

A Study on Challenges to Professional Growth of Women Teachers at Elementary Level in Khordha District, Odisha

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Abstract

Professional growth is an important dimension of teachers' effectiveness and career development. For women teachers at the elementary level, professional growth may be influenced by institutional conditions, social expectations, family responsibilities, training opportunities, and access to leadership and mentoring. This study examined challenges to the professional growth of women teachers working at the elementary level in Khordha District, Odisha. A descriptive survey design with a mixed-methods approach was adopted. The sample consisted of 50 women teachers selected from 10 government elementary schools in the Bhubaneswar/Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation area, with five teachers selected from each school through simple-random procedure. Data were collected using a self-developed semi-structured questionnaire containing closed-ended and open-ended items. Percentage analysis was used for closed-ended responses and content analysis for open-ended responses. The available quantitative findings indicate that 70% of respondents had attended professional training during the preceding two years, while 56% reported difficulty in attending training. Family responsibilities and travel-related problems were the most frequently reported barriers. School support was rated satisfactory or highly satisfactory by 52% of respondents, while 40% reported opportunities to participate in workshops led by experienced or empowered teachers. The findings point to the importance of accessible professional development, institutional support, mentoring, and arrangements responsive to teachers' professional and personal responsibilities. The findings should be interpreted within the limits of the sample size and descriptive design.

Key Words—Women teachers, professional growth, elementary education, professional development, institutional support, Khordha District, Odisha.

1. Introduction

Elementary education provides the foundation for children's academic, social, and personal development. Teachers at this level need continuing opportunities to strengthen their knowledge, skills, competencies, and professional practices. Professional growth may include in-service training, workshops, higher qualifications, seminars, professional networks, mentoring, peer collaboration, and opportunities for leadership and career advancement. Research on teacher learning emphasizes that professional development is more likely to support practice when it is sustained, collaborative, content-focused, and connected to teachers' work .

Women constitute an important part of the elementary teaching workforce. Their professional growth can be shaped by workplace conditions and social expectations, including family and domestic responsibilities, gender-related expectations, administrative support, training access, rigid schedules, mobility and travel difficulties, mentoring, and leadership opportunities. National policy in India recognizes continuous professional development as an important part of teachers' work, while international evidence emphasizes the role of supportive systems and equitable opportunities in education. This study presents a localized descriptive account of the challenges reported by women elementary teachers in the selected area of Khordha District.

2. Rationale of the Study

Professional learning opportunities are useful only when teachers can access and participate in them. A training programme may be formally available but still be difficult to attend because of travel, timing, family responsibilities, lack of information, or insufficient administrative support. Research on professional development highlights the importance of relevant learning opportunities and supportive implementation conditions. The National Education Policy 2020 also emphasizes continuing professional development and opportunities for teachers to share practices.

While considerable research exists on women educators in secondary and higher education, limited focus has been given to women teachers at the elementary level—especially in regional contexts like Odisha. Given the foundational role of elementary education, there is a pressing need to understand the professional struggles of women teachers and develop actionable strategies to support their career advancement. This study fills that research gap by identifying and analyzing challenges specific to this demographic and geographic group.

The present study was undertaken to identify barriers reported by women teachers in the selected government elementary schools of Bhubaneswar/BMC, Khordha District. The localized evidence may help schools and educational authorities consider practical ways to improve access to training, mentoring, peer learning, and institutional support. Since the sample was drawn from 10 selected schools in the Bhubaneswar/BMC area, the results are not intended to represent every woman teacher in Khordha District or Odisha.

3. Operational Definition of Terms Used

Professional Growth: Professional growth is defined as the continuous process of skill enhancement, career development, leadership opportunities, and access to professional development programs that improve a teacher's knowledge, abilities, and career trajectory.

Elementary Level: The elementary level refers to the primary stages of formal education, which focus on basic literacy, numeracy, and foundational knowledge, usually involving children aged 6 to 14 years. And the women teachers those are working in this level are known as elementary level women teachers.

