

## Research Article

# Inept and Indifferent? Self-Understanding of Early Career Teachers of Government Schools in the Indian State of Odisha

**Biswajit Apat**  and **Pranaya Swain** 

*School of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Science Education and Research,  
An OCC of Homi Bhabha National Institute, Bhubaneswar 752050, Odisha, India*

Correspondence should be addressed to Pranaya Swain; pranay@niser.ac.in

Received 4 January 2022; Revised 14 April 2022; Accepted 4 May 2022; Published 25 May 2022

Academic Editor: Zhonggen Yu

Copyright © 2022 Biswajit Apat and Pranaya Swain. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

The Indian education system has remarkably improved in some respects in the last two decades. With the rapid expansion of educational facilities and increased enrolment of children in schools, the issue of access and participation has been addressed to a large extent. The problem of quality, however, still persists. Even after spending several years in school, many children are not acquiring basic literacy and numeracy. Reports indicate that children of the poor learn the least, and unsurprisingly, most of them study in government-run schools. While there are many factors of learning crisis, teachers are often held responsible for the deteriorating condition of government schools. A discourse of teacher criticism has emerged which portrays teachers as poorly trained, frequently absent, work-shy, hard-to-please, inefficient, ineffective, and occasionally corrupt. How does this discourse impact teachers' self-understanding? This study analyses narrative data collected from seventeen early career teachers to understand their professional self-understanding. With the help of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the study concludes that the popular perceptions of being work-shy, inept, and incompetent are contested by the teachers. On the contrary, there is some evidence to suggest that negotiating a positive professional identity has become a struggle for the participating teachers in the quest for becoming better teachers. While they tend to assert their effectiveness and commitment, they also experience helplessness, vulnerability, and humiliation. This research is expected to pave ways for further explorations of whether the discourse of teacher criticism negatively impacts experienced teachers as well and how teachers' struggle for positive professional identity influences children's learning outcomes.

## 1. Introduction

Studies on school education have consistently noted that among all the factors impacting children's learning, the quality of teaching is the most powerful one [1, 2]. Becoming an effective teacher is not just a matter of acquiring subject knowledge and pedagogical skills, it also entails "including the identity "teacher" in one's life" [3]. The importance of knowing one's self is succinctly put by Palmer [4] as "we teach who we are". In the words of Sachs [5], "teacher identity provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of "how to be", "how to act" and "how to understand" their work and their place in society" (p. 15).

Typically described as a period of survival and discovery, the first few years of a teaching career are crucial

for the teachers in terms of socialising into the profession and developing professional identity [6, 7]. Given the importance of this stage in teachers' careers, a large body of research exists that exclusively focuses on early career teachers [8–17]. In the context of India, however, studies on early career teachers are relatively scarce, possibly because research exclusively focusing on teachers' perspectives and perception is yet to gain significant attention in academic lens. Sans a few studies in which teachers' voice is privileged (such as [18–23]) and another few that focuses on ethnographies of schools (such as [24]), one comes across teachers mostly in passing remarks and as objects of critical gaze in academic literature. This study seeks to add to this limited, albeit crucial, literature that brings teachers' voices to the fore.

The core thesis guiding this research is the existence of a strong link between teachers' identity and work [25]. What teachers do in their classrooms certainly depends on their knowledge, skills, school culture, resources at disposal, policies, etc. Their work is also primarily influenced by their self-understanding, aspirations and frustrations, commitment, priorities, and beliefs. While facilitating better teacher development programmes, improving school infrastructure, and introducing accountability measures are important. Helping teachers build and sustain positive identities is also equally important. In the Indian context, research and policy focus on teachers' identity development is even more urgent given that learning crisis is prevalent here, and teachers are often at the receiving end for this issue.

For more than a decade, the Annual Status of Education Reports (ASER) have been reiterating the finding that a large portion of students in government schools lack grade-specific learning. To improve the quality of government schools, state governments have increased allocation of funds for the development of school infrastructure and recruited teachers. The government schools, however, remain ineffective in popular perception and the teachers working in these schools are often criticised for the deteriorating condition of their schools. This perception is reflected in admission preferences, media reports, academic literature, and, most crucially, in the governments' teacher management policies and practices.

This study explores the impact of the discourse of teacher criticism on early career teachers' self-understanding. In the process, it seeks to understand how do early career teachers see themselves in the light of widespread criticism of their work, and are they able to build and present a convincing counternarrative? Using Kelchtermans' [26, 27] framework for analysing teachers' self-understanding, we dived into the narrative data collected from seventeen early career teachers of government primary schools in Odisha. The analysis suggests that the discourse of teacher criticism is an impediment to teachers' identity development. While teachers tend to assert their effectiveness and commitment, they also express feeling trapped in bad schools where they would never be able to prove themselves.

The policy implications of this study are two-fold: first, merely recruiting teachers to reduce teacher shortage is not enough. Helping teachers build a stable and positive professional identity is equally important. Second, the popular perception of government schools as "low-cost and inefficient schools for the poor" needs to be changed. Repositioning government schools as well-equipped centres of learning and at par with the private schools will attract children from all socio-economic backgrounds and boost the morale of teachers working in these schools.

The structure of this study is as follows. The following section discusses the discourse of teacher criticism and some of its effects. This section provides the context and rationale for investigating teachers' self-understanding. Next, we lay out the theoretical framework used for data analysis. The third section presents the study in three parts: objectives, methodology, and findings. The discussion section offers interpretations of the participants' responses in the light of

the discourse of teacher criticism and previous studies on teacher identity. Implications of the findings for policy and future research are indicated in the concluding section.

## 2. The Discourse of Teacher Criticism

The teacher of ancient and medieval India had authority, status, and privilege. Renowned teachers adorned royal courts as scholars and advisors. The village teachers were dependent on parents' donations. Teaching, however, was not a means of employment available to all. Kumar [28] argues that the colonial administration was instrumental in turning teachers into "meek dictators". By keeping the salary and status of teachers as low as possible, the job attracted "only the neediest, and among them the most helpless" ([28], p. 79). Despite several crucial reforms in recruitment of teachers and management policies, the status of teachers in government-run schools has not improved much. Additionally, criticism of teachers is now more prevalent in educational discourse than earlier. A news report puts it thus:

Government schools in India have for long been weighed down by a perception problem: the education they impart is suspected to be low on quality, making for poor learning outcomes, their physical infrastructure too deficient to allow them to focus beyond textbooks, and they are thought to have too few, well-trained teachers (Hindustan Times, April 23, 2018).

The widespread erosion of trust in most of the public institutions could largely be responsible for the negative portrayal of government schools and teachers working in these schools. But is it merely a "perception problem?" Several studies on teachers in India have found evidence for holding teachers partly responsible for the current crisis in school education. There are studies highlighting teacher absenteeism [29], teachers' inadequate and poor training [30, 31], teachers' lack of accountability, involvement in local politics [32], and their petty corruptions such as offering private tuition classes [33, 34], as factors responsible for such perception. The World Bank report titled "Student Learning in South Asia" [35] notes that "substandard teaching" is the foremost factor of low-quality education in developing countries (p. 197). Apart from highlighting high rates of teacher absenteeism, low teacher effort and general lack of accountability, the report also discusses evidences of teachers' lack of knowledge. It says: "While there is anecdotal evidence that many teachers in South Asia barely know more than their students, only recently have data been generated to quantify the extent of the problem" [35], p. 201).

