The Academic
International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research

An Online Peer Reviewed / Refereed Journal
Volume 4 | Issue 10 | October 2026
ISSN: 2583-973X (Online), SJIF IF(2026): 5.6
Website: www.theacademic.in

Exploitation of Teachers in Private and Self-Financed Higher Education Institutions in India: A Critical Review of Working Conditions, Professional Rights and Institutional Accountability

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DOI : https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24416908

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper
Received: 29-10-2026
Accepted: 04-11-2026
Published: 20-11-2026

Keywords:
Teachers' Exploitation, Private Higher Education, Self-Financed Colleges, Teacher Educators, Job Security, Professional Rights, Working Conditions, Institutional Accountability.

ABSTRACT

Teachers play a significant role in the development of educational institutions and the overall progress of society. However, the expansion of private and self-financed higher education institutions in India has raised important concerns regarding teachers' professional rights, employment conditions, financial security and institutional accountability. Despite possessing the required academic qualifications, professional competencies and teaching experience, many teachers working in private educational institutions experience various forms of workplace exploitation. These include inadequate remuneration, excessive workload, contractual appointments, delayed salary payments, lack of job security, absence of promotional opportunities, denial of statutory benefits and institutional pressure to perform non-academic responsibilities. The present paper critically reviews the phenomenon of teachers' exploitation in private and self-financed higher education institutions in India, with particular reference to the broader challenges faced by faculty members in Punjab. The paper adopts a narrative review approach based on secondary sources, including scholarly research

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articles, government regulations, policy documents and international recommendations concerning the professional status of teachers. The review examines the economic, professional, administrative and psychological dimensions of workplace exploitation. It also highlights the gap between prescribed regulatory standards and institutional employment practices. The paper argues that teachers' professional dignity, financial security and academic freedom are essential conditions for ensuring quality higher education. It recommends transparent recruitment policies, fair remuneration, effective grievance-redressal mechanisms, institutional accountability and regular monitoring of employment practices.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is considered one of the most important instruments of social transformation, national development and human empowerment. Teachers are central to the educational process because they facilitate knowledge acquisition, develop critical thinking and contribute to the intellectual and moral development of learners. The quality of an educational institution is substantially influenced by the professional competence, motivation and working conditions of its teachers. In India, the expansion of private and self-financed educational institutions has significantly contributed to the growth of higher education. These institutions have increased access to professional and higher education opportunities. However, the expansion of private education has also generated concerns regarding employment practices, faculty welfare and the protection of teachers' professional rights. In several private and self-financed institutions, teachers may encounter working conditions characterized by comparatively low salaries, excessive academic and administrative responsibilities, temporary appointments, uncertainty regarding continuation of employment and limited opportunities for professional development. Such conditions raise questions about the extent to which institutional financial interests are balanced with the professional dignity and welfare of teachers. Teacher exploitation should not be understood exclusively in terms of low remuneration. It is a multidimensional phenomenon involving economic injustice, professional discrimination, administrative pressure, psychological insecurity and the denial of legitimate employment-related entitlements. The issue becomes particularly significant in professional institutions, including colleges of education, where teachers are expected to fulfill academic responsibilities, undertake research, organize practical activities, supervise internships, perform examination duties and contribute to

institutional administration. Consequently, there is a need to critically examine the employment conditions of teachers and identify institutional and regulatory measures that can promote fairness, accountability and professional dignity.

2. CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF TEACHER EXPLOITATION

Teacher exploitation refers to the unfair utilisation of teachers' professional knowledge, academic qualifications, labour and institutional commitment without providing appropriate remuneration, employment security, professional recognition or legally applicable benefits. It may occur through formal or informal institutional practices that create an imbalance between the responsibilities assigned to teachers and the rights and benefits provided to them. For the purpose of the present review, teacher exploitation is conceptualised through five major dimensions:

Economic exploitation: Inadequate remuneration, delayed salary payments, arbitrary deductions and non-payment of eligible benefits.

Professional exploitation: Excessive workload, responsibilities beyond contractual obligations, denial of professional autonomy and limited opportunities for career advancement.

Employment-related exploitation: Insecure contractual appointments, arbitrary termination, forced resignations and lack of transparent employment policies.

Administrative exploitation: Unreasonable institutional pressure, unequal treatment, excessive non-academic duties and inadequate grievance-redressal mechanisms.

Psychological exploitation: Workplace intimidation, humiliation, discrimination, uncertainty, occupational stress and fear of losing employment.

