



Publications

United International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (UIJMR)

An International Peer-Reviewed and Refereed Multidisciplinary Journal

ISSN: 3048-6726 www.ujmr.in Impact Factor: 6.934 (SJIF) Vol-3, Issue-2 :April, May & June, 2026

A Marxist Study of Pedagogical Labor in the Neoliberal Classroom and the Alienated Teacher

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Article Received:05-06-2025 Article Modified:02-07-2026

Article Accepted:03-07-2026 Article Published:06-07-2026

DOI:10.37854/UIJMR.2026.3.3.23

Abstract

Increasing workloads, computerized surveillance, bureaucratic encroachment, and the loss of professional autonomy are all becoming more and more characteristics of the modern teaching profession. Based on Roopali Sinha's statement, "For Teachers, the Last Period Never Arrives," this study uses a Marxist perspective to analyse how pedagogical labour has changed under neoliberal capitalism. This paper contends that contemporary educational institutions increasingly commodify teachers' intellectual and emotional labour by fusing Karl Marx's ideas of labour, alienation, and surplus value with recent research on neoliberal governance, digital labour, and critical pedagogy. The article illustrates how the line between work and play is blurred by technological connectedness, administrative overreach, and the assignment of non-pedagogical tasks that prolong the working day beyond official school hours. Additionally, it examines how teachers are increasingly vulnerable to managerial supervision and performance measures, alienating them from their creative potential, professional identity, and social mission. The study shows how educational systems legitimize exploitation while hiding its structural causes by analyzing the ideological exaltation of activity and resiliency. In the end, this study argues that recovering education's emancipatory role requires reclaiming leisure, professional autonomy, and intellectual freedom. The article's conclusion promotes a decommodified approach to education that puts human growth ahead of market forces and bureaucratic efficiency.

Keywords: Pedagogical Labour, Marxism, Alienation, Neoliberalism, Teacher Burnout, Educational Capitalism



Introduction: The Crisis of Pedagogical Labor and the Endless Workday

In the past, teaching has held a special place among occupations. Teaching involves the development of human capacities, critical consciousness, and social growth, in contrast to industrial labour, which is primarily concerned with the production of material commodities. Traditionally, teachers have been seen as intellectual workers whose labour goes beyond simple instruction to include cultural transmission, civic engagement, and mentoring. But this ideal is being undermined more and more by the state of education today. Today's educators are ensnared in a system that requires constant output, unwavering administrative conformity, and constant availability.

The essay "For Teachers, the Last Period Never Arrives" by Roopali Sinha offers a convincing description of this change. Her findings shed light on a more widespread structural issue where instructors are no longer given distinct boundaries between their personal and professional lives. Evenings, weekends, and holidays are increasingly taken up by digital reporting, student assessments, homework correction, institutional communications, and bureaucratic mandates. What was before regarded as supplemental labour is now expected by the institution.

This evolution is a reflection of more general changes brought about by neoliberal capitalism. Since the late 20th century, market-oriented approaches that prioritize efficiency, accountability, measurable results, and administrative control have become more prevalent in educational institutions across the globe (Harvey 3). Under the pretence of educational reform, corporate management strategies are now being introduced in schools and colleges. Instead of evaluating teachers based on the level of intellectual engagement they promote, performance indicators, standardized test results, and bureaucratic paperwork are used. As a result, educational labour is profoundly reconfigured. Teachers are becoming more and more administrative employees who are in charge of creating data, keeping compliance records, and carrying out institutional regulations rather than being primarily educators. Standardized curricula, performance standards, and technology monitoring systems limit their professional autonomy.

A particularly helpful framework for comprehending these processes is provided by Karl Marx's criticism of capitalist labour. Marx maintained that capitalism systematically turns human labour into a commodity whose worth is determined by its exchange value in market relations rather than by its inherent social meaning (Marx, Capital 301). Instead of being independent actors involved in meaningful activity, workers become tools for the creation of surplus value. Even



though teaching is frequently thought of as operating outside of traditional capitalist production, pedagogical labour is increasingly susceptible to the same processes Marx observed within industrial capitalism in modern educational institutions. Teachers are expected to be as productive as possible, produce quantifiable results, and be always ready to meet institutional demands. Their labour is extracted, quantified, and commodified in ways that are similar to larger capitalist processes.

This essay makes the case that the current teaching crisis is a particular example of capitalist labour exploitation. Educational institutions prolong teachers' working hours while undermining their intellectual autonomy through the growth of digital technologies, bureaucratic responsibilities, and administrative control. The result is a deep kind of alienation that jeopardizes the emancipatory potential of education itself, rather than just professional discontent.

Marxist Views of Work and the Workplace in Education

The first step in Marx's study of labour is acknowledging that humans are essentially productive entities. Marx states that labour is the main way that people change both nature and themselves in his 1844 *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (74). Under ideal circumstances, work is a creative and self-realizing activity that develops human potential. However, this relationship is essentially distorted by capitalism. The labour process and the goods produced by labour are no longer under the worker's control. Rather, labour turns into a commodity that capitalists buy and take advantage of. The worker becomes "an appendage of the machine" (Capital 548), as Marx famously noted. The teaching profession increasingly demonstrates traits that align with Marx's diagnosis. Teachers create kinds of intellectual, cultural, and social capital that are vital to modern economies even though they might not produce tangible goods. By preparing future workers, consumers, and citizens, schools serve as institutions in charge of replicating labour power.

