

Institutional Constraints and Teacher Professionalism: Evidence from Government Schools – A Review Paper

Annu Kalson
CUH

Abstract—Professional agency among teachers serves as a cornerstone for enhancing scholastic standards, organizational efficacy, and students' outcomes. Within the Indian context, government school teachers navigate systemic environments that frequently curb teaching autonomy, grassroots, innovation, and career morale. This comprehensive review synthesizes empirical and theoretical literature published from 2015 to till now regarding the structural barriers that impede teacher professionalism in India's schools. By aggregating research on pedagogical independence, bureaucratic overreach, regulatory frameworks resource deficits, ongoing training paradigm, and policy updates, this paper maps the current state of the profession.

The synthesis indicates that systematic impediments- including centralized administration, extensive non-pedagogical responsibilities, insufficient career development, staff vacancies, and compliance-driven audit models- deeply compromise teacher identity, instructional delivery, and vocational dedication. Furthermore, the paper analysis the operational realities of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which advocates for teacher empowerment, uniform professional metrics, and continuous upskilling. Despite these progressive statutory goals, systemic inertia and structural disparities continue to hamper grass-roots implementation. The review concludes that genuine educational advancement demands a paradigm shift away from viewing teachers as bureaucratic functionaries towards treating them as reflective practitioners, requiring a deliberate balance between systematic accountability and professional independence.

Index Terms—Teacher professionalism, Systemic constraints, Pedagogical autonomy, Institutional accountability

I. INTRODUCTION

Modern educational scholarship increasingly positions teacher professionalism as a vital determinant of school system quality and academic success (Day & Gu, 2015). Highly professional teachers are characterized by deep pedagogical insight, ethical responsibility, critical self-reflection, and a dedication to lifelong learning (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2016). Within the socio-economic framework of developing nations like India, these professionals are also crucial agents for dismantling educational disparities and fostering social equity (Batra, 2015). Yet, despite widespread legislative strategies and expanded enrollment initiatives, government school teacher in India confronts a web of institutional limitations that constrict their professional capacity (Mooij, 2015). These structural limitations encompass the organizational, administrative, and environment hurdles that erode instructional independence, teacher morale, classroom efficacy, and professional identity (Apple, 2019). Prominent among these barriers are systematic staffing shortages, heavy administrative workloads, top-down governance, deficient infrastructure, outdated training models and punitive accountability measures (Sharma & Sinha, 2021). True teacher professionalism extends beyond curriculum delivery or content mastery; it fundamentally requires instructional latitude, peer collaboration, reflective practices, and a meaningful voice in institutional policy-making (Sachs, 2016). Nevertheless, contemporary research across India's government school networks indicates that teachers typically operate within rigid, hierarchical bureaucracies defined by surveillance, strict compliance, and top-down management (Narayana & Selvan, 2025).

Globally, an institutional emphasis on high-stakes testing and metric-driven accountability has fundamentally altered the teaching profession. These institutional diversions significantly reduce actual classroom contact time while accelerating occupational stress and psychological burnout among staff (Kaur & Singh, 2022). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 explicitly reorganize teachers as foundational anchors of the learning ecosystem, calling for heightened instructional autonomy, updated professional benchmarks, and robust continuous professional development (Government of India, 2020). The policy outlined comprehensive overhauls in teacher preparation, career trajectories, and school governance to elevate the profession. However, localized implementation remains uneven, stymied by deep-seated resource gaps, infrastructural deficits, and bureaucratic resistance (Wayal, 2024). Recent scholarship emphasizes that the expression of teacher professionalism in Indian state schools is fundamentally shaped by prevailing administrative behaviors and organizational cultures (Anderson, 2022; Narayanan & Selvan, 2025). Consequently, a granular examination of these systemic challenges is necessary to revitalize teacher motivation, reconstruct professional identity, and elevate public education. This paper offers a critical synthesis of the literature spanning the review in past research, mapping the structural factors that shape and constrain teacher professionalism within India's government school infrastructure.

II. LITERATURE OF REVIEW

Day and Gu (2015) examined the association of teacher commitment, institutional environment, and professional identity. This study shows that supportive institutional cultures increase teacher motivation and classroom effectiveness. The researchers argued that excessive workload and bureaucratic accountability mechanisms reduce teachers' professional satisfaction and emotional well-being. This research emphasized scopes and need of collaborative school cultures for sustaining professionalism.

Batra (2015) critically analyzed teacher professionalism within the Indian education system and observed that government school teachers frequently function under rigid administrative structures. This research focused that teachers are often treated as implementers of policies rather than reflective professionals. The author argued that increasing bureaucratic expectations and centralized decision-making weaken teachers' institution and autonomy.

