

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION THROUGH TEACHER EMPOWERMENT

9 OCTOBER 2025
WEBINAR REPORT

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION THROUGH TEACHER EMPOWERMENT

Thursday, 9 October 2025

Empowering teachers is the key to transforming education. This webinar will explore how need-based professional development and teacher agency can enhance practice, build confidence, and drive meaningful change. By equipping teachers with both skills and autonomy, we can create inclusive, dynamic learning environments that benefit every learner.



Moderator:
SAROJ THAPA
Educationist & Research Specialist,
Pallavan Learning Systems, India



Panelist:
ABHA SHARMA
Principal (B. Ed.)/ Nodal Officer
(Research Cell), SCERT, India



Panelist:
PEMA EUDEN
Maths Domain Head & Researcher,
The Royal Academy,
Druk Gyalpo's Institute, Bhutan



Panelist:
ANJU WAL
Director of Education,
Shiv Nadar Schools, India

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INTRODUCTION

On 9th October 2025, Pallavan Learning Systems hosted a webinar on the theme, 'Transforming Education Through Teacher Empowerment' in association with Centre for Escalation of Peace and Ritinjali. The webinar brought together a panel of experienced educators and researchers to explore how equipping teachers with the right skills, autonomy, and professional support can lead to meaningful educational transformation. The session focused on the belief that the quality of education depends fundamentally on the empowerment of teachers - their capacity to reflect, innovate, and lead change from within classrooms.

Participants were reminded that teachers are not simply implementers of policy; they are architects of learning, builders of hope, and custodians of the future. The session sought to answer a central question: How can education systems move beyond rhetoric and truly empower teachers to become creators of knowledge and leaders of change?

The conversation revolved around three interlinked themes - need-based professional development, teacher agency through action research, and the creation of systems and cultures that sustain continuous professional growth. The discussion also examined the relationship between teacher empowerment, mental health, and the wider well-being of schools, offering a nuanced and wholistic understanding of what it means to empower educators in today's complex educational landscape.



ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

Moderator

Saroj Thapa

Educationist & Research Specialist,
Pallavan Learning Systems, India



Dr. Saroj Thapa is Programme Director at Pallavan Learning Systems, an education research and development organisation based in Delhi. With extensive international experience in teacher education, school leadership, and curriculum innovation, she has been deeply involved in the design and implementation of the Bhutan Baccalaureate learning process and in mentoring schools across South Asia. Her work focuses on empowering teachers, strengthening teaching and learning practices, building inclusive learning environments, and supporting school enrichment through research, training, and capacity building.

Panelist

Abha Sharma

Principal (B.Ed.)/Nodal Officer (Research Cell),
SCERT, India



Prof. Abha Sharma, Principal (B.Ed.) and Head of the Research Cell at SCERT, New Delhi, is a distinguished academic with over 24 years of experience in teacher education, academic leadership, and research. She serves as District Nodal Officer for Vidyanjali,

MOE's School Volunteer Programme, and for in-service teacher training in South East Delhi. Formerly Professor and Assistant Dean at GD Goenka University, she is an expert in teacher education, stress management, test and measurement, educational technology, and science education. A gold medallist in B.Ed. and M.Ed., and recipient of the UGC Junior Research Fellowship, she holds a PhD in Education alongside degrees in Chemistry and Management. With more than 50 publications, numerous keynote addresses, and contributions to national and international projects—including Erasmus+ RISHII and ICSSR research—she has also developed content for SWAYAMPRAKASH and earned multiple awards such as the Inspirational Leadership Award (2021), Education Icon Award (2022), and recognition from the Early Childhood Association India (2024).

Panelist

Pema Euden

Mathematics Domain Head & Research Specialist,
The Royal Academy, Druk Gyalpo's Institute, Bhutan



Ms. Pema Euden is the Mathematics teacher at The Royal Academy, Druk Gyalpo's Institute, Bhutan, where she leads academic initiatives and curriculum development in mathematics as the Domain Head. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics from the University of Texas at El Paso, a Postgraduate Diploma in Education from Samtse College of Education, and a Master of Science in Statistics, Measurement, Assessment, Research, and Technology from the University of Pennsylvania. With her strong background in mathematics education and research, she brings international perspectives and deep expertise to advancing teaching, learning, and assessment practices at the Academy.

