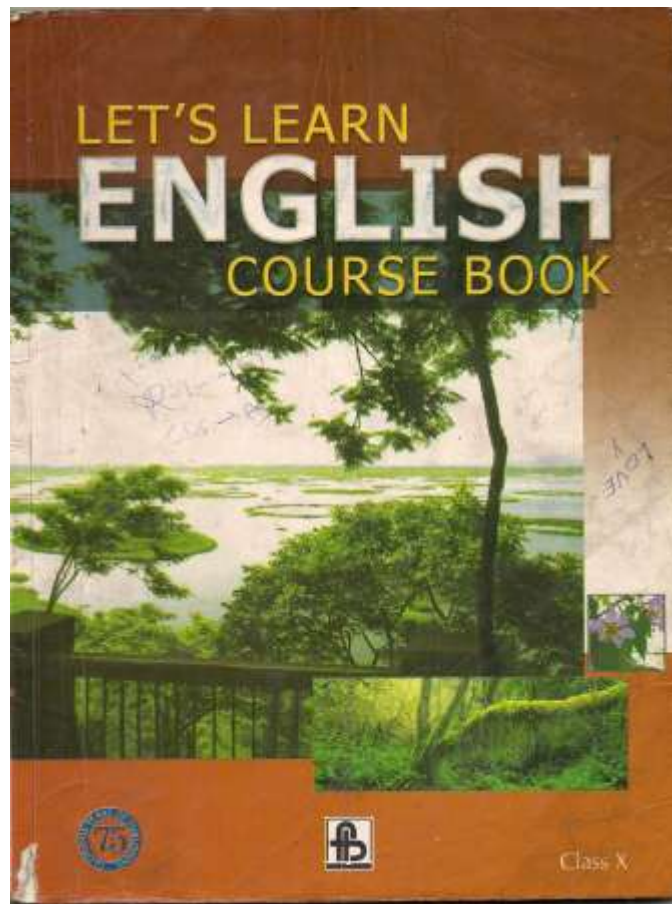
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Tribal literature societies had been complaining lately that the government does not allot funds for the development of the tribal languages. This worsens the delicate condition of these languages. There are not enough financial resources to make proper study to preserve and develop them. Research and scholarly work needs to be the focus in these areas.

English Education in Manipur



English education in Manipur was started first by the colonial officers in the later part of 19th century. It was Major General NE Nuthall, who started the first Primary school in Manipur in the year 1872, followed by Sir James Johnstone in 1885.¹⁶ Some of the efforts of these officers failed due to lack of attendance from the local people. The lack of co-operation of the local folks was mainly due to the perception of the Hinduised Manipuri people who were concerned that Christianity, which was the religion of the colonial powers, might be imposed upon them. It took years to catch the positive vision of the early educationists and to participate fully in the

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educational process initiated by the colonial power. For decades, the schools in Manipur had used textbooks written in Bengali script. Meanwhile, many individuals as well as societies and missionaries and visionaries started establishing English medium schools. Finding the advantages enjoyed by the students of these schools, many started preferring the English medium schools. Thus, mushrooming of private English schools has been witnessed throughout the length and breadth of the state. This trend had gone to such an extent that even many government schools which had earlier used Bengali script have started shifting their focus to the English (Roman) script. Evidence of this is found in the fact that the very subject of Manipuri had been romanized in the script, although the medium remains the same. This way English gains popularity in the state in regards to education. According to the Report of National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi 2012, the total enrolment of elementary students in the state in 2010-11 session was 5, 11,876. Out of this strength, about 3, 42,315 students were in schools of English Medium of instruction.¹⁷ This indicates the popularity of English as a medium of instruction preferred by school children as well as their parents. Having seen the better outcome of English Schools in many parts of Manipur, in relation to better performance in examinations and later careers, even the once Manipuri medium schools have started to adopt English medium of instruction in most schools. This, indeed, in some sense, is a sad situation. There is no medium better than the mother tongue or regional language to teach primary school students.

At present, English occupies a very high position in matters of reading materials and as a medium. It has become the medium of instruction in almost every institutions of repute, the language of the educated, the symbol of globalism and a pride for the affluent. English has gained a very important place in that English coaching and phonetic classes have been seen attracting large crowds in recent years. In Manipur, a person who speaks English well is regarded and respected, even though; no one uses it as mother tongue. It has occupied the second most important language next to the mother tongue for many people.

The importance placed on the English education in the state of Manipur can be easily understood from the number of English medium schools mushrooming up in different parts of

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the state within a very brief period of time. For instance, one of the most notable contributors of education in the state is the Catholic Church, which started English Schools from the year 1956, and by 2008, there are about 60 English schools to their credit, besides many other institutions.¹⁸ Some of the leading schools in the state are schools run by the Catholic Church. It will be appropriate to state here that all the recognized privately run schools in the state are English medium schools, except for one or two schools run in the mother tongue.

