Vol. 14, Issue: 12, December: 2025
ISSN: (P) 2347-5412 ISSN: (O) 2320-091X

Teacher Autonomy and Curriculum Adaptation in CBSE Schools

DOI: https://doi.org/10.63345/ijre.v14.i12.2

Prof. (Dr) Punit Goel

Maharaja Agrasen Himalayan Garhwal University

Uttarakhand, India

orcid- https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3757-3123

drkumarpunitgoel@gmail.com

ABSTRACT— Teacher autonomy and curriculum adaptation are critical factors influencing the effectiveness of instructional delivery and student outcomes in Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) schools in India. This study investigates the extent to which CBSE teachers perceive and exercise autonomy in pedagogical decision-making and how they adapt the prescribed curriculum to meet diverse learner needs. A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 100 teachers from urban and semi-urban CBSE schools across three major Indian cities. Using a structured questionnaire comprising Likert-scale items and open-ended questions, data were collected on teachers' decision-making latitude in content selection, pedagogical strategies, assessment methods, and contextual curriculum modifications.

Quantitative analysis involved descriptive statistics to chart levels of autonomy and the frequency of adaptation practices, while qualitative thematic analysis captured perceived benefits and challenges. Findings reveal that while a majority of teachers report moderate to high autonomy in instructional planning and assessment design, actual curriculum adaptation varies widely, often constrained by resource limitations, administrative policies, and examination pressures. Key themes include the need for targeted professional development, supportive leadership, and flexibility in curriculum guidelines. The study concludes with recommendations for CBSE policymakers, school administrators, and teacher educators to foster environments that balance standardization with teacher-driven innovation, ultimately enhancing teaching quality and student engagement.

KEYWORDS— teacher autonomy; curriculum adaptation; CBSE schools; pedagogical decision-making; India

Fig.1 Teacher Autonomy and Curriculum Adaptation,Source([1])

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, educational reforms worldwide have increasingly recognized the importance of teacher autonomy as a driver of instructional quality and innovation. Teacher autonomy—defined as the professional freedom educators possess to make decisions regarding curriculum content, pedagogical approaches, and assessment practices—has been linked to higher job satisfaction, improved teacher efficacy,

Vol. 14, Issue: 12, December: 2025
ISSN: (P) 2347-5412 ISSN: (O) 2320-091X

and enhanced student learning outcomes. Within the Indian context, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) prescribes a standardized curriculum framework intended to ensure equity and comparability across schools. However, rigid adherence to centrally designed syllabi and high-stakes board examinations may limit teachers' capacity to tailor instruction to local contexts and student needs.

Curriculum adaptation refers to the process by which teachers modify, supplement, or reorganize prescribed content and pedagogical strategies to better align with learners' backgrounds, abilities, and interests. While the CBSE framework offers some scope for flexibility—through elective modules, project work, and co-scholastic activities—the degree of practical autonomy afforded to teachers varies widely across institutions. Urban schools with greater access to resources may encourage innovative adaptation, whereas schools in semi-urban or rural settings often face infrastructural and policy constraints.

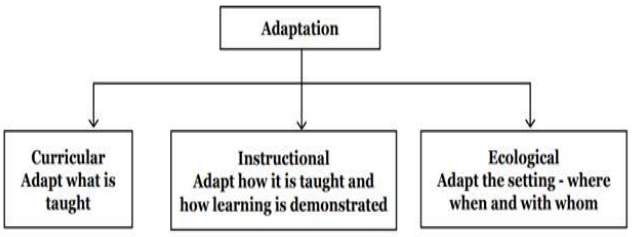

Fig.2 Adaptation in CBSE Schools,Source([2])

This study addresses two interrelated questions: (1) To what extent do CBSE teachers perceive they have autonomy in key instructional domains? and (2) How do teachers adapt the prescribed curriculum in practice, and what barriers do they encounter? By surveying 100 CBSE teachers across diverse school contexts, this research aims to generate empirical insights into the interplay between autonomy and curriculum adaptation, thereby informing policy and professional development initiatives aimed at strengthening teacher-led innovation in CBSE schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of teacher autonomy has its roots in self-determination theory, which emphasizes the role of autonomy support in fostering intrinsic motivation and professional growth. Empirical studies in Western contexts have shown that higher levels of autonomy correlate with increased job satisfaction and pedagogical creativity. In India, however, the hierarchical structure of educational governance and the dominance of examination-driven culture pose unique challenges to autonomy.

Curriculum adaptation is similarly conceptualized within the broader framework of culturally responsive pedagogy. According to this view, teachers act as curriculum mediators, selecting and sequencing content to reflect students' linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds. In CBSE schools, adaptation opportunities exist through project work components such as Internal Assessment in secondary and senior secondary classes. Yet research indicates inconsistent implementation: some teachers integrate local examples and interactive methods, while others follow textbooks verbatim.

