

Original Research Article

Teachers' Perceptions of Creativity in Autonomous Colleges: Evidence from Gender and Locale Comparisons

Shisira Bania^{1*}, Kalpana Behera²

¹Lecturer in Education, Birmaharajpur College, Rajendra University, Bolangir, Odisha

²Lecturer in Education at IMPS Jr. College, Kinjirma, Sundergarh, Odisha

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Abstract: Creativity is increasingly recognised as a vital dimension of higher education, contributing to innovation, flexible thinking, and academic vitality. In autonomous colleges, where curricular and pedagogical freedom is emphasised, teachers play a central role in fostering creative academic environments. The present study examines teachers' perceptions of creativity in autonomous colleges, with specific reference to gender and rural–urban context. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 160 teachers drawn from 12 government and non-government autonomous colleges in Odisha, India. A researcher-developed five-point perception scale was employed to measure teachers' views on creativity-related academic practices and institutional support. Mean scores, standard deviations, and independent samples *t*-tests were used to analyse differences across gender and locale. The findings reveal a significant overall gender difference, with female teachers reporting relatively higher perceptions of creativity than male teachers. Rural–urban differences were largely non-significant, indicating relative consistency in perceptions across institutional contexts. However, selected cross-gender and cross-locale comparisons highlighted that perceptions of creativity are shaped by the interaction of gender and context rather than by location alone. The study concludes that teachers' perceptions of creativity are influenced more by gendered professional experiences than by institutional locale, underscoring the need for inclusive academic cultures and supportive leadership practices to translate autonomy into sustained creative engagement in higher education.

Keywords: Creativity, Teachers' Perceptions, Autonomous Colleges, Gender Differences, Rural–Urban Context, Higher Education.

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RATIONAL OF THE STUDY

Creativity is increasingly recognised as a core educational value in higher education, essential for innovation, problem-solving, and intellectual growth in a rapidly changing knowledge society (Livingston, 2010; Gaspar, & Mabic, 2015). Within academic institutions, creativity extends beyond student outcomes to encompass teaching practices, curriculum design, institutional culture, and professional engagement (Isabirye *et al.*, 2025). Teachers play a central role in fostering creative environments, and their perceptions of how creativity is supported or constrained within institutions are critical for understanding the effectiveness of educational practices (Davies *et al.*, 2014).

In the Indian higher education system, autonomous colleges occupy a distinctive position with regard to creativity and innovation (Aithal & Maiya 2023). Granted academic and administrative autonomy, these institutions are expected to experiment with curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, assessment practices, and co-curricular initiatives that promote creative thinking (Bania, 2021). Autonomy is thus closely associated with the institutional capacity to nurture creativity (Sripirabaa & Maheswari, 2015). However, the presence of autonomy as a structural provision does not automatically ensure a creative academic environment. The extent to which creativity is encouraged in autonomous colleges depends largely on how teachers perceive institutional support, freedom, and encouragement for creative practices.

*Corresponding Author: Shisira Bania

Lecturer in Education, Birmaharajpur College, Rajendra University, Bolangir, Odisha

Teachers' perceptions of creativity are shaped by multiple contextual factors, including gender and institutional location. Gendered experiences in academic workplaces may influence opportunities for innovation, professional expression, and engagement in creative initiatives (Ma, & Wang 2025). Similarly, rural and urban institutional contexts differ in terms of access to resources, exposure to academic networks, and opportunities for experimentation, which may affect how creativity is perceived and enacted (Xu, 2020). Understanding these differences is essential for assessing whether autonomous colleges provide equitable and supportive environments for creative engagement among faculty members.

Despite the growing emphasis on creativity and innovation in higher education policy and practice, empirical studies focusing on teachers' perceptions of creativity in autonomous colleges remain limited, particularly in the Indian context. Existing research has largely concentrated on student creativity or instructional strategies, with comparatively less attention given to teachers' perspectives across gender and locale. Addressing this gap, the present study examines teachers' perceptions of creativity in autonomous colleges, with specific reference to gender and rural-urban differences. By foregrounding teachers' views, the study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how creativity is experienced within autonomous higher education institutions and to inform institutional practices aimed at fostering inclusive and supportive creative environments.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To examine gender-based differences in teachers' perceptions of creativity in autonomous colleges.
2. To analyse differences in teachers' perceptions of creativity across rural and urban institutional contexts.
3. To assess the combined influence of gender and locale on teachers' perceptions of creativity in autonomous colleges.