Panelist

Anju Wal

Director of Education,

Shiv Nadar Schools, India



Ms. Anju Wal is the Director of Education at Shiv Nadar Schools, where she leads the academic vision, curriculum design, and wholistic development initiatives across all campuses. With over three decades of experience in education, she is recognised as a visionary leader and a passionate advocate for progressive learning, institution-building, and forging strong partnerships that enrich the learning ecosystem. Prior to her current role, she served as the Founding Principal of Shiv Nadar School, Faridabad, for a decade, where she laid the foundation for a culture of excellence and wholistic growth. Under her leadership, the schools have embraced forward-looking educational practices that nurture curiosity, creativity, and character in learners.

Her contributions to education have been widely acknowledged, most recently through the Pearson International School Leader Award for the Asia Region (2024), affirming her reputation as a torchbearer of innovation and quality in education. Her enduring commitment, inspiring leadership, and transformative approach have left an indelible mark not only on the Shiv Nadar School community but also on the wider educational landscape in India.



WEBINAR SESSION



Need-Based Professional Development: From Policy to Practice

The discussion opened with a call to rethink teacher training as an evolving, living process rather than a periodic compliance requirement. Professional development, participants noted, must be responsive to the realities of classrooms and the diverse needs of teachers and learners.

Training should not simply deliver strategies; it should create reflective practitioners capable of adapting and innovating. When professional development is need-based, contextual, and relevant, it not only builds competence but also confidence. Teachers begin to see themselves as active contributors to educational reform rather than recipients of prescribed knowledge.

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) was identified as the foundation of institutional growth. Schools are, at their core, human-centred organisations driven by relationships, empathy, and trust. While technology and AI play a growing role in modern

learning, panelists agreed that teachers remain at the heart of every meaningful educational experience. Investing in teachers' professional, emotional, and cerebral growth is therefore an investment in the entire learning community.

Teacher Agency and Action Research

Teacher empowerment, participants argued, thrives when teachers have agency - the freedom and confidence to reflect, question, and innovate. Action research was presented as a key tool for building such an agency.

When teachers engage in action research, their classrooms become laboratories of discovery. By identifying problems, experimenting with strategies, and evaluating outcomes, teachers generate insights that directly enhance their teaching. This cycle of inquiry promotes self-directed learning and encourages continuous improvement.

Speakers described how action research transforms teachers from implementers of policy into creators of knowledge. It also ensures that educational reforms are grounded in the lived realities of classrooms rather than abstract models. Through teacher-led research, schools cultivate reflective practitioners capable of driving systemic change from within.

Building a Culture of Continuous Learning

Professional growth cannot be an isolated endeavour; it must be embedded within a culture of collaboration and shared purpose. Participants described Continuous Professional Development (CPD) as the bridge between new and experienced teachers - a shared journey that eliminates hierarchies and nurtures collegiality.

Examples were shared of schools where every teacher is encouraged to complete at least 100 hours of professional development annually - double the national requirement. These institutions treat CPD as a culture, not a compliance measure, ensuring equitable opportunities for all teachers to learn, reflect, and grow.

One school's guiding philosophy, expressed through the acronym "*I AM*" (Identity, Autonomy, and Mastery), was highlighted as an example of how institutions can embed empowerment into their DNA. Inspired by the African principle of *Ubuntu* ("I am because we all are") this approach celebrates agency, voice, and growth as interconnected. It encourages teachers to take ownership of their professional journeys while contributing to collective excellence.

Through peer observations, reflection journals, and student feedback surveys, schools can benchmark progress, identify emerging leaders, and strengthen teaching practices. When teachers are supported in this way, they experience professional fulfillment and translate that enthusiasm into more engaged learning environments.

Bridging Ideals and Realities

The dialogue then moved to an issue central to many education systems: the gap between the *ideal* of teacher empowerment and the *reality* of classroom practice. Despite investment in professional development, its effects often fade over time. Teachers may return inspired from workshops but struggle to sustain new practices under daily pressures.

To bridge this divide, the panel called for a systems-based approach. Schools must institutionalize professional learning through structured calendars, dedicated reflection hours, and consistent documentation. Growth cannot rely on individual motivation alone, it must be supported by processes that sustain reflection, peer learning, and follow-up.

A recurring theme was *trust*. For teachers to innovate, they must feel safe to take risks and make mistakes. Schools need to create environments that embrace failure as part

of growth. Reciprocal observation - where teachers observe one another and exchange feedback - was identified as a key mechanism for building this trust-based culture.

