

Notions of Importance for Cultural Identity Building and Preservation in Mizoram: A Quantitative Study

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Abstract: This study investigates the dynamics of cultural identity formation and preservation among the Mizo community in Mizoram, drawing from a quantitative survey conducted across the districts of Aizawl, Champhai, and Lawngtlai. The research, rooted in the ICSSR project on origin myths and post-memory, explores generational and educational differences in perceptions of cultural values such as parenting, language, and communal virtues like hospitality. Utilizing descriptive statistics and Chi-square tests, the study reveals that older generations emphasize parenting and traditional customs, whereas younger individuals value traits such as kindness and participation in cultural organizations like the Young Mizo Association (YMA). Educational attainment also influences identity perceptions less educated individuals favour traditional values, while higher education correlates with increased importance on language preservation and social awareness. Despite modern influences, key cultural traits remain significant across all groups, highlighting the resilience of Mizo identity. This research stresses the complex and evolving nature of cultural identity in the face of globalization, suggesting that a balanced approach integrating both traditional and modern elements is vital for sustainable cultural preservation. The findings contribute to broader discourses on identity in indigenous and tribal communities, especially within rapidly changing socio-cultural landscapes.

Keywords: Cultural Identity, Mizo Community, Generational Differences, Language Preservation, Identity Formation.

1. INTRODUCTION

This Quantitative Study has been taken from an ICSSR project titled as “Memorializing Origin Myths: Post-memory and Identity Formation in Mizoram” which involved a collection of data from three districts of Mizoram namely, Aizawl, Champhai and Lawngtlai. This short study conducted in 2024 is based on a survey conducted amongst local Mizo residents of these three districts. Parameters are meant to indicate aspects related to what according to local Mizos are important with regards to preserving ones culture, how Mizo identity is perceived amongst different age groups etc. The implication on this survey is to serve up some defining features of Identity formation amongst Mizos in general, and how to further protect what is termed as ‘Mizo identity’. This is to assume that cultural identity is in constant flux and hence in constant danger of losing important ethos, customs, language and cultural ways.

Age of respondent has been used to measure differences in generational perception amongst local Mizos specifically around issues like Parenting, Language, and other ethos practices like hospitality and kindness. Intergenerational differences are mostly felt around the subject of Parenting as indicator for awareness on the subject of Cultural identity building and preservation, while cultural ethos practices like kindness and helpfulness or *tlawmngaihna* is perceived by all age groups to preserve Mizo culture most effectively.

Preserving of Cultural identity is seen as most important for tribal communities like the Mizos in Mizoram. This provides a strong sense of history and belonging while surviving in a fast-paced globalized world. The fear of losing one’s identity as a people is strongly felt amongst the Mizos. This is one reason why the Young Mizo Association is a strong and

thriving non-government organization that preserves many cultural practices even to the present day. It is without a doubt that a community with a strong cultural identity can freely express their traditions and preserve their language and folkways. A community with strong cultural ties is bound to be socially cohesive where a strong sense of belonging indicates social support and well-being amongst people. These aspects indicated in this short survey thus provides a glimpse into how sustainable a society the Mizo community is, while acknowledging that there are generational differences in what may be considered important for self-preservation and promotion of cultural identity. This in itself, we can surmise may further indicate how cultural identity is actually formed or most likely to be formed amongst different age groups of the same community.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Understanding cultural identity involves exploring how individuals and communities perceive, maintain, and express their sense of belonging, values, and traditions.

Cultural identity formation is shaped by both internal and external influences, beginning in early childhood and continuing throughout life. Internal factors such as race, ethnicity, language, religion, and gender identity are shaped by family and community values, while external influences like peer groups, education, dominant cultural norms, and media play a crucial role, especially during adolescence. Arshad et al. (2021) highlight that children as young as three begin to internalize social cues from their surroundings, including racial categories and media representations. This dynamic interplay often leads individuals to negotiate between inherited identities and externally imposed norms.

In Global contexts, such as Ukraine, globalization has been shown to threaten ethno-folklore and cultural traditions, necessitating efforts to preserve cultural identity through education and institutional support (Mazurkevych et al., 2024). Similar concerns are evident in Mizoram, where cultural practices face erosion due to modern influences, although the preservation strategies differ in approach and context.

