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CONFLICT BETWEEN PERSONAL TEACHING BELIEFS AND INSTITUTIONAL EXPECTATIONS: A TEACHER PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The study looked into the clash between individual teaching philosophies and institutional demands of Indian school instructors. A cross-sectional survey design was employed. Data were collected from 52 school teachers (83% female; M = 14.26 years, SD = 6.93) through convenience sampling using a researcher-constructed 25-item, five-point Likert-scale instrument with four subscales, i.e. Personal Teaching Beliefs (10 items), Institutional Expectations (8 items), Belief–Expectation Conflict (5 items) and Impact on Teaching and Satisfaction (2 items). Statistical analysis Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficients, and independent-samples t-tests were used. Results indicated teachers' endorsement of constructivist pedagogical principles at near-ceiling levels (M=4.85, SD=0.38 on a 5-point scale), perception of moderate-to-high institutional demands (M=3.94, SD=0.87), and perception of moderate professional conflict (M=3.27, SD=1.05). Institutional expectations were highly and positively related to experienced conflict ($r = .66$, $p < .001$). Conflict was also strongly related to negative influence on teaching effectiveness ($r = .68$, $p < .001$). There was no substantial moderation of conflict scores by either gender or years of experience. The findings broaden the scope of role conflict theory and self-determination theory to the Indian educational setting and emphasize the importance of school-level policies that respect teacher autonomy within the accountability framework.

KEYWORDS: Teacher Beliefs; Institutional Expectations; Role Conflict; Teacher Autonomy; Job Contentment; Constructivism; India.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important tensions in contemporary schooling is the tension between what teachers think and what they are compelled to accomplish. The beliefs a teacher holds about learning, pedagogy, and the purpose of education are not peripheral preferences; as Pajares (1992) showed in a seminal review, they are the most powerful predictors of how teachers organize instruction, respond to students, and negotiate professional challenges—more powerful in many cases than formally gained content knowledge. These beliefs are built during years of schooling, observation and early professional experience and, once solidified, tend to resist change even under continued institutional pressure (Nespor, 1987). More recent scholarship has deepened this understanding. In an integrative review of teacher psychological characteristics, Bardach et al. (2022) demonstrated that belief systems have a strong link with teaching effectiveness, teacher well-being, and professional retention, confirming Pajares's seminal thesis in various cultural contexts. Letina (2022) also proved that teachers' epistemological ideas remain enduring predictors of their propensity to constructivist or traditional instructional approaches, even when institutional cultures pull in opposite directions.

But teachers are not practicing in solitary autonomy. They work under institutional frameworks that have their own agenda: syllabuses must be covered, examinations must give acceptable pass rates, administrative obligations must be fulfilled and discipline must be maintained. Such institutional expectations arise due to accountability requirements, rankings of schools in competition, demands of parents, and policies of governments, frequently coalescing into a unified pressure allowing little opportunity for individual pedagogical judgment. The tension created when the expectations inscribed in these structures differ with the views held by teachers is what organisational theorists term role conflict (Rizzo et al., 1970); the simultaneous pressure of contradicting role demands. This dynamic was explicitly identified by Ryan and Deci (2020) in an influential update of Self-Determination Theory. They point out that teachers themselves are constrained by controlling mandates, institutional pressures, and leadership styles in ways that undermine their autonomy and, by extension, their motivational capacity in the classroom. In a recent empirical study on primary and secondary school teachers, Zhu and Zhai (2025) revealed that administrative pressure had a substantial negative influence on teachers' professional identity and psychological well-being, and the mechanism was through increasing occupational burnout. Excessive administrative work is one of the most commonly identified reasons of teacher stress around

the world and experienced instructors are disproportionately loaded with non-instructional obligations, according to the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS 2024). Taken together, these converging pieces of research show that role conflict in teaching is not an anomalous individual experience but a structural element of accountability-driven educational institutions across the world.

In the Indian educational context this tension has been institutionalized in a unique way. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2005; NCERT, 2005) advocated a shift from rote-memorisation and teacher-centred transmission to constructivist, child-centred pedagogy in which teachers act as facilitators, students construct knowledge actively, and creativity and critical thinking take precedence over examination performance. These concepts were further supported by the National Education Policy 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020) that advocated for competency-based learning, less curricular load and more autonomy to teachers. The holistic and multidisciplinary approach to education in NEP 2020 has been identified by scholars as a significant break from the traditional rote-learning methods and its resonance with United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality education for all) has been widely discussed (Jain, 2021; Sharma, 2021). However, despite two decades of progressive policy rhetoric, many Indian schools work under the gravitational pull of examination-driven accountability systems that systematically crowd out the instructional space for constructivist practice. This implementation gap is reinforced by research on constructivist teaching challenges in similar South and East Asian settings: A 2024 study of social studies teachers in Ethiopia (Geremew et al., 2024) showed that even when constructivist beliefs are strongly held, structural barriers such as lack of resources, time constraints and institutional preference for standardized teaching constantly hinder the enactment of constructivism. Koul and Bansal (2023) studied science teachers' beliefs in conflict-affected zones of Jammu and Kashmir, India. They found that teachers were strongly committed to children's cognitive and psychosocial growth even in severe contextual adversity. This underscores the resilience and durability of constructivist values in the Indian teaching profession.

