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THE ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: WORKLOAD, ROLE CONFLICT AND ORGANISATIONAL RESOURCES AMONG GOVERNMENT HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL HEADS

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ABSTRACT:

School heads are expected to give academic direction while also responding to records, reporting, examinations, staff matters and communications that are often difficult to schedule. This cross-sectional study describes the administrative demands and organisational resources reported by 90 headmasters and headmistresses in government higher secondary schools in Tiruchirappalli district, Tamil Nadu. A structured questionnaire covered workload and time pressure, reporting and additional duties, role conflict, emotionally demanding situations and after-hours digital communication; six further item groups addressed perceived resources. Descriptive statistics and item-response frequencies were calculated. Mean scores for the five demand domains lay between 2.98 and 3.04 on a five-point frequency scale; resource-domain means ranged from 3.29 to 3.34 on a separate five-point agreement scale. Thirty-five respondents (38.9%) often or very often reported more work than could be completed during school hours, and 37 (41.1%) reported receiving work-related messages or calls outside those hours. Demand and resource subscales showed exceptionally strong associations in diagnostic analysis, limiting claims about their empirical distinctness. The paper therefore reports descriptive patterns rather than independent predictive relationships. These observations identify reporting schedules, competing assignments and communication expectations as procedures deserving further examination; they do not establish prevalence across the district.

KEYWORDS: *school heads; administrative burden; workload; role conflict; digital intrusion; organisational resources; government higher secondary schools; Tamil Nadu.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The question for school leadership is not whether a headmaster has administrative work. Some administration is indispensable to the functioning of a public school. The more consequential question is how responsibilities are organised, how often one duty interrupts another, and what discretion the head has to give sustained attention to teaching and learning. A school head may be answerable for student progress while attending to examination schedules, staff deployment, compliance reports, parental concerns and instructions from several authorities. These obligations are not necessarily unreasonable in isolation. Difficulty may arise from their accumulation, timing and competing claims on the same working day.

The distinction between leading learning and managing operations is well established in scholarship on school leadership (Harris & Jones, 2023). UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report 2024/5 calls attention to the organisational conditions in which school leaders can focus on learning (UNESCO, 2024). TALIS 2024 similarly documents administrative workload among concerns reported by principals in participating education systems (OECD, 2026). Neither source supplies a direct

estimate for government higher secondary schools in Tiruchirappalli. They demonstrate why the daily organisation of a school head's work merits local empirical attention.

The administrative setting matters. Government higher secondary schools in Tamil Nadu have academic responsibilities alongside public-accountability procedures, reporting requirements and duties delegated through educational administration. How these obligations are experienced cannot be inferred from a formal description of the headmaster's post. The present paper therefore examines what 90 participating school heads reported about work demands and organisational support. It does not assess work–life balance, burnout, instructional effectiveness or student achievement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL ORIENTATION

2.1 Work intensification, time pressure and administrative labour

Workload is not adequately represented by the number of tasks completed. A similar volume of work may be experienced differently depending on interruptions, deadlines and opportunities to organise one's time. In a synthesis of research on teachers and school leaders, Creagh et al. (2025) distinguish workload from work intensification and use time poverty to explain why professional work can become difficult even when formal duties remain unchanged. A headmaster who moves repeatedly between records, staff issues, official messages and student concerns may find it difficult to preserve uninterrupted time for academic supervision. This possibility concerns the arrangement of work; it cannot be established by counting hours alone.

Evidence centred on principals is instructive. Skaalvik (2020, 2023) examined perceived demands and resources among Norwegian principals, including time pressure and support within schools. Tahir et al. (2026), reviewing 38 studies from 18 countries, identified administrative workload and insufficient support as recurrent themes in research on principals' stress. Such studies justify examining particular sources of demand, but their outcomes cannot be transferred directly to Indian public schools. A small interview study by Gupta (2025) similarly underlines the influence of context on school leadership in India; its four-principal sample offers interpretive insight, not a population estimate.

2.2 Role conflict and the organisation of expectations

A heavy workload and role conflict are not the same condition. Role conflict concerns expectations that are incompatible or difficult to fulfil simultaneously, whereas role ambiguity concerns uncertainty about what is expected. Rizzo et al. (1970) established these as distinguishable constructs in organisational research; Schwab et al. (1983) subsequently examined their measurement among teachers. A headmaster may understand an instruction perfectly but still find that it competes with an examination responsibility, a student matter or a reporting deadline. The survey therefore treats conflicting demands and clarity of responsibilities as different aspects of the administrative setting.

The Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model offers a useful organising vocabulary. Demands are features of work requiring sustained effort; resources are features that assist task completion and the pursuit of work goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). For school heads, demands may include reporting, incompatible assignments and emotionally difficult interactions; resources may include discretion in planning, support from supervisors and colleagues, fair allocation of duties and clear communication procedures. This paper adopts the distinction for description. It does not test the JD–R model's proposed pathways to strain, motivation or performance.

2.3 Digital communication and the extension of administrative work

Calls and messages are now part of routine school administration. They may expedite decisions and coordination, but they may also interrupt planned work. Puranik et al. (2020) explain why an interruption must be understood in relation to its purpose and context, not automatically treated as harmful. Research on workplace telepressure distinguishes receiving messages from feeling an obligation to respond promptly (Barber & Santuzzi, 2015). Mazmanian et al. (2013) describe how mobile connectivity can increase short-term flexibility while producing expectations of continual availability. These studies were not conducted among Tamil Nadu headmasters. They support the

narrower question asked here: how frequently do participating heads report communication and digital work outside school hours?

2.4 Institutional resources and the leadership environment

Organisational resources deserve examination in their own right. A school can have demanding work and supportive colleagues at the same time. In research among Norwegian principals, Skaalvik (2020, 2023) distinguishes time pressure and other demands from resources such as autonomy and staff support. The UNESCO (2024) report also frames leadership as work carried out within institutional conditions rather than as an individual's skill alone. None of these findings establishes whether a particular level of support is sufficient in a government higher secondary school. The present survey describes perceived resources without treating them as the numerical inverse of demands.

2.5 Conceptual framework of the present study

The framework distinguishes two groups of reported working conditions. The demand group comprises workload/time pressure, reporting and additional duties, conflicting role expectations, emotionally demanding situations and after-hours digital contact. The resource group comprises task autonomy, supervisor support, collegial support, fairness of duty allocation, role clarity and institutional communication norms. They are kept separate because they refer to different administrative practices. The intended distinction is conceptual; the data do not establish that all eleven item groups are psychometrically independent factors.

Figure 1. Conceptual map of the school leadership working conditions examined in this study

Reported job demands	Perceived organisational resources
Workload and time pressure	Task autonomy
Reporting and additional duties	Supervisor support
Role conflict	Collegial support
Emotionally demanding situations	Fair allocation of duties
After-hours digital contact	Role clarity
	Communication norms

2.6 Research gap and contribution

International research has established that the position of school principal brings together instructional, organisational and relational responsibilities. It is less clear how particular kinds of administrative work are experienced within government higher secondary schools in a district such as Tiruchirappalli. This paper makes a modest, setting-specific contribution. It reports a differentiated picture of perceived demands and resources and identifies practical questions for administrative review. It does not claim to discover a new theory of school leadership or to estimate conditions across every government school in the district.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

The study has three objectives: to document how frequently participating school heads report five categories of occupational demands; to describe their perceptions of six organisational resources; and to identify particular administrative practices that could be investigated through further institutional research.

The research questions are: (1) What forms of work demand are reported by participating heads, and with what frequency? (2) What resources do they report in relation to autonomy, administrative support, colleagues, allocation of duties, role clarity and communication? (3) Which individual reporting and communication practices warrant closer enquiry? The questions are descriptive; the study does not advance hypotheses about causation, psychological outcomes or independent predictors.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Design, setting and respondents

A quantitative, cross-sectional questionnaire survey was conducted with 90 headmasters and headmistresses working in government higher secondary schools in Tiruchirappalli district, Tamil Nadu. Respondents were reached through an accessible group of school heads and participated voluntarily. The study does not claim random selection or a district-representative sample. The group included 40 men and 50 women; all reported regular or permanent appointment. The mean age was 49.14 years (SD = 6.62), and mean total teaching experience was 24.22 years (SD = 2.59). The findings describe only the respondents who took part.

4.2 Measures

The questionnaire asked about experiences during the preceding four working weeks. Twenty-two job-demand items used response options from 1 (never) to 5 (very often). They covered workload/time pressure (eight items), reporting/additional duties (four), role conflict (three), emotionally demanding situations (three) and digital contact outside school hours (four). Eighteen organisational-resource items used a separate five-point agreement scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with three items each on autonomy, supervisor support, collegial support, fairness in duty allocation, role clarity and communication norms. Item-group scores are respondent-level arithmetic means on the original 1–5 scale. Higher demand scores denote greater reported frequency; higher resource scores denote stronger agreement. The groups are described as provisional scales rather than instruments with established factor validity in this cohort. No overall job-demand or overall-resource score is used as a substantive outcome.