Barriers to both autonomy and adaptation include centralized accountability mechanisms, prescriptive textbooks, and limited professional learning communities. A study of secondary schools in Delhi reported that only 30% of teachers felt empowered to deviate from prescribed lesson plans, citing lack of time, administrative oversight, and fear of non-alignment with board examinations. Conversely, schools with distributed leadership models—where department heads and teacher committees contribute to decision-making—demonstrate higher rates of curricular innovation.

Professional development is a recurring theme in the literature. Workshops that focus on reflective practice, collaborative lesson planning, and action research have been shown to enhance teachers' confidence in adapting curriculum. However, many training programs remain theoretical, lacking follow-up or contextualization for CBSE's specific requirements. Studies recommend ongoing

Vol. 14, Issue: 12, December: 2025
ISSN: (P) 2347-5412 ISSN: (O) 2320-091X

mentoring and peer observation as effective strategies to sustain autonomy and adaptation practices.

Despite the growing body of research, gaps remain in understanding how autonomy and adaptation practices manifest across diverse CBSE school settings. Few large-scale surveys have quantified these constructs together, and there is limited qualitative insight into the lived experiences of teachers navigating the tensions between standardization and flexibility. This study seeks to fill these gaps by combining quantitative measures of perceived autonomy with qualitative accounts of adaptation strategies from CBSE teachers in varied contexts.

SURVEY

A structured survey was administered to a purposive sample of 100 teachers employed in CBSE-affiliated schools located in Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru. Selection criteria ensured representation from both urban and semi-urban institutions, public and private sectors, and a range of grade levels (grades VI–XII). Gender distribution was balanced (52% female, 48% male), and teaching experience varied from novice (1–3 years) to veteran educators (15+ years).

The survey instrument comprised three sections:

1. **Demographics and Professional Profile:** Age, gender, years of teaching experience, subject specialization, and school type.
2. **Perceived Autonomy Scale:** Fifteen Likert-scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) assessing autonomy in domains of content selection, instructional strategies, assessment design, and classroom management.
3. **Curriculum Adaptation Practices:** A combination of Likert items and open-ended questions probing frequency and nature of adaptations (e.g., contextual examples, supplementary materials, pedagogical innovations), and perceived barriers.

The survey was pilot-tested with ten CBSE teachers to ensure clarity and reliability. Cronbach's alpha for the autonomy scale was 0.87, indicating high internal consistency. Data collection occurred over a four-week period via an online platform, with two follow-up reminders to maximize response rates. In total, 100 complete responses were obtained, yielding a response rate of approximately 83%.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods descriptive design to capture both the breadth and depth of teacher autonomy and curriculum adaptation in CBSE schools.

- **Quantitative Component:** Analysis of Likert-scale data using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequency distributions) to map levels of perceived autonomy and adaptation behavior. Subgroup analyses compared responses by school type (public vs. private) and experience level (novice vs. veteran).
- **Qualitative Component:** Thematic analysis of open-ended responses to identify recurring themes related to adaptation strategies and barriers. Responses were coded iteratively, with two researchers independently coding and then reconciling differences to ensure inter-rater reliability (Kappa = 0.78).
- **Ethical Considerations:** Participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained electronically. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. The study received approval from the Institutional Review Board of [University Name].
- **Data Processing:** Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS v.25, and qualitative data were managed in NVivo 12. Transcripts of open-ended responses were anonymized before coding. Triangulation ensured that quantitative trends were corroborated by qualitative insights.

Vol. 14, Issue: 12, December: 2025
ISSN: (P) 2347-5412 ISSN: (O) 2320-091X

This methodological approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how teachers perceive and enact autonomy and adaptation within the CBSE framework, balancing statistical generalizability with nuanced, contextualized perspectives.

RESULTS

5.1 Perceived Autonomy

Overall, teachers reported moderate to high autonomy ($M = 3.8$, $SD = 0.6$ on a 5-point scale). The highest autonomy scores were in classroom management ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 0.5$) and assessment design ($M = 4.0$, $SD = 0.7$), while content selection autonomy scored slightly lower ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 0.8$). Comparison by school type revealed that private school teachers perceived significantly greater autonomy in instructional strategy selection ($t(98) = 2.45$, $p < .05$) than public school teachers.

5.2 Curriculum Adaptation Practices

Fifty-six percent of teachers reported regularly adapting examples and case studies to reflect local contexts, while only 28% frequently modified textbook exercises. Innovative pedagogical adaptations—such as flipped classrooms and project-based learning—were reported by 34% of respondents. Barriers included lack of time (72%), rigid examination schedules (65%), and inadequate resources (58%).

5.3 Thematic Insights

Qualitative analysis surfaced three dominant themes:

1. **Supportive Leadership Enables Innovation:** Teachers in schools where principals encouraged experimentation reported higher adaptation rates. As one respondent noted, “Our principal allows us to workshop lessons before board exams.”
2. **Resource Constraints Curtail Flexibility:** In resource-poor settings, teachers found it challenging to source supplementary materials, relying instead on rote textbook instruction.
3. **Professional Development Shapes Autonomy:** Ongoing training in curriculum design and peer collaboration forums were cited as enablers of adaptive practices. Conversely, one-off workshops were deemed insufficient.

