

# Transcend Urban Edges

## An Empirical Study on the Role of Teachers in Rural Education

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### Abstract

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*Education is pivotal in shaping societies and individual growth, with teachers playing a central role in influencing student outcomes and educational quality. This study investigates the experiences, opportunities and challenges faced by teachers in Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh, India and assesses their impact on education quality. Using qualitative methods, including observations and semi-structured interviews, data were collected from 25 teachers across three schools. Key themes identified include job satisfaction, teaching methods, technology integration, holistic development and educational challenges. Findings reveal that supportive environments and innovative teaching are integral to teacher satisfaction, thereby enhancing education quality. This research provides insights for stakeholders and policymakers, offering a basis for strategies to improve education in Jhabua by addressing challenges and fostering an inclusive and effective learning environment.*

**Keywords:** Rural education, teacher experience, holistic development, inclusive education, national education policy (NEP) 2020

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is widely acknowledged as a crucial element in driving social progress and economic growth (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2020). Teachers are considered key agents within the education system, have a direct impact on student learning outcomes and play a vital role in shaping the overall quality of education (Jögi et al., 2022). Especially in rural areas, teachers stand out for their resilience and innovative approaches to navigating geographical and socio-economic challenges (Li et al., 2020).

Numerous studies have explored the experiences of teachers, highlighting the multifaceted nature of their profession and the complex factors that influence their work. Teacher experiences encompass various dimensions, including instructional strategies, classroom management, student engagement, professional development and collaboration with colleagues and administrators (Louws et al., 2017). These experiences are shaped by a wide range of contextual factors such as, school culture, community dynamics, policy frameworks and available resources (Cansoy and Parlar, 2017).

Teachers also encounter opportunities that impact their professional growth and the quality of education. Opportunities include access to effective professional development, collaboration with colleagues, opportunities for innovation and creativity in teaching

and supportive school environments (Ismail et al., 2018). Leveraging these opportunities enables teachers to enhance their instructional practices, engage students effectively and foster a positive learning environment (Monsen et al., 2014).

Alongside opportunities, challenges faced by teachers have been extensively documented in educational research. These challenges encompass diverse aspects such as, limited resources, heavy workloads, classroom management issues, student diversity, curriculum demands, high-stakes assessments and rapidly evolving educational technologies. Understanding these challenges is critical for addressing the complex needs of teachers and developing targeted support systems to enhance their professional well-being and effectiveness (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2018).

To date, limited research has been conducted on the experiences, opportunities and challenges faced by teachers in rural education. Previous studies have predominantly focused on urban areas (Gaikhorst et al., 2017; Howard and Milner, 2021), neglecting the unique dynamics of rural regions. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the educational landscape in Jhabua, providing insights that can inform policies and interventions. Jhabua is in the western-most part of Madhya Pradesh, where 91.03 per cent of the population lives in rural areas, predominantly comprising Bhil, Bhilala and Pateliya tribes (Iyengar, 2012). Investigating the

local educational landscape is crucial in identifying strategies that address the region’s specific needs (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Therefore, research questions are:

1. What are the experiences, opportunities and challenges faced by teachers in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh, and
2. How do these factors influence the quality of education in the region?

By examining the educational practices in Jhabua, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on rural education, offering insights that can inform educational practitioners, policymakers and future research. It seeks to not only highlight the educational practices of schools in Jhabua but also to identify areas for further improvement with the goal of ensuring that every child has access to a quality education.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study employed qualitative research approach to explore the experiences, challenges and practices of teachers in Jhabua. This approach helps in exploring complex phenomena and gaining in-depth insights into participants’ experiences

and perspectives (Creswell, 2014). We used purposive sampling to select participants based on specific characteristics that align with the research objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). We selected 25 teachers from three schools in Jhabua. The selection aimed to ensure representation across different schools and grade levels to capture a diverse range of experiences and perspectives.