Avalos (2016) conducted a review of development in teacher profession studies and resulted as effective professionalism depends upon continuous learning, reflective practice, and institutional support systems. The research points up that professional development course should focus on collaborative learning and classroom-based experiences rather than one-time training workshops. The conclusion is important in understanding the limitations of in-service teacher education in India.

Sachs (2016) explored the changing nature of teacher professionalism in the framework of globalization and accountability reforms. The research shows that two competing models of professionalism: managerial professionalism and democratic professionalism. Managerial professionalism focuses on accountability, performance indicators, and institutional control, whereas democratic professionalism emphasizes collaboration, autonomy, and reflective teaching. The study concluded that increasing institutional surveillance negatively affects teacher identity and innovation.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2016) introduced the concept of "professional capital" and contradicts that educational quality depends significantly on teacher autonomy, collaborative culture, and institutional trust. Their work emphasized that teachers perform more effectively when institutions encourage decision-making participation and professional collaboration. The study is highly relevant to Indian government schools where centralized administration often limits teacher agency.

Kumar and Singh (2018) examined the impact of bureaucratic administration on teacher motivation in Indian government schools. The study shows that teachers spend considerable time on administrative tasks such as maintaining records, data entry, and implementation of welfare schemes. The researchers concluded that institutional overload reduces instructional effectiveness and negatively influences professional commitment.

Apple (2019) analyzed the impact of audit culture and neoliberal educational reforms on teacher professionalism. The study argued that increasing accountability systems transform teachers into policy implementers rather than autonomous professionals. Standardized assessments,

performance indicators, and institutional surveillance were found to reduce professional creativity and pedagogical freedom.

UNESCO (2021) reported that teacher shortages and infrastructural inequalities remain major challenges in public education systems across developing countries, including India. The report highlighted that overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teaching-learning resources, and lack of digital infrastructure significantly affect teacher effectiveness and professional morale.

Anderson (2022) studied teacher expertise and institutional practices in Indian schools. The study concludes that professional learning communities, peer collaboration, and mentoring systems positively influence teacher professionalism. However, the study also talked about that many government schools lack supportive institutional cultures necessary for reflective teaching and innovation.

Kaur and Singh (2022) investigated occupational stress among government school teachers in India. Their results show that institutional pressures such as excessive workload, poor administrative support, and accountability demand contribute significantly to emotional burnout. Teachers reported reduced motivation and declining job satisfaction due to bureaucratic constraints.

Senapati and Singh (2022) a systematic review of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs in India. The study showed most in-service training programs are theoretical and disconnected from classroom realities. The researchers focused on the need for school-based mentoring, collaborative professional learning, and reflective teaching practices.

Rani and Kumar (2023) examined teacher autonomy in secondary government schools. The research resulted that teachers have limited participation in curriculum planning and academic decision-making. The low of autonomy negatively affected teachers' confidence, instructional innovation, and professional identity.

Wayal (2024) analyzed teacher education reforms proposed under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The study highlighted that the policy emphasizes teacher professionalism, merit-based career progression, and Continuous Professional Development. Furthermore, the author noted that implementation challenges such as institutional rigidity and inadequate resources continue to hinder reform outcomes.

Narayanan and Selvan (2025) investigated teacher autonomy and institutional control in India. Their study identified a "culture of compliance" in government schools where teachers are expected to prioritize administrative obedience over professional judgment. The researchers concluded that excessive institutional control weakens professional identity and discourages innovative pedagogy.

Dennison et al. (2025) explored teacher-AI collaboration in low-resource Indian schools. The study shows that digital tools can reduce administrative workload and support lesson planning. However, the researchers argued that technological interventions alone cannot address deeper institutional constraints such as centralized governance and lack of professional autonomy.

Recent educational reports published in 2026 have continued to emphasize that teacher professionalism in India is strongly influenced by institutional support, leadership practices, and

organizational culture. Researches indicate that schools with collaborative environments, mentoring systems, and reduced administrative burden demonstrate higher levels of teacher motivation and instructional quality.