According to Louis Althusser, a French Marxist theorist, educational institutions function as ideological state apparatuses that replicate preexisting social connections (127). Schools foster attitudes, customs, and values that uphold capitalist society in addition to imparting knowledge. As a result, teachers have a paradoxical position. They are responsible for promoting human growth while also taking part in systems that replicate hierarchies already in place. When instructors are subjected to managerial methods that prioritize quantifiable results over educational quality, this discrepancy becomes more noticeable. Students are frequently viewed as customers and education as a commodity in modern educational reforms. As a result, rather than



being judged on their intellectual contributions, instructors are instead considered service providers whose efficacy is determined by measurable criteria.

One important way that capitalist logic has been extended into educational settings is through the emergence of educational managerialism. According to Stephen Ball, performative accountability systems that put quantifiable metrics ahead of meaningful educational objectives take the place of professional trust in neoliberal educational reforms (Ball 216). Teachers are held accountable to institutional rankings, performance goals, and bureaucratic audits rather than to educational values. Marx's observation that capitalism favours exchange value over use value is exemplified by such developments. The creation of quantifiable results that can meet administrative needs takes precedence over the true educational value of instruction.

The Teacher's Loss of Professional Identity and Alienation

Marx's idea of alienation is among his most significant contributions to social theory. Workers in capitalist society experience alienation in four interrelated ways: from their fellow humans, from the products of their labour, from the labour process itself, and from their species-being or fundamental human abilities (Marx, Manuscripts 72-81). These aspects of estrangement are becoming more apparent in modern education. When educational achievements are limited to statistical indicators and standardized tests, teachers feel estranged from the results of their labour. The deep connections they make with pupils are frequently overlooked by institutional assessment systems. Instead of measuring intellectual progress or critical development, educational success is determined on test scores, attendance rates, and bureaucratic documentation. Additionally, they feel cut off from the labour process itself.

Professional discretion and educational creativity are constrained by growing standardization. Teachers' capacity to modify education in accordance with students' needs and intellectual interests is limited by curriculum frameworks, testing policies, and administrative procedures. Moreover, competitive performance environments cause educators to feel alienated from their peers. Instead of promoting group professional solidarity, rankings, assessments, and accountability systems promote individual competitiveness. This dynamic is a reflection of larger neoliberal inclinations to weaken collective opposition and personalize accountability. Above all, educators experience alienation from their species. Teaching is intellectual, relational, and creative by nature. It calls for discussion, creativity, empathy, and introspection. Teachers miss out on opportunities to use these special human abilities when they are overburdened with administrative work and performance demands.



In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Freire makes the case that discourse, critical consciousness, and mutual humanization are necessary for true education (72). These opportunities are undermined by bureaucratic educational institutions, which reduce instruction to administrative compliance and technical procedures. As a result, the profession is becoming more and more marked by disengagement, burnout, and emotional exhaustion. Many studies show that teacher stress is on the rise worldwide, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic's acceleration of digital transitions. It is more accurate to view what seems to be a personal psychological issue as a structural expression of labour alienation.

The Emergence of Educational Capitalism and Neoliberalism

It is impossible to comprehend the evolution of education apart from more general neoliberal restructuring. Neoliberalism is a complete political logic that applies market ideas to all facets of social life, rather than just an economic theory (Brown 31). Educational institutions are increasingly operating in accordance with market logics under neoliberal governance. Teachers become human resources subject to ongoing performance reviews, schools become service providers, and students become clients.

According to David Harvey, neoliberalism is a project that uses deregulation, marketization, and privatization to restore class power (19). Because education impacts future labour markets and ideological formations, it plays a vital role in this undertaking. Neoliberal presumptions are often reflected in the vocabulary used to discuss educational reform. Policy conversations are dominated by terms like accountability, productivity, efficiency, competitiveness, and performance. Policymakers hardly ever prioritize human wellbeing, democratic engagement, or intellectual freedom. Teachers are significantly impacted by this change. Metrics rather than meaning and outputs rather than relationships are used to gauge educational progress. Teachers are therefore under pressure to maximize output while minimizing expenses, a dynamic that is remarkably comparable to capitalist labour management in industrial settings.

The rise of what academics refer to as "educational capitalism" exacerbates these demands even further. The profits from educational activities are growing for digital platforms, educational technology companies, standardized testing enterprises, and data analytics firms. In these growing educational markets, educators become both producers and consumers. Therefore, the monetization of pedagogical labour is a reflection of larger economic shifts that present education as a lucrative industry within global capitalism, rather than just administrative inefficiencies.



The Digital Panopticon: Time Colonization, Connectivity, and Surveillance

Digital technology's quick adoption in education has frequently been hailed as a groundbreaking advancement that can improve accessibility, democratize information, and boost pedagogical effectiveness. Digitalization is often portrayed by governments, legislators, and educational companies as an innately positive force that empowers educators and students alike. However, the material realities that educators face are frequently hidden by such upbeat storylines. Digital technologies have often increased labour expectations, increased administrative surveillance, and eroded the temporal boundaries that traditionally separated professional responsibilities from personal life, rather than freeing instructors from monotonous tasks.

This change was significantly hastened by the Covid-19 epidemic. Teachers were forced to quickly adjust to new technology platforms while preserving educational continuity as schools all around the world switched to online instruction. While digital connectivity made it possible for learning to continue in exceptional situations, it also created new standards for instructor response and availability. According to Sinha, the digital infrastructures that were implemented during the pandemic did not vanish after classes resumed; rather, they developed into enduring systems that allowed educational establishments to consistently contact instructors outside of regular business hours (Sinha).