Collaboration and Roadmaps for Growth

Drawing from the Bhutanese context, participants described how roadmaps are used to track both student and teacher development. These personal and professional plans help educators set goals across cerebral, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual areas.

Periodic reviews by mentors and coordinators keep teachers accountable while providing support and encouragement. This approach makes learning visible and ensures that schools can align institutional resources with teachers' aspirations. Importantly, it shifts ownership of development to the teachers themselves, fostering intrinsic motivation and a sense of shared responsibility for improvement.

The model also highlights the importance of leadership that listens. When leaders are open, non-judgmental, and encouraging, they inspire teachers to be equally open with their students, creating a virtuous cycle of empathy and growth.

Trust, Autonomy, and the Courage to Experiment

Trust emerged again as the foundation of teacher empowerment. Teachers need both the space and the courage to experiment. When schools create safe environments for risk-taking, innovation flourishes.

The concept of reciprocal observation was revisited - mentoring should not be one-directional. New teachers can observe experienced educators, but seasoned teachers should also invite feedback from younger colleagues. This reciprocity fosters humility, learning, and professional respect.

Empowerment, participants agreed, extends beyond skill-building; it includes personal development, emotional intelligence, and the courage to engage authentically with one's own practice.

Reimagining Curriculum and Teaching Practice

The discussion also tackled a challenge familiar to many educators - how to remain creative and relevant when bound by rigid or outdated syllabi. The consensus was that while curricula may be slow to evolve, teaching practice can and must adapt. Teachers have the power to reinterpret static content through meaningful, inquiry-based learning. By connecting curriculum to students' lives, integrating local contexts, and using creative strategies, teachers can make even traditional material engaging and relevant. The textbook, panelists argued, should be viewed as a resource not a restriction. Ultimately, the curriculum's limitations can become opportunities for innovation when teachers approach them with agency, curiosity, and a mindset of problem-solving.

Teacher Well-being and Mental Health

In one of the most heartfelt parts of the discussion, participants reflected on the emotional demands of teaching. Teaching was described as "the hardest profession in the world," one that requires constant empathy, adaptability, and care.

Schools were urged to recognize mental health as a core component of teacher empowerment. Workload balance, mentoring systems, and time for reflection are essential to sustaining motivation. Recognition, empathy, and a culture of listening were highlighted as vital to teacher well-being.

Leadership plays a decisive role. Calm, supportive leaders who maintain composure during crises foster stability and trust. The creation of buddy systems, open-door policies, and mentorship networks were proposed as practical ways to build emotional resilience among teachers.

A psychological perspective on *hardiness* was also shared, emphasizing commitment, control, and challenge as tools for managing stress. Teachers who develop these traits, and schools that cultivate them, can navigate pressures more effectively while sustaining joy in their work.



Q & A HIGHLIGHTS

Q1. How can teachers be empowered to take risks and experiment in classrooms?

A. Empowerment begins with trust. Teachers must feel safe to innovate, even if that means making mistakes. Schools need to build a culture where experimentation is valued and failure is viewed as a learning opportunity. Reciprocal observation - where teachers observe and learn from one another - helps normalize risk-taking and reinforces professional confidence. When teachers know they will not be penalized for trying something new, creativity flourishes.

Q2. How can teacher progress be effectively tracked and supported?

A. The roadmap is a practical way to track growth. Every teacher sets personal and professional goals across multiple areas of development - cerebral, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual. These are periodically reviewed by coordinators or mentors who offer feedback and support. This reflective cycle ensures accountability and helps schools align institutional resources with individual needs. The process also promotes openness and trust, as teachers can discuss challenges and receive encouragement without judgment.

Q3. How can teachers deal with outdated curricula and rigid syllabi?

A. While curricula may not change rapidly, pedagogy can. Teachers can interpret and deliver content creatively, connecting it to real-life contexts. Empowered teachers take ownership of methodology, not just content, to make learning relevant and engaging. When teachers are trusted with autonomy and included in decision-making, they can reimagine their teaching in ways that bridge the gap between policy and practice. The key

lies in cultivating teacher agency, enabling educators to co-create learning experiences rather than simply implement directives.