Overall, the reviewed literature indicates that institutional constraints significantly affect teacher professionalism in Indian government schools. Common themes emerging from the studies include excessive administrative workload, lack of autonomy, centralized governance, inadequate infrastructure, weak professional development systems, and accountability pressures. The literature also suggests that strengthening teacher professionalism requires supportive institutional cultures, participatory leadership, collaborative professional development, and balanced accountability systems.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To identify major institutional constraints affecting teachers in government schools.
2. To analyze the impact of institutional barriers on teacher motivation and professional identity.
3. To suggest recommendations for strengthening teacher professionalism in government schools.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a systematic review methodology to evaluate academic literature published between 2015 and 2026. Relevant peer-reviewed articles, papers, policies by government, academic texts, institutional monographs, and independent research reports were retrieved from prominent global and regional databases, including google scholars, JSTOR, and ResearchGate. The final selection was restricted to English-language empirical studies, conceptual reviews, and policy evaluations published within the researches.

Institutional Constraints Affecting Teacher Professionalism

Teacher Shortage and Workload

Deficits in teaching staff remain a structural crisis within Indian public education, particularly across rural and economically marginalized geographies (UNESCO, 2021). This persistent understaffing inflates individual workloads, leaving educators with little time to dedicate to reflective lesson planning or peer-to-peer collaboration (Sharma & Sinha, 2021).

Research reveals that educators in low-resource environments are routinely forced to navigate overpopulated classrooms and complex multi-grade instruction models (Kaur & Singh, 2022). This intense operational burden acts as a primary catalyst for chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, and a decline in vocational drive (Day & Gu, 2015). Furthermore, Mooij (2015) notes that state-school teachers regularly struggle with professional alienation due to the mismatch between high institutional demands and absent organizational support.

Administrative Burden and Bureaucratic Control

Public school teachers are frequently co-opted into non-academic civic duties, including managing midday meal logistics, executing census tallies, staffing polling stations, and assembling welfare data (Batra, 2015). This diversion of labor directly erodes active instructional hours and dilutes professional focus.

From a global perspective, Apple (2019) notes that rising "audit cultures" within education systems have intensified top-down surveillance and compliance pressures. In India, this manifests as a distinct "culture of compliance," where administrative box-ticking routinely takes precedence over professional judgment and creative teaching (Narayanan & Selvan, 2025). Such pervasive oversight ultimately stifles pedagogical innovation and reflective instruction (Sachs, 2016).

Lack of Professional Autonomy

Pedagogical autonomy is universally recognized as a core tenet of authentic professionalism (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2016). When granted independence, educators can dynamically calibrate curricula, classroom strategies, and assessment formats to match the unique learning profiles of their students.

However, the literature shows that Indian state-school teachers possess minimal influence over institutional choices or policy designs (Anderson, 2022). Because curricular tracks and testing frameworks are dictated by centralized authorities, teachers are left with negligible room for localized pedagogical adaptations (Narayanan & Selvan, 2025). This lack of self-determination dampens professional enthusiasm and fragments teacher identity (Sachs, 2016).

Inadequate Infrastructure and Resources

A significant portion of the government school sector continues to grapple with material deficiencies, such as substandard buildings, missing laboratories, understocked libraries, and poor digital connectivity (UNESCO, 2021). These inadequate environments limit instructional efficacy and undermine job satisfaction.

Teachers anchored in these resource-scarce schools find it difficult to execute student-centric, experiential, or tech-integrated lessons (Kaur & Singh, 2022). These material gaps widen the quality divide between public systems and well-funded private institutions.

Weak Professional Development Systems

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is critical for upgrading teaching competencies and updating instructional standards (Avalos, 2016). However, in-service training frameworks in India are frequently criticized for being overly theoretical and disconnected from real-world classroom challenges (Senapati & Singh, 2022).

Current research indicates that many teacher-training initiatives prioritize top-down policy compliance rather than nurturing reflective, self-directed learning (Anderson, 2022). The lack of sustained mentorship, peer learning networks, and institutional follow-through limits the long-term impact of these professional development programs.

V. DISCUSSION

The review highlights that teacher professionalism within India's government education sector does not exist in a vacuum; it is actively shaped by deep-rooted bureaucratic structures and organizational habits. The compiled literature consistently indicates that heavy administrative duties, centralized control, diminished autonomy, and weak institutional support harm both teacher identity and classroom delivery (Apple, 2019; Narayana & Selvan, 2025). The Autonomy-Accountability Dilemma A central theme emerging from this synthesis is the operational friction between institutional accountability and professional agency. While regulatory frameworks are ostensibly built to uphold academic standards, excessive surveillance strips teachers of their professional agency and degrades institutional trust (Sachs, 2016). When trapped in compliance-driven systems, teachers naturally default to risk-averse, rote instructional methods rather than engaging in creative, impactful pedagogy (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2016). Furthermore, the data underscores that persistent staffing gaps and uneven resource distribution continue to hamper the government school ecosystem (UNESCO, 2021). Teachers stationed in under-resourced schools experience heightened levels of professional frustration and career fatigue (Kaur & Singh, 2022). While NEP 2020 provides a progressive blueprint for teacher empowerment and updated career metrics, its translation into practice is slowed by institutional rigidity and deeply entrenched structural disparities (Govt. of India, 2020). Achieving sustainable improvement requires shifting toward participatory school leadership, building collaborative peer networks, and systematically reducing the non-educational tasks imposed on teachers (Aderson, 2022).