We conducted in-depth face to face interviews (McIntosh and Morse, 2015) with 25 teachers including both male and female (Table 1). The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions. The questionnaire covered themes such as, enjoyable aspects of work, support for creativity and experimentation, technology use, teaching methods, cultural diversity and challenges in the educational environment. Each interview lasted approximately from 20 to 25 minutes. Interviews were conducted in english or hindi to accommodate participants’ language preferences (DeJonckheere and Vaughn, 2019). Informed consent was obtained, ensuring participants’ voluntary involvement and confidentiality. Additionally, observation technique captured contextual nuances within

**Table 1: Respondents’ demographics**

Basis	Characteristics
Gender	Male (8); female (17)
Teaching Experience	Up to five years (11); more than five years (14)
Type of Schools	Primary school (1); senior secondary school (2)

classrooms, focusing on instructional strategies and teacher-student interactions (Cotton et al., 2010). This combination of methods aimed to triangulate data, enhancing the validity and reliability of findings (Denzin, 2012). By employing these approaches, a comprehensive understanding of teaching challenges and practices was achieved, contributing to a robust analysis of the educational landscape in Jhabua.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview data, aiming to identify patterns, themes and insights. It is a widely used method for interpreting qualitative data, providing a systematic approach to uncover recurring ideas, concepts and experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The researchers transcribed and carefully reviewed the interviews, identified recurring ideas and developed codes to categorise the data. The researchers then analysed the coded data, examining the relationships and connections between themes examined, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of the teachers' experiences and practices. Further, it validated by the data captured during observation.

## **FINDINGS**

The data analysis identified five key themes from interviews with teachers, offering valuable insights into their experiences, opportunities and challenges. Understanding these themes allows us to explore factors affecting education quality.

## **Job Satisfaction and Support**

This theme examines teachers' job satisfaction and support within the school, crucial for their overall well-being and motivation, ultimately impacts the quality of education. Findings suggest teachers at these schools enjoy their work, contributing to high job satisfaction. Such positivity is essential, as it boosts motivation and leads to better student outcomes (Iwu et al., 2018). Despite challenges like resource limitations and isolation, the positive feedback indicates a supportive work environment in Jhabua schools. It was observed that satisfied teachers tend to stay in their jobs longer, showing greater engagement and effectiveness in teaching, as highlighted by the following quotes:

“Working with this school brings me great joy and a sense of fulfilment.” (Jaya)

“I feel both fulfilled and supported in my work due to the school's unwavering assistance.” (Janvi)

The analysis highlights the school's support in promoting teachers' creativity and experimentation with teaching methods, which are essential for educational innovation and professional development. Findings indicate a supportive environment that encourages creative teaching approaches, thereby enhancing student engagement and outcomes (Kettler, 2018). Teachers are supported in tailoring instruction to meet diverse needs, thereby improving learning

experiences (Chew, 2016). They engage in brainstorming, collaboration and shared decision-making, valuing diverse expertise (Warsah et al., 2021). Such support fosters the adoption of innovative strategies, demonstrating the school's commitment to teacher development, as shown by the quotes:

"The school actively fosters and supports my creativity and experimentation in teaching methods." (Mohini)  
 "I am grateful for the school's ongoing support, which allows me to implement my own teaching ways." (Krishna)

These findings resonate with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, as the school provides ongoing teacher training, aligning with modern educational trends. Workshops and mentorship by noted academics promote discussion and deepen understanding. It was observed that to tackle challenges like remote teaching during COVID-19, the school supplied necessary resources, crucial in Jhabua's resource-scarce context to ensure quality of education (Operti et al., 2014). The school's support has been acknowledged by teachers:

"I truly like our school's initiative in organising seminars and training sessions for us. These opportunities allow all teachers to stay updated with current knowledge." (Asha)  
 "The school's response in providing resources and support has been very helpful for teaching from home." (Samita)

### **Teaching Methods and Assessment**

This theme delves into educators employing learner-centred teaching strategies and assessing student progress. Interviews and observations show widespread use of methods emphasising student engagement and active learning, thereby boosting motivation, autonomy and understanding (Kember et al., 2020). These strategies involve students in knowledge construction, collaboration, and problem-solving, which enhance outcomes (Kumar Shah, 2020). Teachers also adapt explanations into various languages to address diverse needs which highlights the effectiveness of these approaches in improving education quality. Supporting quotes:

