A STUDY ON SELF-UNDERSTANDING OF EARLY CAREER TEACHERS OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS OF ODISHA

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ABSTRACT: The Indian education system has notably improved in various aspects in the previous two decades. With the fast growth of educational facilities and increasing enrolment of children in schools, the problem of access and participation has been addressed to a considerable degree. The issue of quality, however, still continues. Even after spending many years in school, many youngsters are not gaining fundamental reading and numeracy. Reports reveal that children of the poor learn the least, and unexpectedly, most of them study in government-run institutions. While there are various elements of learning crises, teachers are generally held accountable for the worsening quality of government schools. A discourse of teacher criticism has arisen which characterises teachers as poorly trained, usually absent, work-shy, hard-to-please, inefficient, ineffectual, and sometimes corrupt. How does this discourse affect teachers' self-understanding? This research studies narrative material obtained from seventeen early career teachers to determine their professional self-understanding. With the use of in-depth interviews, the research reveals that the general stereotypes of being work-shy, unskilled, and incompetent are opposed by the teachers. On the contrary, there is some evidence to indicate that negotiating a positive professional identity has become a fight for the participating teachers in the search for becoming better teachers. While they tend to demonstrate their efficacy and devotion, they also suffer powerlessness, vulnerability, and shame. This study is likely to build paths for additional analysis of whether the language of teacher criticism adversely effects experienced teachers as well and how teachers' fight for positive professional identity influences children's learning results.

KEYWORDS: culture, theory, identity, education, immigration, diversity.

INTRODUCTION:
The effectiveness of a school's instructional staff has repeatedly been shown to have the most significant influence on students' ability to learn [1, 2]. Being a good teacher is more than simply learning about the subject matter and developing teaching abilities; it also involves "incorporating the identity 'teacher' into oneself" [3]. [4] "We teach who we are" sums up the necessity of self-knowledge clearly by Palmer [4]. "Teacher identity offers a framework for teachers to build their own concepts of "how to be," "how to behave," and "how to interpret"

their profession and their role in society," as stated by Sachs [5]:The initial few years of a teacher's employment are critical for socialising them into the profession and helping them form their professional identity [6, 7]. There is a substantial corpus of study devoted just to the experiences of new teachers [8–17] because of the significance of this time in their professional development. There are fewer studies on early-career teachers in India, maybe due to a lack of academic interest in research that focuses only on teachers' viewpoints and perceptions. With the exception of a few studies that give special consideration to teachers' perspectives, as well as ethnographies of educational institutions,teachers in academic literature are seldom mentioned except in passing or as objects of scorn. This research aims to contribute to the small but important body of work that has been done to far to highlight the perspectives of educators.The basic hypothesis of this study is that teachers' identities and their job are inextricably linked. Teaching strategies are influenced by a variety of factors, such as the teacher's background and experience, as well as factors like school culture, available materials and regulations. Self-awareness, goals, and disappointments all have an impact on how they approach their job. As crucial as it is to facilitate improved programmes for teacher development, to improve school infrastructure, and to include accountability mechanisms. It is also crucial to aid educators in developing and maintaining strong senses of self-identity. Teachers' identity development is even more critical in the Indian setting because of the widespread learning crises and the fact that teachers are often on the receiving end of this problem [19].

Every year, the Annual Status of Education Reports (ASER) report on how many pupils in public schools lack grade-specific learning. State governments have boosted the distribution of funding for the construction of school facilities and hired instructors in order to enhance the quality of government schools. Despite this, the public still views government schools as ineffectual, and teachers at these institutions are often chastised for the poor conditions in which their students are taught. A lot of this view is mirrored in the way universities like to admit students as well as the media's portrayal of the subject matter, as well as academic research and policy.

This research examines the influence of the language of teacher criticism on the self-perception of early career teachers. Is it possible for early career teachers to construct and deliver a persuasive counter narrative? It was with this paradigm in mind that we examined the narrative data gathered from seventeen early-career government primary school teachers in Odisha. Analysis reveals that teachers' identity development is hindered by the language of teacher criticism. Teachers often claim to be successful and committed, but they often express a sense of being unable to prove themselves in substandard institutions.

Recruiting teachers isn't enough to alleviate the teacher shortage, according to this study's policy implications. Equally vital is helping instructors develop a strong and positive professional identity. This notion of government schools as "low-cost and inefficient for the poor" has to be addressed. This will attract students from various socioeconomic levels and improve the morale of teachers working at these institutions.

