ShodhSamajik: Journal of Social Studies
January-June 2026 3(1)
https://shodhsamajik.com/

Original Article

WORK STRESS IN COLLEGE TEACHERS OF MANIPUR: ROLES OF EFFORT–REWARD IMBALANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL CLIMATE

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ABSTRACT

This paper takes a fresh look at how college teachers in Imphal experience job satisfaction and work stress, focusing specifically on their work environment and the Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) construct. Using survey responses from 400 teachers (N = 400), the results show that most faculty members report low surface-level stress. However, there is a clear mismatch between the hard work they put in (such as managing heavy workloads, meeting deadlines, and juggling multiple roles) and the rewards they feel they receive, such as basic recognition, a say in decisions, and real support from their administration. The workplace culture plays a major role in driving this stress, especially in how openly decisions are made and how well colleagues get along. Ultimately, the research shows that even though these teachers seem to be coping just fine day to day, there is a hidden layer of built-in stress deeply rooted in the college system itself.

Keywords: Effort–Reward Imbalance, Academic Stress, Organizational Climate, Higher Education, India, Job Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Workplace stress among educators is a major issue in higher education today, largely because the growing demands of the job don't match the rewards they receive. In the past, people usually blamed teacher stress on heavy workloads, tight deadlines, and student-related responsibilities. But newer research shows that just looking at how much work someone has isn't enough to see the whole picture. The real problem is often a deeper, built-in flaw in how academic jobs are set up. A great way to understand this is the Effort–Reward Imbalance (ERI) model, created by Johannes Siegrist. This idea basically says that stress arises naturally when the hard work you put into your job doesn't align with what you get back.

The ERI model suggests that employees feel psychological strain when they invest high levels of effort, such as managing workload, handling emotional demands, and fulfilling professional responsibilities, but do not receive enough rewards in return. These rewards may include salary, recognition, job security, and opportunities for career growth. This imbalance is especially relevant in teaching, where emotional effort and social responsibility are high but often not properly recognised. Research using the ERI model has consistently found that when high effort is combined with low reward, it can lead to negative mental health outcomes

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Received: 12 April 2026; **Accepted:** 29 May 2026; **Published** 15 June 2026
DOI: 10.29121/ShodhSamajik.v3.i1.2026.109
Page Number: 205-211
Journal Title: ShodhSamajik: Journal of Social Studies
Journal Abbreviation: ShodhSamajik J. Soc. Stud.
Online ISSN: 3049-2319, **Print ISSN:** 3108-2009
Publisher: Granthaalayah Publications and Printers, India
Conflict of Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.
Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.
Authors' Contributions: Each author made an equal contribution to the conception and design of the study. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.
Transparency: The authors affirm that this manuscript presents an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study. All essential aspects have been included, and any deviations from the original study plan have been clearly explained. The writing process strictly adhered to established ethical standards.

such as anxiety, depression, and burnout, and can also increase teachers' intentions to leave their profession Zurlo et al. (2010), Zurlo and Pes (2012).

In education, the ERI model has been further developed to better reflect the unique nature of teaching work. Studies have identified different types of effort, including workload, emotional demands, and pressures related to students. At the same time, rewards have been divided into material rewards (such as salary) and non-material rewards (such as respect and recognition). These studies show that imbalances in these areas strongly contribute to job burnout and lower well-being among teachers Ren et al. (2019). In addition, ERI has been linked to broader job outcomes, such as job satisfaction and the intention to leave, making it a useful framework for understanding academic stress more comprehensively rather than focusing only on surface-level factors Wang and Shi (2024).

Even though there is extensive research on this globally, very few studies have specifically examined the ERI model in colleges in India, especially in places like Imphal. Colleges in these areas often have to work with tight budgets, constantly changing rules, and growing workloads, which can make the imbalance between effort and reward even worse. Because of this, we need to stop just looking at basic stress levels and start digging deeper into the actual, structural reasons why these teachers are feeling so overwhelmed.