"I believe in creating a learner-centred and interactive classroom environment where students are actively engaged in their own learning." (Anil)  
 "I always try to create an interactive and participative learning environment that stimulates active engagement in the class." (Hema)

Jhabua schools emphasise practical learning by organising educational trips to places like police stations and post offices, and engaging students in projects that boost skills and creativity (Anwar, 2019). Such hands-on experiences improve cognitive development and knowledge retention (Cole, 2013). Noteworthy projects include Bluetooth cars, smart dustbins

and intruder detection devices with students also exploring drones, 3D modelling, and building coolers from recycled materials. These activities are supported by the Atal Tinkering Lab (ATL), a National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog and Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) initiative, which promotes creative thinking and tech skills, preparing students for the future. Teachers highlighted:

“In our curriculum, we give great importance to Vedic Mathematics as a regular subject for students in Classes VI to VIII. The goal is to help students acquire important skills that will enable them to perform calculations quickly and easily, without having to rely on calculators.” (Anjali)

“Our former Class XII students keep coming back to the school to share their expertise and innovative ideas with juniors in the ATL.” (Neelam)

The promotion of critical thinking is a key focus, with many educators embedding it into their methods to enhance students’ analytical and reflective thinking (Prafitasari et al., 2021). This approach encourages questioning and evaluation, deepens concept understanding, and aligns with NEP-2020 goals (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). Teachers also prioritize creativity, essential for holistic education (Péter-Szarka, 2012),

underscoring the value of analytical skills. Supporting quotes include:

“I always strive to create an interactive and participative learning environment that stimulates critical thinking and active engagement among students.” (Neelam)

“I encourage students to think critically by posing thought-provoking questions and engaging them in meaningful discussions.” (Jaya)

The analysis highlights diverse assessment methods used by teachers to boost student engagement and understanding. Key strategies include self-assessment, allowing students to reflect on their progress and set goals; exams without invigilators to foster learning ownership (Panadero and Alonso-Tapia, 2014); and direct observation with immediate feedback for timely improvement (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). Additionally, essay writing and explanations enhance critical thinking and conceptual understanding (Butcher, 2022). Supporting quotes are:

“We allow students to judge their own progress, to encourage them to develop self-awareness, self-assessment, and reflection skills, foster a deeper understanding of their strengths and weaknesses.” (Mohini)

“By providing timely input, I encourage students to reflect on their work and make improvements.” (Anjali)

## Technology Integration and Online Teaching

The theme uncovers the nuanced experiences and perspectives of educators on the adoption and impact of technology in teaching, particularly highlighted during the shift to online learning in COVID-19 pandemic. Central to this discussion is the acknowledgment of technology's crucial role in enhancing education including expanding access, engaging students, and allowing for personalised learning experiences (Bates, 2019), in alignment with the NEP-2020 goals. Supporting quotes are:

“Technology provides educational opportunities, allowing students in rural areas to access resources and educational materials that might otherwise be inaccessible.” (Anchal)

“During the pandemic, technology has been indispensable in facilitating remote learning and ensuring that students in rural areas do not miss out on their education.” (Vishal)

Jhabua schools have embraced technology integration, notably through the implementation of ATLS, which foster active engagement and creativity in technology-driven subjects like robotics. Despite the enthusiasm, challenges such as, the need for more teacher training and support in technology adoption remain prominent. The rapid pivot to

online teaching during the pandemic has further underscored the significance of digital tools, ranging from presentation software to internet resources, in facilitating effective remote learning environments (Hu et al., 2021). A teacher is quoted:

“I frequently use PowerPoint presentations and the internet in my teaching. These tools enhance student learning by visualising concepts.” (Mohini)

Teachers have reported substantial support from schools in integrating these digital resources into their pedagogy. This supportive culture promotes continuous professional development and access to necessary resources, enabling teachers to enhance their instructional strategies and student engagement effectively (Buabeng-Andoh, 2012). Here, teachers said:

“My school consistently promotes the use of digital devices for teaching. They understand the benefits it brings to student engagement and offer training to enhance our digital skills.” (Bhawna)