As you can see, the study's framework is as follows. We'll look at some of the repercussions of teacher criticism in more detail in the next section. The purpose of this part is to set the stage for the investigation of teachers' perceptions of their own identities. The theoretical

foundation for data analysis is the next step. Objectives, technique, and results are all presented in the third section. The participants' replies are interpreted in light of the language of teacher criticism and prior research on teacher identity in the discussion section. In the final part, we discuss the implications of our results for policy and future study.

THE DISCOURSE OF TEACHER CRITICISM:

In ancient and mediaeval India, the teacher was a figure of authority, position, and honour. Scholars and counsellors who were well-known professors were a common sight at royal courts. Teachers in the area relied on contributions from parents. Teaching, on the other hand, was not an option for everyone. He thinks that colonial rule shaped teachers into "meek dictators" as Kumar puts it. The employment attracted "only the neediest, and among them the most defenceless" by keeping the wage and status of instructors as low as possible. Teachers' working conditions in government-run schools haven't changed significantly despite a number of critical revisions in recruiting and management procedures. As a result, teachers are now the subject of greater scrutiny than they were in the past. According to a news report.There has long been a perceived issue about the quality of education provided by government schools in India, which has resulted in poor learning results, a lack of physical facilities that prevents them from focusing beyond textbooks, and a shortage of well-trained instructors.

The unfavourable perception of government schools and teachers working in these schools may be attributed to a general distrust of most governmental institutions. It's possible, but it's also a "perception issue." Several studies on teachers in India have shown evidence for blaming teachers in part for the present educational problem. As a result, the idea that teachers are absent, under-trained, unaccountable, involved in local politics, and engaged in small corruptions such selling private tuition courses, is prevalent. "Substandard teaching" is the leading cause of poor-quality education in developing nations, according to the World Bank study "Student Learning in South Asia." There is evidence that instructors lack expertise, as well as high rates of teacher absenteeism, poor teacher effort and a general lack of responsibility, in the study. Although there is anecdotal evidence to support this claim, statistics have just recently been developed to quantify the prevalence of the issue [18].

India has evolved a new discursive regime of educational ideas, according to Mukhopadhyay and Sarangpani. There is now a specific set of policy solutions that are supported by the use of terms such as quality, efficiency, and accountability. Students' learning outcomes are used as a metric of quality, for example. efficiency indicates value for money, and accountability involves "control" and "management" over the job done by teachers in schools. "Unjustifiably advantage middle-class professionals," "a readily accessible human resource, a replaceable cog," and the spread of low-cost education with low teacher wages are just a few examples of neoliberal thinking's depiction of teachers.

According to the local media, teachers are often accused in local newspapers and media outlets of misbehaviour and abuse of kids, misappropriation of money, non-attendance at school and other infractions. Recent headlines include: It was announced on March 7th, 2022 that a fake school teacher had been fired after 16 years of employment (Tamil Nadu, India). After EOW searches, MP police discover a government school teacher who now controls 20 colleges and assets worth a thousand times his annual salary. There have also been instances when journalists have shown classroom situations while the teacher was either intoxicated or instructing incorrectly. Teaching seems to be the profession that has gotten the most unfavourable press. There are, on rare occasions, views and anecdotes that are friendly to teachers. 'Teachers must not be blamed for India's low learning results,' reads one recent piece.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

Many theories of identity exist, and the significance of each relies on how it is seen. However, there are major distinctions between the many ways I see myself and the ways others perceive me and how I respond to others' views of me, and these discrepancies may be summarised by the term "identity". Any time we talk about who we are, we're dealing with several people — or at least multiple perspectives on who we are.

"How teachers describe themselves to themselves and others" is a good definition of "teacher identity." Their views, experiences, emotional situations, and the larger societal conditions in which they live and work all shape teachers' identities, and the conflicts between these are significant. Teacher identity changes during the course of a teacher's career, and it may be a source of conflict at times of significant change.

Studies have found a variety of characteristics that might impact the development of a teacher's identity. Beginning teachers negotiate at least three conceptions of self-identity: the "pre-teaching" image 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. [3] Sumara and Luce-Kapler Teachers' early experiences in the profession may either affirm or undermine their feeling of fit and aptitude and therefore put them on various paths of teacher identity, according to Morrison Teacher identity construction, according to Zembylas and Chubbuck, may be seen as a political process. Studies have revealed that the subtle exercise of power via techniques such as consistently labelling early career instructors as distinct from veterans might possibly hinder the development of their identity. According to Ramachandran et al., teachers at government schools in India are required to fulfil a range of tasks, which might lead to poor teacher identities. The history, politics, power, rhetoric, and culture of education must all be considered in order to fully comprehend why teachers must also be clerks, gardeners, surveyors, and chefs. In the present day and age, one of the most influential debates about teachers in India is that of teacher criticism. There are several theories on how this discourse could affect instructors' self-identity.