The idea of the panopticon, which was first put forth by philosopher Jeremy Bentham and then revised by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, might be used to investigate this occurrence. According to Foucault, contemporary organizations depend more and more on surveillance systems, which push people to control their own behaviour because they believe they are always being watched (201). Disciplinary power operates through internalized surveillance, as opposed to overt coercion. Employees become self-policing subjects who willingly follow institutional norms.

This dynamic is best illustrated by digital instructional tools. Teachers' activities are continuously tracked, measured, and assessed in settings created by learning management systems, attendance software, performance dashboards, communication apps, and administration portals. An expanding archive of institutional data is created with each assignment uploaded, message responded to, attendance record completed, and assessment turned in. As a result, instructors are constantly aware that their work may be scrutinized.

According to sociologist Shoshana Zuboff, modern digital systems are examples of "surveillance capitalism," a system in which human behaviour is



converted into data that can be tracked, examined, and profited from (8). Educational institutions use digital monitoring tools to maximize efficiency and management control, even though they might not directly monetize instructor data in the same way as tech companies. Teachers are increasingly working in settings where digital technologies' quantitative indicators are used to determine their professional value.

Marxist theory views these changes as an extension of capitalist control over labour-time. Marx highlighted that in order to extract more surplus value from labour, capital is always trying to extend the working day (Capital 340). In the past, labour movements had difficulty using collective action and legislation to set limits on working hours. However, firms are now able to get around these restrictions by expanding operations into formerly protected areas thanks to the development of digital technologies. This process takes the form of emails sent to teachers after hours, administrative alerts, questions from students, the need for digital reporting, and constant online contact. All time is effectively converted into potential labour-time when instantaneous responsiveness is expected. Institutional demands have the potential to disrupt even moments that are officially classified as leisure.

According to Italian theorist Antonio Negri, modern capitalism depends more and more on what he refers to as "immaterial labour," which includes social contact, communication, knowledge production, and affect (Hardt and Negri 290). Teaching is the epitome of immaterial labour. Language, knowledge, empathy, and intellectual engagement are the teacher's main instruments. However, immaterial labour is especially vulnerable to abuse because it frequently lacks distinct temporal boundaries. Therefore, greater changes in modern labour relations are reflected in the colonization of teachers' private time. The lines between work and non-work are blurring as a result of digital connectivity, which gives organizations constant access to employees. According to sociologist Jonathan Crary, the outcome is a "24/7" culture where capitalist productivity increasingly aims to eradicate any disruptions, stops, and withdrawal times (17).

This development has significant implications for educators. Periods of introspection, contemplation, reading, and creative discovery are necessary for intellectual work. The development of critical thinking and intellectual energy is just as important to effective education as just imparting knowledge. Opportunities for intellectual renewal drastically decrease when every moment becomes potentially available for institutional exploitation. It's quite ironic. The very intellectual circumstances required for meaningful education are often undermined by technologies that were first marketed as tools for improving education. Teachers get



caught in cycles of constant responsiveness that put administrative effectiveness ahead of instructional depth. Therefore, the digital classroom runs the risk of continuing what Marx described as capitalism's unrelenting quest to turn every facet of human existence into a site of productive labour.

Non-Academic Responsibilities and the Bureaucratization of Education

The growing number of non-academic tasks assigned to teachers is one of the most concerning trends noted by Sinha. Despite being trained to support student development, foster intellectual growth, and aid learning, educational professionals are often expected to carry out a variety of administrative and governmental tasks unrelated to pedagogy. Election supervision, census operations, data gathering campaigns, welfare distribution programs, survey administration, and different types of bureaucratic documentation are some of these responsibilities (Sinha). The social standing of teaching as a profession is called into doubt by such actions. In the past, public trust, intellectual independence, and specialized expertise have set professions apart. It is expected of physicians, attorneys, engineers, and teachers to use highly developed expertise in their fields. The intellectual integrity of the profession is increasingly compromised when teachers are constantly distracted from their teaching duties to carry out unrelated administrative duties.

One of the organizational characteristics of modernity, according to sociologist Max Weber, is bureaucracy. Although bureaucracy can help with administrative coordination, Weber cautioned that too much bureaucratization can create an "iron cage" where procedural rationality takes precedence over individual creativity and agency (181). People are becoming more concerned with following the rules than with achieving meaningful objectives. These qualities are becoming more and more prevalent in modern education. Teachers are spending an increasing amount of time on paperwork, reporting methods, compliance procedures, and certification requirements. Despite the uncertainty surrounding educational achievements, administrative chores continue to expand. What David Graeber refers to as "bullshit jobs" activities whose social worth is dubious but whose fulfilment is institutionally required take over the profession (9).

Marxist theory views the assigning of non-academic tasks as a major instance of labour appropriation. Teachers have established specific educational skills through professional experience and thorough training. Educational institutions effectively misallocate intellectual labour for administrative convenience when this competence is channelled toward bureaucratic responsibilities. Furthermore, these actions immediately lead to teacher alienation. Marx maintained that when workers lose



control over the meaning and purpose of their labour, they become alienated (Manuscripts 74). The social value of teaching stems from its role in human development. This inherent instructional goal is frequently absent from administrative chores like data input, survey administration, and election logistics. The repercussions go beyond personal discontent. Opportunities for lesson planning, professional development, curricular innovation, and student involvement decrease when teachers spend a significant amount of time on non-pedagogical tasks. When professional competence is taken away from its main purpose, educational quality diminishes. In many developing countries, this dynamic is especially evident in public education systems. Teachers are often used by governments as a readily available labour force that can carry out administrative activities at comparatively little expense. Teachers become useful tools for addressing bureaucratic shortages elsewhere because they are already hired by the state.