This discrepancy between policy-supported notions of good teaching and examination-oriented institutional requirements causes professional strain with significant ramifications. Increasing international research suggests that instructors who perceive insufficient institutional autonomy report lower job satisfaction (Worth & Van den Brande, 2020), more burnout (Ha et al., 2025) and higher plans to leave the profession (Jerrim, 2023). Further

research utilizing TALIS 2018 data has indicated that instructors in more decentralised education systems, who have greater autonomy over class planning and job prioritisation, report much lower levels of burnout than teachers in tightly controlled standardised systems (OECD, 2020). Frontiers in Psychology research by Salokangas et al. (2020) and Collie et al. (2020) found that perceived autonomy is inversely associated with emotional exhaustion, and teachers who feel empowered to exercise professional judgement report stronger occupational competence and commitment. One recent contribution of particular relevance concerns the examination of teacher professional identity under administrative pressure (Zhu & Zhai, 2025): when instructional time and professional discretion are crowded out by administrative demands, teachers experience an erosion of the professional self-concept that sustains their motivation and pedagogical creativity. Similarly, Fernández-Batanero et al. (2024) found that teachers sustain a professional identity built on commitment and satisfaction with teaching practice even in adverse institutional contexts, a pattern that matches the near-ceiling constructivist belief scores obtained in this study. However, systematic empirical data in the Indian context, where the structural conditions are sharply different from those examined in the Western literature, is limited. This study seeks to fill this gap by quantifying, using primary survey data, (a) the nature and strength of constructivist beliefs held by school teachers, (b) the extent to which they perceive institutional demands, (c) the level of conflict they experience between these two forces, and (d) the self-reported impact of that conflict on their teaching effectiveness and professional satisfaction.

Theoretical Framework

This work is grounded in three complementary theoretical perspectives. Role Conflict Theory, as operationalised by Rizzo et al. (1970), suggests that incompatible role demands produce anxiety, lower job satisfaction, and increase turnover intention. Role conflict in teaching is the result of the institutional role (defined by administration, policy, and community) differing with the professional identity role (defined by the teacher's personal values and training). A recent cross-sectional empirical study in clinical teaching contexts (Liu et al., 2024) found that more than 41% of participants reported high levels of role conflict, with institutional demand incongruence as the strongest predictor. This finding directly resonates with the school teacher population studied here. Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2020) further argues that autonomy, the experience of volitional, self-endorsed action, is a universal psychological need whose frustration produces disengagement and burnout, while its satisfaction generates intrinsic motivation and

well-being. Guay (2022) carried conducted a comprehensive study of SDT applications in education and confirmed that autonomy-supportive teaching situations consistently yield better motivational and academic performance across educational levels and cultural contexts. A recent scoping review of SDT in secondary school classrooms (Barrett et al., 2026) further synthesized evidence that need-supportive teaching practices—those that honor teachers' and students' autonomy, competence, and relatedness—are critical for sustaining engagement and preventing burnout in teachers and learners alike. The content of the beliefs at stake is Constructivist Learning Theory, which draws on Vygotsky (1978) and Piaget (1972) and is codified in the NCF 2005: that meaningful learning is active, contextualised and exploratory and not passive, decontextualised and rote. Research on early childhood teachers (DeStefano, 2023) confirmed that a constructivist professional identity is built around providing safe classroom spaces that foster community and appreciate children's interests, qualities that are in structural tension with examination-focused institutional standards.

Research Objectives

The study was performed to achieve four purposes:

(1) to assess the personal teaching beliefs of school teachers,

(2) to analyze teachers' perceptions of institutional expectations,

(3) to gauge the extent of conflict between those beliefs and expectations, and

(4) to evaluate the self-reported impact of that conflict on teaching effectiveness and professional satisfaction.

Other subsidiary aims were to examine whether gender and years of experience impacted the level of conflict faced.

Research Methodology

Research Design and Setting

A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was used. Survey designs are appropriate when the goal is to describe the characteristics of a population and to study correlations among dimensions at one point in time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study was carried out in a school in Delhi-NCR region of India.

Participants

The sample consisted of 52 school teachers (nfemale = 43, 82.7%; nmale = 9, 17.3%)

selected by convenience sampling. Age was grouped into eight categories, from 20–25 years to 55–60 years, with the modal age category being 40–45 years (n = 12, 23.1%). The teaching experience ranged from 0.5 to 30 years (M = 14.26, SD = 6.93). The biggest experience group was 15–19 years (n = 17, 32.7%), followed by 5–9 years (n = 12, 23.1%) and 20 years or more (n = 11, 21.2%). There were participants from 12 subject areas. The largest groups were English and Social Studies (10 each, 19.2% each), followed by Hindi, Mathematics and Science (each n = 7, 13.5%). Participation was voluntary and all identifying information was kept confidential.

