

Role of Institutional Factors in Enhancing Teacher Competency at the Tertiary Level in West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

Teacher competency in higher education is increasingly recognized as a critical determinant of academic quality and institutional effectiveness, particularly in developing contexts such as India. This qualitative study investigates the role of institutional factors in enhancing teacher competency at the tertiary level in West Bengal. Grounded in a phenomenological research design, the study explores teachers' lived experiences and perceptions regarding how institutional environments shape their professional development. Purposive sampling was used to select experienced faculty members from diverse disciplines across higher education institutions. Data were collected through institutional document analysis, and observational notes, and were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. The findings reveal that teacher competency development is deeply embedded within institutional ecosystems rather than being solely an individual attribute. Key institutional factors identified include leadership practices, continuous and need-based professional development, organizational culture and collegiality, feedback and appraisal systems, and availability of physical and technological infrastructure. Supportive and transformational leadership practices were perceived as central to fostering motivation,

innovation, and professional growth. Continuous and coherent faculty development initiatives aligned with institutional goals were found to significantly enhance pedagogical and research competencies. The findings offer important implications for institutional policy reform, leadership training, and quality enhancement initiatives in higher education.

Keywords: *Teacher Competency, Institutional Factors, Higher Education, Professional Development*

INTRODUCTION

Teacher competency in higher education has become a major focus of educational reforms globally, particularly within developing regions where quality improvement is a central policy goal (Darling-Hammond, 2017). In tertiary institutions, teachers are expected not only to possess subject knowledge but also to exhibit pedagogical dexterity, research aptitude, and an ability to integrate technology in teaching. Competency thus transcends basic qualifications and encompasses a spectrum of skills and behaviors that facilitate effective learning and academic growth (Shulman, 1987).

In India, the expansion of higher education has been remarkable over the last three decades, especially in states like West Bengal, fostering increased access and diversity (Tilak, 2003). However, the quality

of education remains inconsistent, with substantial variances in teacher effectiveness across institutions. Research suggests that while teacher competencies are influenced by individual attributes like qualification and experience, institutional factors including leadership support, professional development opportunities, institutional policies, infrastructure, and organizational culture significantly shape and sustain teacher performance (Fullan, 2007; Hoy & Miskel, 2013).

Institutional factors are defined here as systemic organizational elements that influence the work environment and professional growth of teachers. They include administrative leadership, institutional policies on faculty development, supportive academic culture, feedback mechanisms, physical and technological infrastructure, and opportunities for continuous professional learning. These institutional dynamics may either facilitate or inhibit teachers' ability to optimize their competencies for instructional effectiveness and research productivity.

The state of West Bengal, with its rich intellectual legacy and extensive network of universities and colleges, presents a unique context to explore how institutional ecosystems influence teacher competency. Despite its cultural emphasis on education, challenges such as inadequate institutional support, insufficient professional development programs, and limited resources have been reported as constraints on faculty effectiveness (Chaudhuri & Roy, 2018). Yet, few empirical studies have systematically investigated the role of institutional factors in enhancing teacher competency in this regional context.

Review of Related Literature

Teacher competency is widely conceptualized as a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and professional behaviours that enable effective instruction and learning facilitation (OECD, 2005). In the tertiary context, competency spans subject mastery, instructional design,

assessment literacy, research skills, and the adept use of digital tools (Kumar & Ahuja, 2020).

Institutional factors significantly influence teacher competency. Fullan (2007) emphasizes that change initiatives are effective when teachers feel supported by structural conditions like leadership, culture, and professional development. Similarly, Hoy and Miskel (2013) argue that organizational climate encompassing trust, support, and innovation is critical for faculty performance. Professional learning communities and leadership support have been associated with enhanced teacher motivation and reflective practice (Vangrieken, Dochy & Raes, 2015).

Institutional leadership, particularly transformational leadership, is identified as a key driver of teacher development, promoting a shared vision and supportive environment (Leithwood et al., 2004). Professional development, when aligned with institutional goals and teacher needs, reinforces competency and instructional excellence (Desimone, 2009). Conversely, rigid institutional policies, inadequate infrastructure, and limited autonomy can undermine teacher performance (Day et al., 2007).