The extreme examples of this phenomenon are demonstrated by Sinha's discussion of teachers in Uttar Pradesh being given tasks like gathering fodder (Sinha). Professional specialty is fundamentally disregarded by such assignments. Instead of being acknowledged as an intellectual worker, the teacher becomes a generalized administrative resource that may be used anywhere institutional demands emerge. This deterioration of professional identity is a reflection of broader neoliberal inclinations to view employees as adaptable human resources rather than independent professionals. The ability of educational labour to meet organizational needs takes precedence above its intellectual contribution. The teacher becomes a multipurpose bureaucratic worker instead of an educator. Such changes have long been cautioned against by critical educational thinkers.

According to Freire, authentic education necessitates teachers who are able to interact critically with information and encourage discussion among students (72). By limiting instructors' time, energy, and intellectual resources, bureaucratic overload diminishes these opportunities. As a result, teaching bureaucratization is more than just an administrative annoyance. It is a structural attack on the intellectual goals and professional independence of education. Modern educational systems run the risk of turning schools into administrative hubs rather than places of critical learning and human growth by placing teaching labour beneath bureaucratic demands.

Burnout, Emotional Labor, and the Feminization of Pedagogical Work

A thorough examination of pedagogical labour must take into consideration the emotional aspects of teaching, even while debates of teacher exploitation usually focus on high workloads, bureaucratic hassles, and diminishing professional



autonomy. Teaching necessitates ongoing emotional interaction with children, parents, coworkers, and administrators, in contrast to many professions where labour is predominantly assessed through quantifiable outputs. In addition to teaching, teachers are required to support, inspire, nurture, counsel, mediate disputes, and offer emotional stability in increasingly complex social contexts. Emotional expression itself becomes a kind of labour due to these expectations.

Russell Hochschild to characterize the control of emotions and emotional performances necessary for specific professions (7). Hochschild contends in *The Managed Heart* that employees in service-related fields frequently need to control their emotions in order to elicit the correct reactions from others. Emotional displays are turned into commodities and integrated into the work process. This phenomenon is most intensely demonstrated in the teaching profession. Teachers are required to maintain patience in the face of frustration, optimism in the face of weariness, and support in the face of increasing institutional pressures.

Teachers are frequently expected to exude enthusiasm and emotional availability even in the face of stress, anxiety, or fatigue. Their ability to build strong interpersonal ties is just as important to their career success as their subject-matter expertise. Because emotional labour extends commodification beyond intellectual and physical abilities into the domain of subjective experience, it is seen by Marxists as an additional layer of exploitation. Value is progressively being extracted by capitalism from workers' emotions and how they affect others, in addition to what they perform. Institutions in educational settings profit from the emotional investments made by teachers, but they frequently fall short of offering sufficient support for their mental health.

Teachers now face much more emotional demands than they did a few decades ago. In addition to their teaching duties, modern educators often serve as social workers, mental health advocates, and surrogate counsellors. Expectations for teachers' pastoral tasks have increased due to rising rates of student anxiety, family instability, economic precarity, and social fragmentation. These obligations are unquestionably significant, but they also demand a significant amount of emotional energy. Furthermore, because it is consistent with cultural values of care and commitment, educational organizations frequently believe that teachers will carry out such labour voluntarily. Self-sacrifice is often portrayed as an inherent professional value in the discourse surrounding teaching. Teachers who put their own health first could be accused of being uncommitted, while those who always surpass expectations



are praised as model professionals. These narratives conceal the costs of excessive emotional labour while normalizing it.

This process's gendered aspects are especially important. In many nations, teaching has historically been associated with women, particularly in elementary and secondary education. Because they are culturally associated with femininity, caregiving, nurturing, and emotional support jobs are frequently underestimated monetarily, as feminist scholars have long noted (England 390). Because of this, emotional labour is often viewed as a natural quality rather than a specialized ability that should be acknowledged and rewarded.

According to sociologist Nancy Fraser, modern capitalism needs more and more on social reproduction activities that have historically been carried out by women, such as communal upkeep, emotional support, and caring (101). These types of labour are crucial to educational institutions, but formal grading systems hardly ever recognize them. Teachers may dedicate hours to helping troubled children, resolving interpersonal problems, or offering emotional support, but these efforts are frequently overlooked in performance evaluations that concentrate on measurable results. Professional burnout is directly impacted by this invisibility.

Christina Maslach, a psychologist, coined the term "burnout," which describes a state marked by depersonalization, diminished emotions of personal achievement, and emotional tiredness (Maslach and Jackson 99). When demands at work continuously outweigh available resources, burnout develops, resulting in long-term stress that undermines wellbeing and productivity. One of the professions most susceptible to burnout is teaching. The combined stresses of increased workload, administrative accountability, student needs, and public scrutiny have been shown in numerous studies to cause extraordinarily high levels of emotional weariness in educators. In the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak, which exacerbated pre-existing issues while bringing in new types of uncertainty and emotional strain, the issue has grown very severe.