A study conducted in Ethiopia, explored how rapid urbanization is influencing language use and lingo-cultural identity among adolescents in the surrounding Sheger sub-cities. The findings revealed a growing shift toward an Amharic-based identity, largely due to the dominance of the state language and the absence of inclusive language policies that protect and promote linguistic diversity (Heyyi& Mekonnen, 2023). The study emphasizes that in multilingual societies, urbanization without supportive policy frameworks can accelerate the loss of indigenous languages and cultural identities.

A study by Bregasi(2020)examines how shifting social and economic conditions affect the preservation of cultural and linguistic identity, focusing on the Albanian community in Italy. It compares the first major wave of Albanian migration in the 15th century with more recent 20th-century migrations, particularly in terms of how the Albanian language, essential to national identity, has been maintained. Surveying 85 immigrant families, the study reveals that while language once played a key role in Albanian national consciousness, it now shows signs of weakening among second-generation immigrants in Italy.

Using multicultural intersectionality theory, Kaplan et al. (2016) propose how identity is shaped by overlapping cultural factors like socioeconomic status and ethnic identity. Their study of Latino college students found that those from lower SES backgrounds had a stronger and more positive connection to their ethnic identity compared to those from higher SES backgrounds.

Wong et al. (2019) explore how gender influences the identity concerns of sexual minorities in China, focusing on factors like socioeconomic status, family dynamics, and cultural expectations. Based on responses from 1,076 non-heterosexual young adults, the research found that men experience greater identity concerns than women, with traditional values and family pressure to marry affecting both groups. For men, living with parents plays a major role, while for women, regional socioeconomic factors have a stronger influence, highlighting how gender shapes the identity struggles of sexual minorities in different ways.

Langevin (2014) examines how cultural identity, as part of immigrants' assimilation, helps explain socioeconomic inequalities beyond traditional economic views of efficiency and discrimination. It shows that family background and education significantly affect the professional outcomes of both first- and second-generation immigrants, and that ethnic identity tends to weaken over time, though this varies by how it's measured. The study finds that strong ethnic identity can negatively impact employment and voting participation, but not wages, and confirms through a lab experiment that group identity influences individual behaviour.

Social media plays a significant role in shaping the cultural identity of the millennial generation. It has influenced language, with increased use of English terms, and popularized global fashion trends, resulting in a blend of traditional and modern styles. Social values like freedom of expression and gender equality have also gained wider acceptance. While social media supports cultural preservation through online communities, it also exposes users to foreign influences that may erode local traditions (Pangesti et al., 2020).

Countries have increasingly turned to education as a key tool for preserving cultural identity in the face of globalization. For example, Indonesia has implemented cultural preservation programs in overseas schools to strengthen national identity among diaspora communities. A recent initiative at the Indonesian School in Tokyo (Sekolah Republik Indonesia Tokyo – SRIT) exemplifies this approach. Conducted in May 2024, the program used traditional children's songs, guidebooks, musical instruments, and group singing sessions to foster cultural understanding and appreciation among students (Ghoni et al., 2020).

A study Yuan et al. (2025) explore cultural identity preservation in Guangzhou's Huangpu District amid rapid urbanization. Focusing on Lingnan architecture, festivals, and folk arts, it proposes a Rural Culture Development Model (RCDM) to balance modernization with heritage conservation. Using mixed methods and social cognitive theory, the study highlights the roles of community engagement, supportive policies, and economic integration and identifies key challenges such as urban encroachment, talent loss, and limited resources.

Both migrant and indigenous communities face challenges in preserving cultural identity through language. One study highlights how migrants often shift to the dominant language of their host country to access education and employment, which can weaken heritage languages and disrupt intergenerational communication. Language policies and bilingual education play a crucial role in either supporting or hindering cultural retention (Atobatele&Mouboua, 2023).

Similarly, a study from the Republic of Tyva reveals widespread concern over the erosion of the Tuvan language and traditions amid modernization. With 1,528 residents surveyed, the research emphasizes the Tuvan language as central to identity and calls for collaborative efforts by government, institutions, and native speakers to preserve cultural heritage (Gorina&Kefeli, 2025). These studies underscore the importance of language in sustaining cultural identity across diverse contexts.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through a carefully designed individual-level questionnaire and interviews which were conducted with local communities in Mizoram and refugees from Myanmar and Bangladesh to comprehensively investigate Origin Myths: Post-Memory and Identity Formation in Mizoram. To ensure a comprehensive examination, the research adopts a quantitative analysis of the collected data.