Instrument

Data were obtained by a researcher designed 25-item questionnaire organized in five-point Likert format (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The instrument was made of four subscales extracted from a survey of the literature. Section A: Personal Teaching Beliefs (10 questions, e.g., “Creativity and critical thinking are more important than rote learning”) measured the extent to which teachers were committed to constructivist, student-centred beliefs. Section B: Institutional Expectations (8 items, e.g., “Teachers are under pressure to achieve academic targets”) assessed teachers’ impressions of the pressures placed upon them by their schools. Section C: Belief-Expectation Conflict (5 items, e.g., “I feel pressured to compromise my teaching philosophy to meet institutional requirements”) measured the extent that the personal views and institutional demands were regarded to be incompatible. Section D: Impact on Teaching and Satisfaction (2 items) tested if conflict had an impact on teaching effectiveness, and whether institutional autonomy support increased performance. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were obtained for the present sample. The reliability coefficients were as follows: $\alpha = .67$ for Section A, $\alpha = .87$ for Section B, $\alpha = .96$ for Section C, and $\alpha = .36$ for Section D. Section D has a low alpha because of its two items and that the two claims are conceptually different rather than the items are of poor quality.

Procedure

The questionnaire was conducted in the respective schools of the participants and through Google Forms. Before the instrument was distributed, the researcher explained the goal of the study, emphasized voluntary participation and promised the respondents of confidentiality. Participants were informed that the data would be used only for academic purposes. Questionnaires administered in person were gathered immediately and replies provided using Google Forms were recorded online. The duration of data collecting was two weeks.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Participant Characteristics

Table 1 summarises the demographic composition of the sample. The sample skewed female (82.7%), reflecting the well-documented feminisation of school teaching in India. The majority of participants were mid-career professionals aged 30–50 years, with substantial experience.

Table 1 ***Demographic Characteristics of Participants. (N = 52)***

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	9	17.3
	Female	43	82.7
Age Group (years)	20–25	2	3.8
	25–30	2	3.8
	30–35	11	21.2
	35–40	8	15.4
	40–45	12	23.1
	45–50	8	15.4
	50–55	7	13.5
	55–60	2	3.8
Teaching Experience	< 5 years	3	5.8
	5–9 years	12	23.1
	10–14 years	9	17.3
	15–19 years	17	32.7
	≥20 years	11	21.2

Note. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Section A: Personal Teaching Beliefs

Table 2 presents item-level descriptive statistics for Section A. Across all 10 items, not a single respondent selected Disagree or Strongly Disagree, producing a subscale mean of M = 4.85, SD = 0.38. The item receiving the highest endorsement was Q7 ("Real-life examples make classroom learning more meaningful"; M = 4.96, SD = 0.19), immediately followed by Q8 ("Teachers should have freedom to design innovative classroom activities"; M = 4.94, SD

= 0.24). These two items, which together capture the essence of experiential learning and professional autonomy, yielded near-unanimous Strongly Agree responses (96.2% and 94.2%, respectively). The lowest-rated item in the subscale was Q2 and Q3 (tied; M = 4.73, SD = 0.53), both still reflecting overwhelming agreement. The near-zero variance across items underscores the depth and consistency of constructivist conviction in this sample.

Table 2 ***Item-Level Descriptive Statistics: Section A — Personal Teaching Beliefs.***

No.	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	M	SD
1	Teaching should focus on the overall development of students.	47	5	0	0	0	**4.90**	0.30
2	Students learn better through activity-based learning methods.	40	10	2	0	0	**4.73**	0.53
3	Creativity and critical thinking are more important than rote learning.	40	10	2	0	0	**4.73**	0.53
4	Classroom teaching should encourage student participation and discussion.	47	5	0	0	0	**4.90**	0.30
5	Teachers should adapt teaching methods to students' learning needs.	43	9	0	0	0	**4.83**	0.38
6	Emotional support from teachers improves student learning.	42	10	0	0	0	**4.81**	0.40
7	Real-life examples make classroom learning more meaningful.	50	2	0	0	0	**4.96**	0.19
8	Teachers should have freedom to design innovative classroom activities.	49	3	0	0	0	**4.94**	0.24
9	Learning should focus on understanding concepts rather than memorisation.	43	9	0	0	0	**4.83**	0.38
10	Positive teacher-student relationships improve classroom effectiveness.	45	7	0	0	0	**4.87**	0.34
	Scale Mean						**4.85**	0.38

Note. N = 52. SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree.