Despite extensive research globally, regional studies in India and West Bengal specifically are limited. Existing literature highlights gaps in institutional support, particularly in continuous professional development and feedback systems (Chaudhuri & Roy, 2018). This underscores the need to investigate how institutional environments shape teacher competency within this specific social and educational context.

The review of related literature clearly establishes that teacher competency at the tertiary level is not an isolated individual attribute but a product of strong institutional support systems. Scholars consistently emphasize that institutional factors such as leadership practices, professional development opportunities, organizational climate, collaborative culture, and

availability of resources play a decisive role in enhancing teacher effectiveness.

Darling-Hammond (2017) highlights that institutions fostering continuous professional learning, mentoring, and reflective practices enable teachers to sustain and improve their competencies. Similarly, Fullan (2007) asserts that meaningful educational change and teacher development occur when institutional structures support innovation and shared vision rather than fragmented training efforts. These perspectives underscore the systemic nature of teacher competency development.

Shulman's (1987) concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge demonstrates that teacher competency evolves through interaction between individual expertise and institutional context. Institutional flexibility, academic dialogue, and supportive policies are crucial for nurturing this integration. Leadership also emerges as a critical factor, with Leithwood et al. (2004) showing that transformational leadership enhances teacher motivation and professional growth by creating conducive academic environments. The role of professional development is further clarified by Desimone (2009), who emphasizes that faculty development programs must be continuous, relevant, and institutionally aligned to impact teacher competency effectively. Hoy and Miskel (2013) add that a positive organizational climate promotes collaboration, innovation, and job satisfaction, all of which strengthen teacher performance. Finally, Vangrieken et al. (2015) reveal that teacher collaboration significantly enhances professional learning when supported by institutional structures.

As the literature indicates that institutional factors function as foundational enablers of teacher competency. In the context of tertiary education in West Bengal, the reviewed studies highlight the urgent need for supportive leadership, coherent professional development policies, collaborative culture, and adequate infrastructure to enhance teacher effectiveness and ensure quality higher education.

Objectives of the study

1. To explore teachers' perceptions of institutional support in enhancing their professional competencies at the tertiary level in West Bengal.
2. To find out the institutional factors that influence teacher competency in higher education institutions.
3. To examine the role of professional development programs and feedback mechanisms in fostering teacher competencies.
4. To provide recommendations for institutional policies that can enhance teacher effectiveness and academic quality.

Research Questions of the study

1. How do teachers in tertiary institutions of West Bengal perceive the role of institutional factors in their professional competency development?
2. What institutional elements are perceived as most influential in enhancing teacher competencies?
3. In what ways do leadership practices within institutions affect teacher development and effectiveness?
4. What institutional policies and strategies can be adopted to strengthen teacher competencies in higher education?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: This study employs a qualitative research design based on phenomenological inquiry, enabling an in-depth understanding of teachers' lived experiences regarding institutional influences on their professional competency. Qualitative methodology is suitable for exploring complex social phenomena and uncovering nuanced insights that cannot be captured through quantitative measures alone (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposive sampling was used to select experienced teachers who have spent at least five years in their institutions, enabling informed perspectives on institutional dynamics. Participants represented diverse academic

disciplines, including humanities, sciences, and commerce.

Data Collection Methods: Data were collected through Institutional policy documents, faculty development program records, performance appraisal templates, and related artifacts were examined to triangulate data. Researchers documented observations during visits to participating institutions to capture environmental and organizational characteristics.

Data Analysis: Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. Transcripts were coded, and themes were identified inductively. The process involved familiarization, initial coding, theme formulation, review, definition, and reporting. Triangulation of interviews, documents, and observations enhanced credibility and validity.

Analysis and Interpretation

Analysis and Interpretation of Research Question 1: How do teachers in tertiary institutions of West Bengal perceive the role of institutional factors in their professional competency development?