Challenges: Challenges denote the difficulties or issues faced by women teachers that impact their ability to achieve professional growth, including societal expectations, institutional constraints, work-life balance, and lack of resources.

4. Objectives of the Study

- To identify the key challenges faced by women teachers at the elementary level in Khordha District.
- To explore how these challenges impact their professional growth and performance.
- To examine institutional and societal factors contributing to these challenges.

5. Delimitation of the Study

- Only govt. schools within the district boundaries will be included.
- The study focuses exclusively on 50 women teachers from Bhubaneswar of Khordha district.
- The study emphasizes barriers to professional growth and does not extend to other factors like job satisfaction or classroom performance.

6. Population of the Study

Population refers to the entire group of individuals or items under consideration in a research study.

In this study, the population comprises: All women teachers working in government elementary schools (Classes I–VIII) located in Khordha district, Odisha. This includes women teachers employed in schools under the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) and other educational blocks within the district jurisdiction.

7. Sample of the Study

The sample for the study was selected using the lottery method of simple random sampling to ensure fairness and reduce researcher bias. A total of 10 government elementary schools within Bhubaneswar and BMC Block of Khordha district were selected. From each school, 5 women teachers were randomly selected using the same method.

Thus, the total sample size comprises 50 women teachers from 10 different schools. This sample is considered adequate for the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the research problem.

8. Methodology

8.1 Research Design

A descriptive survey design with a mixed-methods approach was adopted. Closed-ended questionnaire items provided quantitative information, while open-ended items gathered respondents' views and suggestions concerning professional growth and related challenges. Mixed-methods research can combine numerical patterns with participants' explanations when both forms of evidence are collected and analyzed systematically.

8.2 Research Tool and Data Collection

A self-developed semi-structured questionnaire was used. It covered demographic information, professional growth opportunities, institutional and societal barriers, professional training, mentoring, leadership opportunities, and suggestions for facilitating professional growth.

8.3 Data Analysis

Closed-ended responses were summarized using percentages. Responses to open-ended items were intended to be examined through content analysis. The numerical results presented below are limited to the quantitative findings available in the supplied manuscript. Complete coded results for the open-ended responses were not available, so no additional theme frequencies or percentages have been introduced.

9. Data Analysis

9.1 Demographic Profile

Figure 1. Age distribution of respondents

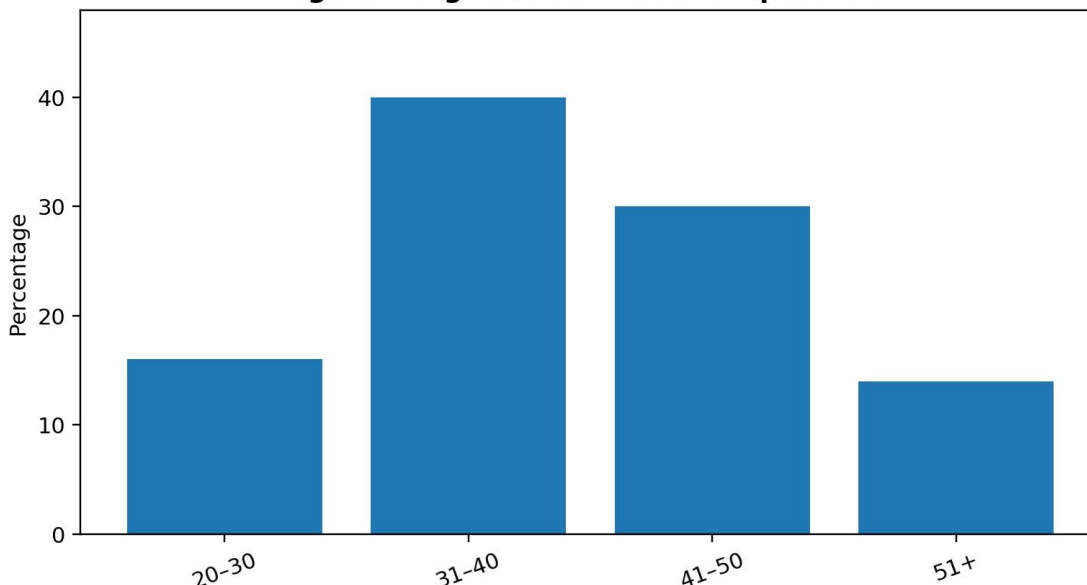


Fig. 1: Age distribution of respondents (N = 50).