M = item mean; SD = item standard deviation. Scale Mean and Scale SD computed across all items × respondents. No respondent selected D or SD on any item.

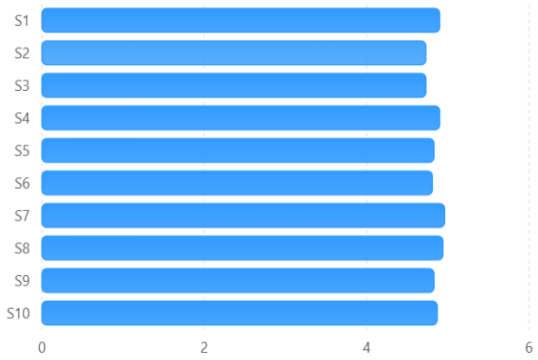

Figure1 ***Item-Level Descriptive Statistics: Section A — Personal Teaching Beliefs.***

Section B: Institutional Expectations

Table 3 presents Section B results. The subscale mean was M = 3.94, SD = 0.87. The most strongly endorsed item was Q14, "Administrative work affects the quality of classroom teaching" (M = 4.27, SD = 0.77), endorsed by 80.8% of participants (SA + A combined). Items reflecting syllabus pressure (Q11: M = 4.10, SD = 0.75), examination emphasis (Q12: M = 4.08, SD = 0.71), and rule compliance (Q13: M = 4.12, SD = 0.78) all exceeded M = 4.00, indicating that these structural demands are widely experienced. The most variably endorsed item was Q17, "Standardised teaching practices are preferred over innovative methods" (M = 3.27, SD = 1.03), where 23.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed—indicating meaningful between-school variation in institutional culture. This item also showed the highest standard deviation in the subscale, suggesting that institutional receptivity to innovation is heterogeneous across schools.

Table 3*Item-Level Descriptive Statistics: Section B — Institutional Expectations.*

No.	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	M	SD
11	My institution emphasises syllabus completion within a fixed time frame.	16	26	9	1	0	**4.10**	0.75
12	Examination results are given high importance in my institution.	15	26	11	0	0	**4.08**	0.71
13	Teachers are expected to strictly follow institutional rules and procedures.	18	23	10	1	0	**4.12**	0.78
14	Administrative work affects the quality of classroom teaching.	24	18	10	0	0	**4.27**	0.77
15	Institutional expectations influence the teaching methods used by teachers.	14	24	14	0	0	**4.00**	0.74
16	Teachers in my institution are expected to	17	16	17	2	0	**3.92**	0.90

	maintain strict classroom discipline.							
17	Standardised teaching practices are preferred over innovative methods.	8	11	21	11	1	**3.27**	1.03
18	Teachers are under pressure to achieve academic targets.	12	19	19	2	0	**3.79**	0.85
	Scale Mean						**3.94**	0.87

Note. N = 52. SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree. M = item mean; SD = item standard deviation.

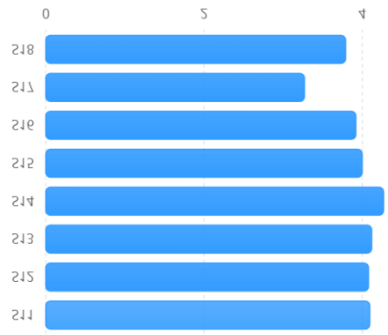

Figure 2*Item-Level Descriptive Statistics: Section B — Institutional Expectations.*

Section C: Belief–Expectation Conflict

Table 4 presents Section C results. The subscale mean was M = 3.27, SD = 1.05. Unlike Sections A and B, all five items showed responses distributed across the full scale, reflecting genuine individual variation in conflict experience. The item with the highest mean was Q23, "Conflicts between personal beliefs and institutional demands create professional stress" (M = 3.38, SD = 0.99): 42.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, while 17.3% disagreed. The item with the lowest mean was Q21, "I feel pressured to compromise my teaching philosophy to meet institutional requirements" (M = 3.15, SD = 1.11): 34.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed (expressing felt compromise), while 30.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The breadth of response distributions across Section C items suggests that conflict experience is not uniformly distributed—some teachers navigate the belief–expectation gap with relative ease, while others experience it as a persistent professional stressor.

Table 4*Item-Level Descriptive Statistics: Section C — Belief–Expectation Conflict.*

No.	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	M	SD
19	I experience conflict between my teaching beliefs and institutional expectations.	7	15	15	13	2	**3.23**	1.10
20	Institutional demands sometimes prevent me from using creative teaching methods.	7	15	18	11	1	**3.31**	1.02
21	I feel pressured to compromise my teaching philosophy to meet institutional requirements.	8	10	18	14	2	**3.15**	1.11
22	Balancing personal teaching beliefs and institutional expectations is challenging.	8	12	20	10	2	**3.27**	1.07
23	Conflicts between personal beliefs and institutional demands create professional stress.	8	14	21	8	1	**3.38**	0.99
	Scale Mean						**3.27**	1.05

Note. N = 52. SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree. M = item mean; SD = item standard deviation.

