

General Strikes: Their Impact and the Response of the Education System in Manipur

S. Meghachandra Singh¹ and Haobijam Bonny Singh^{2,*}

Department of Economics, Manipur University, Canchipur, Imphal West, Manipur, India

*E-mail:*¹<meghachandrasoraisam92@gmail.com>, ^{2,*}<bonny.haobi@gmail.com>

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ABSTRACT The relationship between students' academic lives and the conflict-ridden state is the most recent field of study in a developing state like Manipur, which is currently missing in research. The study investigates the effects of general strikes on the education system by examining student performance in the state in terms of pass percentage at various levels of education, including class X and XII, from 1992-1993 to 2018-2019. Secondary data was gathered from relevant government offices and local newspapers. Statistical tools such as correlation, linear regression, and the Bai-Perron test were used for the analysis. The study discovered no statistically significant relationship between various *bandhs* and blockades metrics and educational system performance. The private tuition taken by the students compensates for the loss that occurred during general strikes.

INTRODUCTION

Education has long been recognised as essential to Asia's economic and social development by policymakers (Maneejuk and Yamaka 2021; Uddin et al. 2020). Despite limited resources, education can help to reduce inequality and prepare people for inclusive economic growth (Raheem et al. 2018; Adeniyi et al. 2021). Most academics have concentrated on conflict and education in various bodies without identifying their connections. *Bandhs*, blockades, and other frequent incidents affect the state's economy and students' academic endeavours. In a state like Manipur, the educational literature has not adequately addressed the connections between education and conflict. In a democratic society, people use various forms of agitation or struggle to achieve their goals or express their opinions. The term "*Bandh*" was coined as a new way to accomplish these goals. In India, a *Bandh* is synonymous with a "general strike". It is derived from the Hindi word '*bandh*', which means "to prevent", "to lock", or "to close". According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term '*Bandh*' refers to a general strike, but in the Manipuri language, it is '*Thingba*' or '*Lep-hanba*' (Meghachandra 2010). Manipur is known throughout the year for its frequent and highly unpredictable *bandhs*. The number of *bandhs* peaked at 120 in 2006-2007, up from 8 in 1981-1982. While in 1985-1986, the average number of days per *bandh* was

7.5. Despite several injunctions from the Supreme Court of India prohibiting *bandhs*, enforcing a *bandh* is no longer as simple as it once was. The intensity of *bandhs* changes over time. There are *bandhs* for human rights violations and *bandhs* to draw attention to the government's failure to deliver on numerous promises, which may be state-wide or highly localised. *Bandhs* are typically associated with the closing of economic activities, including educational institutions. Since many students rely on private buses and light motor vehicles that are not permitted to drive during *bandhs*, educational institutions are rendered inoperable.

Related Literature

The source of a *bandh* or strike has been well documented. It can be classified into internal and external sources. The internal source mainly arises within the system of the organisation, namely, poor management, the workplace's physical environment, the workers' orientation, promotion, and other conditional services of workers (Otobo 2000). External sources originate outside the organisation and are associated with national policies, legislation, and issues, including social and political (Ojeli 1977).

Various empirical studies of a *bandh* or strike and their impact on the educational system in terms of student educational performance were observed in many countries.

Oloyede (2013) discovered that strikes lessen students' academic achievement in secondary school, leading to low morale in both students and faculty. Based on Adegoroye and Ayinde's (2007) studies, it had lowered admissions in public secondary schools and caused the low morale of public secondary school teachers. It also harmed the performance of students in the schools. Okpala (2002) observed that consistent strikes in higher education institutions reduced students' educational outcomes. Students' abilities deteriorated when learning was suspended for an extended period. Due to strikes, some students forget what they learned during the learning phase, failed miserably in exams and frequently engaged in exam misconduct (Onyeonoru 2009), and contributed to the falling standard of education (Ukeji 2002). The strike reduced students' cognitive capacity since they stay more at their residence than at school (Osuafor and Okoli 2010). David and Alexander (2019) thoroughly examined effects of teacher strikes on students' long-term educational and labour-market outcomes. The study discovered that exposure to the average incidence of teacher strikes during primary school among students aged 30 to 40 years reduced annual labour market earnings by 3.2 and 1.9 percent respectively, for males and females. Teacher strikes had been linked to lower educational attainment, an increase in the probability of being unemployed, and occupational downgrading in males. Females exhibit similar effects, with the exception of no effect on occupational sorting. Dar et al. (2022) investigated the impact of conflict-related school closures on student achievement and discovered that students exposed to violent conflict performed worse on reading and mathematics tests following the turmoil. Furthermore, girls and weaker students were disproportionately affected by the conflict. Children in middle and high schools had also been hit the hardest by the unrest. Brück et al. (2019) examined the effect of violent conflict on high school students' academic achievement. They found that conflict lowered the likelihood of passing the final exam, total test score, and university admission. It was explained that the conflict degrades the learning environment at school, which negatively correlates with final exam results. It was also stated that greater exposure to the conflict significantly negatively impacted exam results, affecting both the learning process and exam performance. It potentially