Among the 50 respondents, 16% were aged 20–30 years, 40% were aged 31–40 years, 30% were aged 41–50 years, and 14% were aged above 50 years. The 31–40 age group constituted the largest reported proportion.

Figure 2. Educational qualification of respondents

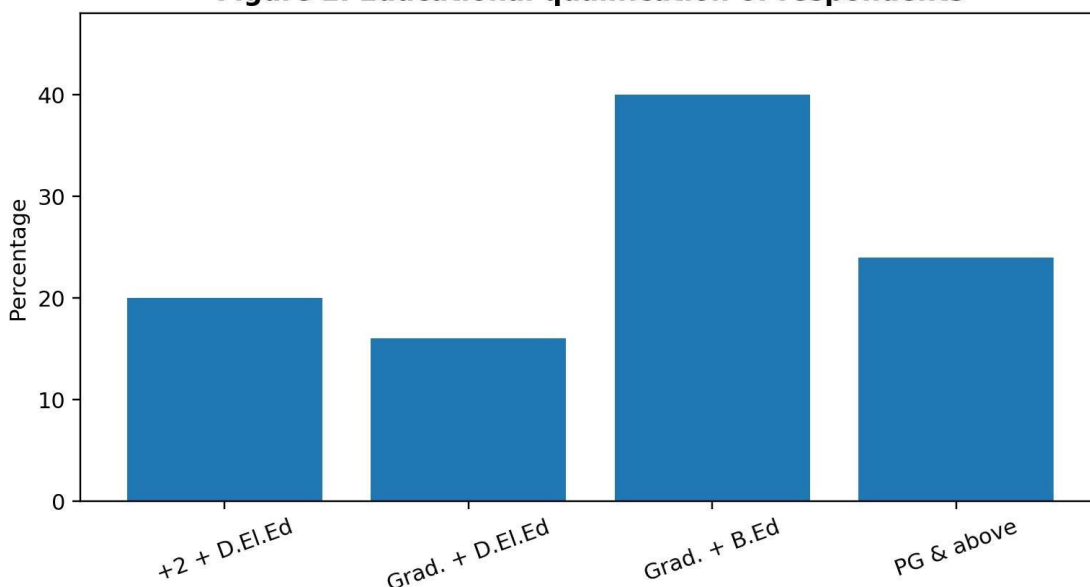


Fig. 2: Educational qualification of respondents (N = 50).

In terms of educational qualification, 20% had +2 with D.El.Ed, 16% had graduation with D.El.Ed, 40% had graduation with B.Ed, and 24% had postgraduate or higher qualifications. Graduation with B.Ed was the largest category.