This paper tries to fill that gap by using the Effort–Reward Imbalance framework to study college teachers in Imphal. By examining their stress in relation to the college system and the rewards they receive, this study aims to provide a clearer picture of how these imbalances occur and how they harm teachers' well-being. Ultimately, this research not only tests the ERI model in a new setting but also provides real, fact-based ideas for making college workplaces better and healthier for everyone.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This research is based on primary data collected through a structured survey given to 400 college teachers. The main goal was to carefully examine their work stress and job satisfaction, specifically focusing on how their colleges are run and the overall work environment. To make sure the results were accurate and easy to understand, the study used two standard tools: the Employment Organisation Sources of Stressors Scale, which looks at the different types of stress caused by the workplace environment, and the Job Satisfaction Scale, which measures how content teachers are with their roles and working conditions overall.

Using the stressors scale, we could break workplace challenges into specific areas, such as pressure from administration, heavy workloads, issues getting along with coworkers, and problems caused by the way the college is organised. These areas were supported by additional data, including basic summaries and counts of how often certain answers occurred, which helped us identify general patterns and group the stressors together. This made it much easier to deeply understand exactly where the stress was coming from. In the end, all this data allowed us not just to count numbers, but to really interpret what those numbers meant for specific areas of the teachers' jobs.

The group of teachers surveyed represents an experienced and mature part of the workforce. A large number of the respondents were over 40 years old, indicating extensive professional experience and long tenure in the academic system. Looking at gender, there were significantly more female teachers (about 61%), which is important to note when considering how work stress might affect men and women differently. The teachers in this group are also highly educated, with about 61.5% holding PhDs, indicating that advanced degrees are a major focus in this profession.

When it comes to job titles, the vast majority of the teachers were Assistant Professors, which generally means they are in the early or middle stages of their academic careers. It is really important to highlight this specific group because Assistant Professors usually have to juggle teaching, research, and the pressure to get promoted. Altogether, the information we collected provides a solid foundation for analysing both the system-wide issues and the mental and social factors that contribute to stress among college teachers.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: EFFORT–REWARD IMBALANCE (ERI) MODEL

This paper uses the Effort–Reward Imbalance (ERI) model as its primary tool to explain why college teachers experience work-related stress. The ERI model essentially says that job stress happens when there is an unfair trade-off between the hard work you put in and the rewards you get out of it—meaning high job demands aren't balanced by fair returns. This idea has been thoroughly tested in studies on workplace health and has proven to be an especially great way to understand stress among teachers Zurlo et al. (2010), Ren et al. (2019).

Under this model, the "effort" side encompasses all the pressures placed on teachers. This covers obvious things like heavy workloads and strict deadlines, as well as handling actual teaching duties, completing administrative paperwork, and meeting performance goals. Beyond that, teaching requires a huge amount of continuous mental and emotional energy, including managing how you interact with students, constantly adjusting your teaching, and maintaining high academic standards. On top of all this, stress is made even worse when teachers face role conflict or confusion—like when expectations aren't clear or when different parts of the college demand conflicting things. Real-world studies show that when teachers have to put in these high levels of effort, it is

strongly tied to mental struggles, causing things like anxiety, severe burnout, and even physical health problems Zurlo et al. (2010), Zurlo and Pes (2012).

On the other hand, the "reward" side looks at what teachers get back in exchange for all that hard work. This includes getting basic recognition and respect, which shows that the college actually values them socially. It also includes opportunities to advance their careers, such as promotions and professional development. The ERI model also underscores the importance of teachers having a say in decision-making, showing that having some independence and being included in how the college is run are crucial. Additionally, getting real support from the college—such as having the administration back them up and providing the resources they need—plays a massive role in lowering stress. Research clearly shows that when teachers don't get enough of these rewards—whether it's actual money or just mental support—it is a huge predictor of them hating their jobs and makes them much more likely to want to quit Ren et al. (2019), Wang and Shi (2024).

In the end, the ERI model is a very strong, proven way to analyse exactly how the mismatch between hard work and fair rewards causes job stress. By using this model in this study, we can get a much deeper understanding of the actual, built-in system flaws that are hurting teachers' well-being in colleges.

RESULTS

EFFORT DIMENSIONS (HIGH DEMAND INDICATORS)

The results clearly show that college teachers are experiencing significant stress directly tied to the effort they put into their jobs Table 1 This means their daily work is extremely demanding in several different ways.