had long-term consequences, as the conflict may jeopardise human capital accumulation and economic development. In short, strikes or conflicts destabilised the education system and caused unrest in a country's educational system development (Tor-Anyim 2013).

Study Setting

Manipur is a state in India's northeastern region, bordering the country of Myanmar. It has a population of 2.57 million people and a literacy rate of 79.2 percent, which is higher than the overall literacy rate of 74.04 percent in India (Census 2011). The people in Manipur are culturally diverse, with multiple ethnic communities. Manipur has become a prominent hub of armed and ethnic strife in recent decades, resulting in human rights violations, civil unrest, and turmoil. Crisis derivatives (*bandhs*, blockades, curfews and general strikes) are prevalent in Manipur (Rebecca 2008). Officially, 628 *bandhs* and blockades were reported in the state over the last 15 years from 1995 to 2010 (Hueiyen News Services 2010). *Bandhs* and blockades have been said to have the most significant impact on Manipur, making it one of the worst-affected states. This has a negative impact on the people's ability to earn a living. The state experiences the most significant number of *bandh* victims in India (Singha 2009). Students are starved of many vital necessities and requirements to achieve their career objectives because they are raised in a conflict-ridden environment.

Estimating the economic losses caused by *bandhs* and blockades has sparked some interest in educating the public about the negative consequences of such activities. Although education is increasingly seen as the most empowering policy tool, limited research has been conducted to examine the impact of *bandhs* and blockades (BB) on the state's education system. Even though *bandhs* and blockades (BB) have affected every sector of the economy, it will be interesting to investigate the impact of *bandhs* and blockades (BB) on the education system and the system's response to such effects.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were:

1. To study the impact of *bandhs* on the education system of Manipur.

2. To analyse the evolved impacts of *bandhs*.
3. To study the response of the education system to the *bandhs* in Manipur.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The data on the pass percentage of class X and XII students were collected from the office of the Board of Secondary Education, Government of Manipur, and the Council of Higher Secondary Education, Manipur, Government of Manipur, respectively. Information on *bandhs*/blockades has been culled from local newspapers as part of an ongoing Ph.D. work of the first author. The period covered is 1992-1993 to 2018-2019. Students' pass percentage in class X, also known as the matriculation exam, was the most attended public examination in the state. Class XII was used as a proxy for the impact on the education system. PASS is the combination of X and XII. The letter BB represents the number of *bandhs* and blockades. DD represents the intensity of the *bandh*, that is, the number of days of *bandhs* and blockades. The higher the number of days for which there was a strike, the higher the impact on the education system, as evidenced by the dropping pass percentage.

The dependent variables were the log transformation of the pass percentage of class X, class XII and the combination pass percentage of both class X and XII denoted by PASS. The independent variables were also the log transformation of the numbers of *bandhs* and blockades denoted by BB and the number of days of *bandhs* and blockades denoted by DD.

Statistical Tools

To accomplish the study's objective and the nature of the data, the methods such as correla-

tion and linear regression were used for the analysis. Further, the Bai-Perron test for the structural break was adopted to examine whether the nature of the relationship remains stable over time.