A. The real transformation lies in approach. Teachers must see themselves as co-creators, not mere transmitters of content. The textbook should be treated as one of many resources, not the sole authority. Even within a fixed syllabus, there is ample room to make learning inquiry-driven and experiential. The challenge is to bring static material alive through creativity, relevance, and student engagement. By connecting lessons to real-world contexts and encouraging curiosity, teachers can turn curriculum limitations into opportunities for innovation and deeper learning.

Q4. What role does trust play in empowering teachers to experiment and take risks?

A. Trust is the cornerstone of empowerment. Teachers must know they are allowed to make mistakes and learn from them. A school that encourages risk-taking creates an environment where innovation thrives. Reciprocal feedback - where teachers observe each other and offer constructive suggestions - helps build confidence and mutual respect. Trust must also be felt, not just spoken about; schools should ensure that feedback loops and peer support systems make this sense of safety tangible.

Q5. How can the mental health and well-being of teachers be supported within schools?

A. Teaching is among the hardest professions in the world, requiring constant emotional investment and adaptability. Schools must actively prioritize teachers' well-being by managing workloads, offering reflection time, and ensuring access to mentorship. Recognition, active listening, and empathy go a long way toward reducing burnout and making teachers feel valued.

A. From a psychological perspective, teachers can build resilience through the concept of *hardiness*, embracing commitment, control, and challenge. When schools decentralize decision-making and grant autonomy, teachers feel more confident and less stressed. An open-door policy by leadership and a mentor–mentee system can also create emotional safety.

A. Check-ins during meetings, peer mentoring, and casual conversations about well-being are simple yet powerful measures. When teachers feel heard and acknowledged, it reduces isolation and fosters camaraderie. Recognition of effort, no matter how small, boosts morale and contributes to a healthier school culture.

Q6. How can schools make professional development more impactful and lasting?

A. Training must move beyond one-size-fits-all formats. It should be practical, continuous, and directly relevant to teachers’ daily realities. When professional development addresses actual classroom challenges, teachers feel respected and motivated to implement new ideas. Real change occurs when reflection and practice are built into the process rather than treated as add-ons.

Q7. How can schools balance care and accountability in professional environments?

A. A culture of care must coexist with a culture of accountability. Empowered teachers are those who feel supported yet take ownership of their growth. Small gestures, like appreciation, empathy, and calm leadership, create emotionally secure spaces. Transparent processes for feedback and professional advancement ensure fairness and trust. When teachers are met where they are, and guided to move forward at their own pace, institutions thrive collectively.

INSIGHTS FROM THE CHAT

The chat during the webinar reflected lively participation and deep engagement from educators across different contexts. Participants shared experiences, raised questions, and voiced reflections that enriched the ongoing discussion on teacher empowerment.

1. “I only bring experience of looking and working closely in the government school systems underpinned on state teacher education agency and NCERT. The big challenge remains. There are two critical areas of teacher support. One is the education systems - how to unshackle the education systems to serve better the teachers to become champions. Another area is to provide opportunity for teachers’ collaboration within their community of practitioners.”

“If the education systems can reconcile finally to view teachers as professional practitioners, that shift in the education system has not come as yet.”

“Our Teacher Support agency does not give space to teachers’ own learning aspirations - that flexibility does not exist.”

“You have to look at the method of CBSE curriculum design process, there are problems right there. Because curriculum and textbooks are designed by a group with a minimalist approach.”

“Assam Govt and Rajasthan Govt returned truckloads of CBSE textbooks back and were compelled to develop their own curriculum framework within the NCF and design and develop their own state textbooks.”

2. : “I have a query, though it is beyond the purview of this webinar. May I? In the workshop, we talk about different activities and competency-based learning, but

when it comes to real life classroom teaching, we the teachers, are supposed to follow the curriculum set by CBSE, especially in senior classes. Most of the syllabus are outdated and theoretical in nature. How to deal with it?”

“I teach Accountancy and there are certain topics which do not have any practical application in real life. Still, I am supposed to teach.”

3. “Can the panellists touch on what role does trust play in empowering teachers to experiment and take risks in their classrooms?”

“Thank you so much Ms Wal for your response on trust. Also wanted to understand how teacher empowerment directly contributes to creating more inclusive and learner-centred classrooms?”

4. “Namgyel from Chokhorling Middle Secondary School attending this PD on Transforming Education through Teacher Empowerment.”

“To transform education and to empower teachers, teachers need enough resources in the classroom — well connected with reliable network, TV, and a printer in each classroom.”