The framework provided by Kelchtermans was employed as a lens for this research to operationalize the concept of teacher identity. Teachers' self-understanding, rather than "teachers' identity," is preferred by him because of the theoretical misunderstanding that surrounds the word. Teacher self-image, self-esteem, work motivation and task perception are all factors in teachers' assessment of their own self-worth. It's important to know how the instructor sees themselves as a teacher. When a teacher's self-perception and the perceptions of others are taken into consideration, the teacher's self-image is formed. A teacher's self-worth is a measure of how well they are performing in their position. Teacher self-evaluation takes into account the opinions of others, especially those who have a substantial impact on the teacher, such as pupils. Perception of one's role as a teacher: What does one do? As part of "his/her work," what refuses to be accepted by the instructor The variables that influence a person's decision to enter the field of education, to remain in it, or to quit it. Teachers' expectations and feelings regarding the future of their professional condition.

Teachers' professional practise results in a constantly evolving self-awareness for themselves and their students. It's a reflection of who you are as a person in the context of your work. Consequently, self-awareness may be individualised. As a teacher in a given place, time, and context is confronted with comparable discourses about their profession: what it means to be a teacher, how a teacher acts, who is a good educator, and so on.

Kelchtermans' idea of teacher identity is a confluence of teachers' self-image, self-esteem, task perceptions, employment motivations and future outlook. In this context, the study aims may be summarised as follows: To explain the participants' self-understanding in terms of their self-image, self-esteem, task perception, work motivation, and future viewpoint of instructors. To see whether teachers' self-perceptions are affected by the language of teacher criticism.

METHODOLOGY:
As part of their research project, the researchers travelled to Cuttack district in Odisha, an Indian state. Purposive sampling was used to identify seventeen individuals. The purpose of this sample approach was to see how the data differed from one another. All of the participants in this study were new elementary school teachers. The instructors came from a variety of schools strewn over four different blocks in the neighbourhood. Between December 2018 and October 2019, semi-structured interviews were performed in three stages. Questions were rephrased and rearranged to better suit the interview's flow. In the vast majority of cases, the interviews turned out to be enjoyable exchanges that yielded a wealth of narrative data. During the interviews, participants were asked about the discourse around teacher criticism. They responded to the general public's perception of instructors and related their own personal stories. Recorded interviews were transcribed and used for a theme analysis. Descriptive coding was used in the first phase of the study to identify the numerous themes that emerged from the information.

Table 1 shows the demographics of the instructors who participated in the study. Participant-A, Participant-B, and so forth have been renamed to protect data anonymity.

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.

Table 1: Demographic profile of participants.

RESULTS:

The self-understanding of each participating teacher was intended to be based on their own personal experiences. Self-perception is shaped by factors such as gender, age, marital status, school size, and more. There are, however, a few recurring themes—common motivations and frustrations—that tie these teachers together as individuals. An overview of findings is shown in Figure 1.
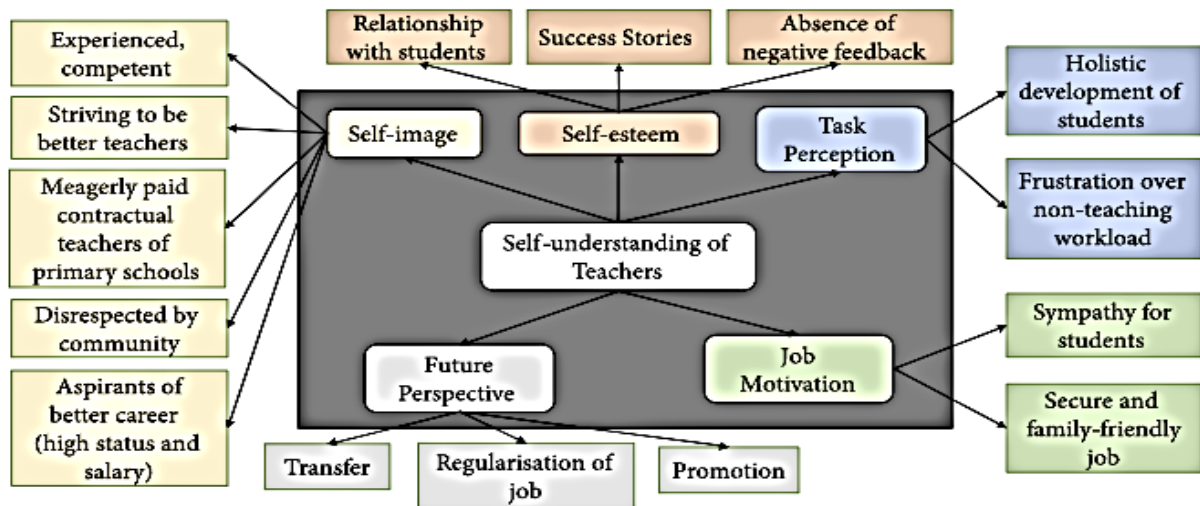
Figure 1: Self-understanding of early career primary school teachers in Odisha.