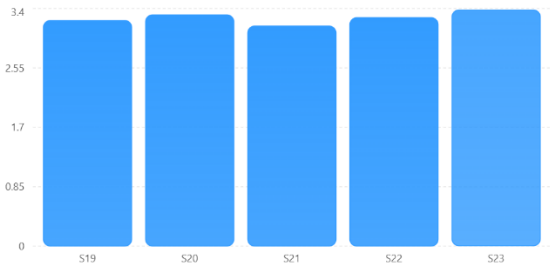

Figure 3*Item-Level Descriptive Statistics: Section C — Belief–Expectation Conflict.*

Section D: Impact on Teaching and Satisfaction

Table 5 presents Section D results. Q25, "Teachers perform better when institutions support their professional beliefs and autonomy," received the strongest endorsement in the entire instrument (M = 4.71, SD = 0.54): 75.0% strongly agreed and 21.2% agreed, yielding 96.2% combined agreement with zero disagreement. Q24, "Such conflicts affect my teaching effectiveness and classroom environment," showed a more divided response (M = 3.63, SD = 1.19): 61.5% agreed or strongly agreed, while 25.0% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The conceptual opposition between these two items—one prospective and one retrospective—partly explains the subscale's low internal consistency (α = .36).

Table 5*Item-Level Descriptive Statistics: Section D — Impact on Teaching and Satisfaction.*

No.	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	M	SD
24	Such conflicts affect my teaching effectiveness and classroom environment.	15	17	7	12	1	**3.63**	1.19
25	Teachers perform better when institutions support their professional beliefs and autonomy.	39	11	2	0	0	**4.71**	0.54
	Scale Mean						**4.17**	1.07

Note. N = 52. SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree. M = item mean; SD = item standard deviation.

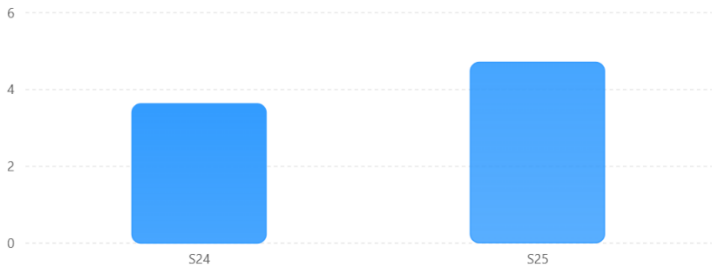

Figure 4*Item-Level Descriptive Statistics: Section D — Impact on Teaching and Satisfaction.*

Subscale Summary and Intercorrelations

Table 6 presents the intercorrelation matrix of subscale total scores and key descriptive statistics. The gap between Section A (M = 48.50 out of 50, SD = 1.88) and Section C (M = 16.35 out of 25, SD = 4.91) is the central finding of this study: teachers hold near-ceiling constructivist beliefs yet report only moderate conflict—a discrepancy suggesting that many teachers have developed adaptive strategies to navigate the gap rather than confronting it openly. Section B (M = 31.54 out of 40, SD = 4.74) indicates a moderately high level of institutional demand.

Table 6 ***Subscale Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Intercorrelation Matrix. (N = 52)***

Subscale	Possible Range	M	SD	Min	Max	1	2	3
1. Personal Teaching Beliefs (A)	10–50	48.50	1.88	43	50	—		
2. Institutional	8–40	31.54	4.74	24	40	−.09	—	

Expectations (B)								
3. Belief–Expectation Conflict (C)	5–25	16.35	4.91	5	25	−.21	.66***	—
4. Impact on Teaching (D)	2–10	8.35	1.44	5	10	−.12	.42**	.68***

Note. M and SD computed from total subscale scores. Correlation coefficients r reported between column and row subscales. **p < .01. ***p < .001 (two-tailed).

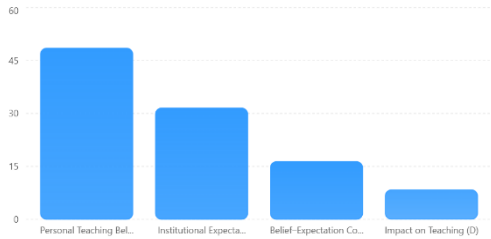

Figure 5*Subscale Descriptive Statistics.*

Institutional expectations were strongly and positively correlated with conflict, r(50) = .66, p < .001, accounting for approximately 44% of the variance in conflict scores. Conflict was in turn strongly and positively correlated with negative impact on teaching and satisfaction, r(50) = .68, p < .001, accounting for approximately 46% of the variance in impact scores. The correlation between institutional expectations and impact was moderate and significant, r(50) = .42, p = .002, suggesting partial direct influence of institutional demands on teaching impact beyond the mediated pathway through conflict. Personal teaching beliefs showed weak, non-significant negative correlations with conflict (r = −.21, p = .143), institutional expectations (r = −.09, p = .536), and impact (r = −.12, p = .414), indicating that belief strength alone does not predict conflict intensity.