4.3 Data collection and ethics

Ninety completed questionnaires were obtained from respondents who gave consent to participate. Responses are reported in aggregate, without naming individuals or schools. No claim of approval by a formal institutional ethics committee is made because an approval record has not been established for this manuscript. Consent and confidentiality are reported separately from ethical-approval status.

4.4 Statistical analysis

Responses were examined for completeness, permissible categories and duplicate respondent identifiers. All 90 records contained valid entries for the 40 occupational-demand and organisational-resource items. Item-group means, sample standard deviations and Cronbach's alpha were calculated. For selected questions, the number and percentage endorsing response categories 4 or 5 were tabulated; these categories mean often/very often for demands but agree/strongly agree for resources. The two sets of numerical means therefore cannot be compared as if they measured the same intensity. Exploratory diagnostics revealed unusually high associations among provisional domain scores, including a Pearson correlation of −.953 between broad demand and resource averages (Spearman ρ = −.887). These averages are not used in the substantive analysis. Because the data do not establish discriminant validity of the proposed subscales, analysis is confined to item patterns, descriptive group means and preliminary internal consistency. The decision to avoid modelling followed these diagnostics; it was not prespecified.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Characteristics of respondents

The respondent group included 40 men (44.4%) and 50 women (55.6%), with all 90 reporting permanent appointment. Participants estimated spending an average of 2.94 hours per week (SD = 1.36) on school-related work outside school hours. This retrospective estimate does not have the precision of a time-use diary, and is not presented as one.

Table 1. Respondent profile (N = 90)

Characteristic	Value
Men	40 (44.4%)
Women	50 (55.6%)
Regular/permanent appointment	90 (100%)
Age, years	Mean 49.14; SD 6.62
Total teaching experience, years	Mean 24.22; SD 2.59
Reported school-related work outside school, hours/week	Mean 2.94; SD 1.36

Note. The sample was accessible and voluntarily participating; descriptive percentages do not imply population representation.

5.2 Profile of reported occupational demands

The five provisional demand-domain means fell within a narrow interval, 2.98–3.04, near the middle frequency category. The means were 3.02 for workload/time pressure, 2.98 for reporting/additional duties, 3.02 for role conflict, 3.00 for emotional demands and 3.04 for after-hours digital contact. Their closeness is not evidence that the demands are identical or equally consequential. It establishes only that their average recorded frequency was similar in this group. Alpha coefficients ranged from .770 to .885; these describe item consistency, not proof of five distinct underlying factors.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of demand dimensions (N = 90)

Demand dimension	Items	Mean	SD	α
Workload and time pressure	8	3.02	0.81	.885
Reporting and additional duties	4	2.98	0.90	.821
Role conflict	3	3.02	0.94	.770
Emotionally demanding situations	3	3.00	0.96	.798
Digital intrusion	4	3.04	0.88	.813

Note. Five-point frequency response scale. Higher scores indicate more frequent reported demands. SD values are sample standard deviations.

5.3 Organisational resources

The six resource-domain means ranged from 3.29 to 3.34 on the agreement scale. The values were 3.32 for autonomy, 3.32 for supervisor support, 3.34 for collegial support, 3.34 for fair allocation of duties, 3.29 for role clarity and 3.34 for communication norms. They cannot be subtracted from, or balanced against, the demand means because the response anchors differ. Cronbach's alpha was .626 for autonomy and .688 for role clarity, below commonly used screening thresholds; the other resource groups ranged from .726 to .789. All should be read as provisional item groupings until independent measurement validation is available.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of organisational-resource dimensions (N = 90)

Resource dimension	Items	Mean	SD	α
Task autonomy	3	3.32	0.80	.626
Supervisor support	3	3.32	0.86	.726
Collegial support	3	3.34	0.88	.771
Fairness of duty allocation	3	3.34	0.92	.789
Role clarity	3	3.29	0.82	.688
Institutional communication norms	3	3.34	0.91	.747

Note. Five-point agreement response scale. Higher scores indicate greater perceived resources; autonomy and role clarity show weaker preliminary reliability.

5.4 Selected administrative practices

Item-level distributions make the administrative picture more concrete. Thirty-five respondents (38.9%) often or very often reported having more school-related work than they could complete during

school hours. Thirty-seven (41.1%) frequently received work-related calls or messages outside regular hours. Thirty (33.3%) frequently reported that registers and reports consumed much of the working day, and the same number reported interruption by official data requests. Of the 90 respondents, 47 (52.2%) agreed or strongly agreed that colleagues help each other when workload rises, and 45 (50.0%) agreed or strongly agreed that a supervisor listens to work difficulties. These are proportions within the respondent group, not district prevalence estimates.

