

Teacher Professionalism and Competency in West Bengal

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Abstract: *Teacher professionalism and competency are fundamental to the quality and effectiveness of education. In West Bengal, teachers work within a diverse educational environment that includes government, government-aided, private, and teacher education institutions. Changes in curriculum, educational technology, assessment practices, inclusive education, competency-based learning, and professional expectations have increased the need for teachers to continuously develop their professional knowledge and skills. The present article reviews the concepts of teacher professionalism and competency and examines their significance within the educational context of West Bengal. The article considers professional knowledge, pedagogical competence, ethical practice, communication, classroom management, assessment literacy, digital competency, reflective practice, professional commitment, collaboration, and continuous professional development as major dimensions of teacher competency. It also discusses institutional and contextual factors affecting teacher professionalism, including working conditions, professional autonomy, leadership, workload, professional development opportunities, and institutional support. Existing research suggests that teacher competency is closely connected with job satisfaction, professional development, institutional climate, and professional commitment. The article argues that strengthening teacher professionalism requires more than improving individual teacher skills; it requires supportive institutional environments and continuous opportunities for professional learning. The article concludes with suggestions for improving teacher professionalism and competency through systematic professional development, mentoring, research engagement, technology integration, collaborative learning, supportive leadership, and effective professional standards.*

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1. Introduction: Teachers are among the most important actors in the educational process. The quality of teaching has a direct influence on students' academic development, social skills, values, motivation, and capacity for lifelong learning. Consequently, teacher professionalism and competency have become important areas of educational research and policy.

Teacher professionalism refers to the knowledge, attitudes, values, ethical standards, responsibilities, and behaviours associated with effective professional practice. A professional teacher is expected to possess

adequate subject knowledge and pedagogical competence while also demonstrating commitment to learners, professional ethics, collaboration, reflective practice, and continuous learning.

Teacher competency is closely related but has a somewhat different emphasis. Competency refers to the integrated knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities required to perform professional responsibilities effectively. A competent teacher should be able to plan lessons, use appropriate teaching strategies, manage classrooms, assess learning, provide feedback, address learner diversity, use educational technology, and reflect upon teaching practice.

In West Bengal, the issue of teacher professionalism is particularly significant because the state has a large and diverse education system extending from primary and secondary schools to higher education and teacher education institutions. Teachers work in different institutional and socio-economic contexts, and their professional experiences may vary according to location, institutional type, resources, training, workload, and opportunities for professional development.

The changing nature of education has further increased professional expectations. Teachers are increasingly expected to integrate digital technology, promote inclusive learning, develop higher-order thinking, use formative assessment, engage in collaborative learning, and respond to diverse learner needs. These expectations require teachers to continually update their professional competencies.

The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) has also emphasized the importance of professional preparation and quality in teacher education. The NCTE Regulations, 2014 introduced significant reforms in teacher education programmes and strengthened the framework governing teacher preparation in India.

The present article examines teacher professionalism and competency in the context of West Bengal and reviews major dimensions, challenges, and possible strategies for professional improvement.

2. Concept of Teacher Professionalism: Teacher professionalism is broader than the possession of academic qualifications. It involves the manner in which teachers understand, perform, and develop their professional roles.

A professional teacher generally demonstrates:

- Sound subject knowledge
- Pedagogical knowledge
- Professional ethics
- Commitment to learners
- Responsibility and accountability
- Reflective practice
- Professional autonomy
- Collaboration with colleagues
- Continuous professional development
- Appropriate use of technology
- Engagement with educational research

Professionalism therefore includes both what teachers know and how they use their knowledge responsibly in professional practice.

Teacher professionalism can be viewed at three interconnected levels.

2.1 Individual Professionalism: Individual professionalism concerns teachers' knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, motivation, ethics, and commitment.

2.2 Institutional Professionalism: Institutional professionalism concerns the environment created by schools, colleges, and teacher education institutions. Leadership, organizational climate, workload, professional autonomy, resources, and recognition influence teachers' professional behaviour.