Figure 3. Teaching experience of respondents

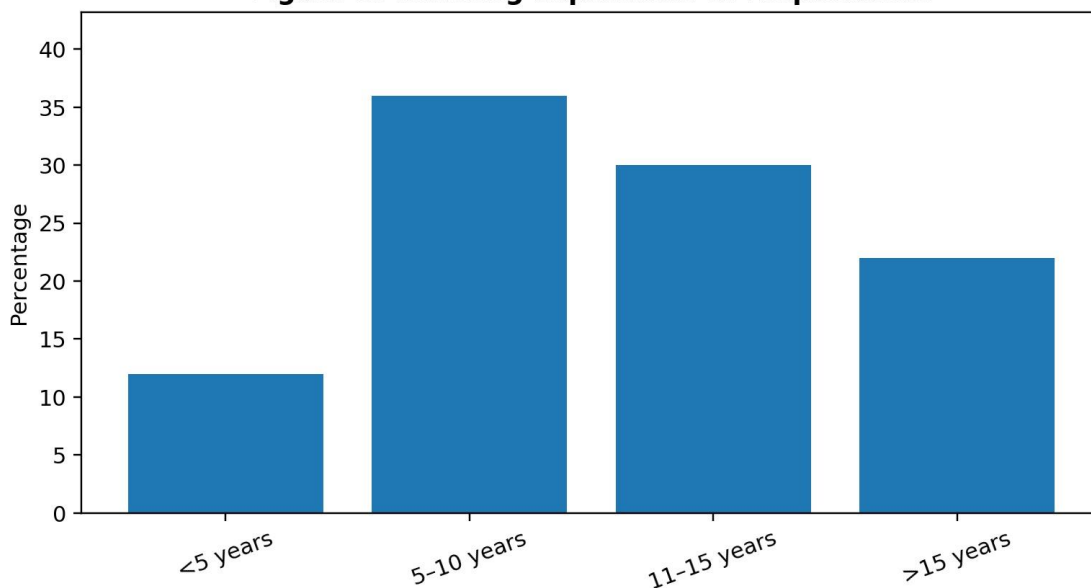


Fig. 3: Teaching experience of respondents (N = 50).

Regarding teaching experience, 12% had less than five years of experience, 36% had 5–10 years, 30% had 11–15 years, and 22% had more than 15 years of experience. Sixty percent of respondents worked in government primary schools and 40% in government upper-primary schools.

9.2 Professional Training and Development

Figure 4. Participation in professional training during the preceding two years

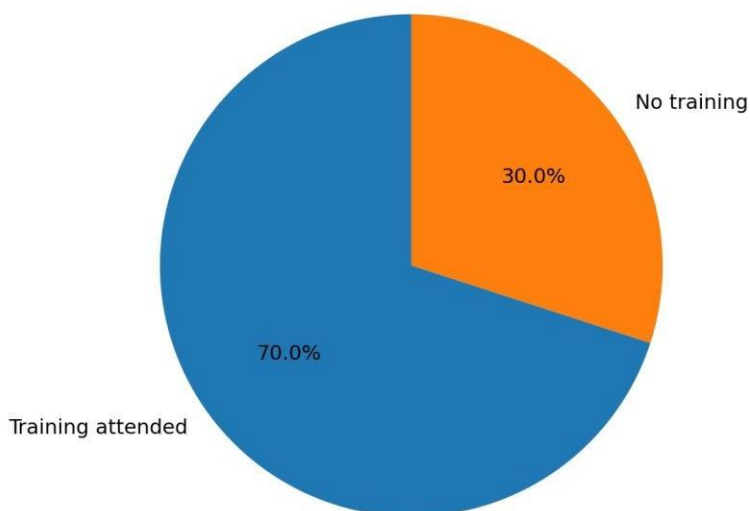


Fig. 4: Participation in professional training during the preceding two years (N = 50).

Seventy percent of respondents reported participation in professional training during the preceding two years, while 30% had not. Among those who attended training, 28.6% attended once a year, 34.3% twice a year, 22.9% more than twice a year, and 14.2% rarely. The organizations or authorities reported as organizing training included DIET (18 respondents), BRC (10), CRCC/Cluster Head (4), NGO/private organizations (2), and other sources (1).