Table 1

Table 1 Effort dimensions of the teachers

Effort Indicator	Percentage (%)
Constant deadline pressure	45
Work–family conflict	36.5
Unclear expectations	30.5
Environmental disturbances (noise)	25.5
Urgent need to relax (sometimes)	68

It is clear that 45% of the teachers surveyed feel constantly rushed by deadlines, and more than a third struggle to maintain a good balance between their work and family life. This really shows how their academic stress easily spills over into their personal time at home. Also, a huge chunk of them (68%) mentioned that they sometimes feel a sudden, desperate need to just sit back and relax. This strongly hints that exhaustion is building up over time, even if they don't always label it as severe stress right away.

REWARD DEFICIENCY (STRUCTURAL GAPS)

The data show clear gaps in the institutional reward system, especially in non-monetary aspects Figure 1.

Figure 1

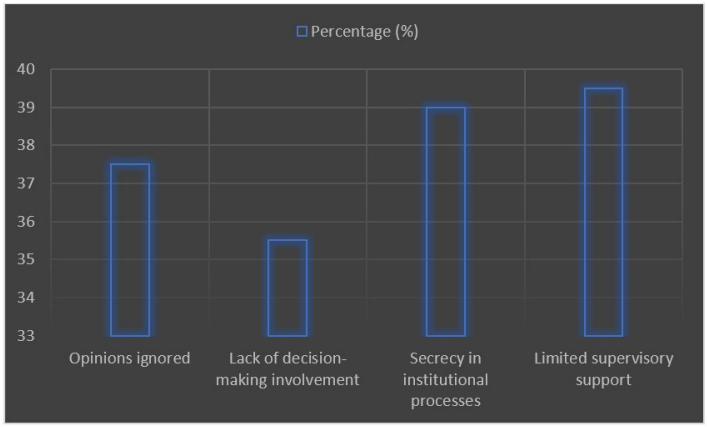

Figure 1 Reward System of the Institution

These results point to a pattern of exclusion within the organisation and a lack of transparency. Nearly 40% of respondents report having limited support and facing unclear institutional processes. These issues suggest deeper structural problems rather than individual limitations.

INTERPERSONAL REWARD IMBALANCE

Interpersonal relationships show a mixed pattern, with both supportive elements and signs of underlying tension Table 2.

Table 2

Table 2 Interpersonal Factors of the Teachers

Interpersonal Factor	Percentage (%)
Approachable colleagues	40.5
Anxiety in peer relations	34
Managing subordinates stressful	31

While around 40.5% of teachers report having supportive and approachable colleagues, a significant number also experience interpersonal stress. This includes anxiety in dealing with peers and challenges in managing subordinates. It suggests that although some social support exists, it is not strong enough to fully reduce the broader structural sources of stress.

ADAPTIVE COPING VS STRUCTURAL STRESS

Even with all these clear imbalances, many teachers are actually doing a great job of finding ways to handle the pressure on their own Table 3.

Table 3

Table 3 Adaptive coping strategies

Coping Indicator	Percentage (%)
Coping well with work demands	59.5
Low overall stress (majority trend)	~60

As you can see, most of the teachers (59.5%) say they are handling their work demands just fine. When you look at the big picture, the overall academic stress levels actually seem pretty low for the majority. But this doesn't mean the deeper problems within the college system have just vanished. What it really shows is that teachers are simply figuring out how to handle the heavy burden on their own, rather than the college actually stepping up to fix the root causes of the problem.

DISCUSSION

Looking at our results through the lens of the Effort–Reward Imbalance (ERI) model, we can clearly see a massive flaw at the heart of college teaching. The teachers we surveyed consistently report putting a huge amount of effort into their jobs—whether dealing with heavy workloads, pouring their emotions into their work, or juggling complex roles—but aren't getting fair or steady rewards in return. This exact mismatch is the whole point of the ERI model, which argues that academic stress builds up when people work incredibly hard but aren't given enough money or mental support to compensate Zurlo et al. (2010), Ren et al. (2019).

The patterns we found in our data line up perfectly with past studies that used the ERI model in education. Previous research shows that when teachers have to deal with huge demands—like heavy workloads, emotional exhaustion, and conflicting job duties—while getting very little reward, their mental health suffers a lot, leading to things like anxiety, depression, and even physical illness Zurlo et al. (2010). Beyond that, the ERI framework is really great at showing the different sides of teacher stress, proving that this imbalance doesn't just hurt mental health but also undermines overall job satisfaction and makes teachers want to quit their jobs entirely Zurlo and Pes (2012).