2.3 Collective Professionalism: Collective professionalism involves teachers working collaboratively to improve teaching and learning. Professional learning communities, peer observation, collaborative research, mentoring, and sharing of teaching resources are examples of collective professionalism.

3. Concept of Teacher Competency: Teacher competency refers to the ability to perform teaching responsibilities effectively through the integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and professional values.

Teacher competency is multidimensional.

3.1 Subject-Matter Competency: Teachers must possess adequate knowledge of the subjects they teach. Subject knowledge allows teachers to explain concepts accurately, connect ideas, answer questions, and identify misconceptions.

3.2 Pedagogical Competency: Pedagogical competency involves the ability to select and apply appropriate teaching methods according to learners, subjects, and educational objectives.

A competent teacher should be able to use:

- Lecture and explanation
- Discussion
- Demonstration
- Problem-solving
- Project-based learning
- Cooperative learning
- Experiential learning
- Inquiry-based learning

The choice of method should depend upon learning objectives rather than habit.

3.3 Classroom Management Competency: Effective classroom management involves maintaining a positive learning environment, organizing activities, managing time, encouraging participation, and responding appropriately to behavioural issues.

3.4 Assessment Competency: Teachers need knowledge of assessment principles and techniques. Assessment competency includes test construction, formative assessment, summative assessment, feedback, interpretation of results, and use of assessment information to improve instruction.

3.5 Communication Competency: Teaching depends heavily on communication. Teachers should communicate clearly through verbal, non-verbal, written, and digital forms.

3.6 Digital Competency: The growth of digital education has made technology competency increasingly important. Teachers need to use digital platforms, educational applications, online resources, multimedia, and digital assessment tools appropriately.

However, digital competency should not mean simply using technology. Teachers must understand when and why technology improves learning.

3.7 Inclusive Education Competency: Teachers increasingly work with learners from diverse linguistic, social, economic, cultural, and ability backgrounds. Professional competency therefore includes the capacity to design inclusive learning environments.

3.8 Reflective Competency: Reflective teachers examine their own teaching practices, identify strengths and weaknesses, consider student feedback, and modify their approaches.

Reflection transforms teaching from routine activity into continuous professional learning.

4. Relationship Between Professionalism and Competency: Professionalism and competency are closely related but not identical.

Competency primarily concerns the ability to perform professional tasks effectively, whereas professionalism includes the broader values, attitudes, ethical responsibilities, and identity associated with the teaching profession.

For example, a teacher may possess strong subject knowledge but demonstrate weak professional ethics. Similarly, a teacher may be highly committed to students but require additional training in assessment or digital pedagogy.

A professionally competent teacher therefore needs both:

Capability + Professional responsibility: Teacher professionalism can be conceptualized as a framework within which competencies are developed and applied.

5. Major Dimensions of Teacher Professionalism in West Bengal

5.1 Professional Knowledge: Teachers need current knowledge of their subjects and educational developments. Professional learning should not stop with initial teacher education.

5.2 Ethical Responsibility: Teachers have responsibilities toward learners, parents, colleagues, institutions, and society. Fairness, honesty, respect, confidentiality, and non-discrimination are important professional values.

5.3 Commitment: Professional commitment includes dedication to teaching and willingness to contribute to institutional development.

5.4 Continuous Learning: Education changes continuously. Teachers therefore need lifelong professional development.

5.5 Research Orientation: Teachers should be encouraged to examine educational problems through action research, classroom inquiry, academic reading, and collaborative research.

5.6 Collaboration: Professional teachers should share ideas, resources, experiences, and solutions with colleagues.

5.7 Reflective Practice: Teachers should regularly examine the effectiveness of their teaching methods.

5.8 Social Responsibility: Teachers contribute to the development of responsible citizens. Professionalism therefore includes social awareness and commitment to equity and inclusion.