RESULTS

Table 1 displays the strength of the relationship between the five variables of interest as determined by the correlation test. The number of days on strike (DD) was found to be negatively correlated with performance in class X (-0.107436) and Class XII (-0.97320) public examinations. On the other hand, the number of *bandhs*/blockades (BB) was negatively related to class XII performance (-0.051499). At the same time, no such correlation was found with class X students' performance. Although a strong association was expected, the results showed no strong relationship between the variables of interest. An extensive private tuition system in the state may be the possible reason that could have acted as a countervailing force, reducing the adverse effects on the education system.

Table 2 depicts the estimates of elasticities of academic performance, namely the two measures of disruption due to *bandhs* and blockades (BB). Ordinary least square estimation indicated that none of the measures of strikes BB and DD significantly impact the variable representing impact on the education system, namely X, XII, and PASS. The signs of elasticity concerning the *bandh* intensity (DD) agreed with expectations. With the number of *bandhs* and blockades (BB), only XII had a negative sign. However, all were statistically insignificant. It should be stated that the explanatory power of the specifications was uniformly low. The Durbin-Watson statistics revealed the issue of first-order positive autocorrelation. Thus, it did not necessarily mean that

Table 1: Correlation matrix

	X	XII	BB	DD	PASS
X	1.000000	0.762912	0.043740	-0.107436	0.948524
XII	0.762912	1.000000	-0.051499	-0.097320	0.899792
BB	0.043740	-0.051499	1.000000	0.822995	0.019905
DD	-0.107436	-0.097320	0.822995	1.000000	-0.102008
PASS	0.948524	0.899792	0.019905	-0.102008	1.000000

Source: *Author's calculation

Notes: BB=No. of *bandhs* and blockades, DD= No. of days of *bandhs* and blockades, X= pass percentage in class X examination, XII=pass percentage in class XII examination, PASS= combined pass percentage

Table 2: Academic performance elasticities of *bandhs* and blockades in Manipur from 1992-93 to 2018-19

<i>Dependent variable</i>	<i>Independent variable</i>	<i>Regression coefficient</i>	<i>t-statistics</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>Durbin Watson statistics</i>
Log(X)	Log(DD)	- 0.039	-0.4344	0.007	0.3029
Log(XII)	Log(DD)	-0.0248	-0.4114	0.006	0.503
Log(PASS)	Log(DD)	-0.032	-0.4523	0.008	0.34
Log(X)	Log(BB)	0.0695	0.547	0.012	0.314
Log(XII)	Log(BB)	- 0.0147	-0.1717	0.001	0.476
Log(PASS)	Log(BB)	0.027	0.2666	0.0028	0.3225

Source: Author's calculation

bandhs and blockades (BB) have no adverse effect on the education system. The education system's response to their persistent adverse effects might have confounded and covered up the negative effects in the process.

A related question was whether such a relationship holds for all time. Can sub-period analysis reveal a statistically significant relationship? This was examined in Table 3 by using Bai-Perron tests of $L+1$ versus L sequentially determined breaks. The test found that the relationships showed breaks. Fitting a single regression over the entire period would be inappropriate, even though significant relationships were found only during sub-periods.

DISCUSSION

Bandhs, blockades, and general strikes were expected to harm students' academic performance due to their destabilising effects. However, according to the analysis findings, it did not affect the students' performance in the state, though the negative impact, even when visible, was mostly insignificant. Such findings may be attributed to the state's extensive emergence of the private tuition sector, which filled the void left by a lack of teaching time in schools.

The emergence of private tuition systems, also known as shadow education, was common across the globe (Bray 2020, 2021). The literature demonstrated the significance of private tuition and explored its role in various countries. The study by Bray and Lykins (2012) observed that the households spent a substantial portion of their earnings on private tuition, possibly due to the poor quality of the school education. It also helped poor students improve their academic performance and allowed good students to achieve high grades. In India, a study by Sujatha (2014) observed that the three main factors for attending private tuition were namely, academic (failure to understand classroom lectures, poor teaching and examination failure), personal (ambition for high grades), and social factors (peer-group, relative and kin group pressure/competition, parent's decisions, etc.). The study also found that most government and aided (semi-government) school students preferred private tuition to pass the examinations. In contrast, private school students favoured private tuition to secure higher marks in the examination. The study concluded that private tuition might emerge to support students' academic performance and resolve school deficiencies. Bhorkar and Bray (2018) conducted a study in India that examined the role of private