Figure 5. Difficulty in attending professional training

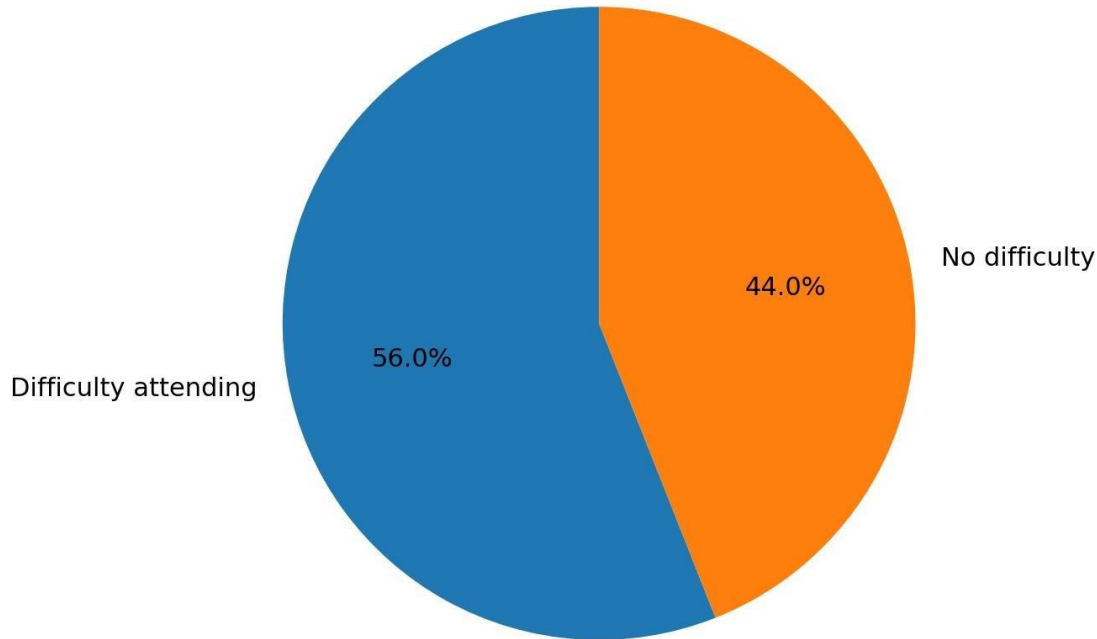


Fig. 5: Difficulty in attending professional training (N = 50).

Figure 6. Reported reasons for difficulty in attending training

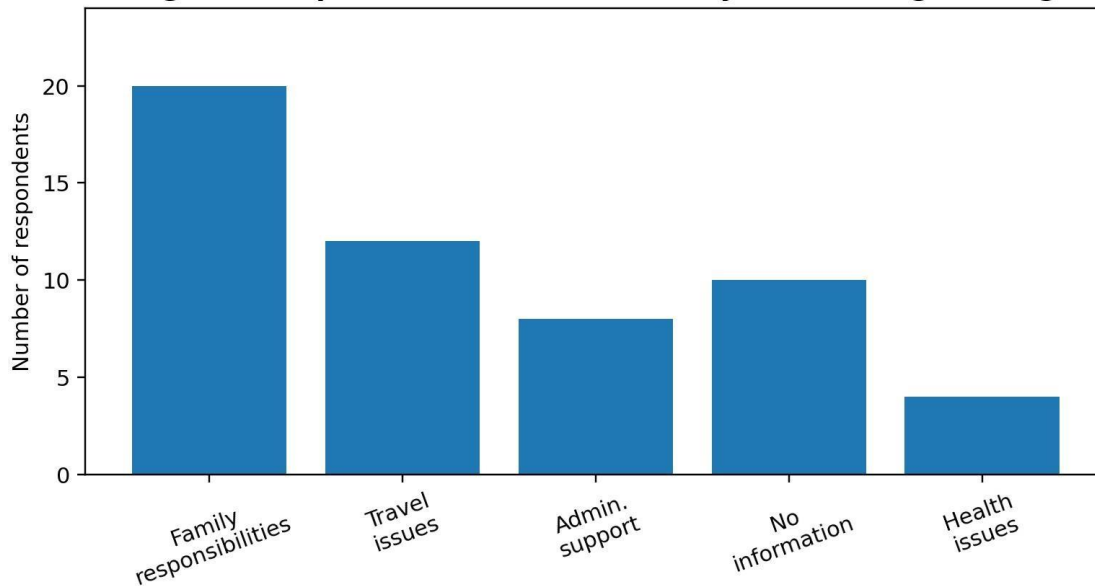


Fig. 6: Reported reasons for difficulty in attending training (number of respondents).