Knowing well about the emphasis place on English education by the people, the policy makers gave priority to English in the conduct of common examinations in the state despite the government schools using the Bengali script or Manipuri script. Moreover, it is obvious that language proficiency plays a part in employability in our country. Language proficiency is also linked to the level of education, especially since tertiary education is conducted in English in our country.¹⁹

English is a subject that is the major part of study right from primary to post graduate level in the state. English as a subject deals with learning of English language through stories, poems, drama, etc., including grammar and composition. It is considered one tough subject among the students mainly because of the difficulty in securing good marks in the subject. While many subjects except the language-subjects are printed in the English language and also taught through English medium, one cannot deny the viability and applicability of English language as a means of educating the different learners in Manipur. One may call it language or cultural colonialism but one fact stands out tall that English has been an open window to the world to many of the educated persons in Manipur.

Major Difficulties in English Language Education in Manipur

Learning English, both speaking and writing in the state of Manipur has had a lot of difficulties right from the start of modern form of education in the nineteenth century. Although much is there to hinder, it has made a good progress steadily. Some of these difficulties are briefly discussed below.

Negative Attitude of the People and Government

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English was the language of the colonizers. It was a language of a completely different people. The negative attitude toward the Britishers and their form of education was the main reason for the lack of attendance in the first primary school established by the Englishmen which eventually failed the school²⁰. The people who used the language had come to the state and fought battles against the people of the land. They were the people who forcibly occupied and ruled the land. They had completely strange religious practices to the ones already practiced in the valley among the Meiteis as well as in the Hills of Manipur among the tribals. In the initial period, it was believed that learning or speaking English and even schooling was considered a plot of the colonizers to Christianize the Manipuris. This attitude persists even after Indian independence among the common folks in the state. In the past, especially in the hills, schooling was considered the work of the lazy and good-for-nothing persons.²¹ One of the most important reasons for the poor attitude of the folks in Manipur was due to the non-recognition of the usefulness and merits of school education. In recent years, there has been development of better attitudes toward English education which is now on the progress mode. It is no doubt, however, that an expert in the English language may be highly esteemed among the people in the state.

Beside the people's negative attitude toward English, the government also seems to encourage only Manipuri medium in the government schools. It has indeed introduced some tribal dialects to some levels of learning but most are confined still to primary and secondary levels of education. In the move against such acts of the government, some hill districts have not accepted the books like the Romanized Manipuri Sahitya, etc. of the free text books issued by the government through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Manipur.²²

Cultural and Mother Tongue Influence

The influence of the mother tongue among the learners is so great that it often make English sound like the native language of the speaker, such as Meitheilon. Mother tongue is developed and structured according to the culture of the people and the concepts they have. English presents a different picture which is very unlike of the local mother tongues. So there is some linguistic interference from the mother tongue when learning English. The difficulty lies in the difference of the local culture to the culture of the English speaking people. Sentence

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structures are different and pronunciation tends toward the more fluent mother tongue. For instance, Thadou-Kuki language has very few, almost none, sound of the letter R. So, it poses a problem when a Thadou-Kuki speaking novice starts practicing English, because he will begin to use R for D and vice-versa. The same is with the other communities. Meiteis usually make the pronunciation of L for N, V for Bh, vice-versa, etc. The Tangkhuls, on the other hand, could not make the differences in pronouncing P and B and so the list goes on. These difficulties, of course, can be overcome by right and timely proper drills. This problem seems to have been overcome in younger generation except for a few students who could not get over with it yet. Besides the structure of the mother tongues, which are influenced by the respective culture, the situations and concepts as understood and meant by the English language are not the same with those experienced by the people in Manipur. This makes the learning of English very difficult unless it was introduced to the child early while he or she develops language skills. And for this proper atmosphere of learning with a positive attitude learning English is necessary.

Lack of Specially Trained Teachers

The most acute problem of English language teaching-learning is the lack of special training to teachers who teach English in the schools. Well, it may be argued that trained teachers were employed in the schools. However, in several areas these trained teachers do not practice as they were trained to teach for various reasons such as lack of resources, etc. There is also proxy teaching carried out in the state, especially in the hill areas.²³ In proxy teaching, trained teachers do not teach the students but their substitutes do, who do not have the essential training. In cases, where the trained teacher teaches, lesson plans and pupil cumulative records were not maintained well. So, the students are asked to cram some information and some answers without knowing how they may benefit from it. This way the teaching-learning of English has been carried out on similar to the process adopted in teaching the mother tongue. This produces a variety of English languages. Many English-speaking persons we come across could not understand the English we use and many of us are not able to have a conversation with English speaking people within the country. However, students studying outside the state have lesser possibility of such problems. The situation has of course improved a lot in years in the state also. With the introduction of

Right to Education Act 2009 in the state from April 2010, it is hoped and expected that positive changes will bring a paradigm shift and better practices of teaching will prevail.

Right Motivation is Needed

We need to motivate the students to be creative and innovative in learning and using English in the school and outside of the school. Students need to take more responsibilities and make use of the learned knowledge in English.

