



Teaching Writing as Invisible Labor in India: Teaching, Gendered Work, and Institutional Marginalization

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Article Info

Article History:

Published: 20 Feb 2026

Publication Issue:

Volume 3, Issue 2
February-2026

Page Number:

318-322

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Abstract:

In higher education systems around the world, teaching and academic writing instruction hold a paradoxical position: they are vital to students' success but are consistently underappreciated as intellectual labor. This article explores how similar patterns of feminization, marginalization and invisibility characterize writing instruction in Indian higher education, drawing on Cynthia Selfe's groundbreaking claim that teaching has historically been framed as women's work. This article examines how teaching in India is viewed as remedial service-oriented and emotionally taxing work that is frequently assigned disproportionately to women and early-career faculty through a critical contextual analysis. According to the article, this position is structurally produced by colonial legacies, examination-driven pedagogies, neoliberal institutional logics and gendered presumptions about teaching care and language. The study illustrates how teaching instruction in India is both crucial and deprofessionalized by applying Selfe's framework to a postcolonial multilingual setting. The article's conclusion urges institutional changes that acknowledge teaching pedagogy as essential rather than incidental to academic life, as well as a rethinking of teaching instruction as intellectual work.

Keywords: writing studies, gendered labor, teaching, India, women's work, higher education

1. Introduction

It is commonly known that teaching is essential to students' success in all subject areas. Ironically, though teaching instructors frequently hold marginal positions in academic hierarchies, Selfe makes the case in her seminal essay "Teaching Composition as Women's Work" (1994) that universities have traditionally been perceived as feminized labor—care remediation service and emotional investment rather than intellectual authority. Consequently, writing instruction has been routinely underappreciated, underfunded and shut out of institutional power centers. Selfe's analysis comes from the U. S. context its conceptual insights have a significant impact on other educational systems especially in postcolonial settings like India. Teaching instruction particularly in English holds a similar contradictory position in Indian higher education. Despite being essential for students navigating both academic and professional environments, it is frequently regarded as secondary, remedial and non-specialized. Women, junior faculty, contract instructors and teachers with training in literature rather than writing pedagogy are frequently assigned to teaching courses. This article makes the case that writing instruction in India is a type of gendered invisible academic labor that is influenced by institutional cultural and historical factors that closely resemble the dynamics noted by Selfe. The article shows how teaching writing in India is framed as support work rather than knowledge production by placing writing instruction within feminist labor theory, writing studies and postcolonial education research. The article argues that this marginalization is structurally produced—through colonial language hierarchies, exam systems, neoliberal university reforms and gendered expectations of care—rather than being incidental. This short article adds to international discussions about academic labor, writing pedagogy and educational justice by extending Selfe's framework to India.

2. Literature Review

The central claim made by Selfe (1994) is that writing has historically been feminized in ways that are similar to caregiving and domestic work. She lists a number of recurrent traits of teaching writing. Instead of being presented as scholarship, it is framed as service. Care nurturing and emotional labor are perceived as less intelligent and more laborious. Instead of expertise, it is linked to remediation. Women and contingent faculty are disproportionately given such roles and less respect. Even though universities depend on students' writing competence to uphold academic standards, Selfe contends that these characteristics place composition outside the centers of disciplinary authority. For a long time, feminist labor scholars have demonstrated that caregiving language and emotional support work is frequently undervalued especially when done by women (Bourdieu, 1991; Acker, 1995). This pattern is best illustrated by writing instruction which requires a high level of intellectual engagement (close reading, personalized feedback and rhetorical judgment) but is rarely acknowledged as research-intensive or theoretically complex. This framework shows remarkable similarities when it is applied to India. English academic writing serves as a gatekeeping mechanism in both the higher education and employment sectors but writing instruction is similarly framed as auxiliary corrective and non-disciplinary.

3. Institutional Context of Writing in India

The institutional and historical background of writing instruction in India

Writing instructions marginalization in India is inextricably linked to the history of colonial education. English was first used as a tool for social stratification and governance rather than as a neutral means of communication (Macaulay 1835/1935). Writing in English became a sign of elite status and not being able to do so was seen as a personal shortcoming rather than a result of systemic injustice. Universities today continue to carry on this legacy. Instead of being a subject deserving of ongoing instruction, academic writing is viewed as a necessary skill that students should already have. Because of this, writing classes are frequently viewed as remedial add-ons rather than essential parts of curricula.