Hypotheses of the Study:

1. There is no significant difference between the perception of male and female teachers on creativity.
2. There is no significant difference between the perception of rural male and urban female teachers on creativity.
3. There is no significant difference between the perception of urban male and urban female teachers on creativity.
4. There is no significant difference between the perception of rural male and urban female teachers on creativity.

5. There is no significant difference between the perception of rural female and urban male teachers on creativity.
6. There is no significant difference between the perception of rural female and urban female teachers on creativity.
7. There is no significant difference between the perception of rural male and urban male teachers on creativity.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine teachers' perceptions of creativity in autonomous colleges. The design was considered appropriate as it enables systematic collection and analysis of perceptual data from a defined population without manipulation of variables. The approach facilitated comparison of perception scores across gender and locale categories.

Population and Sample

The population of the study comprised teachers working in government and non-government autonomous colleges in the state of Odisha, India. Autonomous colleges were selected due to their enhanced academic and administrative freedom, which is closely associated with opportunities for creativity and innovation in higher education.

A sample of 160 teachers was drawn from 12 autonomous colleges located in rural and urban regions of Odisha. The sample included equal representation of:

- Urban male teachers
- Urban female teachers
- Rural male teachers
- Rural female teachers

Teachers from different academic disciplines were included to ensure a broad representation of institutional experiences. Random sampling techniques were employed to minimise selection bias and to ensure representativeness of the sample.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a researcher-developed five-point perception scale designed to measure teachers' perceptions of creativity in autonomous colleges. The instrument focused on institutional support for creativity, opportunities for innovative practices, encouragement of original thinking, and facilitation of creative academic activities within colleges.

Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*. Both positively and negatively worded items were included to reduce response bias and to enhance the reliability of responses.

Reliability and Validity

The perception scale formed part of the broader doctoral research and was subjected to reliability and validity testing. Reliability was established using the Spearman–Brown split-half method, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.73, which is considered acceptable for social science research.

Content validity was ensured through expert review. Senior faculty members and subject experts examined the items for relevance, clarity, and adequacy in representing the construct of creativity within autonomous higher education institutions. Based on their feedback, necessary revisions were made before final administration of the tool.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through personal visits to the selected autonomous colleges. Prior permission was obtained from institutional authorities. Teachers were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would be kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes.

The perception scale was administered directly to the respondents, and sufficient time was provided for completion. Completed questionnaires were collected personally by the researcher to ensure completeness and accuracy of responses.

Statistical Analysis

The collected data were coded and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques.

Mean scores and standard deviations were computed to summarise teachers’ perceptions of creativity.

To examine differences across gender and locale, independent samples *t*-tests were employed. The *t*-test was selected as it is appropriate for comparing mean differences between two independent groups. Statistical significance was tested at the 0.05 level.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were maintained throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. No identifying information was recorded, and the data were used exclusively for research purposes.

RESULT

Perception on Creativity

It is revealed from table no. 1 that obtained *t*-value is 2.78 which is lower than the standard *t*-value (1.97 at 0.05 level and 2.59 at 0.01 level) at *df* (158) and it is significant at both the levels. Hypothesis-1 states that “There is no significant difference between the perception of male and female teachers on creativity” where it is proved to be significant. In this context Hypothesis-1 is not retained. Hence, it is rejected. Thus, it is concluded that there is significant variation in opinion of male and female teachers on creativity.