- **SELF-IMAGE**

In the way teachers characterised themselves, their priorities and knowledge of what it meant to be a teacher were clearly visible in their descriptions of themselves. Teacher participants like Participant-I and Participant-K didn't consider themselves as "novices" in need of guidance or supervision since they had worked in the public sector for over a decade.

All of the participants thought they were qualified to be teachers. Education, training, and passing the Teacher Eligibility Test were the most often cited sources of their self-confidence. In addition, many of them felt embarrassed as underpaid contract teachers in elementary schools. Participant-C was a case study of the extreme. As a result of the extensive criticism of teachers, he said that he was considering a career change. Because he was unable to pursue his other professional goals, he unwillingly accepted a teaching position. This may be considered a "limited entrance" into the field. He saw his current position as a stepping stone to a more lucrative and prestigious position in the future.

- **SELF-ESTEEM**

According to the teachers who took part in the study, the most prevalent source of their teachers' self-esteem was their relationship with the students. In their minds, they saw themselves as experts who knew all there was to know about the students they taught. When it comes to explaining why Johnny can't read or write, everyone in the school system has an opinion. However only Johnny's teacher can legitimately claim to have the most in-depth understanding of Jonny's educational issues. As a result, all participants believed that they were at least somewhat effective in their roles as teachers. Participant D and Participant H felt that this type of knowledge of children distinguished the instructors from the rest of us.

It is possible for anybody to follow the teaching manual's guidelines and teach, but we know our students better than anyone else. We are aware of their academic abilities. We have a good idea of their learning style and rate. In my classroom, there are 29 students with varying

degrees of learning ability. There is no way to assume that a youngster who is capable of grasping the principles of civics would be equally adept at solving arithmetic problems. (Participant-D). Participants also described their successes with pupils, and how they had tailored their teachingmethods to meet the needs of certain students. In eighth grade, Participant-A was the only teacher in her school with a doctoral degree in science. Everybody believed she was crazy when she said she had a pupil who "hated" school. This boy's behaviour in the first few days of class was fresh in her mind.

- **TASK PERCEPTION**

Teachers who participated in the study disagreed with the new discursive regime's view that their primary responsibility was to apply the curriculum and deliver good learning results. It was clear that Participant-I was concerned about the overall development of the children and opposed the generally held belief that holistic development of children was only feasible in private schools. Before taking her present position, she spent several years as a private school teacher. She didn't see her kids or co-workers as any less deserving of respect than those at elite schools. She believed that instructors may achieve desired results by using specialised teaching strategies.

Primary school teachers have a more challenging job than high school teachers. Students in high school build on what they've already learned. When the instructor speaks, they can easily follow along. Children study the fundamentals of education at a primary school. They've never seen anything before. You have to start from the beginning, which might take a long time. It might be tough to tell whether a youngster is genuinely gaining knowledge. Despite this, elementary school teachers get less money and are expected to do more activities outside of the classroom. (Participant-J).

More than only academics, the participants have to participate in a variety of non-teaching activities. For example, we had to keep a lot of records and make sure midday meals were properly prepared and distributed. We also had to make sure uniforms were given out and deworming medicines were given out. They all wondered why instructors had to do so many chores that had nothing to do with their primary role of teaching. Snarkily, Participant-O referred to teachers as gardeners, housekeepers, nurses, managers, cooks, and clerks, all at the same time. Who would be responsible for cleaning the restrooms? owing to the fact that no one at her school had such a position.

- **JOB MOTIVATION**

The majority of participants who answered the question "Why did you decide to become a teacher?" said that they were motivated by external factors such as job stability and compatibility with family life (inability to pursue higher education because of financial problems, lack of opportunity to pursue own interests, pressure to earn as soon as possible, etc.). It was a childhood desire of participant-J's to become a teacher like her father, who also spoke about her early aspirations. This participant's instructor admired her abilities to assist

students with their homework and encouraged her to consider becoming a teacher in the future.