Writing Without Self-Control

Unlike in the United States, in India writing courses have not yet become a recognized academic discipline. Writing instruction is usually found in general communication skills courses or in English departments that prioritize literary studies or technical stuff. The idea that writing pedagogy doesn't require specialized knowledge is strengthened by this structural absence. As noted in the United States by Selfe (1994), when a field lacks disciplinary legitimacy, it is easier to take advantage of its labor. This results in heavy teaching loads little professional recognition and few chances for writing instructors to advance through research in India. Although India has given birth to several theorists and writers, India still lacks formal courses that specialize in composition or technical communication like in the USA or Europe (Padmanabhan, 2011). In the absence of solid and specialized writing programs, Indian SMEs cannot confidently publish their work without editorial assistance from some professional writers or technical professionals to create a comprehensive and inclusive documents for a wide audience (Pandit et al., 2011).

4. Gender and Writing Labor

Feminization of Writing Education

Anecdotal and institutional evidence indicates that women are disproportionately represented in positions, involving writing instruction language support and remedial teaching in Indian universities despite the paucity of systematic national data. These roles closely correspond to socially constructed expectations of women as linguistically proficient patient and nurturing. In India where writing instructors are frequently expected to make up for systemic educational injustices without institutional support, Selfe's (1994) observation that writing instruction is linked to helping to fix and supporting strikes a deep chord.

Affective and Emotional Work

Responding to student writing requires a great deal of emotional work, including managing students concerns about their English proficiency, encouraging discouraged students and tracing linguistic insecurity. Promotional criteria and workload calculations seldom take this affective dimension into account. The normalization of

emotional labor, according to feminist labor, scholars make it invisible (Acker, 1995). Writing instructors carry out a great deal of emotional mediation in Indian classrooms where students may suffer from severe linguistic alienation, but this work is still mainly unacknowledged.

5. Evaluation feedback and unseen intellectual labor

Feedback practices are among the most obvious examples of writing as invisible labour. Close reading, rhetorical analysis and pedagogical judgment are necessary for providing insightful feedback. However, rather than viewing feedback as an intellectual endeavor, institutional cultures frequently view it as routine clerical work. Selfe (1994) criticizes the reduction of writing teachers' work to marking papers a term that minimizes the theoretical and interpretive aspects of response. Regardless of gender, instructors' workload to pairing students, readying templates, creating a conducive environment, and using technological feedback cannot be undermined (Sherma, 2025). There has been a lot of talk about teachers' workload due to the demand and necessity of personalized feedback. This had led many writing teachers to opt for verbal and general feedback to save their time. Protsiv et al. (2018) rightly revealed that "the issue of teacher workload should be seen as a symptom of the much wider challenges currently faced in education" (p. 14). Feedback is just believed to be a normal task that each writing teacher does every single day. This decrease is also common in India where exam pressure and big class sizes further diminish feedback's value as disposable labour. Teachers are therefore put in a difficult situation where they are expected to help students write better but are not given the time tools or credit they need to do so.

6. The intensification of marginalization and neoliberal universities

These dynamics have been exacerbated in Indian higher education by recent neoliberal reforms. Universities heavily rely on contract and part-time faculty to teach foundational courses, including writing while placing an increasing emphasis on employability rankings and efficiency. This is similar to what Selfe refers to as the institutional exploitation of composition labor: writing instruction turns into an affordable way to uphold academic standards without spending money on permanent qualified teaching positions and faculty training (Selfe, 1994). In this setting, writing instructors, mostly women, are expected to produce soft skills, employability and communication skills but they are not given institutional voice or intellectual authority.

Writing instruction should be reframed as intellectual work. It is evident from extending Selfe's argument to India that issues of labor gender and power are inextricably linked to bettering writing pedagogy. Until institutions address the structural conditions under which writing is taught calls for improved feedback procedures or creative teaching strategies will remain ineffective.

- i. Teaching writing must be reframed as an intellectual endeavor
- ii. acknowledging the specialty of writing pedagogy
- iii. Valuing criticism as academic work addressing the distribution of teaching work by gender
- iv. offering training and institutional support for writing research

According to Selfe (1994), teaching writing will remain marginalized as long as it is presented as women's work as opposed to essential academic labour or intellectual production in the 21st century.