This research question seeks to understand teachers' subjective perceptions regarding how institutional environments influence their professional competency development. The emphasis on perception aligns with a qualitative interpretive paradigm, recognizing that teachers' experiences and meanings are shaped by their interaction with institutional structures, policies, and cultures (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather than measuring competency quantitatively, the question explores how teachers interpret institutional support, leadership, professional development, and organizational climate in shaping their professional growth. Supportive leadership that encourages participation in workshops, research activities, and innovation is perceived as fostering confidence, pedagogical improvement, and academic engagement.

This finding resonates with Fullan's (2007) assertion that institutional change and teacher development are sustainable only when educators feel supported by organizational structures. Institutions that promote collaboration and reflective dialogue are perceived as enhancing teaching competencies and research orientation, consistent with Hoy and Miskel's (2013) concept of a positive organizational climate. Conversely, rigid administrative control, excessive workload, and limited autonomy are perceived as barriers to professional growth. This aligns with Desimone's (2009) framework, which emphasizes coherence and relevance of professional development for competency enhancement. Teachers in institutions where faculty development is sporadic or compliance-driven report limited impact on their professional growth.

All the findings imply that improving teacher competency at the tertiary level in West Bengal requires a shift from isolated, individual-focused interventions to institution-wide strategies that foster supportive leadership, collaborative culture, meaningful professional development, and adequate infrastructure.

Analysis and Interpretation of Research

Question 2: What institutional elements are perceived as most influential in enhancing teacher competencies?

One of the most frequently cited institutional elements is institutional leadership. Teachers perceive leadership practices particularly those that are supportive, participatory, and vision-driven as central to competency enhancement. Administrators who encourage innovation, facilitate access to professional development, and recognize academic efforts create environments conducive to teacher growth. This perception aligns with Leithwood et al. (2004), who argue that leadership indirectly influences teaching quality by shaping working conditions and professional motivation. However, teachers also report that when professional development is infrequent or compliance-oriented, its impact on competency remains

minimal. This observation supports Desimone's (2009) assertion that professional development must be coherent, sustained, and relevant to be effective.

Organizational culture and climate also emerge as influential elements. Teachers highlight the importance of collegiality, trust, academic freedom, and collaborative practices in fostering professional learning. Institutions that promote peer interaction, interdisciplinary dialogue, and shared decision-making are perceived as enhancing reflective practice and instructional innovation. Hoy and Miskel (2013) describe such climates as "open" and conducive to teacher effectiveness. Teachers further identify availability of physical and technological resources as a foundational institutional element. Access to smart classrooms, laboratories, digital libraries, and ICT tools is perceived as essential for implementing innovative pedagogical approaches. Inadequate infrastructure, on the other hand, is seen as a significant barrier to competency enhancement, particularly in technology-integrated teaching (Fullan, 2007).

From a theoretical standpoint, these perceptions support a systems approach to teacher development, where institutional elements interact dynamically to influence professional growth (Fullan, 2007). Teachers' emphasis on leadership and culture indicates that competency development is as much a social and organizational process as it is a technical or pedagogical one. All the findings imply that enhancing teacher competency requires integrated institutional strategies that prioritize supportive leadership, sustained professional development, collaborative culture, robust infrastructure, and meaningful feedback systems. Addressing these elements holistically can significantly strengthen teaching quality and academic excellence in tertiary education.

Analysis and Interpretation of Research Question 3: In what ways do leadership

practices within institutions affect teacher development and effectiveness?

This research question explores how institutional leadership practices shape teacher development and teaching effectiveness at the tertiary level. Qualitative analysis of teachers' narratives reveals that leadership influences teacher competency both directly, through professional development opportunities and performance support, and indirectly, by shaping institutional culture, motivation, and professional identity. Another significant leadership practice is vision-building and goal alignment. Such leadership practices foster a shared sense of purpose and commitment to quality teaching. Fullan (2007) emphasizes that leadership-driven shared vision is critical for sustainable professional learning and institutional improvement. In contrast, authoritarian or bureaucratic leadership styles are perceived as inhibiting collaboration and professional experimentation. Hoy and Miskel (2013) describe such restrictive leadership as detrimental to teacher morale and effectiveness.