Marxist theory holds that burnout is more than just a personal psychological issue. Instead, it is a systemic result of labour systems that put productivity ahead of human welfare. Employees are required to devote emotional energy on a constant basis without sufficient opportunity for rest or rejuvenation. The fatigue that follows is a reflection of the unsustainable demands that modern economic institutions impose. Marx's theory of alienation sheds important light on this phenomenon. People frequently experience emotional burnout when they lose touch with the important parts of their jobs. Aspirations to stimulate learning, encourage critical thinking, and



make a beneficial impact on society are often the driving forces for teachers' entry into the field. These goals become more challenging to achieve when performance metrics and bureaucratic constraints rule professional life. Significant emotional suffering results from the mismatch between institutional realities and educational ideals.

Teachers are not the only ones affected emotionally. Classroom settings, student performance, and larger educational cultures are all impacted by burnout. Teachers who are worn out may find it difficult to maintain the levels of creativity, empathy, and intellectual engagement required for successful instruction. As a result, students' educational experiences are eventually compromised by the exploitation of teachers. Relationships based on respect, communication, and humanization are essential to authentic education, according to critical educators like Freire (58). Both intellectual vibrancy and emotional presence are necessary for these kinds of partnerships. Maintaining the conditions required for transformative teaching becomes more challenging when instructors experience chronic overwork and emotional exhaustion. Additionally, there are connections between larger patterns of social inequality and the feminization of educational labour. The "second shift," which Hochschild refers to as juggling work with disproportionate household and caregiving responsibilities, is a common experience for female educators (Hochschild and Machung 4). The assumption that women will succeed in their roles as family managers, educators, and caregivers at the same time adds to the responsibilities that make them more susceptible to burnout.

These dynamics are often made worse by neoliberal educational changes. Teachers are encouraged to internalize structural issues as personal failings by these reforms, which emphasize individual responsibility and performance accountability. Teachers may blame themselves for not working hard enough or successfully managing their time, rather than acknowledging burnout as a result of structural factors. The institutional causes of stress are hidden by this individualization of guilt, which also deters group resistance. Thus, one important aspect of educational exploitation is the emotional labour required of educators. While simultaneously enforcing circumstances that compromise emotional well-being, educational institutions depend more and more on the emotional abilities of instructors. The cycle of self-sacrifice, weariness, and care that results is a reflection of larger capitalist impulses to commodify human capacities without providing sufficient support for their reproduction.



It takes more than wellness programs or stress-reduction seminars to address the teacher burnout epidemic. These treatments frequently address symptoms without addressing underlying problems. The structural factors that lead to excessive workloads, emotional strain, and professional alienation must be addressed for meaningful reform to take place. This entails easing administrative constraints, reestablishing professional autonomy, drawing distinct lines between work and personal life, and acknowledging emotional labour as a valid aspect of teaching. The deep conflict at the core of modern education is ultimately exposed by the emotional aspects of teaching. In order to develop human potential, promote social cohesiveness, and assist emotional growth, society needs on educators. However, the organizations in charge of these duties increasingly expose teachers to circumstances that undermine their own humanity and well-being. Thus, pedagogical employment is converted from a profession of intellectual and social empowerment into an increasingly unsustainable type of capitalist labour through the monetization of emotional labour.

The Busyness Ideology: From Corporate Productivity to Nation-Building

One of the most successful ideological strategies used by contemporary capitalist cultures to ensure worker conformity is the celebration of busyness. Modern labour discipline systems progressively encourage people to internalize productivity norms and willingly subject themselves to increased workloads, in contrast to earlier forms that mostly relied on external force. Employees are now encouraged to want work, identify with work, and get their self-worth from work rather than just being forced to work. Because exploitation is reframed as ambition, dedication, or professional engagement in such a system, it becomes challenging to identify. This change is remarkably well captured in Roopali Sinha's analysis. She observes how catchphrases that originally arose from certain historical situations have been recycled to support ceaseless labour in modern settings (Sinha). The urgency of rebuilding a newly independent nation was initially represented in the slogan "Aaram Haram Hai" ("Rest is Forbidden"), which was associated with post-independence India's developmental objectives. However, such discourse frequently serves as a moral defense for ongoing overwork when it is removed from its historical context and used in neoliberal economies.

It is helpful to review Marx's idea of ideology in order to comprehend this shift in ideology. Marx maintained that the interests of dominating classes are often reflected in prevailing beliefs in society (Marx and Engels 64). Ideology functions by portraying historically conditioned social structures as normal, unavoidable, and



advantageous to everybody. Because exploitative conditions are portrayed as essential for either individual or group achievement, workers are urged to accept them. This dynamic is best illustrated by the exaltation of busyness. Long workdays, constant availability, and unrelenting output are presented as signs of virtue rather than as signs of systemic pathology. Workers who make sacrifices for their personal well-being, family life, and leisure are praised as responsible and hardworking citizens. In the meantime, people who raise concerns about high workloads risk being branded as uncommitted or resistive to advancement.

This ideology has a long history. Weber contends in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* that some religious traditions linked moral value and spiritual virtue to disciplined labour (53). These religious principles were eventually secularized and assimilated into capitalist society. Hard effort began to be seen as a moral duty as much as an economic requirement. Many of Weber's observations are still applicable today, despite the fact that his study concentrates on early capitalism. The quasi-religious nature of modern productivity culture is still present. Many times, failure is blamed on a lack of commitment, while success is presented as the prize for unwavering effort. Narratives that emphasize personal accountability and self-improvement mask structural injustices and institutional limitations. Because education has always been presented as a profession rather than just an occupation, teachers are especially susceptible to these narratives. Teachers are supposed to be passionate, committed, and unselfish. These ideals can improve teaching, but they can also be used as an excuse for abuse. Because teaching is a profession that is linked with service, sacrifice, and societal duty, teachers may be encouraged to take on excessive workloads.