6. Teacher Professionalism in the Context of West Bengal: West Bengal has a complex educational landscape. Educational institutions exist across urban, semi-urban, and rural areas, and teachers may experience substantial differences in institutional resources and professional opportunities.

The professional development needs of a teacher working in an urban institution may differ from those of a teacher working in a rural or economically disadvantaged area. Access to internet connectivity, libraries, professional networks, training programmes, and technological resources may vary.

Language is another important contextual consideration. West Bengal has a strong Bengali-medium educational tradition alongside English-medium institutions and other linguistic contexts. Teachers therefore require communication and pedagogical strategies appropriate to multilingual learners.

Social and economic diversity also requires teachers to develop inclusive professional practices.

Consequently, teacher professionalism in West Bengal should not be viewed only through standardized measures of competence. Contextual factors must also be considered.

7. Teacher Competency and Professional Development: Professional development is one of the most important mechanisms for strengthening teacher competency.

Initial teacher education provides a foundation, but professional learning must continue throughout a teacher's career.

Professional-development activities may include:

- Orientation programmes
- Workshops
- Seminars
- Conferences
- Refresher courses
- Faculty-development programmes
- Online courses
- Peer learning
- Mentoring
- Action research
- Collaborative lesson planning
- Professional learning communities

Professional development should be relevant to actual classroom problems.

For example, rather than providing only theoretical lectures on educational technology, programmes could allow teachers to develop digital lesson plans, create online assessments, use multimedia resources, and evaluate digital learning outcomes.

8. Teacher Competency and Technology: Technology has transformed educational practices.

Teachers increasingly use:

- Learning management systems
- Video-conferencing platforms
- Digital libraries
- Educational videos
- Online quizzes
- Digital presentations
- Interactive simulations
- Artificial intelligence-supported educational tools

However, technology can create new professional challenges. Teachers need to evaluate the credibility of online information, protect student privacy, address digital inequality, and ensure that technology supports rather than replaces meaningful pedagogy.

Digital competency should therefore be considered an important component of contemporary teacher professionalism.

9. Teacher Competency and Inclusive Education: Inclusive education requires teachers to recognize learner diversity and adapt instruction accordingly.

Teachers may encounter differences in:

- Learning ability
- Language
- Socio-economic background
- Gender
- Culture
- Physical and sensory abilities
- Learning pace
- Prior educational experiences

Professional competency requires teachers to provide flexible learning opportunities and avoid discriminatory practices.

Teachers need knowledge of differentiated instruction, accessible teaching materials, classroom adaptation, and appropriate assessment strategies.

10. Teacher Professionalism and Job Satisfaction: Professionalism and job satisfaction are also connected.

A teacher who has strong professional competence may experience greater confidence and achievement. At the same time, teachers who work in supportive environments may be more motivated to improve their professional skills.

Research involving teacher educators in West Bengal has identified relationships between teaching competence and job satisfaction. A recent study reported a strong positive relationship between teaching competence and job satisfaction among teacher educators from government and private B.Ed. colleges. The study involved 300 teacher educators and reported a correlation of $r = .84$. While this is a study of teacher educators rather than all school teachers, it provides relevant evidence for the connection between professional competence and occupational satisfaction.

Other research in West Bengal has examined job satisfaction among teacher educators and identified institutional type, salary, professional development, location, and other personal and organizational factors as relevant variables.

These studies indicate that professional competency cannot be separated completely from teachers' working conditions.

11. Institutional Factors Affecting Teacher Professionalism: Teacher professionalism is influenced by institutional conditions.

11.1 Leadership: Supportive educational leadership can encourage teachers to experiment, collaborate, conduct research, and participate in institutional decision-making.

11.2 Professional Autonomy: Teachers require reasonable autonomy in teaching methods, assessment, academic planning, and professional development.

11.3 Workload: Excessive administrative workload may reduce time available for lesson preparation, research, and professional learning.