Mukhopadhyay and Sarangapani [36] argue that a new discursive regime of educational ideas has developed in India. Concepts such as quality, efficiency, and accountability are now employed with very specific meanings, and the discourse using these concepts endorses a particular set of policy solutions. Quality, for instance, is now measured only on the basis of students' learning outcomes. Efficiency implies value-for-money, and accountability means "control" and "management" of teachers' work. Jain and Saxena [37] observe that research inspired by neoliberal thinking

portrays teachers as expensive, inefficient, “unjustifiably privileged middle-class professionals”, “an easily available human resource, a replaceable cog” and advocates expansion of low-cost schooling with low teacher salaries (p. 79–80).

In local media, it is not uncommon to encounter reports about teachers accused of misconduct, abusing students, misappropriating school funds, not showing up in schools, negligence in duty, doing personal work during school hours, etc. Some of the recent headlines are: Fake school teacher terminated after 16 years of service (Times of India (<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/education/news/fake-school-teacher-terminated-after-16-years-of-service-fired-ordered/articleshow/90042985.cms>), March 7 2022), Tamil Nadu teacher arrested for marrying minor student (India Today (<https://www.indiatoday.in/india/tamil-nadu/story/teacher-arrested-for-marrying-minor-student-trichy-pocso-1929357-2022-03-25>), March 25 2022), Government school teacher owns 20 colleges, assets 1000 times more than his income, finds MP police after EOW raids (Financial Express (<https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/government-school-teacher-owns-20-colleges-assets-1000-times-more-than-his-income-finds-mp-police-after-eow-raids/2472880/>), March 27 2022). Journalists have also televised classroom scenes where the teacher was teaching something incorrect, or the teacher was in inebriated condition. No other profession seems to have received as much negative publicity as teaching. Although rarely, one also encounters opinions and stories sympathetic to the teachers. A recent article titled ‘Teachers must not be blamed for India’s poor learning outcomes’ (Mint (<https://www.livemint.com/opinion/columns/teachers-mustn-t-be-blamed-for-india-s-poor-learning-outcomes-11645028578318.html>), February 16 2022) exemplifies the counternarrative.

The discourse of teacher criticism can also be recognised in teachers’ writings. A particularly revealing example is an article titled “*Aajna, Mun Jane sarakari sikhyaka*” (Yes, I am a government school teacher) published in an Odia local daily [38]. Authored by a government school teacher, this article offers an unpretentious description of the social image of teachers in contemporary India. A few excerpts are worth quoting:

Yes, I am a teacher in a government primary school. I have BA and B.Ed. degrees. Joy, peace and respect have vanished from my life- in school and out of school. Everywhere I am compared with private school teachers and criticised. Some people say that children of government schools cannot even write their parents’ names. Some say these children come to school only for the mid-day meal. Others comment about a certain male teacher who comes to school after getting drunk and the lady teacher who is usually seen sleeping on a chair during school hours. Surveys like ASER and NAS question our competency. It is not just the laypeople who make fun of the quality of education in government schools; officers of the education department also scoff at our schools. With whom shall I share my sorrow?

Although I am a teacher, I am responsible for everything other than education... Everything is smart these days-smart classes, and smart children. But they do not say that I

am smart. According to the government’s rule, punishment is banned in schools. But our children are really smart. They threaten me with false allegations and say, they would approach the media and Commissions for human rights and child rights. If something wrong ever gets published in the media, the officers of the education department would destroy me. I would be labelled worthless or someone who cannot manage even basic things in a primary school.

I do not get my salary on time. I have to rush to the office of the Block Education Officer frequently regarding matters like salary increment, General Provident Fund (GPF), updating my service book, etc. From the peon to the head clerk—everyone has to be bribed. I run the risk of my file and service book being “lost” otherwise. Even the peon harasses me threatening that he would get me transferred. He talks foul and calls me at odd hours. In the eyes of the clerks of the Block office, teachers are inferior creatures. Or in other words, we are like their prey.

The author indicates some of the effects of the discourse of teacher criticism. Teachers of the government schools have become easy targets to be ridiculed, threatened, harassed, and insulted. Some teacher management policies can also be regarded as effects of this discourse. The large-scale recruitment of para-teachers by several state governments in the last two decades is an exemplary case [39, 40]. In the context of acute teacher shortage and financial constraints, recruiting local, untrained youth with just ten to twelve years of formal education as primary teachers by offering a fraction of the salaries of regular teachers was argued as the most efficient and cost-effective policy solution. This policy reflects the underlying assumption that teaching in primary schools did not require specific skills and knowledge, and anyone could teach. Teachers were reduced to implementers of curricula designed at the top level. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, enacted by the Government of India in the year 2009, sought to reverse this trend by mandating that only trained teachers could be recruited. Qualifying the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) also became a mandatory requirement for becoming a teacher.

The practice of recruiting contractual teachers has been done away with in some states. It has taken a different form in states like Odisha, where the present study is based (see [41] for differences in current recruitment policies across selected states). In Odisha, teachers are recruited on a contractual basis, and they become regular teachers after six years of service. The participants of this research are contractual teachers. Before 2018, the contractual teachers were referred to as *Sikhya Sahayaks* (teaching assistants). The teachers of this cadre, frustrated with their meagre salaries and service conditions, frequently went on strikes and demanded pay hikes, ease of transfer, and other benefits (Times of India (<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhubaneswar/hundreds-of-sikshya-sahayaks-on-indefinite-strike/articleshow/50037998.cms>), December 4 2015; The Samaya (<https://odishasamaya.com/sikshya-sahayaks-stop-going-to-school-launch-indefinite-hunger-strike/>), August 17 2017; Kalinga TV News Network (<https://kalingatv.com/state/sikshya-sahayak-teachers-launch-indefinite-strike-again-in-odisha/>), March 12 2018). Changing the designation

*Sikhya Sahayak* was also one of the demands. Though the salary of the contractual teachers has not increased much, the recruits are now redesignated as Junior Teachers-Contractual (JTC). After three years, a JTC becomes eligible to be a Junior Teacher (JT). JTs are absorbed in the permanent teaching workforce after another three years. Thus, in this study, being an early career primary school teacher entails being a contractual teacher with a fraction of the regular teacher's salary.

Recruiting teachers as *Sahayaks* (assistants) and expecting them to serve as contractual employees for six years with meagre wages reflects the government's insensitive attitude towards teachers. Such attitude can be argued to be an effect of the discourse of teacher criticism.

Negative public perception of teachers is arguably most noticed in parents' choices of schools for their wards. The last two decades have marked rapid expansion of government schools. At the same time, it was also the period during which unaided private schools increased manifold. The critics of the proliferation of private schools labelled this growth as "mushrooming of teaching shops" [42]. The exact number of private schools is often under-estimated since many such schools are unrecognised. Kingdon [42] argues that the growth of private schooling parallels the gradual abandonment and emptying of government schools. Most parents who can afford private education hesitate to enrol their children in a government school. Government schools are "the recourse for only the extremely marginalised sections of the population. . . *schools of the last resort*" ([36], p. 12, emphasis original).