Fifty-six percent of respondents reported difficulty in attending training, whereas 44% did not report such difficulty. Reported reasons included family responsibilities (20 respondents), travel issues (12), lack of administrative support (8), lack of information (10), and health-related reasons (4). Family responsibilities and travel-related barriers were the most frequently reported reasons.

9.3 Institutional Support

Figure 7. Satisfaction with school support

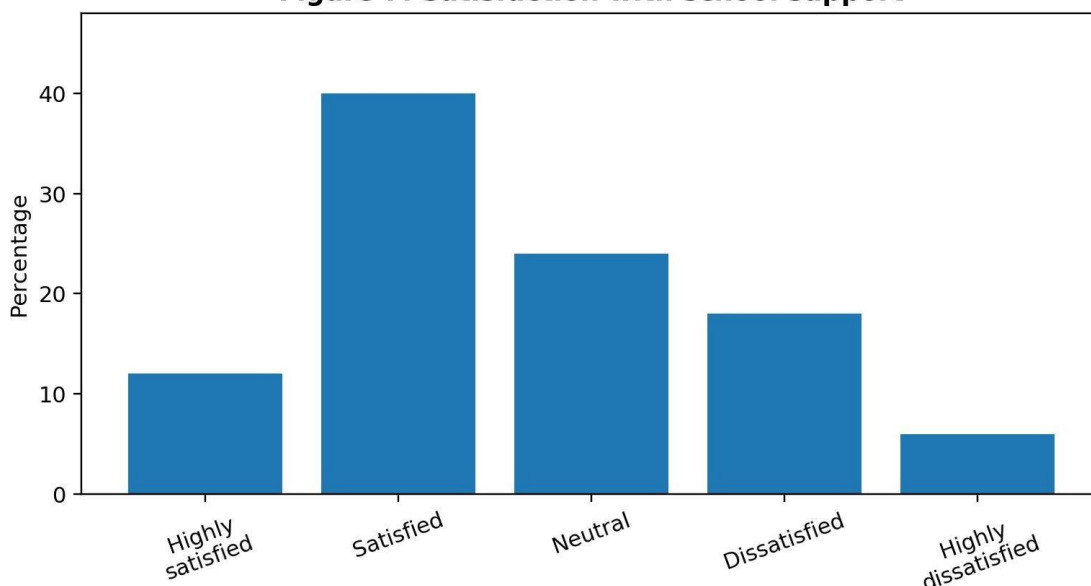


Fig. 7: Satisfaction with school support (N = 50).

Regarding school support, 12% were highly satisfied, 40% satisfied, 24% neutral, 18% dissatisfied, and 6% highly dissatisfied. Thus, 52% expressed satisfaction or high satisfaction, while 24% expressed dissatisfaction or high dissatisfaction.