These dimensions may overlap and collectively influence teachers' job satisfaction, professional commitment and institutional performance.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present review paper has been developed with the following objectives:

- To examine the concept and different dimensions of teachers' exploitation in private and self-financed higher education institutions.

- To review existing research concerning teachers' working conditions, remuneration, job security and professional rights.
- To analyse the economic, professional, administrative and psychological factors contributing to teachers' exploitation.
- To examine the relationship between institutional employment practices and teachers' professional satisfaction.
- To identify gaps in existing literature concerning teachers' exploitation in private higher education institutions, particularly in Punjab.
- To suggest appropriate measures for protecting teachers' professional dignity, employment rights and overall welfare.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study follows a narrative literature review methodology. It is based exclusively on secondary sources and does not claim to present primary empirical findings.

Relevant literature has been considered from the following sources:

- Research articles published in peer-reviewed academic journals.
- Government notifications and regulatory documents.
- University Grants Commission regulations and policy publications.
- UNESCO recommendations concerning the professional status of teachers.
- Scholarly publications dealing with contractual employment and working conditions.
- Research concerning private and unaided educational institutions.
- The reviewed material has been organised thematically to examine the major dimensions of teachers' exploitation.
- The review is conceptual and interpretative in nature. It does not claim to be a systematic review or a statistically representative investigation of all private institutions in India.

5. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The exploitation of teachers in private and self-financed higher education institutions has increasingly attracted scholarly attention. Recent research has shifted from examining job satisfaction alone towards understanding contractual employment, institutional pressure, workload intensification, psychological well-being, financial insecurity and academic freedom.

5.1 Chandra (2015): The Implications of Contract Teaching in India

Chandra (2015), in the review titled *The Implications of Contract Teaching in India: A Review*, examined the implications of contractual teacher appointments, salary structures and working conditions. The study highlighted concerns regarding the impact of inadequate remuneration, employment conditions and insufficient professional support on teacher motivation, morale and long-term commitment. The discussion provides a useful framework for understanding how insecure employment arrangements can influence the professional identity and commitment of teachers.

5.2 Sarangapani et al. (2023): Public and Private Sector Contract Teachers in India

Sarangapani et al. (2023), in their analytical research paper prepared for the State of Teacher, Teaching and Teacher Education Report 2023, examined the development and persistence of contractual teacher employment in India. The study traced the historical expansion of contract-based teaching arrangements and discussed the rationale behind their continued use. It provides an important understanding of how contractual employment has become embedded in educational systems and raises questions regarding employment security, professional status and equitable working conditions. Although the report primarily addresses school-sector contractual teaching, its discussion provides a useful background for examining the broader phenomenon of precarious academic employment.

5.3 Gharat (2023): Comparative Analysis of Stress Levels and Psychological Well-being among Permanent and Hourly Contract College Faculty

Gharat (2023) conducted a comparative study of stress levels and psychological well-being among permanent and contractual hourly-based college teachers. The study included 80 college faculty members, divided equally between permanent and contractual employment categories. The study examined differences in psychological well-being and stress between the two groups. Its findings highlighted the importance of employment security and stable working conditions in protecting the psychological well-being of college teachers. This research is particularly relevant to the present paper because it establishes a connection between employment arrangements and teachers' psychological experiences.

5.4 Sharma and Sengupta (2025): From Pressure to Progress: Examining Teaching Demands and Resources in Private Higher Education Institutes of India

Sharma and Sengupta (2025) examined the teaching demands experienced by professors working in private higher education institutions in India. The qualitative investigation involved in-depth interviews with 21

professors and employed the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theoretical framework. The study identified three major teaching demands: job-role ambiguity, workload stress and emotional strain. It also highlighted personal resources such as positive outlook, personal mastery and collegial relationships that help faculty members manage institutional demands. The findings are particularly significant because they demonstrate that teachers' professional challenges extend beyond classroom teaching and involve institutional expectations, emotional demands and administrative responsibilities. The study provides direct evidence for examining workplace pressure and professional well-being in private higher education institutions.

5.5 Hendricks and Gupta (2025): Workplace Financial Challenges Faced by Women in Private Higher Educational Institutions in India

Hendricks and Gupta (2025) examined workplace financial challenges experienced by women employed in private higher educational institutions in India through a review of secondary data. The authors discussed gender-based wage inequality, contractual employment, financial insecurity, barriers to promotion and the economic consequences associated with maternity. Their review also highlighted the importance of examining the employment conditions of women faculty members in self-financed and unaided institutions. This research introduces a gender-sensitive perspective to the study of teacher exploitation. It indicates that employment inequality may be influenced by the intersection of gender, institutional policies and financial vulnerability.