11.4 Infrastructure: Adequate classrooms, libraries, laboratories, digital facilities, internet connectivity, and teaching-learning resources support professional practice.

11.5 Recognition: Teachers are more likely to remain professionally motivated when their achievements are recognized.

11.6 Career Development: Opportunities for promotion and increased professional responsibility can strengthen professional commitment.

12. Challenges to Teacher Professionalism and Competency: Several challenges may affect teacher professionalism in West Bengal.

12.1 Unequal Access to Professional Development: Teachers in different geographical and institutional contexts may have unequal access to training, conferences, research facilities, and professional networks.

12.2 Excessive Administrative Responsibilities: Administrative duties may reduce teachers' time for academic preparation and professional development.

12.3 Digital Divide: Not all teachers and learners have equal access to reliable digital resources and internet connectivity.

12.4 Limited Research Opportunities: Teachers may face difficulties obtaining research funding, mentorship, data access, and publication opportunities.

12.5 Resistance to Change: Some teachers may be reluctant to adopt new pedagogical and technological approaches because of inadequate training or lack of institutional support.

12.6 Professional Stress: Workload, institutional expectations, employment conditions, and administrative pressures can influence professional motivation.

12.7 Weak Professional Collaboration: Where teachers work in isolation, opportunities for peer learning and collaborative problem-solving may be reduced.

13. Teacher Professionalism in Private Teacher Education Institutions: Private Teacher Education Institutions represent an important component of teacher preparation in West Bengal.

Teacher educators in these institutions have responsibilities including:

- Teaching B.Ed. and D.El.Ed. courses
- Supervising teaching practice
- Conducting internal assessment
- Guiding student-teachers
- Organizing seminars and workshops
- Preparing academic documentation
- Participating in institutional activities
- Engaging in research and professional development

Research conducted in West Bengal has reported varying levels of job satisfaction among teacher educators in private institutions. Some studies have identified concerns related to salary, compensation, working conditions, and professional development.

This suggests that teacher professionalism in private TEIs should be examined alongside institutional factors.

A teacher educator may have adequate academic qualifications but may have limited opportunities to develop professionally if the institution does not provide support for research, conferences, training, or academic collaboration.

14. Teacher Education and Professional Competency: Teacher education institutions have a special responsibility for developing teacher competency because they prepare future teachers.

Teacher educators should therefore model the competencies they expect student-teachers to acquire.

For example, if teacher educators expect student-teachers to use learner-centred methods, they should themselves demonstrate learner-centred pedagogy.

If student-teachers are expected to use reflective practice, teacher educators should demonstrate reflection.

If future teachers are expected to use educational technology, teacher educators should demonstrate meaningful technology integration.

Teacher education is therefore not only about what is taught but also about how professional values and competencies are modelled.

15. Role of Professional Learning Communities: Professional learning communities can strengthen teacher professionalism.

A professional learning community provides opportunities for teachers to:

- Discuss classroom challenges
- Share teaching strategies
- Review student learning
- Develop teaching materials
- Conduct collaborative research
- Observe peer teaching
- Provide constructive feedback

Such collaboration can reduce professional isolation and encourage continuous improvement.

In West Bengal, schools and teacher education institutions could develop local professional networks connecting teachers across institutions and geographical areas.

16. Role of Action Research: Action research is another important method for developing teacher competency.

Through action research, teachers can identify a classroom problem, introduce an intervention, observe the results, and reflect on the outcomes.

For example:

Problem: Students have difficulty participating in classroom discussions.

Intervention: Introduce structured cooperative learning.

Observation: Examine participation and learning outcomes.

Reflection: Determine whether the strategy improved participation.

This process develops teachers as reflective professionals rather than passive recipients of externally designed training.

17. Strategies for Improving Teacher Professionalism and Competency: The following strategies may strengthen teacher professionalism in West Bengal.

17.1 Continuous Professional Development: Professional development should be continuous rather than limited to occasional workshops.

17.2 Mentoring: Beginning teachers and newly appointed teacher educators should receive structured mentoring from experienced professionals.