An important point from this study is the identification of what we call "latent" or hidden institutional stress. Unlike obvious stress, where people are clearly burned out or reporting huge stress levels, this hidden stress is baked right into how the college is run and organised. It stays mostly out of sight because teachers naturally find ways to cope so they can keep doing their jobs, even when working conditions are poor. This aligns with other research showing that ERI-related stress doesn't always manifest as

obvious panic or distress; instead, it slowly builds over time, eventually taking a delayed toll on a person's well-being Ren et al. (2019).

Our data paints a very clear picture of this situation: even though most teachers say they are handling their workloads just fine, there is plenty of evidence that they are actually very unhappy with the lack of recognition, their inability to participate in decision-making, and the secrecy of the college administration. This tells us that teachers are just swallowing their stress and dealing with it on their own, while the deep-rooted problems at the college persist. Seeing this pattern really supports the idea that academic stress isn't just about having too much work; it's actually caused by a broken system that simply doesn't fairly reward its teachers Zurlo et al. (2010), Zurlo and Pes (2012).

Another really important piece of the puzzle is how the overall workplace vibe, or organisational climate, acts as a middleman. This workplace climate includes how well coworkers get along, how the leaders manage, how openly people communicate, and whether teachers get a say in how the college is run. In our study, seeing teachers have friendly coworkers but still feel relationship tension points to a very broken workplace culture. Essentially, there are some nice moments of support, but they aren't strong enough or built into the system enough to fix the bigger, structural flaws. This aligns with research showing that the fallout from an effort-reward imbalance is heavily influenced by the surrounding environment, including people's job satisfaction and workplace culture Wang and Shi (2024).

To be specific, this effort-reward imbalance has been shown to directly lead teachers to want to quit, and their overall job satisfaction acts like a volume knob that can turn that feeling up or down Wang and Shi (2024). This means that even if a college has a bad effort-reward setup, a really supportive workplace culture can help soften the blow and protect the teachers a bit. On the flip side, in workplaces that are overly secretive, leave teachers out of decisions, and offer very little support from the bosses—which is exactly what we saw in this study—the harmful effects of that imbalance are only going to get much worse.

Breaking down the differences between physical and invisible rewards really adds depth to our findings. While getting paid fairly is obviously important, our results show that the invisible perks—like feeling respected, being recognised, having some freedom, and being included in decisions—matter just as much, if not more, in making teachers feel valued and happy. Past studies have repeatedly shown that both money and these emotional rewards are key parts of the ERI framework, and that lacking either leads directly to higher mental stress Zurlo et al. (2010), Ren et al. (2019).

More importantly, seeing this hidden, built-in stress stick around really makes us question how we actually measure and understand stress in college research. The usual methods that just ask people to rate their stress levels often miss the deeper, system-wide problems that are actually causing the stress in the first place. On the flip side, the ERI model gives us a much sharper tool. By focusing directly on the tug-of-war between hard work and the rewards it earns, this model helps us spot deep-rooted unfair systems that may not appear in standard surveys Ren et al. (2019).

Furthermore, these results push back against the common practice of blaming teachers for failing to manage their own stress effectively. Just because a large number of teachers say they are coping fine right now doesn't mean the workplace is actually healthy. Instead, it just shows that these individuals are using their own personal toughness and coping skills to make up for the college's failures. As ERI-based research shows, people can only keep this up for a short while before it leads to serious, long-term problems such as severe burnout and eventual quitting the profession entirely Zurlo and Pes (2012).

Because of all this, if we really want to fix work-related stress, we have to stop just telling individuals to be more resilient and start actually changing the way colleges are run. The ERI model is a fantastic guide for identifying exactly where things are unfair, such as when teachers are left out of decisions, aren't recognised for their hard work, or don't get enough support from the administration. If colleges take steps to fix these specific areas—by being more open, including teachers in choices, and building better support networks—they can finally balance the scales and boost everyone's overall well-being.

In conclusion, this discussion shows that work-related stress among college teachers is mainly linked to institutional structures rather than individual weaknesses. The combination of high effort, low rewards, and moderate reported stress levels points to a situation of hidden but widespread imbalance. By using the ERI framework, this study explains the deeper causes of teachers' academic stress and highlights the need for structural changes to improve working conditions in higher education.