Herbert Marcuse, a critical theorist, offers a helpful framework for comprehending this phenomenon. Marcuse contends in *One-Dimensional Man* that sophisticated industrial cultures provide social integration strategies that stifle critical thought and opposition (11). People absorb prevailing ideals to the point where they are unable to think of alternatives to the social structures that now exist. This is exactly how the busyness ideology operates. Many educators grow to view constant overwork as an inevitable aspect of their line of work. They concentrate on improving efficiency, resilience, or time-management abilities rather than challenging structural conditions. Systemic issues become personal difficulties that call for adjustment.

In *The Burnout Society*, philosopher Byung-Chul Han expands on this criticism. Han contends that achievement-oriented regimes in which people become self-employed have supplanted disciplinary systems in modern neoliberal societies



(8). Instead of being forced to do so, employees willingly take advantage of themselves in an effort to succeed and maximize their own potential. Han contends that the achievement subject has replaced the submissive worker as the dominant character in modern society. This person is always looking to increase output, enhance performance, and get past obstacles. However, this quest for self-optimization frequently leads to burnout, worry, and tiredness. The achievement subject is both exploited and exploited at the same time.

Teachers are becoming more and more representative of this paradox. Teachers are encouraged by educational institutions to pursue professional development, use cutting-edge teaching strategies, enhance student outcomes, keep copious records, participate in extracurricular activities, and always be reachable. In isolation, any expectation could seem acceptable. But when taken as a whole, they provide an unachievable ideal of constant productivity. Crucially, neoliberal productivity culture frequently passes for empowerment. Teachers are taught that performance reviews would promote excellence, professional development opportunities will promote progress, and technology tools will increase efficiency. However, these measures often result in increased institutional monitoring and duties. This dynamic is further reinforced by the language of flexibility. Teachers are reportedly able to work from anywhere at any time because to digital technologies. However, organizations frequently gain more from flexibility than employees do. The capacity to work remotely turns as a must for consistent work. Professional responsibilities permeate evenings, weekends, and vacations, erasing temporal boundaries.

In this setting, Marx's analysis of surplus value is still very applicable. Capital aims to maximize the extraction of labour from workers in addition to increasing productivity (Capital 325). Innovations in technology often help achieve this goal by making labour control and intensification more effective. What seems like progress could also be a means of exploitation. These priorities are reflected in the growing adoption of corporate management strategies by educational institutions. Strategic goals, benchmarking systems, accountability metrics, and performance indicators become essential components of educational governance. Teachers are required to consistently improve their performance while exhibiting quantifiable output. The effects go beyond an increase in workload. Cultural conceptions of leisure are radically altered by the busyness ideology. In the past, leisure was frequently seen as crucial for personal growth, political engagement, and intellectual advancement.



From Aristotle to Bertrand Russell, philosophers stressed the value of leisure as a prerequisite for introspection, creativity, and participation in democracy.

Russell's essay "*In Praise of Idleness*" questions the notion that working nonstop is intrinsically good. He contends that working too much keeps people from engaging in social, creative, and intellectual pursuits that enhance human existence (14). Leisure is a chance for cultural engagement and self-improvement rather than just inactivity. Leisure is especially important to instructors. Continuous intellectual renewal is essential for effective teaching. Teachers need time to read, think, investigate novel concepts, participate in scholarly activities, and develop personal interests. By fostering curiosity and broadening intellectual boundaries, these activities improve the quality of education. However, the busyness mindset consistently devalues these endeavours. Time spent relaxing, engaging in creative endeavours, or reading for enjoyment could be viewed as unproductive. Teachers are urged to dedicate all of their time to professional duties, administrative work, or skill improvement.

Sinha recognizes this loss with a great deal of urgency. She notes that educators are deprived of opportunities to read, think, create, and explore due to their constant bustle (Sinha). Individual well-being and the larger educational system are both negatively impacted by such deprivation. It is difficult for teachers to support pupils' intellectual development when they don't have enough time for it. Furthermore, opportunities for collective resistance are undermined by the normalization of overwork. Employees who are worn out, alone, and always busy have little ability to mobilize or protest institutional conditions. Thus, busyness serves as a depoliticization technique. Institutions limit opportunities for critical thought and group action by keeping people constantly busy. This realization is in line with Marx's more general criticism of capitalism. Not only do workers continue to be exploited because they are economically reliant, but the reality of exploitation is often hidden by prevailing beliefs. Teachers are encouraged to view structural issues as personal obligations by the exaltation of busyness, which inhibits the development of group criticisms.

Therefore, promoting better work-life balance alone is not enough to challenge the concept of busyness. Social ideals must be fundamentally reevaluated. Educational systems must acknowledge the value of leisure, introspection, and intellectual freedom and reject the notion that work is the ultimate human good. Therefore, defending leisure is necessary for meaningful education rather than a way to avoid taking on educational responsibilities. If teachers are not given the chance to



reflect critically, they will not be able to foster critical consciousness in their students. Reclaiming leisure turns into a protest against the commercialization of human time and the conversion of education to a business focused on production.