7. Discussion

Current research on the teaching profession in India identifies trends that are particularly pertinent to comprehending the status of women as writing instructors. Sarangapani et al. (2021) claimed that women are disproportionately concentrated in certain educational sectors, such as early childhood education, primary schooling, special education and privately run non-governmental institutions despite appearing to be numerically well-represented throughout the teaching profession. Intensive, affective and caregiving labor characterizes these spaces and their lower institutional prestige corresponds with global rankings that place these roles below leadership and secondary teaching positions (Dolton et al., 2018). Higher education writing instruction especially foundational and remedial academic writing courses increasingly reflects these circumstances: it is pedagogically demanding labor-intensive and student-facing, but it is institutionally underappreciated and frequently given to

women. For a long time, feminist scholars have maintained that cultural narratives that associate pedagogy with caring and household duties are what sustain the feminization of education. According to Latha's (2020) ethnographic research, educators often use familial metaphors to describe their professional identities viewing schools as families and teachers as maternal figures.

This is demonstrated by her work with Indian women teachers. By framing pedagogical labor, particularly language and writing instruction, as emotionally embedded rather than intellectually specialized, these metaphors normalize teaching as an extension of women's domestic roles. These discursive constructions are especially important for writing instructors whose work entails providing linguistically insecure students with ongoing mentoring personalized feedback and emotional support, which are frequently hidden by institutional reward systems. Manjrekar's (2013) analysis which contends that education serves as a crucial mechanism of social and cultural reproduction further places the labor of female teachers within the intersecting sites of family and school. Unquestionably the growth of formal education has made it easier for women to find work, but it has also restricted many of them to feminized teaching positions that prioritize moral responsibility patience and care. This paradox is best illustrated by writing instruction where women's linguistic and pedagogical labor is mobilized to support economic productivity and academic success, but their work is still marginalized and unconnected to decision-making authority. Both the state and the family uphold women's inferior status in academic institutions by portraying teaching—and consequently writing instruction—as a “natural” manifestation of women's nurturing abilities. However, the experiences of female writing instructors are not consistent and differ greatly between institutional contexts. Chudgar and Sakamoto (2021) show using data from India's National Sample Survey that highly educated women in urban areas are disproportionately drawn to private educational institutions in part because of gendered social norms that place a premium on scheduling flexibility commute safety and proximity to home. Age and marital status, which are frequently stand-ins for stability and experience, are linked to better working conditions in these contexts.

However, younger female instructors are more likely to work in unstable jobs with few benefits including those who teach writing on contractual or temporary employment. According to Sundararaman and Vijaysimha (2011), government institutions on the other hand typically provide more job security and welfare benefits such as maternity benefits which give women teachers a better ability to manage their personal and professional lives. However, writing instruction is frequently limited to lower-status teaching assignments even in these comparatively secure settings. The general trend is unchanged despite institutional variations: women's intellectual linguistic and emotional labor is systematically undervalued in Indian higher education. Women's continued underrepresentation in leadership and curriculum-design roles is a result of gendered expectations that frame writing pedagogy as supportive rather than scholarly work (Dolton et al., 2020; Symeonidis, 2015). Thus, the feminization of writing instruction contributes significantly to the perpetuation of professional hierarchies in which women carry out the work necessary to maintain academic systems but are kept out of positions of authority. Lastly, even though current research provides insightful information about the experiences of female teachers its scope is still uneven. The majority of qualitative research is focused on areas like Maharashtra Karnataka and Rajasthan which restricts its applicability to India's varied educational environments. Furthermore, gender is frequently viewed as a single analytical category with little consideration given to the ways in which caste class language background and institutional type interact to influence women's experiences as writing instructors. To develop a more thorough and socially grounded understanding of how gendered academic labor functions in Indian higher education it is imperative that these gaps be filled.

8. Conclusion

Many of the gendered and institutional dynamics noted by Selfe in the United States are replicated in composition instruction in India according to this article. To S. context. Writing instruction is crucial but underappreciated, intellectually challenging but presented as a service and heavily gendered in its dissemination and acknowledgment. The study demonstrates that marginalization is structurally produced rather than accidental by placing Indian writing pedagogy within feminist analyses of academic labor. Therefore, addressing the difficulties in teaching writing in India necessitates institutional and ideological change in addition to pedagogical reform. It

is not just a professional issue to acknowledge composition as intellectual labor it is also an issue of academic justice and educational equity.

Funding Details

There is no funding to disclose.

Data availability

This study has no data.

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