While school choice is influenced by an array of factors (such as availability of schools in the vicinity, medium of instruction, teaching-learning activities, fees and other expenses, school reputation, infrastructure, and safety), many parents consider teachers' characteristics an essential factor. Lahoti and Mukhopadhyay [43] reported that even when parents value teacher characteristics, they do not necessarily choose schools with better teachers. Their data showed more number of qualified, trained, and experienced teachers working in government schools than in private schools. Why do some parents choose private schools when they value better teachers, and such teachers are usually employed in government schools? The authors argue that these parents are misinformed and misled by the private schools. This argument seems valid given the skillful marketing strategies that the private schools engage to lure parents. But one could also argue that the mismatch in parental perception of teachers and actual teacher characteristics reflect the widespread mistrust in the effectiveness of government school teachers. In a similar study conducted in Andhra Pradesh [44], researchers found that many parents were dissatisfied with government schools for teacher-specific reasons.

Parents complained about government school teachers not caring about children, being absent frequently, being distracted, not caring whether children attended school or not, not caring whether children were fed good food, and not communicating with parents. Some parents felt that the

government schools were getting worse. Some other parents complained about very large class sizes in government schools, especially when teachers were absent. Some parents expressed concerns about private schools too, but felt that they had the right to complain because they paid fees. Parents realised that private schools were not necessarily of high quality, and were resigned to having to overlook shortcomings in both systems. However, they did feel being able to complain about quality of teaching in private schools in ways that parents of children in Government schools did not. ([44], p. 4).

Such perceptions make one wonder as to how do teachers of government schools navigate the discourse of teacher criticism? What is it like to be a teacher in the present context? One way of approaching these questions is available from the vantage point of teacher identity. The following section presents the theoretical framework to address these questions.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

There are many ways of theorizing identity, and its meaning depends on how it is thought about [45].

My sense of myself, others' perceptions of me, my reactions to others' perceptions, the social categories that attach themselves to me and to which I attach myself—all may be referred to as "identity", yet clearly there are important differences between them. Any discussion of identity always means we are in the presence of not one but many persons—or perceptions of a person. ([45], p. 7–8).

Teacher identity can be defined as "how teachers define themselves to themselves and others" [25], p.121). Teachers' identities are influenced by the interaction of their beliefs, experiences, their emotional contexts, the broader social conditions in which they live and work, and most crucially, the tensions between these. Teacher identity evolves throughout the career, and in times of drastic change, identity becomes a site of struggle.

The process of teacher identity formation is complex, and studies have identified a host of factors that can influence this process. For instance, Sumara and Luce-Kapler [3] argue that beginning teachers negotiate at least three conceptions of self-identity: the "pre-teaching" image of themselves as teacher they bring to teacher education; the "fictive" image that develops while they learn to teach; and the "lived" image that forms during their interactions with students in the practicum (p. 67). According to Morrison [46], early experience of teachers in the profession may confirm or undermine their sense of suitability and capacity and thereby set them in distinct trajectories of teacher identity. Zembylas and Chubbuck [47] argue that teacher identity formation is a political process. Studies have shown that subtle exercise of power through practices such as constantly classifying early career teachers as different from veterans can potentially stifle the identity development of the former [48]. In the context of India, Ramachandran et al. [41] note that the sheer variety of roles teachers working in government schools are expected to play, can result in suboptimal teacher identities. Why teachers have to be

clerks, gardeners, surveyors, cooks apart from being teachers, cannot be understood without reference to the history, politics, power, discourse, and culture. In contemporary India, the discourse of teacher criticism is one of the most powerful discourses on teachers. This study seeks to explore the possible effects of this discourse on teachers' identity formation.

To operationalise the notion of teacher identity, we used the framework offered by Kelchtermans [26, 27] as the lens for this study. Instead of "teachers' identity", he prefers to use the phrase "teachers' self-understanding" because of the theoretical confusion surrounding the term identity. He identifies five components of teachers' self-understanding: self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception, and future perspective.

**Self-image:** How does the teacher describe himself or herself as a teacher? Self-image is a product of a teacher's self-perception and how others perceive them.

**Self-esteem:** How well is one doing in his/her job as a teacher? Evaluation of teacher self considers feedback from others, particularly from significant others such as students.

**Task perception:** What is one's job as a teacher? What does the teacher refuse to accept as part of "his/her job?"

**Job motivation:** The motivating factors for someone to choose the teaching job, stay in the job, or leave it.

**Future perspective:** Teachers' expectations for the future development of their job situation and how they feel about it.

Self-understanding is a dynamic outcome of teachers' professional practice. It reflects the personal in the context of the professional. Thus, self-understanding can be subjective. It can also be intersubjective and context-specific because situated in a particular time and space, teachers encounter similar discourses surrounding their occupation: what it means to be a teacher, how does a teacher behave, who is a good teacher, and so on.

Following Kelchtermans [26], we make an attempt to understand the concept of teacher identity as the convergence of teachers' self-image, self-esteem, task perception, job motivation, and future perspective. In this light, the objectives of this research can be stated as follows:

To describe participating teachers' self-understanding in terms of their self-image, self-esteem, task perception, job motivation, and future perspective.

To explore whether the discourse of teacher criticism has any effect on teachers' self-understanding.

#### 4. Methodology

This study was conducted in Keonjhar district of Odisha, a state in eastern India. Seventeen participants were selected through purposive sampling method. The rationale behind this sampling method was to observe variation in data. All the participants of this research were probationary teachers working in elementary schools. The teachers belonged to

different schools scattered over four blocks of the district. Semistructured interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted in three phases between December 2018 to October 2019. Every teacher was interviewed thrice and a total of 51 interviews were conducted. The phrasing and order of questions were altered to fit the flow of the interviews. In most instances, interviews turned into good conversations, and rich narrative data were generated. In the course of the interviews, the discourse of teacher criticism was discussed with the participants. They offered their responses on how people perceive teachers and shared their own experiences. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis. As the first step of the analysis, descriptive coding method was employed to identify various topics emerging from the database [49]. Then, the codes were grouped under the five components of Kelchtermans' [26, 27] framework of self-understanding. Necessary approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee for Human Research at the National Institute of Science Education and Research in Bhubaneswar (India) to carry out this study with the teachers as participants.

The demographic characteristics of the participating teachers have been presented in Table 1. Participants' names have been coded as Participant-A, Participant-B, and so on, to ensure data anonymity.

#### 5. Results

Each participating teacher's self-understanding was expected to be based on their individual lived experiences. Work experience, gender, marital status, school size, etc., are crucial variables shaping participants' self-understanding. However, there are a few common themes—common sources of motivation and frustration that unite these teachers as agents. Summary of the results has been depicted in Figure 1.

**5.1. Self-Image.** The way teachers described themselves revealed a lot about their priorities and understanding of what it meant to be a teacher. Teachers like Participant-I and Participant-K, who had become government school teachers with almost a decade of prior work experience, did not see themselves as "novices" who needed advice and supervision. Participant-I said:

I feel that I am competent enough to teach. I do not feel like seeking advice anymore. I have 17 years of teaching experience. But here, I act like a novice because I am in a junior position. If I were to evaluate myself, I would rate myself 80 out of 100. (Participant-I).

Relatively young teachers usually have certain images of ideal teachers in their minds against which they judge themselves. An ideal teacher can be a real person—a teacher from one's schooldays, a close relative who was a teacher, or a senior teacher one met in an in-service training programme. For instance, Participant-J compared herself with her role model—her father, a retired government school teacher. As a follower of her father's footprints, she felt that she was on the right path.

TABLE 1: Demographic profile of participants.