To provide additional scholarly context, the study incorporates secondary sources including published books, articles, and academic journals, which offer broader interpretations and insights. Furthermore, relevant online resources are utilized to enrich the research and enhance its depth and breadth.

By combining quantitative analysis with a diverse range of primary and secondary sources, this research endeavors to present a comprehensive exploration of identity formation in Mizoram.

Sampling Design: This study explores the attitudes of local inhabitants of Mizoram. Among the 11 districts in Mizoram, Aizawl, Champhai, and Lawngtlai were purposively selected for this study due to their high concentration of refugees. Within these districts, five villages were randomly chosen to ensure geographic diversity and representation. From each of the selected villages, 10 individuals were chosen as respondents, utilizing a purposive sampling technique. This sampling was employed to specifically select local individuals who are not only interested in issues of identity formation but also possess knowledge of the history and culture of the Mizo people. This approach ensured that the participants were well-informed and could provide valuable insights.

Sample Size: In this research respondents were selected using Yamane's sample size formula. This formula ensures that the selected sample is statistically representative of the larger population, providing robust and reliable data for the study. The sample size formula proposed by Yamane is as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N \cdot e^2}$$

For the local population, the 2011 Census served as the basis for calculating the sample size. According to the census, the total population of the three selected districts—Aizawl, Champhai, and Lawngtlai was 643,948.

$$n = \frac{643948}{1 + 643948 \cdot 0.05^2} \approx 400$$

Using Yamane's formula for sample size determination, with a margin of error typically set at 5%, a sample size of approximately 400 individuals was calculated. However, to account for potential sample size errors and ensure sufficient representation, a total of 550 respondents from various age groups were initially selected. During data processing, some responses were discarded due to inconsistencies or incomplete information, resulting in a final dataset comprising 539 respondents. By adhering to this method, the research ensures a scientifically grounded approach to participant selection, enabling a thorough exploration of identity formation in Mizoram.

Analytical Method: In this research, the collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to summarize and interpret the findings effectively. Key measures such as the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, and percentages were utilized to provide a clear and concise representation of the data. In addition to descriptive statistics, a non-parametric test like the Chi-Square test, was utilized to examine whether a significant association exists between identity formation and various demographic characteristics.

Based on these analyses, inferences were drawn to support the research objectives, offering insights into the attitudes and perspectives of the respondents. This approach ensured that the data were systematically processed, enabling meaningful conclusions and a better understanding of the study's focus on identity formation in Mizoram.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section explores the influence of socio-economic factors, such as education and age, on the preservation of cultural identity. To achieve this, these variables were cross-tabulated with the key factor identified as the most significant in shaping cultural identity. The statistical relationship between these attributes was assessed using a Chi-square test of independence, and the results were analyzed for significance. The table 1 presents the perceived importance of four cultural identity-preserving factors across different age groups: Parenting, Mother Tongue, Attending Church, and Being Hospitable, Kind, Unselfish, and Helpful to Others.

It could be observed for the table that parenting emerges as the most important factor in preserving cultural identity across all age groups, particularly for the older groups. There is a clear trend that older individuals place a greater emphasis on parenting as a means of preserving cultural identity. Younger individuals, particularly those in the 18-25 age group, are less focused on this aspect.

Table 1: Perceived Most Important in Preserving Cultural Identity on the Basis of Age

Age Group	Parenting	Mother Tongue	Attending Church	Being hospitable, kind, unselfish, and helpful to others	Total
18-25 Years	29.9%	32.9%	1.7%	35.5%	100.0%
26-45 Years	54.7%	27.7%	1.9%	15.7%	100.0%
46-64 Years	59.3%	11.4%	1.6%	27.6%	100.0%
65+ Years	60.9%	4.3%	4.3%	30.4%	100.0%
Total	45.3%	25.2%	1.9%	27.6%	100.0%

Note: Chi Square statistics value of 55.364 is significant at 1% level.

The importance of mother tongue in cultural identity preservation decreases as age increases. Younger individuals (18-25) are more likely to perceive mother tongue as critical to cultural identity. However, as individuals age, the importance of language declines significantly. This could reflect changing dynamics in language use, assimilation, or shifting societal priorities as people grow older.