The interpretation of this research question suggests that leadership practices function as a central mediating force between institutional structures and teacher effectiveness. Teachers perceive leadership not merely as administrative authority but as a professional influence that shapes opportunities, motivation, and the overall learning environment. From a theoretical perspective, these findings support the transformational leadership model, which emphasizes inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized support as key drivers of teacher development (Leithwood et al., 2004). Leadership practices that are participatory, transparent, and academically oriented foster teacher confidence, professional engagement, and instructional effectiveness. All the findings imply that enhancing teacher development and effectiveness requires leadership practices that prioritize academic support, collaboration, reflective feedback, and

shared vision. Institutional leaders play a pivotal role in transforming organizational conditions into environments that sustain teacher competency and educational quality.

Analysis and Interpretation of Research

Question 4: What institutional policies and strategies can be adopted to strengthen teacher competencies in higher education?

This research question focuses on identifying institutional policies and strategic interventions that teachers perceive as effective in strengthening professional competencies in higher education. Analysis of qualitative data indicates that faculty members view competency enhancement as a result of deliberate, structured, and sustained institutional policies rather than ad hoc initiatives.

Another significant policy recommendation emerging from the analysis is the adoption of mentoring and peer-learning systems. Teachers perceive structured mentoring especially for early-career faculty as an effective strategy for developing instructional competence and professional confidence. Institutional policies that promote peer observation, team teaching, and interdisciplinary collaboration are seen as fostering reflective practice and shared professional learning. Vangrieken et al. (2015) emphasize that such collaborative structures require formal institutional support to be sustainable.

The interpretation of this research question suggests that strengthening teacher competencies in higher education requires a policy-driven and system-oriented institutional approach. Teachers perceive that effective policies must integrate professional development, mentoring, appraisal, leadership training, and resource allocation into a coherent institutional framework.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings reinforce the institutional capacity-building model, which views teacher competency as an outcome of supportive organizational structures and strategic leadership (Fullan, 2007). Policies that promote collaboration, reflection, and continuous learning

contribute to sustainable professional growth and instructional excellence.

All the findings imply that institutional policies should move beyond compliance-based approaches and focus on development-oriented strategies that empower teachers, enhance professional autonomy, and create supportive academic environments. Such policies are essential for improving teacher effectiveness and ensuring quality higher education.

Findings of the study

The qualitative analysis of teachers' perceptions regarding the role of institutional factors in enhancing teacher competency at the tertiary level in West Bengal reveals several interrelated findings. These findings demonstrate that teacher competency development is largely shaped by the institutional ecosystem within which teachers operate rather than by individual effort alone.

1. Institutional Support as a Foundational Determinant of Teacher Competency: A major finding of the study is that teachers perceive institutional support as central to their professional competency development. Faculty members consistently report that supportive institutional environments enable them to refine pedagogical skills, update subject knowledge, and engage in reflective teaching practices.

This finding aligns with the work of Linda Darling-Hammond (2017), who emphasizes that teacher effectiveness is strongly influenced by institutional conditions, including access to professional learning opportunities and supportive policies. Similarly, Lee Shulman (1987) highlights that pedagogical content knowledge develops through structured institutional contexts that encourage continuous learning. The present study corroborates these perspectives, indicating that institutional ecosystems significantly shape teacher competency beyond individual initiative.

2. Influence of Leadership Practices on Teacher Development and Effectiveness: The findings reveal that leadership practices

play a pivotal role in shaping teacher development. Teachers identify supportive, participatory, and academically oriented leadership as crucial for fostering professional motivation and instructional improvement.