5.6 Singh, Bhalla and Divyam (2026): Transforming Work Culture: Flexible Work Arrangements, Wellbeing, and Work-Life Balance Among Academics in Punjab

Singh, Bhalla and Divyam (2026) investigated the relationship between flexible work arrangements, well-being and work-life balance among 210 faculty members in Punjab. The researchers employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to examine the effects of flexible work arrangements on different dimensions of faculty well-being. The study reported positive relationships between flexible work arrangements and subjective, psychological and workplace well-being, as well as work-life balance. However, it also identified increased work intensification and isolation as potential negative outcomes. The study is particularly relevant to the present review because it provides a regional perspective on the working conditions of academics in Punjab. It demonstrates that institutional flexibility must be accompanied by appropriate workload management and gender-responsive employment policies.

5.7 Patgiri (2026): Can Pedagogy of Care be Practiced in Precarity? Lived Experiences of Contractualization of Academic Labor from India

Patgiri (2026) examined contractualisation of academic labour in Indian higher education, with particular attention to the experiences of ad-hoc faculty members at the University of Delhi. Using qualitative approaches, including auto ethnography, lived experiences and in-depth interviews, the study explored the relationship between precarious academic employment and the possibility of practising a pedagogy of care. The research highlighted workplace hierarchy, structural inequality and restrictions on academic freedom as important consequences of contractual academic employment. It questioned whether teachers can be expected to provide an environment of care and academic support when their own employment conditions remain insecure. This contribution is highly significant for the present study because it connects teachers' professional dignity with the broader institutional environment and the quality of the teaching-learning process.

5.8 Singh and Mishra (2026): Faculty Learned Helplessness in Indian Private Higher Education

Singh and Mishra (2026) developed a conceptual framework examining the relationship between institutional pressure, mental health and social inclusion among faculty members in Indian private higher education. The authors discussed how ranking-related pressures, placement expectations, admission targets, administrative workload and reduced professional autonomy may contribute to emotional exhaustion, faculty silence and disengagement. The study proposes that prolonged institutional pressure can create conditions associated with learned helplessness and reduced academic participation. This conceptual contribution broadens the understanding of teacher exploitation by introducing psychological safety, faculty voice and institutional recognition as essential components of professional well-being.

5.9 Gopinathan and Prasobh (2026): The Act and Its Enforcement: Employment Conditions and Regulatory Gaps in Self-Financing Colleges in Keralam

Gopinathan and Prasobh (2026) examined employment conditions and regulatory gaps among teachers working in self-financing colleges in Keralam. The study used a quantitative research design involving 200 teachers and examined salary sufficiency, welfare benefits, financial stress, job security and institutional regulatory practices. The findings highlighted concerns relating to inadequate remuneration, limited welfare benefits, irregular salary increments, excessive workload and employment insecurity. The authors also discussed the importance of effective implementation of legal provisions governing employment conditions in self-financing colleges. Although this study is geographically focused on Keralam, it offers a useful comparative perspective for examining employment practices in self-financed colleges in Punjab and other Indian states.

5.10 Similar Work, Different Pay? Private School Teacher Working Conditions in India (2021)

This study, published in the *International Journal of Educational Development*, examined differences between public and private school teachers in India. Its discussion highlighted comparatively less favourable monetary and non-monetary employment conditions among private-school teachers, including concerns regarding job security and collective bargaining. Although the research focuses on school education rather than higher education, its findings provide relevant contextual insights into employment inequalities within India's private education sector.

5.11 UNESCO (1997): Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel

UNESCO's (1997) Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel emphasises the importance of academic freedom, professional responsibilities, appropriate working conditions and institutional autonomy. The recommendation recognises that higher-education teaching personnel must be provided with an environment that supports teaching, research and professional development. This international framework establishes that teachers' rights are not merely employment-related considerations but essential conditions for maintaining academic standards.

5.12 Critical Synthesis of Recent Literature

The reviewed studies reveal several interconnected dimensions of teachers' exploitation in private and self-financed higher education institutions.