In general, however, it was noted that those who went into teaching because of their love of children and a government career that promised financial stability and progress also remained dedicated to the profession. All of the attendees were energised by tales of students' accomplishment. Teachers who participated in the study found delight in interacting with children, seeing them develop, and sharing their experiences with colleagues. There were just a few other people in their workplace who could give them favourable comments besides children. Teachers seldom received recognition for their efforts, and even fewer students' parents showed their gratitude. It was their participation in the children's activities and events that kept them going. Teaching was seen as a moral obligation by many instructors. Students' plight touched teachers' hearts since many of them came from hardscrabble backgrounds.

DISCUSSION:

Teachers' self-perception seems to be impacted in two ways, at least on the surface, by the discourse around teacher criticism. First, teachers' lives are filled with stress as a result of the negative rhetoric around teacher criticism and the humiliating management techniques that go along with it. There is a sense of helplessness and vulnerability amongst educators. Second, teachers' statements that they are competent might be seen as a counternarrative to the prevailing narrative. They believe that they have a good grasp of their pupils and that this understanding aids them in developing techniques that are specifically tailored to each one. Teachers who participated in the study shared accounts of how they were able to achieve desired results. Personality attributes and the effect of "ideal" instructors were frequently cited as evidence that they were really sincere.

The participants were all certified teachers, and several of them even had bachelor's degrees, but they made no claims to pedagogical ability or enthusiasm for the academic issues they were discussing. This might be due to a variety of factors, including both historical and cultural ones. During colonial authority, elementary teachers, according to Kumar, were "meek subordinates of administrative authorities." Non-teaching and administrative duties made the instructor a "jack of all crafts, but master of none," according to the students. The position of elementary school teachers is a matter of concern, despite the fact that they are often seen as a non-specialized employment.

A Teacher Eligibility Test has been passed by the new hires, however. Two of the participants in this research are qualified to teach at the college level. Even yet, they don't see themselves as educational specialists who can help students learn in difficult situations. To be sure, the existing rhetoric of teacher criticism supports teachers' inadequate educational efforts by emphasising the failure of government schools.

Likewise, no one mentioned receiving any favourable comments. For example, officials visiting schools would "inspect" schools' operations, which mainly involves checking records and checking for signs of cleanliness in the school. Teachers who aren't given the kind of

constructive criticism they need to improve their performance are more likely to do the bare minimum.

None of the participants cited students' learning outcomes when they reflected on their own performance as educators. Teacher criticism cites low student results as proof that instructors are incompetent. Teachers in the study presented two counterarguments to the idea of separating competence evaluations from student learning outcomes. Firstly, students' test results are neither the only or the most essential factor for evaluating a teacher's effectiveness. Students' learning results are also affected by elements that are not directly related to the teacher's actions. It turns out, according to Downey, that instructors may use the label of "problem" to describe their kids when the wider societal narrative holds that teachers are to blame for educational failure. The students in this survey appeared to agree with this strategy, citing a variety of reasons for their schools' low academic performance. These issues, such as a lack of qualified educators, a scarcity of basic resources, difficulties in the home lives of many of the children, and a history of abrupt changes to the curriculum, are often overlooked in the debate over teacher evaluations. To prove oneself in a demanding environment, one must have the necessary support and encouragement. Consequently, labelling teachers as incapable simply serves to reinforce their sense of helplessness and powerlessness.

Formation of the teacher identity is inherently political, since it requires interaction with systems of truth and systems of power. It is possible to empower teachers by deconstructing the discourses and power relations that generate, regulate, and normalise teachers' identities. In the field of education, "no discourse is intrinsically freeing or repressive" since there are various discourses. There is always room and leeway for instructors' own choices, intentions, and preferences when their perception of themselves is impacted, informed, and to some extent decided by the setting, in the words of Kelchtermans [1]. (p. 233). As a result, educational policy should not limit teacher agency and autonomy by turning teachers into simple curriculum implementers.

CONCLUSION:

Despite its limited scope, this research shows that teacher criticism has a considerable impact on public school teachers' professional self-understanding. In the eyes of the public, public school instructors are lazy, unskilled, and incompetent. The study's participants, however, mainly refuted this common misconception. They try to be better instructors despite obstacles including non-teaching workload and a lack of community support. In the rhetoric of teacher criticism, low student results are blamed on teachers and the teaching workforce is criticised. This discourse aims to make teachers more responsible and controlled in order to make them more effective. These stories show that teachers are demotivated and their professional identities are harmed by this discourse, according to this research.

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