Moderator Analyses

An independent-samples t-test revealed no significant difference in conflict scores between male teachers (M = 18.33, SD = 7.16) and female teachers (M = 15.93, SD = 4.63), t(50) = 1.35, p = .184, d = 0.40. Similarly, Pearson's r between years of experience and conflict scores was negligible and non-significant, r(50) = −.04, p = .768. Thus, neither gender nor professional seniority moderated the experienced level of belief–expectation conflict in this sample.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the conflict between personal teaching beliefs and institutional expectations among 52 school teachers. Three principal findings warrant detailed interpretation.

The Near-Ceiling Endorsement of Constructivist Beliefs

The most remarkable finding of this study is the almost universal and almost ceiling support of constructivist, student-centred pedagogical views (M = 4.85 on a five-point scale, with zero disagreements across 520 item responses). This pattern is in line with the seminal work of Pajares (1992) who stated that teacher beliefs are more potent drivers of instructional behaviour than formal knowledge. The homogeneity of ideas throughout the present sample (in terms of age groups, experience and subject areas) implies that values of progressive education have been entrenched among Indian school teachers. This is not a homogenous sample that might be the result of a selection artefact but rather teachers with a wide range of experience, diverse subjects and both genders. The regularity is striking and profound. This finding aligns with DeStefano's 2023 qualitative study of early childhood teacher narratives, which identified a common core belief amongst participating teachers that knowledge construction necessitates a safe, community-oriented classroom environment that is responsive to students' interests despite structural and demographic differences. This is also reflected in the near unanimity of endorsement for items such as Q7 (real-life examples; M = 4.96) and Q1 (holistic development; M = 4.90) in the current study. Similarly, the integrative review by Bardach et al. (2022) found that psychological characteristics of teachers, including their pedagogical belief systems, are strong predictors of teaching effectiveness across cultures, adding further validity to the near-ceiling belief endorsement observed here as a genuine reflection of professional conviction rather than social desirability artefact.

This conclusion also corresponds with Priestley et al. (2015) who proposed that teacher beliefs are a lasting component of professional identity that endures even when performed practice is limited by structural reasons. The near ceiling belief ratings in the present sample could be indicative of successful internalisation of the NCF 2005 (NCERT, 2005) and NEP 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020) vision among teachers. But as the conflict data reveal, internalisation of beliefs does not necessarily translate into practice. The belief-practice gap has been established in the international literature. Geremew et al. (2024) found that in their work with social studies teachers in Ethiopia, constructivist beliefs were prevalent, but implementation was consistently hampered by structural constraints such as lack of resources,

time pressure, and lack of institutional support—a set of challenges that closely resembled institutional expectations reported by the current sample (specifically Q11 concerning syllabus completion pressure, M = 4.10 and Q14 about administrative burden, M = 4.27). Koul and Bansal (2023) demonstrated the resilience of belief systems in Indian teaching to structural constraint by showing that Indian teachers in Jammu and Kashmir were committed to constructivist principles of children's academic, cognitive and psychosocial development in the face of extreme contextual adversity.

The Moderately High Perception of Institutional Demands

Institutional expectations were expressed at a rather high level (M = 3.94). Interestingly, the highest mean item in Section B was not directly related to pedagogical constraint but rather to administrative burden: 80.8% of respondents agreed that administrative work reduces classroom teaching quality (Q14: M = 4.27). This conclusion aligns with a growing body of international literature that identifies administrative overburden as a major cause of teacher discontent (Worth & Van den Brande, 2020). TALIS 2024 data supports Ma and MacMillan's (1999), Perryman and Calvert's (2020) earlier assertion that administrative burden is a major contributor to teacher stress and job dissatisfaction. These data found too much administrative work to be one of the most common causes of occupational stress around the world, with experienced teachers being affected more than others. This is the case for the majority of this sample (65.4% with 15 or more years of experience). This was nuanced by Zhu and Zhai's (2025) Chinese empirical study which showed that administrative pressure was not simply an external stressor but an active threat to teachers' professional identity with significant implications for their sense of well-being and enthusiasm for teaching. The strong item-level agreement on Q14 (administrative work impacting classroom quality) in this study aligns with the findings of Dorji and Wangchuk (2022) and Arañas (2023), who both observed that non-instructional tasks diminish teachers' time for lesson planning, student feedback, and innovative pedagogical design. The item with the largest standard deviation in Section B (Q17: SD = 1.03) indicated that institutional preference for standardised rather than innovative teaching differed widely between schools. This is an important qualification to the argument that the structural conditions limiting teacher autonomy are uniform across the Indian school system and echoes OECD (2020) findings on the variability of decentralisation and teacher autonomy across systems.