No.	Participant Code	Age (as of 2019)	Gender	Social Category	Educational Qualification	Year of recruitment	work experience before becoming government school teacher
1	Participant-A	34	Female	General	MSc, BEd	2018	4 years. Teaching in private schools and colleges.
2	Participant-B	30	Male	SEBC	BA, CT	2014	No prior work experience
3	Participant C	27	Male	ST	BA, CT	2015	1 year. Teaching in a private school
4	Participant-D	24	Female	General	BSc, CT	2013	No prior work experience
5	Participant E	24	Male	SEBC	BA, CT	2015	No prior work experience
6	Participant F	26	Female	SEBC	BA, CT	2015	No prior work experience
7	Participant-G	40	Female	SEBC	BA, CT	2013	No prior work experience
8	Participant H	26	Male	SC	+2, CT	2014	No prior work experience
9	Participant-I	46	Female	SEBC	MA, BEd	2013	12 years. Teaching in private schools in different cities.
10	Participant-J	32	Female	SEBC	BA, CT	2014	No prior work experience
11	Participant-K	41	Male	General	BA, CT	2014	10 years. Insurance agent
12	Participant L	37	Male	SC	BA, CT	2015	6 years. Teaching in a private school
13	Participant M	24	Male	SEBC	+2, CT	2015	No prior work experience
14	Participant N	32	Female	ST	MA, CT	2014	No prior work experience
15	Participant O	29	Male	SEBC	BSc, BEd	2014	No prior work experience
16	Participant P	30	Male	ST	BA, CT	2013	No prior work experience
17	Participant Q	35	Male	ST	BA, CT	2014	5 years. Business.

SC, scheduled caste; ST, scheduled tribe; SEBC, socially and economically backward classes; BA, bachelor of arts; CT, certificate of training; MA, master of arts; BEd, bachelor of education.

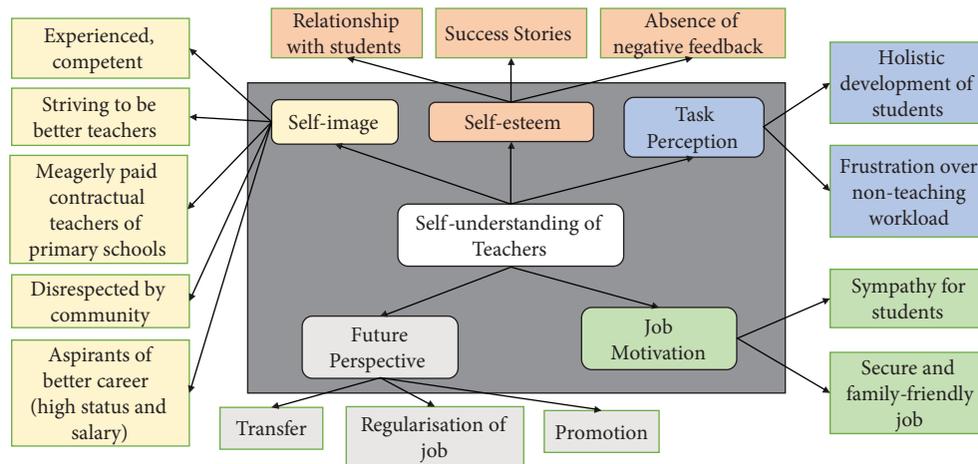


FIGURE 1: Self-understanding of early career primary school teachers in Odisha.

I am trying to be a teacher like my father. I won't say that I have succeeded in this. We do not have the kind of dedication he used to have for his job. In comparison to his contribution, we are nothing. (Participant-J).

Participants also tended to compare themselves with imaginary ideal teachers. They talked about the "good" teachers of earlier generations who were supposedly more ethical, disciplined, and respected.

Many participants talked about their personality traits as their defining features. Participant-L thought he was a good teacher because he was always occupied with various activities. For him, a good teacher was anything but lazy.

I am the kind of person who does not like to sit idle. In all my previous schools, I was known for this quality. If you love working, then nothing is difficult for you. I never sit idle. I look after the school garden when I am free. I engage students in gardening. Gardening and hygiene are my top

priorities. I request other teachers to make students sensitised about self-care. (Participant-L).

Many teachers like Participant-A described themselves as teachers striving toward perfection. She recognised that she had a long way to go as there are structural constraints like nonteaching workload and personality flaws.

I would not say that I am a perfect teacher. But I feel that I know what is best for my students. My satisfaction is that I am giving my best. In fact, that is also not the case every day. On some days, I get caught up in nonteaching work. I would be a better teacher if I could control my anger. I get angry very soon. (Participant-A).

All the participants regarded themselves as suitable for teaching. The most reported sources of their confidence were their educational qualification, teacher's training, and passing the Teacher Eligibility Test. Most of them also expressed feeling humiliated as meagerly paid contractual

teachers of primary schools. Participant-C represented an extreme case. Deeply affected by widespread criticism of teachers, he expressed his intention to switch to some other profession. His entry into the profession could be termed as a case of “constrained entry” ([50], p. 46) because he had better career plans that he could not pursue and reluctantly joined a teaching job. He considered his job as a stepping stone and had plans to be in the profession till he got a job with a better salary and status.

Participant-H, posted in a rural school about a hundred kilometres far from his home, lived alone in a rented room. Unlike Participant-C, he was happy to be a teacher. He was the first person in his family to become a government employee. He seemed to have achieved his goal and claimed to be spending considerable time interacting with the village folks, and trying to gain his place in this community.

It is the poor people who respect us. People who are well off do not show that kind of respect. For them, we are just primary teachers. They must be wondering: what do these people know? They have studied just CT (Teachers’ Certificate) or something. (Participant-H).

Only two participants felt that most of the parents appreciated their work. Some teachers described themselves as vulnerable to community’s outrage over trivial issues. For Participant-D, community’s disrespectful attitude towards the school was an everyday experience.

These people do not respect the school, let alone us. They come and party inside the school premises during most of the evenings. The first thing we do every morning is clean up the mess they leave here- fish and chicken bones and wine bottles. (Participant-D).

*5.2. Self-Esteem.* As gathered from the participants, the most common source of participating teachers’ self-esteem was their connection with the children. They perceived themselves as professionals who had comprehensive knowledge of the children they teach. Although every stakeholder of the education system has an answer to the proverbial question “why Johnny cannot read or write”, only Johnny’s teacher can justifiably claim to provide the most comprehensive explanation of Jonny’s educational problems. All the participants claimed to have adequate knowledge about their students and thus felt partly successful in their mission as teachers. Participant D and Participant H were of view that this kind of understanding of children differentiated the teachers from others.

Anybody can follow the instructions available in the teaching manual and teach, but we know our children. We know their learning levels. We know how will they learn and at what pace. I have 29 children in my class, and I can see 29 different levels of learning abilities. If a child can easily understand concepts of civics, you cannot claim that he will have similar competency in solving maths problems. (Participant-D).

I instantly know when a child fails to learn something. I observe them closely every day. When I conduct monthly tests, I can tell you beforehand which child will not be able to answer. You can infer how a child is doing in the school from

the test scores. But I can tell you why the child is doing well or bad. (Participant-H).

Participants also narrated their experiences of success with students, experiences in which they had adopted unique approaches for particular students. Participant-A, the only teacher in her school with a postgraduate degree in science, was the class teacher in the eighth grade. She told her success with a student who, everyone thought, “hated” studying. She had vivid memories of how this boy behaved in the first few days in her class.