“Sometimes, my school encourages the use of digital devices for teaching. However, the support may vary depending on the specific requirements and preferences of each teacher.” (Samita)

The transition to online teaching revealed the critical need for infrastructure support such as Wi-Fi connectivity in Jhabua, to

overcome network issues and ensure seamless online access. The varied use of devices for online teaching, primarily smartphones and laptops highlight the digital divide and points to the necessity of addressing device availability and affordability (Suriashah, 2021). Supporting quotes are:

“I rely on my smartphone for online teaching, and it has served me well in ensuring I can connect with my students and deliver lesson content effectively.” (Kalpana)

“For online teaching, I have utilised various devices such as my smartphone and the school’s desktop depending on the situation and requirements of the lesson.” (Anil)

It was observed that despite initial challenges and preferences for traditional classroom settings, the experience of online teaching has fostered a diversity of teacher responses towards remote learning, influenced by factors like self-efficacy, technological competency, and available support systems (Li, 2019).

“I have a neutral stance towards teaching through distance learning initiatives. I am open to exploring new approaches but I would need time to make such a decision.” (Hema)

“I am not inclined towards teaching through distance learning initiatives. I believe in-person interactions are

vital for effective teaching and learning.” (Shilpa)

### **Holistic Development and Inclusive Education**

This theme highlights the importance of holistic education in Jhabua schools, focusing on students’ overall growth and well-being. It emphasises incorporating of creative and practical skills such as, doll making, bamboo working, and embroidery, to foster cultural appreciation (Kokko and Dillon, 2011). Extra-curricular activities like dance, music and sports are prioritised to boost self-confidence and emotional well-being, aligning with the NEP-2020 goals for a well-rounded education that values practical skills and cultural traditions (Shukla et al., 2022). As a teacher said:

“Our school has a zero period for activities like yoga, english conversation, Indian culture and tradition, Indian mythology, gardening, bird feeding, debates on current topics and self-study. It is all about learning by doing and fostering students’ development outside the classroom.” (Anchal)

Jhabua schools, serving students from varied backgrounds, recognise multilingualism as key to inclusive education. Teachers use hindi, english, and local dialects, especially for students from tribal areas, aligning with NEP-2020’s inclusive principles (de Jong, 2023). This approach promotes linguistic

diversity, cultural exchange, and belonging, embodying inclusive educational practices (Nilholm, 2021). Here a teacher said:

“Many of our teachers communicate with parents in their local language.” (Samita)

Teachers in culturally diverse classrooms believe in their ability to manage and embrace cultural diversity, highlighting the importance of cultural competence for inclusivity (Adebayo and Heinz, 2023). They aim to create open environments that value cultural differences, promoting empathy and intercultural understanding. This commitment aligns with culturally responsive teaching principles (Ladson-Billings, 2014), enhancing engagement and outcomes for students from varied backgrounds. Engaging with diverse cultures also fosters critical thinking and innovation (Shirayev et al., 2020). A teacher stated:

“We believe in nurturing students’ multidimensional growth by encouraging their active participation in various multi-cultural activities. Students are empowered to choose activities aligned with their interests, which they pursue under our guidance.” (Mohini)

### **Challenges in Education**

The theme on educational challenges in Jhabua sheds light on critical issues identified by teachers such as, low parental involvement, students being unprepared for learning, absenteeism,

and high dropout rates, all exacerbated by socio-economic factors prevalent in tribal communities. Parental illiteracy, often due to their engagement in farming or casual labour, limits their ability to support or involve themselves in their children’s education. This situation is worsened by a lack of awareness about the value of education (Đurišić and Bunijevac, 2017). Such disengagement leads to students arriving at school unprepared, contributing to lower self-esteem, low motivation, and struggles with the curriculum. Additionally, without parental support, absenteeism and dropout rates increase, disrupting learning continuity and academic progress (Kearney and Graczyk, 2020). Supporting quotes:

“As parents are illiterate, we often see a lack of their involvement, which creates barriers to providing the necessary support and attention to their children’s learning.” (Krishna)

“Parents are unaware of their child’s school homework and activities.” (Neema)