17.3 Digital Training: Professional development should include practical training in educational technology and digital pedagogy.

17.4 Research Support: Teachers should be encouraged to conduct classroom-based research and publish their findings.

17.5 Collaborative Learning: Institutions should create professional learning communities and peer-learning groups.

17.6 Recognition and Incentives: Professional achievements should be recognized through awards, career opportunities, research support, and institutional appreciation.

17.7 Participatory Leadership: Teachers should have meaningful opportunities to contribute to institutional decision-making.

17.8 Improved Working Conditions: Reasonable workload, appropriate infrastructure, adequate resources, and supportive administration are necessary for professional effectiveness.

18. Recommendations: Based on the reviewed literature and conceptual discussion, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Develop competency-based professional-development programmes that address actual teaching needs.
2. Strengthen digital competency through hands-on training rather than purely theoretical workshops.
3. Promote research culture by providing institutional support for action research, publication, and academic collaboration.
4. Establish mentoring systems for early-career teachers.
5. Create professional learning communities within and across institutions.
6. Improve institutional leadership through participatory and supportive management.
7. Reduce unnecessary administrative workload so teachers can focus on teaching and professional development.
8. Strengthen assessment literacy so teachers can use assessment to improve learning.
9. Promote inclusive teaching practices through training in differentiated instruction and learner diversity.
10. Recognize professional achievement through transparent evaluation and career-development systems.
11. Provide equitable access to professional development for teachers working in rural and disadvantaged areas.
12. Integrate reflective practice into routine professional activities.

19. Scope for Future Research: Several areas require further research.

Future studies may compare:

- Government and private-school teachers
- Urban and rural teachers
- Primary and secondary teachers
- Government and private teacher educators
- Male and female teachers
- Experienced and beginning teachers
- Bengali-medium and English-medium teachers

Research may also examine the relationship between teacher professionalism and:

- Job satisfaction
- Teacher effectiveness
- Organizational commitment
- Burnout
- Professional identity
- Student achievement
- Digital competency
- Leadership
- Organizational climate

Longitudinal studies could examine how teacher competency develops throughout a professional career.

Mixed-method studies combining questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations, and institutional data could provide deeper understanding.

20. Conclusion: Teacher professionalism and competency are essential for improving the quality of education in West Bengal. Professionalism extends beyond academic qualifications and includes ethical responsibility, professional commitment, reflective practice, collaboration, autonomy, continuous learning, and accountability. Competency encompasses the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities required for effective teaching.

The reviewed literature suggests that teacher competency is influenced not only by individual characteristics but also by institutional conditions. Professional development, leadership, workload, recognition, infrastructure, professional autonomy, and employment conditions can affect teachers' professional growth.

In the contemporary educational environment, teachers need competencies in subject knowledge, pedagogy, classroom management, assessment, communication, digital education, inclusive education, and reflective practice. These competencies must be continuously developed because educational needs and technologies are constantly changing.

The situation of private Teacher Education Institutions is particularly important because teacher educators prepare the next generation of teachers. Their professional competence and working conditions can have a

multiplier effect on the wider education system. Strengthening teacher educators' professionalism can therefore contribute indirectly to improving school education.

A sustainable approach to teacher professionalism should combine individual professional development with institutional support. Training alone cannot create professionalism if teachers work under inadequate conditions. Similarly, good institutional conditions cannot fully compensate for insufficient professional competence.

Therefore, West Bengal requires an integrated approach involving continuous professional development, mentoring, research, digital competency, inclusive pedagogy, collaborative learning, supportive leadership, professional autonomy, and appropriate working conditions.

Ultimately, teacher professionalism should be viewed as a continuous process rather than a fixed status. Teachers become more professional through learning, reflection, collaboration, experience, ethical practice, and engagement with changing educational needs. Strengthening this process is essential for creating an effective, equitable, and future-ready education system in West Bengal.

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