Attending church is the least important factor for preserving cultural identity across all age groups. Church attendance shows minimal importance for cultural identity across all age groups. The slight increase in the older population could indicate that some individuals may place more importance on religious practices or community involvement as they age.

Being Hospitable, Kind, Unselfish, and Helpful to Others remains relatively important across all age groups, showing moderate consistency. The younger group (18-25) places the highest importance on being kind and helpful, which could reflect the values instilled in them by contemporary social movements. Older age groups place a moderate level of importance, with a slight increase in the oldest group (65+ years).

The Chi-Square statistic value of 55.364, which is significant at the 1% level, indicates a strong relationship between age and the perceived importance of these cultural factors. This means there is a significant age-related difference in how individuals perceive the importance of cultural identity-preserving factors.

This result suggests that as people age, their perceptions of what contributes most to preserving cultural identity shift. Younger individuals may place more value on cultural symbols such as language, while older individuals see family-related activities like parenting as a primary means of preservation.

Table 2: Perceived Best highlights Mizo Identity/Culture on the Basis of Age

Age Group	Active YMA Membership	Punctuality	Hospitality & Kindness	Mother tongue	Religion	Birth Name	Literacy (Read/Write)	Cultural Showcase	Total
18-25 Years	4.3%	4.7%	38.9%	13.7%	4.7%	1.3%	5.6%	26.9%	100.0%
26-45 Years	1.9%	0.0%	35.8%	19.5%	6.3%	2.5%	1.3%	32.7%	100.0%
46-64 Years	.8%	1.6%	40.7%	18.7%	.8%	4.9%	1.6%	30.9%	100.0%
65+ Years	26.1%	0.0%	43.5%	4.3%	0.0%	4.3%	8.7%	13.0%	100.0%
Total	3.7%	2.4%	38.6%	16.1%	4.1%	2.6%	3.5%	28.9%	100.0%

Note: Chi Square statistics value of 72.206 is significant at 1% level.

The table 2 presents the perceived highlights of Mizo identity and culture across different age groups. The findings indicate that hospitality, kindness, selflessness, and helpfulness are generally regarded as fundamental elements of Mizo identity across all age groups. However, younger generations, particularly those in the 18-25 and 26-45 age ranges, place a higher value on active participation in the Young Mizo Association (YMA) and the promotion of Mizo culture to other clans. In contrast, older generations emphasize more traditional cultural markers such as birth name and literacy. The importance of the mother tongue and religion is more noticeable among middle-aged individuals, but this significance diminishes as individuals age. Notably, the 65+ age group places greater emphasis on traditional aspects such as birth name and literacy, while younger generations prioritize community engagement and cultural exchange.

The Chi-Square statistic of 72.206, which is significant at the 1% level, this confirms that age significantly influences how individuals view the important aspects of Mizo culture, with noticeable generational shifts in values. This finding highlights the generational shifts in values, reflecting a broader evolution in how Mizo identity is understood and expressed across different age groups.

Table 3: Perceived Most Important in Preserving Cultural Identity on the Basis of Education

Education	Parenting	Mother Tongue	Attending Church	Being hospitable, kind, unselfish, and helpful to others	Total
Illiterate	60.0%	0.0%	0.0%	40.0%	100.0%
up to Class 10	60.0%	12.6%	3.2%	24.2%	100.0%
Higher Secondary	48.6%	21.5%	0.0%	29.9%	100.0%
Graduate	41.8%	24.0%	1.0%	33.2%	100.0%
PG & above	36.8%	39.7%	3.7%	19.9%	100.0%
Total	45.3%	25.2%	1.9%	27.6%	100.0%

Note: Chi Square statistics value of 39.123 is significant at 1% level.

The findings indicate that parenting is unanimously recognised as the most crucial factor in preserving cultural identity, although its importance gradually diminishes as educational attainment increases. In contrast, mother tongue becomes more valued with higher levels of education, suggesting that education fosters a deeper connection to language preservation. On the other hand, attending church is not regarded as a significant cultural element across any education level.

The value placed on hospitality, kindness, and helpfulness is notably higher among those with lower education levels, while individuals with more advanced education, such as those with graduate or postgraduate qualifications, place less emphasis on these traits. This shift reflects a broader trend in which less educated individuals focus more on traditional, personal virtues, while those with higher education prioritize elements related to language preservation and social consciousness.