Teachers recognise that addressing these challenges necessitates a collaborative approach, emphasising the collective responsibility of schools, teachers, and the community. Collaborative approach strategy is important, especially in socio-economically disadvantaged areas (Dusi, 2012) like Jhabua. Through joint efforts, stakeholders can more effectively tackle the barriers to

education, fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students. A teacher stated:

“The socio-economic background and limited educational opportunities in tribal communities significantly contribute to the challenges we face in education. Students from these communities often lack access to quality education, which hampers their overall educational attainment.” (Kapil)

## DISCUSSION

This study examines Jhabua’s educational landscape, focusing on teachers’ experiences, opportunities and challenges, and their impact on education quality. Structured around five key themes—aligns with NEP-2020 goals, it addresses our initial research question and explores factors influencing educational quality, tackling the second question.

The study revealed diverse experiences and opportunities among teachers. The exploration into the job satisfaction theme highlights that a supportive work environment increases teachers’ job satisfaction, which is fundamental to their motivation and effectiveness in teaching (Iwu et al., 2018). It stems from positive feedback and encouragement for creative pedagogical practices, underlines the importance of emotional and professional support in education.

The teaching methods theme reveals an emphasis on learner-centred

strategies and innovative assessment methods, reflecting a commitment to active engagement and the holistic development of students (Kumar Shah, 2020). Such pedagogical approaches facilitate diverse and inclusive learning experiences, catering to the varied needs of students.

Technology Integration demonstrates that digital tools have become indispensable in modernising education, particularly during the COVID-19. This theme captures the opportunities and challenges associated with adopting technology in education, highlighting a shift towards more accessible and engaging learning environments (Bates, 2019).

Holistic development and inclusive education underscores the efforts of schools to provide an education that goes beyond academic achievements (Nilholm, 2021). By incorporating cultural, practical and extracurricular activities, schools aim to foster students’ overall growth, emphasising the significance of a well-rounded educational approach for enhancing student well-being and engagement.

Lastly, Challenges in Education theme details the substantial barriers to education in Jhabua, including socio-economic factors, parental involvement and systemic issues like absenteeism and dropout rates (Kearney and Graczyk, 2020). These challenges not only disrupt the educational process but also highlight areas requiring targeted interventions and support.

Upon analysing these themes, we explored factors affecting education quality in Jhabua. Factors like positive work environment and innovative teaching methods significantly contribute to enhancing educational outcomes, demonstrating a direct correlation between teacher satisfaction, pedagogical practices and student achievement. The integration of technology and emphasis on holistic development further enrich the learning experience, making education more accessible, engaging and comprehensive. However, the persistent challenges underscored by socio-economic constraints pose significant threats to maintaining and improving the quality of education (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2020). These challenges highlight the necessity for a multifaceted approach that not only supports educators and leverages technology but also involves the community and addresses barriers.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study offers insights into Jhabua's educational practices but has limitations. The findings may not be directly applicable to other contexts, as they are specific to Jhabua's unique socio-cultural and geographical factors. The qualitative focus limits generalisability. Future research could validate findings quantitatively and include broader stakeholders such as, students and the community for a fuller understanding. Additionally, the impact of external

factors like government policies and infrastructure requires further exploration.

The three schools examined in Jhabua, emerge as exemplary models within their predominantly rural region. These institutions distinguish themselves by prioritising critical thinking, extracurricular activities, holistic development and inclusivity in their educational practices. Their dedication to fostering an environment that supports the growth and development of their teachers is commendable. Through such commitments, these schools ensure that students receive a well-rounded educational experience, setting a benchmark for educational excellence in regions facing similar socio-economic challenges. This research underscores the necessity of targeted policy and practice interventions. Educational stakeholders and policymakers are encouraged to invest in professional development for teachers, enhance access to technological resources and design curricula that promote holistic learning experiences. Such initiatives could significantly improve the educational landscape in rural areas, ensuring that all students have access to high-quality education. Moreover, the emphasis on teacher growth and the provision of a well-rounded educational experience highlights the importance of addressing both educator and student needs in the quest to elevate educational standards and outcomes.

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