I do not know what was he expecting from me, but I knew he did not even have basic mathematical skills. Those days I was helping students revise things they had learnt in the previous academic year. For the first 2–3 days, I did not ask him to do anything particularly. I just observed him. He observed that all the other students were busy. They were asking me questions and completing their lessons. One day, suddenly, he approached me with a numerical problem. By not forcing him to pay attention to his studies from day one, I let him decide whether he wanted to engage. I had managed to win his trust. He swiftly learned a lot in the next few days. Every day he would come to me with his worksheets, and I would guide him to solve problems. I was thrilled to see his progress. (Participant-A).

Although rare and less dramatic examples like this were offered by most teachers. These success stories constituted a major source of motivation and validation for teachers.

None of the participants mentioned getting positive feedback as their source of self-esteem. Instead, most felt happy because they did not receive any harsh feedback on their teaching. They seemed to assume that the absence of direct criticism was an indicator of their effectiveness.

The parents and guardians are the actual judges. It does not matter whether I feel confident. But I think I am doing alright. I believe parents are happy with me. When students show disinterest and when they seem bored, I go back and reflect on my teaching. (Participant M).

*5.3. Task Perception.* While the new discursive regime considers the only task of the teachers is to implement the curriculum as prescribed and produce high learning outcomes, the participating teachers did not perceive their role in such a narrow fashion. Participant-I’s emphasis on activity-based learning indicated her concern for the holistic development of the children and challenged the widely held notion that holistic development of children was possible in private schools only. She has taught in private schools for many years before joining her current job. She did not consider her students or colleagues any inferior to private school students and teachers. She was of the view that by adopting specific methods, teachers could produce desirable outcomes.

In private schools, I have seen children singing songs and telling stories and making several gestures while communicating. We discuss these things here. We know that these activities make children smart and confident. Why cannot our children do all these? They are not different from children going to private schools. Their parents are different.

Parents of these students are mostly from the underprivileged categories. They cannot afford private schools. The senior teachers here do not pay much attention to this. But, we the new ones, strongly believe that our children should learn to sing and act. So, our teaching is more action-oriented. (Participant-I).

Similarly, Participant-K focuses on students' cleanliness and hygiene.

The first thing I observed here was that children used to wear dirty, soiled clothes. They were not careful about their personal hygiene. The smell inside the classrooms made me very uncomfortable. I realised that nobody had taught them the importance of cleanliness. If private school children are told to keep themselves clean, it is absolutely possible for these children as well. I started talking about cleanliness all the time. I can see the difference now. As long as I am here, I will ensure that everyone maintains cleanliness. (Participant-K).

When asked about the initial experiences of teaching, most teachers did not mention facing any significant "academic" challenge. However, Participant-A claimed to have faced some language problem. Participant-I got into a conflict with the head-teacher, and Participant M had difficulty in "controlling" students. Participant-J somewhat hinted at the academic challenge involved in teaching while comparing it with teaching in high school.

In comparison to the work of a high school teacher, a primary teacher's job is more difficult. High school children learn based on their prior learning. They can quickly follow what the teacher is saying. In a primary school, children learn the basics. Everything is new to them. You have to teach from the very basics which is often time taking. Sometimes it is difficult to judge whether a child is actually learning. Despite all these, the primary teachers are paid less salary and have to do all the nonteaching duties too. (Participant-J).

Apart from the curricular and extra-curricular activities, participants had to engage in many nonteaching activities too. Some of the activities included maintaining numerous registers, supervising the preparation and distribution of midday meals, distributing uniforms, administering deworming tablets, conducting surveys in the local communities, etc. All the participants questioned the rationale behind burdening teachers with so many diverse tasks that had no relevance to their core task of teaching. Participant-O sarcastically said that being a teacher meant a single person being a gardener, a housekeeper, a nurse, a manager, a cook and most importantly, a clerk. Participant-D asked, "who would clean the toilets?" as no one in her school was employed for that.

Some participants appeared so frustrated with the nonteaching workload that it profoundly affected their professional identity. Participant-D said, "I am a teacher who rarely gets to teach". After describing all the nonteaching work, she had to do every day, she said:

Out of the six hours that we spend in school, we get to teach for about 2–3 hours only—one hour before recess and another one or one and a half hour after recess. Due to less teaching time, we try to teach a whole chapter in one hour.

Ideally speaking, one hour is not enough for teaching a few paragraphs of literature, let alone the entire chapter. But somehow we manage to cover a lot in less time. We cannot expect every child to learn at such a fast pace. Teachers should do only one thing, and that is teaching. There is no shortage of unemployed youth in our country. We can recruit people to deal with things like mid-day meals (MDM) and other things. (Participant-D).

Participant-D also thought that being a teacher was a risky affair, and she felt vulnerable. She feared that even a slight error such as a shortage of a couple of boiled eggs for midday meals could allow others to point fingers at her character. She also feared that the school administrators, the parents of the children, and the media would "accuse" her if anything went wrong in her school. She was always cautious as she felt that she was treading a path full of numerous tiny yet unnecessary obstacles that slowed her down.

Participant-I, the oldest and the most experienced of all, refused to succumb to the pressure of nonteaching work. As a teacher, she seemed to be the most ambitious of all.

I consider teaching to be my first and foremost task. I never neglect my teaching activities. We are given a lot of paperwork. I do them only after I am done with teaching. Sometimes I complete such work after school hours in my room. Even when the head-teacher calls me during teaching, I politely respond that I will talk to her after the class. Other than teaching, I strive to make my children smart. I want them to participate in various competitions which are held in other schools. I want to see them winning prizes. (Participant-I).

*5.4. Job Motivation.* When asked why they decided to become teachers, most participants talked about external motivations (job security, compatibility with marriage and family life, social mobility, etc.) and constraints (inability to pursue higher education because of financial problems, lack of opportunity to pursue own interests, pressure to earn as soon as possible, etc.). Participant-J, whose father was a teacher, talked about her childhood dream of becoming a teacher like her father was. Participant-D shared the memory of her teacher, who appreciated her ability to help her friends in their studies and suggested that she should become a teacher.

The reason for entry into the profession might vary, but the reason for remaining committed to the profession was reportedly the same: they had a government job that promised financial growth and security, and they loved children. As mentioned earlier, stories of success with students motivated all the participants. Interacting with children, seeing them learn and discussing about them with colleagues were some of the everyday sources of joy for the participating teachers. Apart from children, there were few other sources of positive feedback in their work context. The education system seldom rewarded hard-working teachers, and only a few parents were appreciative. It was their involvement in the children's activities and events that kept them motivated. Moreover, for many teachers, teaching was a moral responsibility. Teachers felt sympathetic towards the

condition of the children because many of them belonged to poor and disadvantaged families.

You are about to teach mathematics, and then you realise that there is no chalk in stock. It was irritating. Then gradually, I understood the actual situation. I felt sorry for the children. If every teacher thinks like me and leaves the school, children will suffer. I began buying chalks, etc., from my expenses. We were told during our training programs that we should not hesitate to buy a few things for our class. We should not expect the government to provide everything. Instead, we should spend 50–100 rupees every month to prepare teaching and learning materials (TLMs). I usually buy coloured chalks and other materials to conduct experiments. (Participant-A).

Participant-E and Participant-G “missed” their students during long holidays. Participant-H felt “bored” on days that were holidays for children but working days for teachers. She felt motivated because teaching was a “social service” for her.