CONCLUSION

This study makes it clear that academic stress for college teachers is actually a system-wide issue, not just a personal failing. While people used to blame stress on a teacher's inability to manage their time or cope with their workload, our results show that the real problem is baked into how colleges are run—specifically, how hard work is rewarded. Teachers are constantly pouring their energy into their classes, their emotional connections with students, and their professional duties, but they simply aren't getting fair rewards in return.

What's really important here is that this unfair balance between effort and reward keeps happening even when overall stress levels look pretty low on paper. This points to a hidden layer of stress that doesn't immediately show up in standard surveys but is

definitely alive and well within the college system. Teachers might be doing a great job of surviving and handling the pressure on their own, but just because they are coping well doesn't mean the deeper, structural problems have gone away.

On top of that, the findings really highlight just how much the overall workplace vibe—or organisational climate—matters when it comes to feeling stressed. Things like how openly the college shares information, whether teachers get a say in decisions, how supportive coworkers are, and how well the administration listens all play a massive role in how stress affects people day to day. A truly supportive work environment can act like a shield against the harmful effects of feeling under-rewarded, while a secretive or strict workplace only makes those feelings worse.

Overall, reducing teacher stress requires institutional-level changes. Efforts should focus on creating a better balance between effort and reward and building a more open, inclusive, and supportive work environment.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

What this study ultimately shows is that colleges need to make real, system-wide changes to help reduce teacher stress. For starters, it is incredibly important to create a system in which teachers actually have a say in how the college is run. Letting them join the decision-making process not only gives them more freedom but also makes them care more about their jobs and helps them avoid feeling pushed to the sidelines.

Second, institutions need to take clear steps to minimise administrative opacity and secrecy. Open and transparent communication about policies, evaluations, and organisational changes can greatly build trust and reduce uncertainty, which are major causes of academic stress.

Thirdly, getting better support from the bosses is absolutely crucial. Institutional leaders and administrators need to be easier to talk to, quick to listen, and actually helpful when teachers come to them with problems. Building stronger relationships between teachers and administrators can create a much happier workplace vibe and help block out some of the heavy, daily pressures of the job.

Finally, there is a massive need to make sure that a teacher's hard work actually leads to real, meaningful rewards. This means giving them proper recognition, real opportunities to advance in their careers, and a fair grading system. When teachers feel their hard work is actually recognised and fairly rewarded, it restores balance and makes them much happier with their jobs overall.

Together, these measures show that reducing stress in higher education requires structural changes rather than relying only on individual coping strategies, with a focus on building a fairer, more transparent, and more supportive institutional environment.

CONTRIBUTION TO LITERATURE

This research adds a lot of value to what we already know about academic stress and the Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) model. First off, it applies the ERI theory directly to the college system in India, specifically focusing on a local region that hasn't been studied much before. By doing this, we gain fresh, local insights into a framework that has mostly been tested in Western countries or in a few specific parts of Asia.

Next, this study shines a light on that hidden, unfair gap between hard work and rewards, even in situations where teachers say their overall stress levels are just moderate. This pushes back against the usual assumption that low stress scores mean everything is fine, proving that we actually need to look much closer at the deep-rooted flaws in the workplace system.

Lastly, this paper builds on the actual theory by blending the idea of overall workplace culture right into the ERI framework. It clearly shows how factors like open communication, being included in decision-making, and strong support actually change how teachers feel and how they address that imbalance. Ultimately, it gives us a much bigger, more complete picture of how stress is driven by both the college structure and the daily work environment.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE

While this study offers valuable insights, there are a few limitations to keep in mind when interpreting the results. First, because we only looked at a single snapshot in time, we can't definitively prove that the effort-reward imbalance is the cause of academic stress. Second, our analysis was pretty basic; we mostly just described the data instead of using advanced statistical tools—like regression or structural equation modelling—which could have helped us dig deeper into exactly how all these different factors are connected. Third, we focused only on teachers in one specific region, so our findings might not apply to colleges elsewhere. Moving forward, future research should follow teachers over a longer period, use more robust mathematical models, and examine a much wider range of college campuses.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The corresponding author expresses gratitude to the participants during the fieldwork and to the other authors for their valuable contribution to the manuscript.

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