5. “Ms Wal spoke about the importance of mental health. A question to elaborate more - how can we address teachers' mental health in day-to-day school activities?”

6. “How far curriculum and assessment align with the PDs for teachers, the reality of teaching pedagogies, and the way teachers engage the learners?”

7. “As a leader, how do you empower your staff to enhance performance - both the staff and learners?”

8. “Suggest some ways how we can make professional development continuous and sustainable in a school environment where there is poor systemic support

and uninterested teachers. In such environment, even highly energetic teachers become demotivated and so on.”

9. “What are the effective strategies of mentor–mentee sessions in the school?”

10. “Thank you Dr. Saroj Thapa and the facilitators. It was insightful.”

CONCLUSION

The webinar concluded with a shared understanding that transforming education begins with transforming the teacher’s experience. Empowered teachers - those who are trusted, supported, and valued - become catalysts for meaningful change in schools and society.

Empowerment is not a policy directive; it is a lived culture of respect, reflection, and responsibility. When teachers are given autonomy, opportunities for growth, and emotional support, they bring authenticity, creativity, and purpose to their classrooms. The discussion affirmed that investing in teachers’ professional and personal development is the most direct route to improving learner outcomes and building inclusive, dynamic schools. Need-based professional development, teacher-led research, trust-based collaboration, and attention to mental health emerged as the cornerstones of this transformation.

The session ended with lively participation from educators and school leaders who shared their reflections and posed insightful questions. The conversation reinforced a collective commitment to building systems where empowered teachers, equipped with both knowledge and autonomy, become the driving force of educational transformation.

LEARNINGS FROM THE WEBINAR

The webinar offered rich insights into what genuine teacher empowerment entails and how it can serve as a catalyst for educational transformation. One of the most important takeaways was the reaffirmation that empowerment is not a one-time intervention but a sustained process built on trust, reflection, and professional autonomy. When teachers are given the space to explore, innovate, and learn from experience, they naturally evolve into leaders of change. The discussions underscored that professional development must be need-based, continuous, and contextual, responding to the specific realities of classrooms rather than following generic models. Action research emerged as a powerful approach that not only sharpens teachers' practice but also transforms classrooms into communities of inquiry and growth.

Another key learning was that teacher well-being is inseparable from empowerment. Professional confidence and emotional resilience go hand in hand. Schools that invest in teachers' mental health, provide safe spaces for dialogue, and foster a culture of empathy are better positioned to sustain motivation and creativity among educators. The webinar highlighted that true transformation happens when teachers are trusted to make decisions, collaborate freely, and reflect deeply on their work. Empowerment, therefore, is both a professional and a human journey - one that begins with recognizing teachers as thinkers, researchers, and visionaries who shape not just lessons, but the future itself.

SUMMARY

On 9th October 2025, Pallavan Learning Systems hosted a webinar on the theme, 'Transforming Education Through Teacher Empowerment' in association with Centre for Escalation of Peace and Ritinjali. The webinar explored how need-based professional development and teacher agency can lead to meaningful change in schools. The

discussion highlighted that when teachers are trusted, supported, and equipped to reflect on and improve their practice, they become catalysts for student learning and school transformation.

Panelists underscored the value of action research as a practical tool for teachers to investigate their own classrooms, identify challenges, and design solutions that foster continuous improvement. This follows the need-based professional development led completely by teacher agency. The conversation also addressed the persistent gap between teacher preparation and classroom realities, emphasizing the need for systemic support and recognition of teacher-led initiatives to bridge this divide.

Panelists discussed the importance of creating sustained, systems-based approaches to professional development that are embedded into the school calendar and designed as ongoing, reflective processes. Building strong, collaborative teams and fostering a culture of trust were identified as key enablers of teacher growth, along with providing space for experimentation, observation, and constructive feedback.

The discussion also turned toward teacher well-being, noting that professional growth must be accompanied by emotional and mental support. Panelists emphasized the importance of cultivating resilience, a sense of purpose, and a culture of care in schools, where teachers feel valued and empowered to take initiative. Personalized and practical training, coupled with institutional structures that encourage reflection and recognition, were seen as vital for sustained motivation and engagement.

The session concluded with lively engagement from the audience, who posed thoughtful questions and shared reflections on how to strengthen teacher empowerment within their own educational contexts.





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