Regaining Teacher Autonomy through Critical Pedagogy and Resistance

As the previous discussion has shown, in neoliberal educational systems, the role of the modern teacher is becoming more and more contradictory. On the one hand, educators are charged with the vital duty of fostering intellectual growth, civic engagement, and critical thinking. However, they are prone to administrative regimes that promote quantifiable production above genuine learning, limit autonomy, and increase labour expectations. This paradox begs a crucial question: How can educators' rebel against these circumstances and restore education as a truly liberating endeavour?

One of the strongest answers to this query is provided by critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy, which emerged from Paulo Freire's writings and was further refined by academics like Henry Giroux, Bell Hooks, Peter McLaren, and Michael Apple, challenges the idea that education is just a technical method of imparting knowledge. Rather, it views education as an essentially political endeavour that has the power to either perpetuate or subvert prevailing systems of dominance. This tradition is still based on Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire contended that conventional educational paradigms frequently serve as social control mechanisms in the context of political repression and socioeconomic inequality. In his well-known statement, he compared traditional education to a "banking model" in which instructors deposit knowledge into obedient pupils (72). These methods uphold current hierarchies and inhibit critical thought.

According to Freire, dialogue rather than dominance is necessary for true education. Together, educators and learners must participate in processes of inquiry, introspection, and change. Through education, people gain the ability to identify and confront oppressive social institutions and develop critical consciousness, or what Freire refers to as *conscientización* (35).

Freire's observations are extremely applicable to the state of education today. The very modes of discourse and critical interaction that Freire deemed crucial are undermined by the bureaucratization and commercialization of education. Teachers frequently lack the time and freedom needed to create transformative learning environments because they are overburdened with administrative duties, monitoring systems, and performance goals. Additionally, the alienation that teachers feel is similar to the alienation that Freire found among oppressed groups in general.



Publications

United International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (UIJMR)

An International Peer-Reviewed and Refereed Multidisciplinary Journal

ISSN: 3048-6726 www.ujmr.in Impact Factor: 6.934 (SJIF) Vol-3, Issue-2 : April, May & June, 2026

Teachers may lose touch with the creative and liberating aspects of education, just as students may lose touch with their own intellectual agency. Therefore, resistance necessitates both pedagogical change and the reinstatement of teachers' ability to function as intellectuals rather than merely employees.

Henry Giroux makes a strong case against the idea that educators should only be technical implementers of curricula that are imposed from without. Giroux makes the case in *Teachers as Intellectuals* that teachers should be viewed as transformative intellectuals who are able to analyse, evaluate, and alter teaching methods (121). Teaching involves the creation of meaning and democratic possibilities rather than just imparting knowledge. Neoliberal educational policies are immediately challenged by Giroux's notion of the transformational intellectual. Modern accountability systems frequently make the assumption that managerial monitoring, data collection, and standardization may lead to effective education. These presumptions turn educators into technicians whose job it is to carry out predefined goals. Giroux, on the other hand, maintains that teachers must have the freedom to interact critically with social conditions, policy, and curriculum. Therefore, the fight for teacher autonomy is a larger democratic imperative rather than a specific professional issue. Schools are vital in forming civic culture and public consciousness. One of society's most vital resources for democratic renewal is lost when educators lose their ability to engage critically.

Bell Hooks, a feminist researcher and educator, broadens this viewpoint by introducing the idea of "engaged pedagogy." Hooks makes the case in *Teaching to Transgress* that education should promote holistic learning approaches that take into account the social, emotional, and intellectual aspects of the human experience (13). She takes issue with educational institutions that put efficiency, control, and compliance ahead of real human connection. In order to establish learning environments that empower students, Hooks highlights that teachers themselves need to be emotionally and intellectually healthy. Teachers who work under conditions of fatigue, surveillance, and alienation are unable to stimulate critical thought. Teachers' liberation is inextricably linked to students' liberation. This realization is especially crucial in light of the current teacher burnout epidemic. The well-being of teachers is often neglected in favour of student progress in educational policies. However, critical pedagogy acknowledges that relationships marked by mutual respect, trust, and communication are the foundation of effective learning. Teachers who have the time, effort, and independence required for genuine participation are needed in these kinds of interactions.



There are several ways to oppose the commercialization of education. Collective organization is a key tactic. Marx repeatedly stressed that when workers act collectively as opposed to individually, they have more power (Marx and Engels 79). In the past, teacher unions, professional groups, and grassroots educational movements have been essential in promoting better working conditions, opposing exploitative practices, and protecting professional autonomy. In neoliberal environments that promote individual rivalry and self-responsibility, the importance of communal action becomes especially clear. Teachers are frequently urged to see professional obstacles as personal issues that call for unique solutions. Overwhelming tasks become chances for better time management, and burnout becomes a resilience issue. Collective resistance is discouraged and structural conditions are obscured by such tales.

Critical pedagogy, on the other hand, pushes teachers to acknowledge the social and political aspects of their experiences. Declining autonomy, digital surveillance, and administrative overload are examples of larger systemic changes rather than individual occurrences. Gaining an understanding of these relationships opens up opportunities for group criticism and action. Reclaiming intellectual labour itself is a significant act of resistance. The reduction of education to quantifiable results and defined processes is one of the hallmarks of educational commodification. By placing a strong emphasis on inquiry, creativity, and critical thinking in the classroom, educators may refute this reasoning. Teachers frequently have the chance to foster democratic discourse and intellectual curiosity, even in constrictive institutional settings.