Table 3: Bai-Perron tests for a structural break

<i>Dependent</i>	<i>Independent</i>	<i>Break</i>	<i>Comment</i>
Log(XII)	Log(DD)	2003,2007	Significant relation during 1993-2002/ positive
Log(X)	Log(DD)	1997,2002,2007	Significant relation during 2002-2006/ negative
Log(PASS)	Log(DD)	1997,2001,2007	Significant relation during 2001-2006/ negative
Log(XII)	Log(BB)	1997,2003,2008	Significant relation during 2003-2007/positive
Log(X)	Log(BB)	1997,2007	None
Log(PASS)	Log(BB)	1997,2007	Significant relation during 1997-2006/ negative

Source: Author's calculation

tutoring as it advanced from lower to higher grades, with a focus on classes XI and XII, where it was observed to supplant rather than supplement formal schooling. In the study, it was examined how changing relationships are influenced by social, economic, and educational factors. Not only did it apply to other regions of India, but also other nations.

In Manipur, the 71st round of National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) reports (MOSPI 2015) depicted a comparative picture of the importance of private coaching across all strata of students. Among the north-eastern region of India, Tripura (812 per 1000 students) had the highest proportion of students taking private tuition, followed by Manipur (355 per 1000 students), overtaking the all-India proportion of 259 per 1000 students. Moreover, the Annual Status Educational Report (ASER) report (Pratham 2021) also showed the widespread practice of private tutoring in Manipur where the proportion of school children taking private tuition had reached around 49 percent overtaking the national average of 40 percent.

The rising trend of private tuition was explained in a study by Chingtham (2015) in Manipur, who revealed that, among other factors, the *bandhs*, blockades, and socio-political issues were important factors for the mushroom growth of private tuition culture. Furthermore, it was discovered that the private tuition was able to complete the syllabus, resolving the weak students to pass the examination, enabling the students to score high while also earning extra income for the teachers. However, the study also highlighted the negative outcome of private tuition among students (in terms of a lack of recreational activities, creativity, problem-solving, confusing teaching methods, etc.) leading to both physical and mental health concerns in the long run. The study concluded that private tuition had become a necessary evil in the state. A similar finding was also observed during the study by Karam and Somokanta (2016). The study found that private tuition served as a coping mechanism to complete the curriculum that was not covered in school due to *bandhs*, blockades, and strikes. The study concluded that the concerned actors, namely students, parents and teachers, played a crucial role in maintaining a functional educational system in a conflict-ridden state like Manipur and further

enabling it to harness better education. Therefore, in the present study, private tuition culture may confound the impact of *bandhs* and blockades on the students' academic performance in the state.

CONCLUSION

Bandhs and blockades reduced the number of working days in a school. As a result, teaching programs must be compromised, which has become the norm. The paper discussed the associations between the education system and the turmoil state. It found no statistically significant relationship between various measures of *bandhs* and blockades on the one hand, and educational system performance on the other. Even though the anticipated significant negative impact was visible in some sub-periods, this should not be interpreted as harmless *bandhs*. The institution of private tuition might cover up the true nature of the relationship, as confirmed by previous reports and studies in the state.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study, the state's educational system should make the education sector a free education zone regardless of any political or other conflicts that result in strikes, *bandhs*, and blockades. The new government has also taken many steps, politically and legally, as well as through dialogue, to eliminate all forms of strikes. Furthermore, tuition can have positive and negative social consequences depending on the circumstances. Through proper regulation, the government should look for different approaches to promote favourable types of private tuition while demoralising negative ones, which could bring social equity and efficiency to the state's education systems.

LIMITATIONS

A micro-level investigation of students' academic performance and the role of private tuition in the state were missing from the study, which should be investigated further in the future.

The study could not cover the primary and secondary levels of education, which might have understated the findings. However, the current pa-

per concentrated solely on the results of public examinations at the end of classes X and XII. These were regarded as important predictors of success, considering the fierce competition for enrollment to preferred academic streams at higher levels. Nevertheless, the current research sheds new light on the effects of *bandhs* and blockades, as well as the state's response to the educational system.

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