The most satisfying aspect of my job is I can share my knowledge with my students. They can learn whatever is good in me. It is like social service. I like that. When some students fail to learn, I feel frustrated. (Participant-J).

*5.5. Future Perspective.* It was intriguing to understand how the participating teachers envisioned their future selves. Since all the participants were contractual teachers, they had eagerly been waiting for their job to be regularized. No matter how unpleasant, their present institutional identity was a temporary one. The most humiliating aspect of this identity was the pay. Participant-K was 41 years old during the interview for this study. After working for more than a decade in different jobs, he decided to become a government teacher because of the job security. He was earning a decent amount in his previous job. He knew that the salary of a contractual teacher would not be enough for his family. Even then, he took the plunge and now, at the last year of his probation, he was happy that his days of hardship were finally going to be over.

Unlike Participant-K, Participant-A was not worried about her salary because her husband had a decent job. Nevertheless, she was also waiting to become a permanent teacher because the salary of a contractual teacher was far from satisfactory.

Teachers like me do not have respectable social status. The skilled daily wage labourers get 400 rupees per day. Even if they work for 20 days, they earn 8000 rupees per month. We do not even get that. My salary is 7400 rupees. After deductions, I get 6500 rupees in hand. I do not get my salary regularly. As I speak, it is already outstanding for four months. In the fifth month, they may pay, and it can be just two months’ salary. Again, you have to wait for months. There are no annual increments. Our salary will be increased after three years when we will become JT. (Participant-A).

Apart from salary increment, the prospect of transfer would open up for the participants after their regularisation. Many of them were already posted in their desired locations. Participant-I, Participant-L, and Participant-H were not natives of Keonjhar district. These teachers were not sure

whether an interdistrict transfer was even possible. They were prepared to work in their present schools till the end of their service period. The desire to work near their native places was not the only reason for seeking transfer; safety is also a concern for some teachers.

I wanted to be a teacher, and I have become one. It would have been much better if I were posted near my native place. That is the reason I am not fully satisfied with this job. Here I work with a little fear as this is not my area. Nowadays, many people drink and roam around. Anybody can come and start a fight. Anybody can make an issue. If a child gets into any problem, his guardian will not hesitate to beat us. I try to avoid such people. I know they say that this teacher does not teach well. (Participant-H).

Most of the participants did not seem much excited about planning for progress in their careers. Many of them did not have a clear idea of how the promotion system worked. Participant-J, the daughter of a teacher, said:

After six years, I will become a regular teacher. I have not thought any further than that. First, there are few ladders to climb, and second, I have seen many teachers waiting for years to get a promotion. So why bother about all these? (Participant-J).

The younger teachers, however, have enrolled themselves in distance education programmes. Older teachers like Participant-I and Participant-K were not very hopeful. Participant-I says, “I joined government service when I was 41. This is too late to dream anything big in terms of a career. I will certainly accept if any good responsibility comes in my way”. Apart from Participant-C, who was preparing for other government services, all other participants have planned to remain in the teaching profession.

## 6. Discussion

At the surface level, the discourse of teacher criticism seems to impact teachers’ self-understanding in two broad ways. First, the discourse of teacher criticism and the demeaning teacher management practices accompanying it are found to be significant sources of distress in teachers’ lives. Teachers feel unsupported, annoyed, humiliated, anxious, and vulnerable. Second, teachers’ claims about their competence can be construed as a counternarrative. They think that they have adequate understanding of their students and that knowledge helps them devise personalised strategies. The participating teachers narrated stories of success wherein they were able to produce desirable outcomes. They also asserted their sincerity by referring to their personality traits and the influence of “ideal” teachers. Figure 2 summarises these two basic effects of the discourse of teacher criticism.

Josselson [51] suggests two broad approaches to interpretation: faithfully seeking to understand others as they understand themselves (the hermeneutics of restoration) and discovering the deep realities masked by surface appearances (the hermeneutics of demystification). The second approach uses a range of techniques such as noticing silences, omissions, contradictions, inconsistencies, etc., to discover the deeper meanings. From this perspective, what the participants said are as important as what they did not

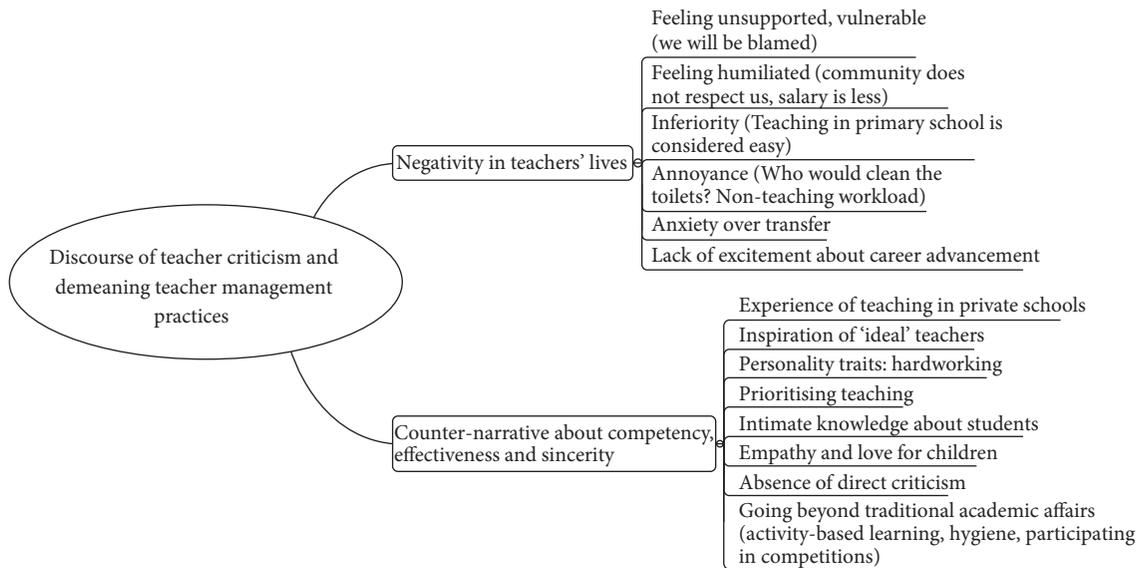


FIGURE 2: Effects of the discourse of teacher criticism on teachers.

say. Some of these unarticulated themes can indicate how the discourse of teacher criticism affects teachers in a fundamental way.

Although all the participants are trained teachers, and many have undergraduate degrees, they neither claimed pedagogical expertise nor boasted their love for the academic subjects. The reason behind this can be historical as well as cultural. As Kumar [28] argues, primary teachers acted as “meek subordinates of administrative officers” during colonial rule. Engaged in a host of nonteaching and clerical activities, the teacher was treated as “the Jack of all trades, but master of none”. Popularly perceived as a nonspecialised occupation, the status of teaching in primary school still remains a cause of concern.

However, the latest recruits are more qualified and have passed a Teacher Eligibility Test [41]. Two participants of this study have enough qualifications for teaching in colleges. Still, they do not perceive themselves as pedagogical experts who can facilitate learning in challenging circumstances. Unfortunately, this attitude reinforces the current discourse of teacher criticism that underlines the failure of government schools and discredits teachers’ pedagogical efforts as ineffective.

Similarly, none of the participants made any reference to positive feedback. The officers visiting schools “inspect” school affairs which usually entails going through registers and records, and quick to observe indicators, such as school cleanliness ([52], p. 160). In the absence of meaningful professional feedback, teachers feel underappreciated and focus on what is minimally expected of them.