This observation is consistent with the transformational leadership framework proposed by Bernard M. Bass (1985), which posits that visionary and supportive leaders enhance organizational commitment and professional growth. In higher education contexts, Kenneth Leithwood and colleagues argue that instructional leadership significantly influences teacher performance and student outcomes. The present study reinforces the view that leadership is a catalytic factor in competency enhancement at the tertiary level.

3. Continuous and Relevant Professional Development Enhances Competency:

Another significant finding is that continuous, need-based professional development programs are perceived as essential for enhancing teacher competencies. Teachers emphasize that faculty development initiatives are most effective when aligned with institutional goals and responsive to instructional and research needs.

This finding resonates with the scholarship of Michael Fullan (2007), who underscores the importance of sustained professional learning for systemic improvement. Furthermore, Thomas R. Guskey (2002) highlights that effective professional development must be ongoing, context-specific, and outcome-oriented. The study confirms that sporadic training programs are less impactful compared to structured, continuous faculty development models.

4. Organizational Culture and Collegiality as Catalysts for Professional Growth:

The study finds that a positive organizational culture characterized by trust, collegiality, and collaboration significantly enhances teacher competency. Teachers perceive peer interaction, knowledge sharing, and interdisciplinary dialogue as valuable sources of professional learning.

This finding is supported by the concept of professional learning communities advanced by Richard DuFour, who argues that collaborative cultures foster continuous improvement. Additionally, Andy Hargreaves (1994) emphasizes that collegiality and collaborative professionalism contribute to sustained teacher development. The present research affirms that competency flourishes in environments where collaborative norms are institutionalized.

5. Feedback and Appraisal Systems as Mechanisms for Reflective Practice:

Teachers perceive performance appraisal and feedback mechanisms as influential in shaping professional growth when these systems are developmental rather than punitive. Constructive feedback from peers, students, and administrators encourages reflective practice and instructional refinement.

This finding is consistent with reflective practice theory proposed by Donald Schön (1983), which underscores reflection-in-action as central to professional growth. Additionally, evaluation frameworks such as those developed by Charlotte Danielson highlight the importance of structured feedback in improving teaching effectiveness. The study confirms that appraisal systems are most beneficial when oriented toward growth and mentoring.

6. Infrastructure and Resource Availability as Enablers of Competency:

Availability of adequate physical and technological resources emerges as a critical enabler of teacher competency. Teachers emphasize that access to ICT facilities, libraries, laboratories, and digital learning tools enhances innovative teaching and instructional effectiveness.

This finding is aligned with research on technology integration by Punya Mishra and Matthew J. Koehler (2006), whose TPACK framework highlights the integration of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge. The study indicates that institutional investment in infrastructure

directly influences teachers' ability to adopt innovative pedagogies.

7. Need for Coherent Institutional Policies and Strategic Alignment: The findings further indicate that teacher competency development is strengthened when institutions adopt coherent and integrated policies supporting professional development, mentoring, leadership training, and resource allocation. Fragmented or inconsistent policies limit sustained growth. This observation reflects systems theory perspectives in education, particularly those advanced by Peter Senge (1990), who argues that organizational learning requires systemic coherence and shared vision. The study suggests that strategic alignment between institutional goals and faculty development initiatives enhances long-term competency outcomes.

Collectively, the findings demonstrate that teacher competency at the tertiary level in West Bengal is institutionally mediated. Institutional support, leadership practices, professional development, organizational culture, feedback mechanisms, infrastructure, and coherent policy frameworks interact dynamically to shape professional growth. The results support a holistic and systemic understanding of teacher competency, consistent with contemporary theories of educational leadership and organizational development.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study reaffirm that teacher competency at the tertiary level is not merely an outcome of individual qualifications or experience but is deeply embedded within the institutional context. Teachers in tertiary institutions of West Bengal consistently perceive institutional factors such as leadership practices, organizational culture, professional development structures, feedback mechanisms, and infrastructure as decisive influences on their professional growth and effectiveness.