Table 4. Selected single-item response proportions

Statement/indicator	Positive-category responses	Percentage
More school-related work than can be completed during school hours	35 often/very often	38.9%
Registers/official reports take much of working time	30 often/very often	33.3%
Official data requests interrupt planned work	30 often/very often	33.3%
Work calls/messages received outside school hours	37 often/very often	41.1%
Colleagues help one another during heavy workload	47 agree/strongly agree	52.2%
Supervisor listens to work-related difficulty	45 agree/strongly agree	50.0%

Note. Demand and resource items have different anchors. Values represent counts out of 90, not prevalence estimates for all district school heads.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Administrative burden as an accumulation of responsibilities

Several pressures appear in the same administrative role. The composite scores for workload, reporting, conflicting expectations, emotionally difficult interactions and digital contact are close together. It would be misleading to identify one as the principal cause of administrative burden from those means. Creagh et al.'s (2025) distinction between workload and time poverty offers a sharper question: how often does the structure of the working day prevent heads from giving sustained attention to academic matters? The survey raises that question; it does not record a diary of actual work allocation.

The distinction matters for governance. Compliance reporting, examination arrangements, staff decisions and student welfare cannot simply be dismissed as unnecessary duties. But they can collide in time. Role-conflict research (Rizzo et al., 1970; Schwab et al., 1983) directs attention to the compatibility and clarity of expectations. An administrative review would therefore need to examine the sequencing of tasks, the number of independent requests and the latitude granted to heads when priorities compete.

6.2 Reporting and digital communication as organisational practices

The item findings provide two concrete points of entry. One third frequently reported interruptions from official data requests, and just over two fifths frequently received work-related calls or messages after school hours. These responses do not tell us how many communications were urgent or useful. The interruption literature cautions that the effects of contact depend on timing and purpose (Puranik et al., 2020). Research on telepressure similarly distinguishes the presence of messages from expectations of an immediate reply (Barber & Santuzzi, 2015). The administrative question is therefore not whether communication should stop, but whether requests are consolidated, time-bound and labelled clearly enough for heads to distinguish urgent work from routine business.

6.3 Support is present but cannot be assumed sufficient

Responses concerning support do not sustain a simple story of organisational neglect. Forty-seven respondents endorsed collegial help during periods of heavy workload, while 45 reported a supervisor who listens when work becomes difficult. The provisional resource means were slightly above the neutral midpoint, though their close associations and uneven reliability prevent strong

conclusions about distinct resource dimensions. These responses indicate support that some heads perceive as available; they do not show whether that support is adequate to the work assigned.

A more serious measurement question lies beneath the descriptive results. The provisional demand and resource scores were so closely related that treating them as separate independent predictors would give a misleading impression of explanatory precision. Strong correlations may reflect a general evaluative response tendency, overlap among items, shared conditions or error in the movement of responses into the electronic data file. Common-method concerns are discussed by Podsakoff et al. (2003), but a shared response method by itself does not establish the cause here. The appropriate response is to report the diagnostics, refrain from causal and multivariable claims, and recommend source-record checking and independent validation—not to manipulate scores or selectively remove cases until the correlations weaken.

6.4 Contribution and limits of context

The limits of comparison are important. The OECD (2026) and UNESCO (2024) reports cover education systems with different governance, school levels and staffing arrangements. Gupta's (2025) Indian interviews show why local context matters, but they are not a statistical benchmark for Tiruchirappalli. The present study contributes a description of one group of government higher secondary school heads. A more exact account of the administrative system would require a known sampling frame, school-level characteristics, time diaries, examination of actual reporting schedules and interviews capable of explaining why particular tasks compete.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Four administrative enquiries follow from these responses. Authorities could map the calendar of routine submissions and determine which requests duplicate information already held. They could specify response windows and indicate when a task takes priority over an existing obligation. Communications outside school hours could distinguish matters requiring immediate action from those that may wait. Finally, school heads and their supervisors could review where discretion, delegation and staff support are sufficient or constrained. None of these measures has been tested as an intervention in this survey; they are practical questions for further investigation.

8. CONCLUSION

School heads' administrative responsibilities are necessary, but the way those responsibilities accumulate deserves scrutiny. In these 90 responses, time pressure, reporting demands, conflicting expectations, emotionally difficult situations and after-hours digital contact were reported at broadly similar average frequencies. Some respondents also described useful collegial and supervisory support. These results do not establish a general condition across the district or explain the effects of any particular demand. They locate practical questions about the organisation of reporting, assignment of responsibilities and communication expectations.

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