While reflecting upon how well they were doing as teachers, none of the participants mentioned students’ learning outcomes. However, the discourse of teacher criticism uses poor learning outcomes as evidence of teachers’ incompetency. During the interviews, teachers offered two counterarguments to delink assessment of their competency from learning outcomes. First, students’

performance in examinations is neither the sole nor the most important criterion for judging teacher performance. Second, students’ learning outcomes are influenced by many factors other than teaching. Downey [53] finds that when the larger cultural narrative frames teachers as the “culprit” in educational failure, teachers may frame students as “problems” to portray themselves as good teachers in bad schools. The participants of this study seemed to endorse this approach by pointing out various factors responsible for poor learning outcomes in their schools. These factors such as shortage of teachers, lack of basic resources, problems in children’s families, frequent programmatic changes, etc., are not given due importance in the discourse of teacher criticism. It is difficult to prove one’s professional worth in a challenging context without the required support and encouragement. Therefore, branding teachers as incompetent only reinforces their feeling of being trapped and in charge of a losing battle.

The five constitutive components of self-understanding are interdependent and intertwined [1]. The task perceptions of teachers who consider themselves as unfairly treated contractual employees working in primary schools can be narrower than those who primarily see themselves as seasoned teachers with experience of teaching in a diverse environment. Thus, the negative impact of the discourse of teacher criticism on teachers’ self-image or self-esteem can have repercussions on their motivation, task perception, and future perspective.

The value of teacher’s work in the society or their Perceived Societal Appreciation (PSA) diminishes, when they feel they are held accountable for low student performances. Dropping PSA can have negative effects on teachers’ motivation and sense of self-worth [54]. Moreover, holding teachers accountable for educational outcomes can make attracting youth towards teaching occupation more difficult [55]. Thus, the discourse of teacher criticism has the potential to produce effects that are the exact opposites of its original goal—fixing the teacher workforce.

Teacher identity formation is inevitably a political process because it involves engagement with both regimes of truth and practices of power ([47], p. 188). Deconstructing discourses and power relations that produce, govern, and normalise teachers' identities can empower teachers to develop complex professional identities. There are multiple discourses on teachers and teaching, and "no discourse is inherently liberating or oppressive" ([47], p. 189). In Kelchtermans' [1] words: "even when teachers' understanding of themselves is influenced, informed and to some point determined by the context, there always remain space and leeway for their individual choices, motives, and preferences" (p. 233). Educational policies must expand the space for teacher agency and autonomy instead of curtailing it by turning teachers into mere deliverers of curriculum.

## 7. Conclusion

This study, albeit small in scope, argues that the professional self-understanding of government school teachers is shaped significantly by the discourse of teacher criticism. In popular perception, government teachers are often workshy, inept, and incompetent. The participants of the study presented here largely countered this perception. Despite constraints like nonteaching workload and lack of community support, they strive to be better teachers. The discourse of teacher criticism blames teachers for poor learning outcomes and highlights the problematic aspects of the teacher workforce. This discourse seeks to make teachers effective by making them more accountable and controllable. Narratives presented in this study, however, suggest that this discourse demotivates teachers and is detrimental to the development of positive professional identity of the teachers.

What is actually needed in the present context is a discursive shift from "bad teachers in bad schools" to "good teachers in good schools". Recruiting qualified and trained teachers to reduce shortage of teachers is necessary but not enough. Policy makers and teacher educators must help teachers (both preservice and in-service) build a stable and positive professional identity. Teacher education programmes have to prepare teachers for real schools, not ideal schools. Governments need to trust the teachers and treat them as professionals, not as multi-purpose employees located at the lowest rung of the administrative ladder. Government teachers should be encouraged to identify themselves as educators responsible for the education of children belonging to socially and economically disadvantaged families, many of whom are first-generation learners. Contradictory policies like recruiting qualified and trained teachers and expecting them to serve for six years as contractual employees must be replaced.

The popular perception of government schools as "low-cost and inefficient schools for the poor" needs to be changed. Repositioning government schools as well-equipped centres of learning and at par with private schools will attract children from all socio-economic backgrounds and boost the morale of teachers working in these schools. Since many teachers feel unsupported by local communities,

the relationship between teachers and community also needs policy attention.

We acknowledge that the study has its limitations of scale and scope. One can argue that a sample size of seventeen, however in-depth was the study, may not be as representative of the population as one would intend it to be. However, the attempt was to unravel the qualitative underpinning of the lived experiences of the early career teachers regardless of the scale. Further research is needed to explore whether and how the discourse of teacher criticism influences senior government teachers and teachers working in supposedly better government schools (such as the model schools of the state governments and the schools funded by the central government). More quantitative studies are required to measure various aspects of teachers' identity and their relationship with learning outcomes. The impact of the discourse of teacher criticism on the status and prestige of teaching also needs to be studied. Most importantly, further studies could be undertaken to present teachers' voices-their needs, concerns, experiences, opinions, and knowledge. Dismissing their lived experience not only disempowers them, it also results in arbitrary policies and ineffective implementation.

## Data Availability

The interview data used to support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

## References

- [1] G. Kelchtermans, "Professional self-understanding in practice: narrating, navigating and negotiating," *Research on Teacher Identity: Mapping Challenges and Innovations Mapping Challenges and Innovations*, Springer, Berlin, Germany, 2018.
- [2] J. A. C. Hattie, "Teachers make a difference: what is the research evidence?" in *Proceedings of the Building Teacher Quality: What Does the Research Tell Us ACER Research Conference*, Melbourne, Australia, 2003.
- [3] D. J. Sumara and R. Luce-Kapler, "(Un) Becoming a teacher: negotiating identities while learning to teach," *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 65–83, 1996.
- [4] P. J. Palmer, "The heart of a teacher identity and integrity in teaching," *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, vol. 29, no. 6, pp. 14–21, 1997.
- [5] J. Sachs, "Teacher education and the development of professional identity: learning to be a teacher," *Connecting Policy and Practice: Challenges for Teaching and Learning in Schools and Universities*, Routledge, London, UK, 2005.
- [6] M. Huberman, C. L. Thompson, and S. Weiland, "Perspectives on the teaching career," in *International Handbook of Teachers and Teaching*, Springer, Dordrecht, Netherlands, 1997.
- [7] F. Nasser-Abu Alhija and B. Fresko, "Socialization of new teachers: does induction matter?" *Teaching and Teacher Education*, vol. 26, no. 8, pp. 1592–1597, 2010.