Conflict, Its Correlates, and Its Consequences

Also, the moderate conflict level (M = 3.27) is between the high belief endorsement (M = 4.85) and the moderately high institutional expectation perception (M = 3.94) indicating that teachers do not perceive the logical gap between their beliefs and institutional demands as a fully proportionate psychological conflict. This moderation can be explained by several ways. First, instructors may compartmentalise, holding constructivist views as ideals while executing traditional techniques without feeling this to be a personal conflict. Lortie (1975) found that instructors are socialised to accept rather than aggressively challenge institutional limitations. Secondly, the accommodating tactics described by Priestley et al. (2015) in their ecological view of teacher agency may apply here: instructors with strong convictions and high perceived autonomy do not necessarily clash with institutional demands; rather they maneuver around them selectively. The moderate conflict mean identified in this study is particularly consistent with Liu et al.'s (2024) cross-sectional finding among clinical teachers, where 58.7% reported only low-to-moderate levels of role conflict even when objective incongruence between role demands was demonstrably high—supporting the interpretation that professional socialisation moderates the psychological translation of structural conflict into experienced strain. Importantly, the between-teacher variation in conflict scores (SD = 1.05; range 5–25) suggests that this moderation is not uniform: a sizeable minority of teachers experience conflict at full blast, which is in line with Frontiers in Psychology research (Marenco-Escuderos et al., 2023) documenting that teachers with lower perceived autonomy report significantly higher emotional exhaustion and conflict, while those with stronger self-efficacy buffer against institutional strain.

Institutional demands were also strongly and positively related to conflict ($r = .66$, $p < .001$) and conflict was strongly and positively related to negative teaching impact ($r = .68$, $p < .001$). The empirical support for this causal sequence is clear: the higher the institutional demands, the greater the role conflict, and the lower the teaching effectiveness and professional satisfaction. This chain is exactly what both Role Conflict Theory (Rizzo et al., 1970) and SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2020) would predict. Deci and Ryan (2000) suggest that when the basic psychological desire for autonomy is thwarted in the workplace, intrinsic motivation diminishes, affective involvement lessens, and performance falls. The present results are concrete evidence at the item level of that mechanism occurring in Indian classrooms. The amplitude of the correlation ($r = .66$ and $r = .68$) closely resembles effect estimates found in comparable international literature. A moderated mediation analysis

of 824 US teachers by Ha et al. (2025) found that administrative support was strongly associated with less burnout through job satisfaction, and teacher autonomy was a major moderator. This is structurally parallel to the institutional expectations → conflict → teaching impact pathway identified in this study. In a review published in ScienceDirect, Fernández-Batanero et al. (2025) confirmed that administrative burden and limitations of autonomy are the two most robust predictors of teacher dissatisfaction across education systems, with effect sizes in the moderate-to-large range. Further, Collie et al. (2020) and Salokangas et al. (2020) confirmed, using structural equation modelling, that perceived autonomy adversely predicts emotional exhaustion, with path coefficients of a similar magnitude to the correlations in the present study. The present findings, therefore, add to this body of information for the Indian school context that had not been quantified before using primary survey data.

Perhaps the most policy-actionable conclusion from this study was that 96.2% of respondents felt that institutional support for professional autonomy would improve their teaching (Q25: M = 4.71). This aligns with Ha et al. (2025), who showed that perceived administrative support and autonomy are the strongest predictors of teacher satisfaction and burnout reduction, and Worth and Van den Brande (2020), who found teacher autonomy to be more strongly predictive of retention intention than salary or workload. Jerrim (2023) introduces an important nuance: it is possible that constraining teacher autonomy does not visibly harm student test scores in the short run, but it does impose real costs on the teacher—and the present findings suggest that over 60% of teachers experience those costs as a direct impairment of their classroom performance. This is confirmed by a 2022 systematic assessment on the TALIS 2018 dataset (OECD, 2020): teachers in educational systems where there is more autonomy about decisions on lesson planning and professional development report consistently reduced burnout and higher intentions to stay. Guay's (2022) comprehensive review of SDT in education was a synthesis of convergent evidence that autonomy-supportive educational environments predict better teacher motivation, engagement, and well-being across diverse cultural and institutional contexts, and this conclusion is powerfully echoed by the near-unanimous Q25 endorsement in the present sample. Zhu and Zhai (2025) further strengthened this notion from the professional identity perspective: when institutional conditions facilitate rather than hinder teachers' sense of professional agency, burnout is buffered, and occupational commitment is maintained. The policy implication for Indian school leaders and administrators is therefore straightforward and empirically based. Structural reforms to reduce non-instructional burden and increase

pedagogical discretion are not merely optional enhancements to the system but a prerequisite to sustaining teaching quality and teacher well-being.