The Chi-Square statistic of 39.123, significant at the 1% level, supports the conclusion that education significantly influences how individuals perceive and prioritize the factors that contribute to cultural identity. These results underscore how education not only shapes individuals' values but also shifts cultural focus from traditional, community-centered virtues to more modern concerns such as language and social awareness.

Table 4: Perceived Best highlights Mizo Identity/Culture on the Basis of Education

Education	YMA membership	Punctuality	Hospitality, & Kindness,	Mother Tongue	Religion	Birth Name	Literacy	Cultural Showcase	Total
Illiterate	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	80.0%	100.0%
Up to 10	1.1%	0.0%	43.2%	18.9%	5.3%	5.3%	4.2%	22.1%	100.0%
HSS	4.7%	2.8%	44.9%	7.5%	3.7%	.9%	.9%	34.6%	100.0%
Graduate	4.6%	3.1%	32.1%	18.9%	5.1%	2.0%	2.6%	31.6%	100.0%
PG & above	3.7%	2.9%	41.2%	16.9%	2.2%	2.9%	6.6%	23.5%	100.0%
Total	3.7%	2.4%	38.6%	16.1%	4.1%	2.6%	3.5%	28.9%	100.0%

Note: Chi Square statistics value of 40.011 is insignificant at 5% level.

Table 4 shows an insightful analysis of the perceived significance of various factors related to Mizo identity and culture, categorized by educational attainment. A prominent observation is that illiterate individuals place the highest importance on showcasing Mizo culture to other clans (80%), highlighting a robust cultural engagement despite the absence of formal education. This suggests that cultural identity may be more profoundly expressed through actions such as cultural representation, rather than through educational milestones.

In the category of individuals with up to 10 years of formal education, there is a marked emphasis on values such as hospitality, kindness, selflessness, and helpfulness (43.2%), reflecting the strong interpersonal and community-oriented values within this group. Additionally, knowing the mother tongue (18.9%) and showcasing the culture (22.1%) hold some importance, although they are less pronounced compared to the former values.

Among individuals with Higher Secondary School (HSS) education, there remains a notable emphasis on kindness (44.9%) and cultural representation (34.6%). However, there is a decline in the prioritization of knowing the mother tongue (7.5%) and religion (3.7%), indicating a potential shift in focus towards social and cultural integration as education levels rise.

Graduates place significant value on hospitality and kindness (32.1%), with continued attention to knowing the mother tongue (18.9%) and an increase in the perceived importance of literacy (2.6%). Moreover, the value of showcasing culture remains relatively high at 31.6%, suggesting that cultural pride persists despite formal educational achievements.

For individuals with postgraduate education and above, the emphasis on hospitality and kindness remains the most significant (41.2%). Language knowledge and cultural representation continue to be prioritized, although literacy (6.6%) and birth names (2.9%) are seen as particularly relevant in this group, reflecting an evolving view of Mizo identity that integrates both traditional and modern elements.

The Chi-Square statistic of 40.011, which is insignificant at the 5% level, indicates that there is no statistically significant association between education level and the perception of cultural factors. This implies that, despite the diversity in

educational attainment, the cultural and identity-related values appear to maintain a consistent level of importance across all groups.

Thus, it can be concluded that Mizo identity and culture are perceived as central to personal and community life, regardless of formal educational background. This highlights that, even in the face of educational progress, the Mizo community continues to place considerable emphasis on traditional cultural values.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study provides valuable insights into the preservation and formation of cultural identity within the Mizo community in Mizoram, emphasizing the generational and educational shifts in cultural values. The findings suggest that the preservation of Mizo cultural identity is perceived differently across age groups, with older generations prioritizing traditional values such as parenting and language, while younger generations emphasize interpersonal virtues such as kindness, hospitality, and active participation in cultural organizations like the Young Mizo Association (YMA). Besides, the study reveals that educational attainment significantly influences how cultural identity is valued, with less-educated individuals focusing on traditional virtues and more educated individuals placing greater emphasis on language preservation and social consciousness.

The results emphasize the dynamic nature of cultural identity, shaped by both internal community values and external societal influences. As generational perspectives evolve, there is a marked shift from a focus on traditional markers of identity such as language and religious practices to more contemporary concerns like community engagement and social awareness. These findings have important implications for understanding the processes of cultural preservation in the context of globalization and modernization, suggesting that a balance between tradition and adaptation is crucial for maintaining a cohesive and resilient cultural identity in the Mizo community.

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