The strong influence of institutional leadership observed in the findings aligns

with transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes shared vision, motivation, and professional support as drivers of teacher development (Leithwood et al., 2004). Supportive leadership practices were found to enhance teacher confidence, encourage pedagogical innovation, and foster research engagement. This supports Fullan's (2007) assertion that leadership acts as a catalyst for sustainable educational change by shaping favorable organizational conditions.

The study also highlights the centrality of continuous and relevant professional development in enhancing teacher competency. Teachers perceive professional learning as effective when it is sustained, need-based, and institutionally supported, corroborating Desimone's (2009) framework of effective professional development. Sporadic or compliance-driven programs were perceived as insufficient, indicating that professional development must be embedded within institutional planning rather than treated as an isolated activity.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of organizational culture and collegiality. Institutions that promote trust, collaboration, and academic freedom facilitate reflective practice and shared learning, which are essential for competency enhancement. This aligns with Hoy and Miskel's (2013) notion of an open organizational climate that fosters teacher motivation and effectiveness. Similarly, the emphasis on collaboration echoes Vangrieken et al.'s (2015) findings that professional learning communities significantly contribute to teacher development when institutionally supported. The role of feedback and appraisal systems also emerges as critical. Teachers value developmental feedback mechanisms that promote reflection and improvement, supporting Darling-Hammond's (2017) argument that formative evaluation practices are more effective for professional growth than summative or punitive approaches. Lastly, the importance of infrastructure and resources highlights that institutional support must extend beyond policy to include

material and technological provisions necessary for innovative teaching.

All the discussion indicates that institutional factors operate as an integrated system influencing teacher competency. The findings are consistent with global research while also reflecting the unique contextual challenges of higher education in West Bengal, such as uneven institutional capacity and policy implementation.

Educational Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for higher education policy, institutional administration, and academic practice:

1. Institutional Leadership Development:

There is a need for systematic leadership training programs for academic administrators to promote transformational and participatory leadership practices. Effective leadership can create supportive environments that enhance teacher motivation, autonomy, and professional growth.

2. Structured Faculty Development Policies:

Higher education institutions should formulate and implement comprehensive faculty development policies that ensure continuous, relevant, and inclusive professional learning opportunities. These policies should align with national frameworks such as NEP 2020 and UGC guidelines.

3. Promotion of Collaborative Academic Culture:

Institutions should encourage collaborative practices such as peer mentoring, team teaching, and interdisciplinary dialogue. Establishing professional learning communities can enhance reflective practice and collective competency development.

4. Reform of Appraisal and Feedback Systems:

Performance appraisal systems should be redesigned to focus on developmental feedback rather than bureaucratic compliance. Incorporating self-reflection, peer review, and student feedback can strengthen professional learning.

5. Investment in Infrastructure and Digital Resources:

Adequate investment in physical and technological infrastructure is essential to support innovative teaching and digital pedagogy. Institutions must ensure equitable access to learning resources across disciplines.

6. Policy Standardization Across Institutions:

To reduce disparities in teacher competency development, there is a need for standardized institutional frameworks at the state level that promote consistent support structures across tertiary institutions in West Bengal.

CONCLUSION

The present study concludes that institutional factors play a pivotal role in enhancing teacher competency at the tertiary level. Teachers in higher education institutions of West Bengal perceive their professional growth and effectiveness as being strongly influenced by leadership practices, professional development opportunities, organizational culture, feedback mechanisms, and availability of resources. Competency development is thus a systemic and context-dependent process, requiring coordinated institutional strategies rather than isolated individual efforts. While some institutions in West Bengal demonstrate supportive practices and progressive policies, inconsistencies across institutions result in uneven competency development. Addressing these disparities requires institutional commitment to capacity building, leadership development, and sustained professional learning. The study underscores the need for higher education institutions to move beyond compliance-oriented approaches and adopt development-focused, teacher-centered institutional policies. All strengthening teacher competency in higher education demands a holistic institutional approach that integrates supportive leadership, collaborative culture, meaningful professional development, and adequate infrastructure. Such an approach is

essential for ensuring teaching excellence, academic quality, and sustainable improvement in tertiary education in West Bengal.

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