Figure 8. Opportunities for workshops led by experienced/empowered teachers

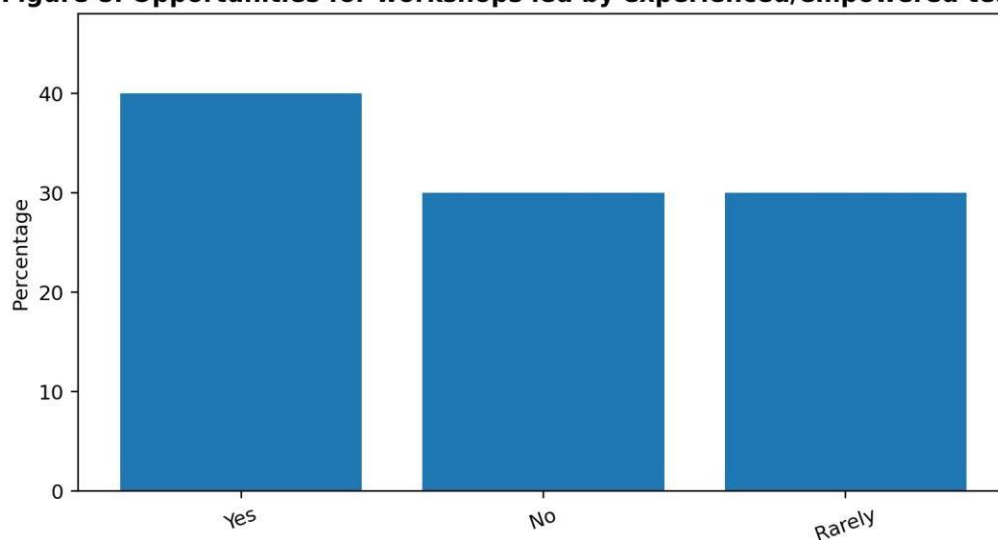


Fig. 8: Opportunities for workshops led by experienced or empowered teachers (N = 50).

Forty percent reported that opportunities for workshops led by experienced or empowered teachers were available, 30% reported that they were not available, and 30% reported that such opportunities occurred rarely. This indicates variation in access to peer-led professional learning.

10. Major Findings of the Study

- Seventy percent of the respondents reported that they had participated in professional training during the preceding two years; 30% had not.
- Despite reported participation in training, 56% experienced difficulty attending professional training.
- Family responsibilities (20 respondents) and travel issues (12 respondents) were the most frequently reported barriers. Lack of information (10), lack of administrative support (8), and health-related reasons (4) were also reported.

- Fifty-two percent of respondents were satisfied or highly satisfied with school support; 24% were dissatisfied or highly dissatisfied, and 24% were neutral.
- Forty percent reported access to workshops led by experienced or empowered teachers, while 30% reported no such opportunities and 30% reported that they occurred rarely.
- The largest age group was 31–40 years (40%); the largest qualification category was graduation with B.Ed (40%); and the largest teaching-experience category was 5–10 years (36%).
- The findings suggest that the existence of training opportunities does not necessarily ensure that all teachers can access them easily. The descriptive data do not establish causal relationships or allow generalization to all women teachers in the district.

11. Educational Implications

- Training schedules should take account of teachers' practical availability, school responsibilities, family responsibilities, and travel requirements.
- Schools and education authorities should communicate training information sufficiently in advance and through reliable channels.
- Administrative support should be strengthened so that teachers can attend relevant professional development without avoidable procedural barriers.
- Mentoring and peer-learning opportunities can be expanded through experienced teachers, cluster-level collaboration, and school-based professional learning communities.
- Professional development should include accessible formats and, where appropriate, blended or online options while considering teachers' digital access and support needs.
- School leaders should review whether women teachers have equitable access to workshops, professional networks, and leadership opportunities.
- Further research should include larger samples from multiple educational blocks and districts, and should report full qualitative coding procedures and reliability evidence where applicable.

12. Conclusion

The study examined challenges to the professional growth of women teachers at the elementary level in the selected area of Khordha District, Odisha. The available findings indicate that professional training was reported by many respondents, but practical barriers remained. Family responsibilities and travel issues were prominent obstacles, while satisfaction with school support and access to peer-led workshops varied across respondents. Professional growth should therefore be considered not only in terms of whether training programmes exist, but also in terms of accessibility, timely information, administrative support, mentoring, professional interaction, and the working conditions in which teachers participate. Because the study involved 50 women teachers from 10 selected government elementary schools in the Bhubaneswar/BMC area, the findings should not be generalized to all women teachers in Khordha District or Odisha without further evidence. The complete open-ended thematic results were not available in the supplied manuscript, so conclusions are limited to the reported quantitative findings.

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