Concluding Remarks

The present system of education was introduced first by the colonialists in the later part of nineteenth century. It was first carried out through the medium of Bengali script. However, gradually the importance of English education is recognized, even as the level of education goes up. Now, nobody could deny the role played by the English medium schools in the promotion of intellectual growth in the state of Manipur. English-language education became all the more significant in that it had played tremendous role in the development of various fields and aspects of languages especially tribal languages. All the tribal languages use the English Roman script to write their languages as they do not possess the written script of their own language. Although, English education has not resulted in significant proficiency in all of us, it has been one of the remarkable areas of achievement in the educational field. Most teaching in the classes are carried out through the medium of English right from primary levels in private schools. English has such a big influence on the people and their attitudes that the most legible form of communication among the different communities in the state is through English, next to Manipuri especially when the situation arises where more than two or more communities gather. English has become the language of the intellectual community too. English has become an effective instrument for many educated people to express themselves through the mass media as well. Despite the Secondary Education Commission²⁴ and the Right to Education Act 2009, focusing on mother tongue as the medium of instruction at the elementary education, it will not be wrong to say that English education as well as English as a subject of study is still on the progress mode especially in terms of preferences and opportunity. No doubt, obstacles are everywhere but English

education is one that promises growth, shapes personality and opens a hydra of career opportunities. English Education has made many in the state global and international.

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³ Cynthia Groff: Status and Acquisition Planning and Linguistic Minorities in India, 2003; University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education, USA.

⁴ S.K. Kochhar: Language problem: Pivotal Issues in Indian Education, 30th December 2005.

⁵ See for detail information, Manipur: Graceful Contours published by India Tourism Development Corporation, New Delhi, October 2005.

⁶ Provisional Report Census of India 2011, India, Provisional Population Totals, Paper-I of 2011, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India Ministry of Home Affairs 2/A, Mansingh Road, New Delhi-110011. <http://www.censusindia.gov.in>.

⁷ See, Pauthang Haokip, The Languages of Manipur: A case study of Kuki-Chin languages, Linguistics of Tibeto-Burman Area, Volume 34.1-April 2011. The Kuki-Chin Languages being similar to each other and being mutually intelligible has made communication quite easily possible among them.

⁸ There has been a controversy over the name, while some who uses it called it Thadou, there are others who would like to called it Kuki. So, finally the government decided to call it Thadou-Kuki. But it should be noted that both this name meant the same language.

⁹ One of the kuki-chin language spoken by the Vaiphei tribe which is one of the recognized tribes. For the tribe list

you can see the Annual Report of TRI Manipur 2007-08, p.22.

¹⁰ The cases of the Sekmai, Andro, Pheiyeng, Kakching can be cited for instances.

¹¹ M.S ningomba : Manipuri dialects, Manipur University.

¹² Short for 'Meetei Erol Eyek Loinasillon Apunba Manipur' (MEELAL), a non-governmental organization that promote Meitei Mayek (Manipuri Script).

¹³ The case of non-distribution of Manipuri (romanised), Hindi and Meitei Mayek books of the SSA Manipur, as the locals do not accept it in among the school syllabus in Senapati can be cited for instance.

¹⁴ Minati Panda & Ajit Mohanty: concept note on MOTHER TONGUE BASED MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION: FRAMEWORK, STRATEGIES AND IMPLEMENTATION (Concept Note for an International Meet & Strategy Dialogue), NMRC, JNU.

¹⁵ Annual Report 2007-08, Tribal Research Institute, Manipur, Government of Manipur.

¹⁶ Jamani Devi: Education in Manipur (1989), Rai Prauina Brothers, Imphal.

¹⁷ See, State-wise enrollment by medium of instruction , NIEPA, New Delhi 02 March 2012, p.25

¹⁸ Holkhongam Haokip: Christian Missionaries among the kukis: A Historical Study, a thesis submitted to the Dept of History, Manipur University 2009.

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²⁰ Opcit, J. devi(1989)

²¹ Interview with Pi Neijalhing Haokip, 70 plus years old daughter of the late General Tintong Haokip of the Anglo- Kuki war 1917-1919. She resides at present with her children and grand children in K.Salbung village, Churachandpur, Manipur. Interview with Pu Shumthang Haokip of T Laijang village, who is 60+ years old narrated a similar attitudes in the past.

²² A report on Free Text book Distribution in Senapati district by the District Programme Manager states the details of the non acceptance of some books in the district. English had been preferred by the people and so, the Manipuri medium text books had not been collected as the locals refuse to take it.

²³ All Manipur Tribal Students Union Manipur (ATSUM): Unresolved Problems in the Hills; a pamphlet distribution of the All Tribal Students Union Manipur which highlighted the major unresolved issues Pertaining to the hill districts, where proxy teaching was an acute problem.

²⁴ Also known as the Mudaliar Commission's Report 1952-53 (The Secondary Education Commission 1952-53) recommended that mother-tongue or the regional language should generally be the medium of instruction throughout the secondary school stage, subject to the provision that for linguistic minorities special facilities should be made available.