- [8] J. Buchanan, A. Prescott, S. Schuck, P. Aubusson, P. Burke, and J. Louviere, "Teacher retention and attrition: views of early career teachers," *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 112–129, 2013.
- [9] M. Cameron, J. V. Berger, S. Lovett, and R. Baker, "Early career teachers' opportunities for professional learning: impacts on teaching practice, job satisfaction, motivation, and career decisions," *BERA Annual Conference*, vol. 7, pp. 1–17, 2007.
- [10] J. Caspersen and F. D. Raaen, "Novice teachers and how they cope," *Teachers and Teaching*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 189–211, 2014.
- [11] M. Hulme and I. Menter, "New professionalism in austere times: the employment experiences of early career teachers in Scotland," *Teachers and Teaching*, vol. 20, no. 6, pp. 672–687, 2014.
- [12] R. M. Ingersoll and M. Strong, "The impact of induction and mentoring programs for beginning teachers," *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 81, no. 2, pp. 201–233, 2011.
- [13] J. Kuzmic, "A beginning teacher's search for meaning: teacher socialization, organizational literacy, and empowerment," *Teaching and Teacher Education*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 15–27, 1994.
- [14] J. Manuel, "Such are the Ambitions of Youth": exploring issues of retention and attrition of early career teachers in New South Wales," *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 139–151, 2003.
- [15] P. Spencer, S. Harrop, J. Thomas, and T. Cain, "The professional development needs of early career teachers, and the extent to which they are met: a survey of teachers in England," *Professional Development in Education*, vol. 44, no. 1, pp. 33–46, 2018.
- [16] S. Veenman, "Perceived problems of beginning teachers," *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 54, no. 2, pp. 143–178, 1984.
- [17] K. M. Zeichner and B. R. Tabachnick, "The development of teacher perspectives: social strategies and institutional control in the socialization of beginning teachers," *Journal of Education for Teaching*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 1–25, 1985.
- [18] S. Brinkmann, "Teachers' beliefs and educational reform in India: from "learner-centred" to "learning-centred" education," *Comparative Education*, vol. 55, no. 1, pp. 9–29, 2019.
- [19] M. G. Chandran, "Teacher accountability and education restructuring: An exploration of teachers' work identities in an urban school for poor in India," *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, pp. 1–20, 2020.
- [20] S. Khora, "Teacher professionalism: a study of teachers and classroom processes," Doctoral dissertation, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India, 2008.
- [21] M. Majumdar, "Politicians, civil servants or professionals?" *Contemporary Education Dialogue*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 33–65, 2011.
- [22] V. Ramachandran, S. Bhattacharjea, and K. M. Sheshagiri, "Primary school teachers: the twists and turns of everyday practice," Technical Report, Educational Resource Unit, New Delhi, India, 2008.
- [23] A. Sriprakash, "Being a teacher in contexts of change," *Contemporary Education Dialogue*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 5–31, 2011.
- [24] M. Thapan, *Ethnographies of Schooling in Contemporary India*, SAGE Publications India, New Delhi, India, 2014.
- [25] C. Day, P. Sammons, G. Stobart, A. Kington, and Q. Gu, *Teachers Matter: Connecting Work, Lives and Effectiveness*, Open University Press, Maidenhead, UK, 2007.
- [26] G. Kelchtermans, "Getting the story, understanding the lives: from career stories to teachers' professional development," *Teaching and Teacher Education*, vol. 9, no. 5/6, pp. 443–456, 1993.
- [27] G. Kelchtermans, "Career stories as gateway to understanding teacher development," *Teachers' Career Trajectories and Work Lives*, Springer, Dordrecht, Netherlands, 2009.
- [28] S. C. Ghosh and K. Kumar, "Political agenda of education: a study of colonialist and nationalist ideas," *History of Education Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 3, pp. 394–94, 1993.
- [29] M. Kremer, N. Chaudhury, F. H. Rogers, K. Muralidharan, and J. Hammer, "Teacher absence in India: a snapshot," *Journal of the European Economic Association*, vol. 3, no. 2–3, pp. 658–667, 2005.
- [30] A. J. Desai, "Problems of teacher education in India," *International Journal of Religious Education*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 54–58, 2012.
- [31] D. R. Goel and C. Goel, "Teacher education scenario in India: current problems & concerns," *MIER Journal of Education Studies, Trends & Practices*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 231–242, 2012.
- [32] G. Kingdon and M. Muzammil, "A political economy of education in India: the case of Uttar Pradesh," *Oxford Development Studies*, vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 123–144, 2009.
- [33] T. Beteille, *Absenteeism, Transfers and Patronage: The Political Economy of Teacher Labor Markets in India*, Doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, USA, 2009, <https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/8496945>.
- [34] B. P. Biswal, "Private Tutoring and Public Corruption: a cost-effective education system for developing countries," *Developing Economies*, vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 222–240, 1999.
- [35] H. Dunder, T. Beteille, M. Riboud, and A. Deolalikar, *Student Learning in South Asia: Challenges, Opportunities, and Policy Priorities*, The World Bank, Washington, DC, USA, 2014.
- [36] R. Mukhopadhyay and P. M. Sarangapani, "Introduction," *School Education in India: Market, State and Quality*, Routledge, England, UK, 2018.
- [37] M. Jain and S. Saxena, "Politics of low cost schooling and low teacher salary," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 45, no. 18, pp. 79–80, 2010.
- [38] S. K. Mohanty, *Ajna, Mun Jane Sarakari Sikhyaka*, The Samaja, Cuttack, India, 2019.
- [39] M. Chandra, "The implications of contract teaching in India: a review," *Policy Futures in Education*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 247–259, 2015.
- [40] V. Ramachandran, "What is "para" about some teachers?" *Vikalpa*, vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 81–89, 2009.
- [41] V. Ramachandran, T. Beteille, T. Linden, S. Dey, S. Goyal, and P. Goel Chatterjee, *Getting the Right Teachers into the Right Schools: Managing India's Teacher Workforce*, World Bank, Washington, DC, USA, 2018.
- [42] G. G. Kingdon, "The private schooling phenomenon in India: a review," *Journal of Development Studies*, vol. 56, no. 10, pp. 1795–1817, 2020.
- [43] R. Lahoti and R. Mukhopadhyay, "School choice in rural India: perceptions and realities in four states," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 54, no. 49, pp. 51–57, 2019.
- [44] V. Morrow and E. Wilson, *Parents' Perspectives on Quality of Schooling in Andhra Pradesh, India*, Save the children, London, UK, 2014.
- [45] S. Lawler, "Introduction: identity as a question," in *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, pp. 1–22, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 2014.
- [46] C. M. Morrison, "Teacher identity in the early career phase: trajectories that explain and influence development,"

- Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, vol. 38, no. 4, pp. 91-107, 2013.
- [47] M. Zembylas and S. Chubbuck, "Conceptualizing "teacher identity": a political approach," *Research on Teacher Identity: Mapping Challenges and Innovations*, pp. 183-193, Springer, Berlin, Germany, 2018.
- [48] A. McCormack and J. Gore, "If only i could just teach": early career teachers, their colleagues, and the operation of power," in *Proceedings of the Annual conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education*, Brisbane, Australia, 2008.
- [49] J. Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, Sage, London, UK, 2013.
- [50] D. C. Lortie, "Recruitment and reaffirmation," in *School-teacher: A Sociological Study*, pp. 25-54, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, 1975.
- [51] R. Josselson, "The hermeneutics of faith and the hermeneutics of suspicion," *Narrative Inquiry*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 1-28, 2004.
- [52] V. Davis, "Mapping workflows and perceptions of Delhi's public school teachers," *Teaching and Teacher Education: South Asian Perspectives*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, UK, 2019.
- [53] C. A. Downey, "They kicked him out": teachers' student stories as counterstories," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 1-18, 2015.
- [54] B. Spruyt, F. Van Droogenbroeck, L. Van den Borre, L. Emery, G. Keppens, and J. Siongers, "Teachers' perceived societal appreciation: PISA outcomes predict whether teachers feel valued in society," *International Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 109, 2021.
- [55] S. W. Han, "Who expects to become a teacher? The role of educational accountability policies in international perspective," *Teaching and Teacher Education*, vol. 75, pp. 141-152, 2018.