It is worth noting the absence of substantial impacts of gender and experience on conflict scores. It might be expected that more experienced teachers would have developed more effective coping techniques and report less conflict, or that female instructors would report greater conflict (due to the added domestic role obligations that they encounter in addition to institutional pressures). Neither hypothesis was supported. This suggests that the belief-expectation conflict is a structural characteristic of the teaching job in Indian schools and not a personal or demographic one.

CONCLUSION

The current study adds to the expanding body of literature on teacher views, professional autonomy, and institutional accountability by presenting empirical findings from an Indian school context. Consistent with previous research, the findings show that teachers have strong constructivist and learner-centered pedagogical beliefs that prioritize holistic development, critical thinking, student participation, and meaningful learning experiences (Pajares, 1992; Priestley et al., 2015). The extraordinarily high level of support for these views implies that the values promoted in the National Curriculum Framework (NCERT, 2005) and the National Education Policy 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020) have been internalized by teachers as desired educational goals. These findings align with international studies that show instructors in various situations are increasingly in favor of constructivist teaching practices even when their implementation is not fully supported by an institutional framework (Geremew et al., 2024; Letina, 2022).

At the same time, teachers indicated moderate-to-high levels of institutional expectations with regard to syllabus completion, examination performance, administrative tasks and conformity with organisational processes. These findings are in line with international evidence that identifies accountability pressures and administrative workloads as major sources of occupational stress for teachers (OECD, 2024; Worth and Van den Brande, 2020). It is particularly significant that administrative burden was so prominent in this study, as it indicates the extent to which non-instructional activities can limit opportunities for creative and student-centred teaching. As pointed out by Zhu and Zhai (2025), over-burdened administrative expectations may damage teachers' professional identity and limit the chances for educational innovation, thereby setting the stage for role conflict.

One of the main contributions of this research is to demonstrate the link between institutional expectations, experienced conflict and perceived influence on teaching. The strong positive association between institutional expectations and belief–expectation conflict ($r = .66$, $p < .001$) and the equally strong association between conflict and teaching impact ($r = .68$, $p < .001$) are consistent with the propositions of Role Conflict Theory (Rizzo et al., 1970) and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2020). These results demonstrate that institutional constraints do not just coexist with teacher views, but function as structural factors that can create psychological conflict and impact professional effectiveness. Hence the findings offer empirical support to the claim that educational quality is determined not just by teacher competency but also by organisational contexts which enable or constrain professional autonomy.

Importantly, the findings suggest that personal teaching beliefs were not significantly connected to institutional expectations, conflict, or instructional impact. This implies that the intensity of teachers' pedagogical convictions per se does not determine the amount to which they suffer professional conflict. Instead it appears that organisational factors have a greater influence. This finding supports ecological theories of teacher agency which suggest that teachers negotiate their professional identities within wider institutional, cultural and policy contexts rather than acting on the basis of individual convictions (Priestley et al., 2015). It also shows that many instructors develop adaptive methods that allow them to preserve constructivist ideals while negotiating institutional constraints, thereby maintaining conflict at levels that might not otherwise be expected.

One of the most important practical implications of the study is the strong consensus that institutional support for professional autonomy improves teaching performance. The overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that instructors fare better when schools respect their professional judgement and instructional independence. This result is in line with Self-Determination Theory that considers autonomy as a basic psychological demand that is necessary for motivation, well-being and effective performance (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Similar findings have been seen internationally, with autonomy-supportive workplaces related with increased teacher satisfaction, lower burnout, greater professional commitment, and higher instructional quality (Guay, 2022; Ha et al., 2025). Thus, the current findings indicate that strengthening teacher autonomy should be regarded not as an optional administrative practice but as a strategic necessity for educational improvement.

The study also has substantial consequences for educational leadership and policy. School administrators should work to decrease the administrative responsibilities that are not essential, involve teachers in decision making and foster creative classroom methods. There is a need for a balance between institutional accountability measures and professional trust, in order to enable teachers to exercise their pedagogical discretion and still accomplish organisational goals. Such reforms also would improve teacher well-being, retention, and instructional effectiveness, in addition to decreasing professional conflict. In light of the continuing educational reforms under NEP 2020, promoting autonomy-supportive school cultures may be crucial in turning policy goals into classroom realities.

Overall, this study offers systematic evidence that Indian school teachers are still strongly devoted to the ideas of learner-centred and constructivist education, even as they operate within institutional frameworks that often emphasise accountability, standardization and administrative compliance. The results suggest that institutional pressures are important sources of professional conflict, which impacts teaching effectiveness and satisfaction. The substantial endorsement of professional autonomy, in turn, suggests that instructors view autonomy-supportive contexts as crucial to high quality instruction. Collectively, these findings underline the need for educational institutions to be designed with a balance between responsibility and professional trust so that teachers can put their pedagogical views into practice in ways that are ultimately beneficial to teachers and learners.

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