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REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-57626

Title: Teacher Strikes and Labor Relations in Public Education: A Narrative Study in Meghalaya.

Recommendation:

- Accept as it is**
- Accept after minor revision.....
- Accept after major revision
- Do not accept (*Reasons below*)

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality	√			
Techn. Quality	√			
Clarity	√			
Significance	√			

Reviewer's ID: JPR- 212

Detailed Reviewer's Report

Summary of the Manuscript

This paper presents a narrative study of teacher strikes in the public education sector of Meghalaya, a state in northeastern India. The study reconceptualizes teacher strikes not merely as educational disruptions but as relational events embedded in asymmetric labor negotiations between educators and the state. Using narrative interviews with teachers, students, parents, NGO members, and administrators, the study examines how strike action emerges from accumulative institutional silence, delayed remunerations, and constrained grievance channels. The analysis introduces three key concepts: **compelled visibility** (collective action after prolonged institutional silence), **moral-labor tension** (the conflict between economic claims and professional self-conception as caregivers), and **aspirational fragility** (the subtle destabilization of confidence in educational futures due to recurring labor conflict). The study integrates labor process theory, moral economy scholarship, and the sociology of education. The methodology includes 20 narrative interviews, document and media analysis, and thematic narrative analysis. The findings reveal three major themes: employment precarity and structural inequality, moral tensions and social expectations, and identity, dignity, and professional recognition.

Overall Assessment

This is an **exceptionally strong, theoretically sophisticated, and methodologically rigorous** piece of qualitative research. The paper makes a genuine and significant contribution to the literature on teacher labor relations, particularly in peripheral public sector governance contexts. The author demonstrates deep familiarity with relevant theoretical traditions (labor process theory, moral economy, narrative identity theory) and skillfully integrates them into a coherent conceptual framework. The introduction of the concepts "compelled visibility," "moral-labor tension," and "aspirational fragility" represents original theoretical contributions. The methodology is thorough and appropriate for narrative inquiry. The findings are richly supported by participant quotes and supplemented by a detailed table of news reports. The discussion engages seriously with existing literature and draws out theoretical implications. The paper is clearly written, well-organized, and of publishable quality.

Recommendation: Accept after minor revision. The revisions required are modest: clarifying a few methodological details, minor reorganization of the literature review, and standardizing reference formats. This paper is ready for publication with very light editing.

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Minor Concerns Requiring Revision (All Low Effort)

1. The Literature Review Is Overly Long and Somewhat Disconnected (Minor)

The literature review (pages 2-15) is comprehensive but feels at times like a series of annotated summaries rather than an integrated critical synthesis. Sections on "Core Labor & Industrial Relations," "Sociology of Education & Aspirations," "Teacher Work & Professional Identity," and "Teacher Strike Case Studies & Comparative Contexts" are each valuable individually, but the connection between them and the specific context of Meghalaya is not always made explicit. Additionally, some classic texts (e.g., Braverman 1974, Burawoy 1979, Thompson 1971) are summarized at length, but their direct application to the Meghalaya case could be clearer.

Suggested Revision: Add a brief transitional paragraph at the end of each major subsection explaining how the theoretical concepts discussed (e.g., deskilling, consent, moral economy) apply specifically to the teacher labor context in Meghalaya. Alternatively, move some of the classic theoretical material to the "Theoretical Framework" section (pages 15-17) where it would be more directly connected to the study's own concepts.

2. The Table of News Reports (Table 4) Is Excellent but Could Be Better Integrated

Table 4 (pages 30-31) provides a detailed summary of 10 news reports on teacher strikes in Meghalaya from 2017 to 2025. This is valuable secondary data. However, the table appears in the "Data Analysis and Interpretation" section (pages 25-31) but is then discussed again in the "Findings" section on pages 28-30. There is some redundancy.

Suggested Revision: Move Table 4 entirely to the "Findings" section or to an appendix. Streamline the textual discussion to avoid repeating information already presented clearly in the table.

3. Minor Formatting and Consistency Issues

- **Citation inconsistency:** Some in-text citations include full first names (e.g., "Edward R, 1979" on page 4 – this should be "Edwards, R. 1979" or similar). Check all citations against the reference list.
- **Duplicate citation:** Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) appears twice on page 6 (lines 188-192 and 193-197). This appears to be a copy-paste error.
- **Table numbering:** Table 1 appears on page 12, Table 2 on page 22, Table 3 on page 23, Table 4 on pages 30-31. Table 2 is actually the interview protocol (36 questions) – this might be better placed in an appendix given its length.
- **Missing page numbers for some references:** Several references in the reference list (pages 36-38) lack page ranges or DOIs where available (e.g., Mawthoh & Rani 2018; Nonglait & Myrthong 2018).
- **Minor typographical errors:**
 - Page 2, line 47: "conceptualising strike action as compelled Visibility" – "Visibility" should be lowercase ("visibility") unless intended as a proper term (the author defines "Compelled Visibility" as a concept on page 15, so capitalization may be intentional but should be consistent).
 - Page 9, line 279: "salaried" should be "salaries"
 - Page 9, line 282: "Meghalaya's" missing apostrophe
 - Page 10, line 312: "mobilise" vs "mobilize" – be consistent with spelling (UK or US English)
 - Page 18, line 498: "Stakeholders perceptions" missing apostrophe ("Stakeholders' perceptions")

4. The Interview Protocol (Table 2, Pages 22-23) Is Very Long

Table 2 presents 36 interview questions. While comprehensive, this is unusually long for a semi-structured interview guide. It raises the question of whether all 36 questions were asked of every participant in every interview, which would make for very long interviews (potentially 2-3 hours). If the questions were used flexibly as a topic guide rather than a fixed questionnaire, this should be clarified.