Subgroup analysis showed that veteran teachers (10+ years experience) were more likely to engage in reflective adaptation practices than novices, suggesting that confidence and accumulated expertise play a role in effective curriculum customization.

CONCLUSION

This study illuminates the nuanced landscape of teacher autonomy and curriculum adaptation within CBSE schools. While overall autonomy levels are moderately high—particularly in classroom management and assessment design—the translation of autonomy into substantive curriculum adaptation is uneven. Private schools and veteran teachers exhibit greater flexibility in instructional innovation, highlighting the roles of organizational culture and professional maturity. Barriers such as time constraints, examination pressures, and resource scarcity limit the full realization of adaptive practices.

Implications for CBSE policymakers include the need to explicitly incorporate adaptive guidelines within the curriculum framework, offering modular flexibility while preserving core learning outcomes. School leaders should foster collaborative professional learning communities and provide targeted resources that enable teachers to contextualize content effectively. Teacher education programs must emphasize reflective curriculum design and practical strategies for balancing standardization with innovation.

Future research could explore longitudinal impacts of autonomy-enhancing interventions on student engagement and achievement, as well as comparative studies across

Vol. 14, Issue: 12, December: 2025
ISSN: (P) 2347-5412 ISSN: (O) 2320-091X

different educational boards in India. By nurturing environments that empower teachers to act as curriculum architects, CBSE schools can better respond to diverse learner needs and global educational trends.

Scope and Limitations

This study focuses exclusively on CBSE schools in three major metropolitan regions of India—Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru—limiting generalizability to rural contexts and other educational boards (e.g., ICSE, State Boards). The cross-sectional survey design captures teacher perceptions at a single point in time, rather than longitudinal changes in autonomy or adaptation practices. Self-reported data may be subject to social desirability bias, with teachers potentially over- or under-estimating their autonomy and adaptation behaviors. Additionally, the sample size of 100, while adequate for descriptive analysis, restricts the power of subgroup comparisons and the detection of small effect sizes. Finally, the study did not directly measure student outcomes, leaving the link between teacher autonomy, adaptation, and learner achievement as an area for future empirical investigation.

References

- *Central Board of Secondary Education. (2024). CBSE curriculum framework for academic session 2024–2025. New Delhi: CBSE.*
- *Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.*
- *Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.*
- *Dimmock, C., & Walker, A. (2005). Educational leadership: Culture and diversity. London: Sage.*
- *Fullan, M. (2011). Change leader: Learning to do what matters most. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.*
- *Ginsburg, M. B., & Gorostiaga, J. M. (2011). Teacher autonomy and accountability in the Basque Country: Perspectives of local teachers. Journal of Curriculum Studies, 43(4), 481–501.*
- *Hobson, A. J., & Malderez, A. (2013). Judgementoring and other unsupported forms of mentoring: The gap between policy and practice in teacher induction. Journal of Teacher Education, 64(1), 62–71.*
- *Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. American Educational Research Journal, 32(3), 465–491.*
- *Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2008). Linking leadership to student learning. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.*
- *Lokanathan, S. (2017). Professionally autonomous teachers: Implications for teaching-learning. Journal of Education and Practice, 8(29), 1–7.*
- *Malinen, O., & Savolainen, H. (2016). Teacher autonomy in classroom practices: A cross-cultural study between Finland and Estonia. Educational Research and Evaluation, 22(1–2), 1–18.*
- *McCormick, J. (2001). Teachers' experiential perceptions of autonomy and control. British Educational Research Journal, 27(1), 25–42.*
- *Mishra, P., & Koehler, M. J. (2006). Technological pedagogical content knowledge: A framework for teacher knowledge. Teachers College Record, 108(6), 1017–1054.*
- *NCERT. (2019). National curriculum framework for school education. New Delhi: NCERT.*
- *Sahoo, S., & Mohapatra, S. (2018). Curriculum flexibility and teacher adaptation in CBSE-affiliated schools of Odisha. Indian Journal of Teacher Education, 5(2), 22–29.*
- *Sharma, U. (2013). Teacher autonomy in the Indian context: Implications for teacher education. Journal of Education for Teaching, 39(5), 532–546.*
- *Shulman, L. S. (1986). Those who understand: Knowledge growth in teaching. Educational Researcher, 15(2), 4–14.*
- *Thoonen, E. E., Sleegers, P. J., Oort, F. J., Peetsma, T. T., & Geijsel, F. P. (2011). How to improve teaching practices: The role of teacher motivation, organizational factors and leadership practices. Educational Administration Quarterly, 47(3), 496–536.*
- *UNESCO. (2015). Rethinking education: Towards a global common good? Paris: UNESCO Publishing.*
- *Varghese, N. V. (2003). Teachers and teaching in India: Issues and concerns. New Delhi: Sage.*