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

To cultivate and protect teacher professionalism within Indian government schools, the following systemic steps are recommended:

- **Staffing Stabilization:** Rapidly fill vacant teaching posts and optimize teacher-student ratios across under-resourced schools.
- **Administrative Decoupling:** Insulate educators from non-educational civic assignments to maximize classroom instructional time.
- **Pedagogical Decentralization:** Grant teachers greater flexibility to adjust curricula and assessment methods to local classroom contexts.
- **Resource Upgrades:** Target capital investments toward improving basic school infrastructure, learning resources, and classroom technology.
- **Reimagined CPD:** Transition toward practical, continuous professional development models that emphasize reflective and interactive teaching.
- **Professional Learning Communities (PLCs):** Establish peer-led learning networks within and across schools to encourage collaborative problem-solving.
- **Structured Mentorship:** Build institutional peer-support and mentoring tracks for both early-career and veteran educators.

- Democratic Governance: Cultivate non-hierarchical, participatory school leadership models that include teachers in key decisions.
- Well-being Initiatives: Introduce institutional mental health initiatives and stress-management support tailored for educators.
- Trust-Based Accountability: Replace punitive compliance monitoring with balanced evaluation frameworks rooted in professional trust and mutual growth..

VII. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the exercise of teacher professionalism within Indian state schools is bound to the country's institutional frameworks, bureaucratic practices, and policy climates. This review clarifies that systemic staffing deficits, compliance-heavy administrative cultures, infrastructural gaps, and centralized governance frameworks collectively limit teacher autonomy, vocational motivation, and instructional success (Narayanan & Selvan, 2025; UNESCO, 2021). Although statutory transformations like the NEP 2020 offer promising frameworks for teacher autonomy and elevated professional standards, actualizing these goals requires deep, systemic restructuring (Government of India, 2020). Educational systems must cease treating teachers as mere administrative executors and instead view them as intellectual, reflective professionals vital to societal progress and educational equity (Sachs, 2016). Elevating the teaching profession by cultivating supportive school environments, encouraging peer collaboration, and balancing systemic oversight with professional trust is a vital prerequisite for securing educational quality across India.

REFERENCES

- [1] Anderson, J. (2022). Learning from Indian teacher expertise: A policy and practice report for educational organisations in India.
- [2] Apple, M., & Apple, M. W. (2019). Ideology and curriculum. Routledge.
- [3] Avalos, B. (2011). Teacher professional development in teaching and teacher education over ten years. *Teaching and teacher education*, 27(1), 10-20.
- [4] Batra, P. (2020). Re-imagining curriculum in India: Charting a path beyond the pandemic. *Prospects*, 51(1-3), 407.
- [5] Day, C., & Gu, Q. (2015). Educators committed to improving student achievement. Routledge.
- [6] Government of India. (2020). National Education Policy 2020. Ministry of Education.
- [7] Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2016). Professional capital: Transforming teaching in every school. Teachers College Press.
- [8] Kaur, R., & Singh, M. (2022). Occupational stress among government school teachers in India. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 15(2), 45–57.

- [9] Mooij, J. (2015). Teacher motivation and institutional challenges in Indian government schools. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 40, 1–10.
- [10] Narayanan, M., & Selvan, T. (2025). Teacher autonomy and control in India: Seeking professionalism in a culture of compliance. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 20(4), 593–610.
- [11] Sachs, J. (2016). Teacher professionalism: Why are we still talking about it? *Teachers and Teaching*, 22(4), 413–425.
- [12] Senapati, R., & Singh, S. K. (2022). Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of in-service school teachers in India: A systematic review.
- [13] Singh, A. K., Rind, I. A., & Sabur, Z. (2021). Continuous professional development of school teachers: Experiences of Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. In *Handbook of education systems in South Asia* (pp. 1355-1380). Singapore: Springer Singapore.
- [14] UNESCO. (2021). *Teachers at the heart of education recovery*. UNESCO Publishing.
- [15] Wayal, L. S. (2024). Teacher education reforms under NEP 2020 and professional standards in India.