Suggested Revision: In the methodology section, clarify that the 36 questions served as a flexible topic guide rather than a fixed questionnaire, and that not all questions were asked of every participant. Consider moving the full protocol to an appendix.

5. Participant Numbers Are Inconsistent

- Page 21: "approximately 22-25 participants" (8-10 teachers, 6-8 students, 6-8 parents, plus optional union representatives)
- Page 25: "20 participants comprising ad-hoc teachers, deficit school teachers, government teachers, and NGO members" (note: no students or parents are mentioned in this count, though students and parents were listed in the participant profile on page 21)

Suggested Revision: Clarify the final participant numbers. How many teachers, students, parents, NGO members, and administrators were actually interviewed? The discrepancy between 22-25 (planned) and 20 (reported) needs

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explanation. Also, clarify whether student and parent interviews were conducted – they appear in the research design but not in the participant count on page 25.

6. The Concept of "Aspirational Fragility" Is Introduced but Not Fully Developed

The concept of "aspirational fragility" is introduced in the abstract and theoretical framework (page 16) as "the subtle weakening of confidence in institutional futures caused by recurring instability." This is an interesting and potentially valuable concept. However, it does not appear prominently in the findings or discussion sections. There is limited direct evidence from participants about how strikes affected their aspirations or the aspirations of students and parents.

Suggested Revision: Either (a) strengthen the presence of this concept in the findings by providing more participant quotes specifically about future-oriented hopes and fears, or (b) acknowledge that this concept is a theoretical proposition emerging from the study that requires further empirical exploration in future research.

7. The Conclusion Could Be Stronger

The conclusion (pages 35-36) is somewhat brief and does not fully synthesize the study's contributions. It does not explicitly restate the three key theoretical concepts (compelled visibility, moral-labor tension, aspirational fragility) or explain how the findings support them. It also does not provide specific recommendations for policy or future research.

Suggested Revision: Expand the conclusion to include:

- A one-sentence restatement of each key finding and its corresponding theoretical concept.
- 2-3 specific, actionable policy recommendations (e.g., "establish a timely salary disbursement monitoring system," "create a clear pathway to permanent employment for ad-hoc teachers after 3-5 years of service").
- 2-3 specific directions for future research (e.g., longitudinal studies of how strike participation affects teacher retention, comparative studies with other northeastern Indian states).

8. Self-Citation and Originality Check

The reference list includes a working paper by Lyon, Kraft, & Steinberg (2026) – note that 2026 is in the future relative to the current date (2025). This is either a typo (should be 2025 or earlier) or the author has access to a forthcoming paper. Either way, verify this citation. Similarly, "Lyon et al. 2026" appears in the discussion on page 33.

Suggested Revision: Verify all citations with publication years in 2025 or 2026. If these are forthcoming or in-press papers, indicate this clearly (e.g., "in press" or "forthcoming").

Positive Features Worth Noting (Strengths of the Paper)

This paper has many strengths that should be acknowledged:

1. **Theoretical originality:** The concepts of "compelled visibility," "moral-labor tension," and "aspirational fragility" are genuine theoretical contributions that extend existing labor process and moral economy frameworks.
2. **Methodological rigor:** The narrative inquiry design is appropriate for the research questions. The sampling strategy (purposive + maximum variation) is well-justified. The data analysis approach (thematic narrative analysis) is clearly described.
3. **Rich primary data:** The participant quotes are evocative and directly support the themes. The inclusion of diverse voices (ad-hoc teachers, deficit teachers, government teachers, NGO members) adds depth.
4. **Comprehensive secondary data:** Table 4 (news reports) is an excellent resource for understanding the chronology and nature of teacher strikes in Meghalaya.
5. **Clear writing:** The paper is well-organized and clearly written, with logical flow from introduction through theoretical framework to methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion.
6. **Policy relevance:** The study addresses real-world labor issues with direct implications for education policy in Meghalaya and similar contexts.
7. **Ethical awareness:** The paper includes a clear statement of ethical considerations (informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, sensitivity).

Overall Verdict

This is an excellent, publishable paper that makes a meaningful contribution to the literature on teacher labor relations, public sector governance, and the sociology of education. The author demonstrates sophisticated theoretical knowledge, methodological competence, and a genuine commitment to understanding the lived experiences of teachers in a peripheral public education system. The introduction of three new theoretical concepts

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(compelled visibility, moral-labor tension, aspirational fragility) is a significant contribution. The narrative data are rich and well-analyzed. The paper is clearly written and well-organized.

The revisions required are minor and can be completed within a few hours. Once these are addressed, the paper will be ready for publication in a reputable peer-reviewed journal. I recommend acceptance after minor revision with enthusiasm.

Confidential Comments to the Editor:

This is one of the stronger manuscripts I have reviewed. The author has done excellent work. The paper is suitable for publication in a sociology of education journal, a labor studies journal, or a South Asian studies journal. The theoretical contributions are genuine, and the empirical work is solid. I recommend expediting the review process and accepting with the minor revisions noted above. Well done to the author