Table 1: Test of significance between the perception of male teachers and female teachers on Creativity (N=160)

Sl. No.	Category	Number (N)	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	t-value
1	Male	80	23.94	8.53	2.78**
2	Female	80	27.5	7.73	

Df =158 at.05 level = 1.97;01 level = 2.59

**significant at .01 level

This has been graphically presented here:

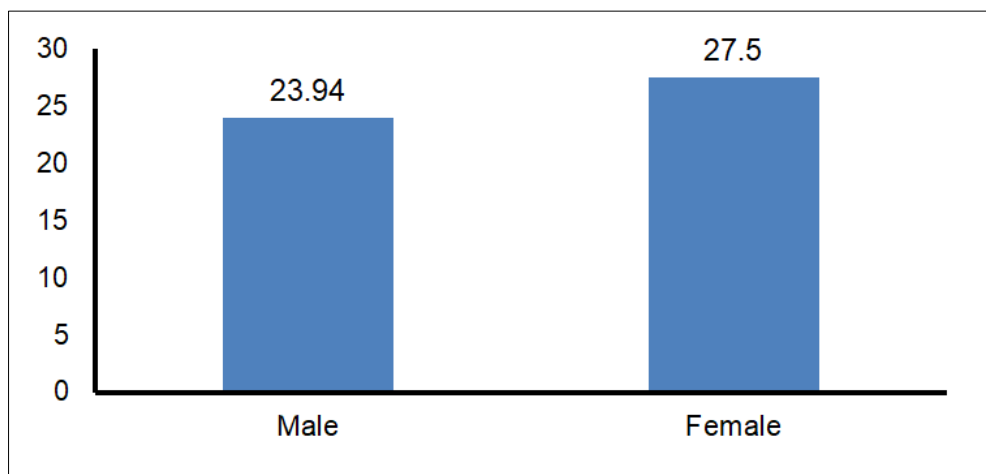


Fig. 1: Perception of male teachers and female teachers on creativity

It infers that activities like encouraging, understanding, reflectiveness, ambition, emotional expression, spontaneity, aesthetic appreciation, and risk

taking are not promoted in autonomous colleges on creativity. The reason is that male and female teachers do not provide proper means for creativity.

Table 2: Test of significance between the perception of rural male teachers and rural female teachers on Creativity (N=160)

Sl. No.	Category	Number (N)	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	t-value
1	Rural Male	40	22.88	8.66	1.38 ^{NS}
2	Rural Female	40	25.5	8.16	

Df =78 at .05 level = 1.99; 01 level = 2.64

NS – Not significant at .05 level

This has been graphically presented here:

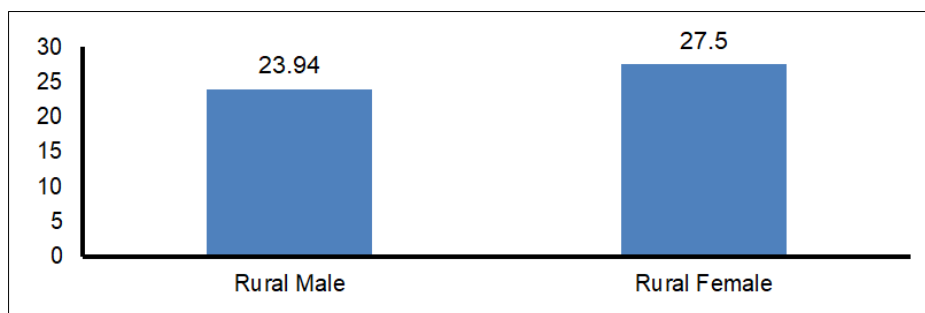


Fig. 2: Mean values of rural male and rural female teachers on creativity.

The table no. 2 shows that obtained t-value is 1.38 which is lower than the standard t-value (1.99 at 0.05 level and 2.64 at 0.01 level) at df (78) and it is significant at both the levels. It shows that Hypothesis-2 that, “There is no significant difference between the perception of rural male and rural female teachers on creativity” is accepted.

It is revealed from the responses of the male and female teachers give a positive views on creativity. The creativity among the students is promoted in the autonomous colleges because the teachers are giving many scopes for the development of creativity among the students like conducting competition, workshop and conferences, personality development programme by eminent personnel which are the best means of its development.