The work of educational theorist Michael Apple, who contends that schools are places of continuous ideological conflict rather than passive tools of dominance, significantly aligns with this viewpoint (Apple 58). Even if educational institutions have the potential to perpetuate societal injustices, they also offer opportunities for change and resistance. Teachers are active actors who can challenge prevailing narratives and practices; they are not just victims of systemic pressures. In this sense, the emergence of digital technologies offers both benefits and challenges. As was previously said, digital technologies frequently serve as tools for labour intensification and surveillance. But they can also help instructors work together, share expertise, and organize as a group. Teachers from different places may now rally around shared problems, debate working conditions, and exchange resources thanks to online networks. Thus, fatalistic views of educational development are rejected by critical pedagogy. Although it acknowledges the influence of neoliberal



institutions, it maintains that there are still other options. Realizing that the current arrangements are historically created rather than inevitable is the first step towards resistance. The commodification of pedagogical labour is the outcome of certain political and economic decisions rather than an inherent aspect of education.

In the end, regaining teacher autonomy necessitates a more comprehensive rethinking of education. Societies must acknowledge schools' role in promoting democratic citizenship, critical consciousness, and human flourishing rather than seeing them simply as means of generating human capital. Such a shift necessitates policies that put human growth ahead of economic output, intellectual freedom ahead of bureaucratic compliance, and educational excellence ahead of managerial efficiency. Therefore, the fight for democratic education and the fight for teacher autonomy are inextricably linked. Teachers need to be empowered as intellectual workers whose knowledge and inventiveness are crucial to the development of an educated and critical public, not only as employees. Education can only achieve its emancipatory potential and avoid becoming just another site of capitalist accumulation in such circumstances.

Conclusion: The Revolutionary Educational Principle of Leisure

The current teaching problem is a reflection of larger changes in how labour is organized under neoliberal capitalism. The teaching profession is becoming more and more defined by the monetization of pedagogical labour, the growth of digital surveillance, the extension of bureaucratic tasks, and the ideological exaltation of constant busyness, as this study has shown. Together, these advancements weaken the intellectual and emotional prerequisites for meaningful instruction, increase workloads, and decrease professional autonomy. This article has argued that the difficulties teachers face cannot be reduced to administrative inefficiencies or isolated policy failures, drawing on Marx's ideas of labour, alienation, and surplus value. Instead, they are structural expressions of capitalist logics that aim to minimize institutional costs and enhance output. Teachers are becoming more and more like commodities whose mental, emotional, and temporal resources are constantly being taken from them.

A potent metaphor for this predicament is Roopali Sinha's remark that "the last period never arrives" (Sinha). The last class period no longer marks the conclusion of the teacher's workweek. Rather, professional responsibilities are perpetual due to non-pedagogical tasks, administrative reporting, digital communications, and evaluation needs. As institutional needs take over areas that were once used for relaxation, introspection, and personal growth, the line between



work and leisure gradually blurs. This change has far-reaching effects. Teachers feel alienated from both the goals that first drew them to the profession and the results of their labour. The creative, relational, and intellectual dimensions of teaching are increasingly subordinated to managerial priorities and bureaucratic imperatives. Instead of fostering critical consciousness, educational institutions run the risk of perpetuating the exact systems of dominance they are supposed to oppose.

The decline of leisure is especially concerning. Leisure is sometimes written down as superfluous or pointless in today's productive culture. However, leisure is a necessary prerequisite for intellectual development, creativity, and democratic engagement, according to academics from Aristotle to Russell. For educators, leisure is a professional requirement rather than a luxury. Effective teachers need time to read, ponder, analyse, and interact with concepts outside of their immediate institutional obligations. The defense of leisure takes on serious significance from a Marxist standpoint. The ongoing growth of labour time and the commercialization of human activity are essential to capitalism. One of the few remaining domains that defies commercial logic is leisure. It offers chances for introspection, self-improvement, and the formation of alternative social lives.

Therefore, it is necessary to view the restoration of leisure as a political and educational necessity. If teachers are denied the conditions required for intellectual freedom, they will not be able to foster it in their students. Similarly, when educators are reduced to worn-out bureaucrats working under conditions of constant surveillance and overwork, democratic societies cannot thrive. Instead of focusing on surface-level reform, structural change is needed to address these issues. The underlying conflicts found throughout this study are unlikely to be resolved by policies that are only intended to increase efficiency or accountability. Rather, educational systems need to adopt a decommodified approach to teaching that places an emphasis on democratic engagement, professional autonomy, intellectual innovation, and emotional health. Restoring leisure must therefore be seen as a political and pedagogical imperative.

Teachers cannot cultivate intellectual independence in their students if they are denied the necessary conditions. In a similar vein, democratic societies cannot flourish when educators are reduced to exhausted bureaucrats operating under conditions of continual surveillance and excessive workload. To solve these problems, fundamental transformation is required rather than only surface-level improvement. Policies that just aim to improve efficiency or accountability are unlikely to address the fundamental issues discovered throughout this study. Instead,



educational systems must embrace a decommodified approach to education that prioritizes intellectual creativity, professional autonomy, democratic engagement, and emotional well-being.

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United International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (UIJMR)

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ISSN: 3048-6726 www.ujmr.in Impact Factor: 6.934 (SJIF) Vol-3, Issue-2 : April, May & June, 2026

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