- First, contractual and insecure employment arrangements remain important concerns affecting teachers' professional stability and psychological well-being.
- Second, excessive workload, administrative pressure and unclear job responsibilities contribute to occupational stress and emotional exhaustion.
- Third, financial insecurity and unequal employment opportunities may adversely affect teachers' professional satisfaction and economic independence.
- Fourth, restrictions on academic freedom and inadequate faculty participation may weaken institutional democracy and professional autonomy.

Finally, recent regional research from Punjab highlights the importance of examining work-life balance, flexible employment policies and faculty well-being within the specific institutional context of the state. An important observation emerging from the literature is that teacher exploitation cannot be understood through

salary-related issues alone. It must be examined as a multidimensional phenomenon involving economic, professional, administrative, psychological and institutional factors.

6. MAJOR DIMENSIONS OF TEACHERS' EXPLOITATION

6.1 Financial Exploitation and Inadequate Remuneration

Financial exploitation is one of the most significant concerns associated with employment in private and self-financed educational institutions. Teachers invest considerable time and resources in acquiring higher educational qualifications, professional degrees, eligibility certifications and research experience. Nevertheless, their remuneration may not always correspond to their qualifications, experience and assigned responsibilities. Some employment practices requiring investigation include:

Payment of salaries below applicable prescribed scales.

- Delayed monthly salary payments.
- Unauthorized or unexplained salary deductions.
- Non-payment of eligible allowances and benefits.
- Disparity between similarly qualified employees.
- Unpaid additional academic and administrative responsibilities.
- Such practices can adversely affect teachers' economic independence, professional motivation and family well-being.

6.2 Excessive Workload and Professional Exploitation

Teaching is an intellectually demanding profession that requires continuous preparation, classroom engagement, evaluation, research and professional development. However, teachers in certain institutions may be assigned responsibilities beyond their regular academic duties without appropriate compensation or workload adjustment. These responsibilities may include admission campaigns, student mobilisation, institutional promotion, examination administration, documentation, accreditation activities and miscellaneous administrative assignments. When such duties become excessive and interfere with teaching and research responsibilities, they may contribute to professional exploitation.

6.3 Job Insecurity and Contractual Appointments

Employment insecurity is another important dimension of teachers' exploitation. Temporary, contractual and ad-hoc appointments may create uncertainty regarding employment continuation. Teachers working under

such arrangements may hesitate to express professional disagreements or raise concerns about institutional practices because of the possibility of non-renewal or termination. The absence of transparent appointment conditions and clear service rules may further increase institutional dependence and professional vulnerability.

6.4 Administrative Pressure and Institutional Dominance

The relationship between institutional management and teaching faculty should be based on professional respect, accountability and mutual understanding. However, an excessive concentration of administrative authority may create situations in which teachers experience unreasonable institutional pressure. Examples requiring scholarly investigation include:

- Restrictions on expressing professional opinions.
- Unreasonable demands regarding institutional activities.
- Lack of transparency in administrative decisions.
- Discriminatory allocation of responsibilities.
- Threats relating to employment continuation.
- Inadequate opportunities to represent grievances.
- Such practices may weaken institutional democracy and reduce teachers' participation in academic decision-making.

6.5 Psychological and Emotional Exploitation

Continuous workplace pressure, financial uncertainty and employment insecurity may contribute to occupational stress, emotional exhaustion and reduced job satisfaction. Teachers who experience a lack of recognition or professional respect may gradually lose their sense of belonging to the institution. A supportive working environment is therefore essential for maintaining teachers' psychological well-being and professional effectiveness.

6.6 Gender-Based Inequality

Gender-based differences in employment conditions represent another important area requiring attention. Women teachers may encounter additional challenges relating to maternity, career interruptions, unequal opportunities for promotion and work-life balance. Institutional policies should ensure equal treatment, non-discrimination and access to applicable statutory benefits.

7. REGULATORY AND POLICY PERSPECTIVES

The protection of teachers' professional rights requires an appropriate understanding of national regulations and international standards. **University Grants Commission Regulations, 2018:** These regulations provide an important framework for minimum qualifications, recruitment and service conditions in higher education. Their applicability must be considered alongside the relevant university statutes, affiliation requirements and other regulatory provisions. **UNESCO Recommendation, 1997:** The Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel emphasises academic freedom, institutional responsibilities and appropriate professional conditions.

Employment and labour protections: Applicable central and state labour laws, employment contracts and statutory social-security provisions must also be considered when examining the rights of teachers in private institutions. A significant concern is the gap that may exist between formal regulatory provisions and actual institutional employment practices. This gap requires transparent monitoring, effective complaint mechanisms and accountability.

8. CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The reviewed literature indicates that employment conditions are an important factor influencing teachers' professional motivation, institutional commitment and academic performance. The expansion of private higher education has created employment opportunities, but the availability of employment does not necessarily ensure fair and dignified working conditions. A major concern is the imbalance between institutional expectations and employee entitlements. Teachers may be expected to demonstrate high levels of academic productivity, institutional commitment and administrative efficiency without receiving corresponding professional and financial recognition. Another important concern is the limited availability of institution-specific research examining the actual working conditions of faculty members in private and self-financed colleges in Punjab. The available research provides useful insights into private-sector employment and contractual teaching, but further investigation is required to understand the experiences of college and teacher-education faculty. It is therefore important to distinguish between institutional allegations, documented employment practices and empirically established patterns of exploitation. Future research should examine these issues through reliable evidence rather than generalization.

9. RESEARCH GAP

The review identifies the following important research gaps:

- Limited empirical research specifically examining teachers' exploitation in private and self-financed colleges of Punjab.
- Insufficient comparative studies of salaries and employment conditions among teachers working in government, aided and unaided institutions.
- Inadequate investigation of the relationship between excessive workload and teachers' professional satisfaction.
- Limited research concerning the psychological consequences of employment insecurity and administrative pressure.
- Insufficient attention to the experiences of women faculty members in private higher education institutions.
- Limited examination of grievance-redressal mechanisms and institutional accountability.

A need for more research concerning the implementation of UGC and University service-condition requirements in affiliated private colleges. Insufficient research specifically focusing on teacher educators working in B.Ed. and M.Ed. institutions. These research gaps indicate the need for systematic and institutionally grounded investigation.

10. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the reviewed literature, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Transparent salary structure:** Institutions should maintain clear and documented remuneration policies consistent with applicable regulatory and legal requirements.
- **Written employment agreements:** Every teacher should receive a written appointment letter specifying salary, designation, duties, working hours and service conditions.
- **Reasonable workload:** Academic and administrative responsibilities should be distributed transparently and equitably.
- **Employment security:** Institutions should adopt fair and transparent procedures concerning appointment, contract renewal, disciplinary action and termination.
- **Effective grievance-redressal mechanisms:** Independent and accessible mechanisms should be established for addressing teachers' complaints.
- **Professional autonomy:** Teachers should be encouraged to participate in academic planning, institutional governance and curriculum-related decisions.

- **Equal treatment:** Institutions should ensure non-discrimination and fair professional opportunities for all faculty members.
- **Regulatory monitoring:** Relevant regulatory and affiliating authorities should strengthen monitoring of applicable employment and service-condition requirements.
- **Professional development:** Institutions should provide adequate opportunities for research, conferences, faculty development programmes and career advancement.
- **Institutional accountability:** Management practices should be guided by transparency, fairness, ethical leadership and respect for teachers' professional dignity.

11. IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

The issue of teachers' exploitation has implications beyond individual employment relationships.

- First, unfair working conditions may adversely affect the quality of teaching and learning.
- Second, employment insecurity may discourage academic innovation, research participation and professional independence.
- Third, excessive administrative responsibilities may reduce the time available for classroom teaching and student mentoring.
- Finally, institutional practices that fail to protect teachers' dignity may negatively influence the overall academic environment.
- Therefore, teacher welfare should be recognised as an essential component of institutional quality assurance and sustainable higher education development.

12. CONCLUSION

Teachers constitute the intellectual foundation of educational institutions. Their professional dignity, economic security and academic freedom are essential for maintaining the quality and credibility of higher education. The present review highlights that teachers' exploitation in private and self-financed educational institutions is a multidimensional issue involving financial inequality, excessive workload, insecure employment, administrative pressure and psychological challenges. Although regulatory frameworks and international recommendations provide important principles for protecting teachers' professional rights, the effective implementation of these provisions remains a significant concern requiring further investigation. Particular attention needs to be given to the employment conditions of teachers working in private and self-financed colleges in Punjab. Transparent institutional policies, fair remuneration, reasonable workload distribution, professional autonomy and effective grievance-redressal mechanisms can contribute to a more

equitable academic environment. Ultimately, educational development cannot be sustainable when the professionals responsible for delivering education are deprived of fair and dignified working conditions. Protecting teachers' rights is therefore not simply an employment issue; it is a fundamental requirement for ensuring quality, equity and excellence in higher education.

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