Table 3: Test of significance between the perception of urban male teachers and urban female teachers on Creativity

Sl. No.	Category	Number (N)	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	t-value
1	Urban Male	40	25	8.28	2.59*
2	Urban Female	40	29.38	6.85	

Df =78 at .05 level = 1.99; 01 level = 2.64

*significant at .05 level

This has been depicted in the bar chart:

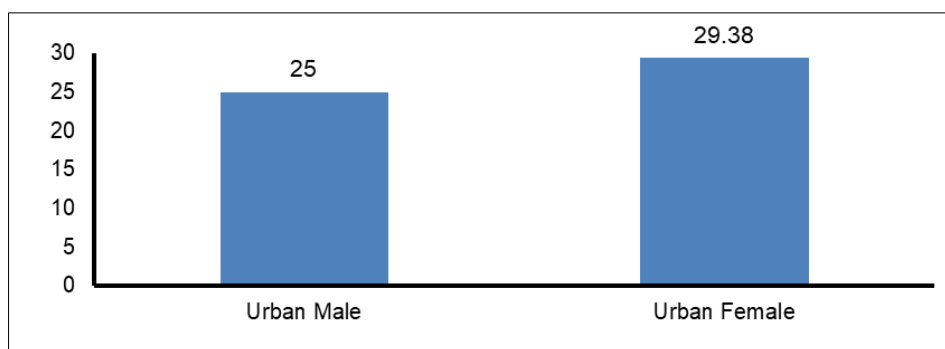


Fig. 3: Mean values of urban male teachers and urban female teachers on creativity

Table no. 3 shows that obtained t-value is 2.59 which is more than the standard t-value (1.99 at 0.05 level and lower than the standard t-value (2.64 at 0.01 level) at df (78). It indicates that Hypothesis-3 that “There is no significant difference between the perception of urban male and urban female teachers on creativity” which is significant at 0.05 level and it is accepted. It is concluded that there is significant

difference in their opinion between urban male and female teachers on creativity. It infers that urban female teachers opined that the students are more involved in creative activities like preparing innovative teaching materials, innovative thoughts of writings etc which was promoted their creativity. In other side urban male teachers do not focused on these aspects due to lack of their own interest.

Table 4: Test of significance between the perception of rural male teachers and urban female teachers on Creativity (N=160)

Sl. No.	Category	Number (N)	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	t-value
1	Rural Male	40	22.88	8.66	3.75**
2	Urban Female	40	29.38	6.85	

Df=78 at.05 level = 1.97; 01 level = 2.64

**significant at .01 level

The table no. 4 indicates that obtained t-value is 3.75 which is more than the standard t-value (1.99 at 0.05 level and 2.64 at 0.01 level) at df (78). It shows that Hypothesis-24 stating that “There is no significant difference between the perception of rural male and urban female teachers on creativity” is proved to be significant at both the levels. Hence, Hypothesis-4 is

rejected. Therefore, it is concluded that there is significant variation in rural male teachers and urban female teachers towards creativity. Because, the activities like innovative ideas and innovative writings are not promoted development of creativity among the students in autonomous colleges of Odisha.

Table 5: Test of significance between the perception of rural female teaches and urban male teachers on Creativity (N=160)

Sl. No.	Category	Number (N)	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	t-value
1	Rural Female	40	25.5	8.16	0.15 ^{NS}
2	Urban Male	40	25.00	8.28	

Df=78 at.05 level = 1.99; 01 level = 2.64

NS - Not significant at .05 level

The above table depicts that obtained t-value is 0.15 which is lower than the standard t-value (1.99 at 0.05 level and 2.64 at 0.01 level) at df (78). It shows that Hypothesis-5 stating, “There is no significant difference between the perception of rural female and urban male

teachers on creativity” where it is proved to be significant at both the levels. Hence, it is rejected.

Therefore, it is concluded that the opinion of rural female and urban male teachers are similar. It infers that creative activities are developed in their counterparts in the autonomous colleges of Odisha.

Table 6: Test of significance between the perception of rural female teaches and urban female teachers on Creativity (N=160)

Sl. No.	Category	Number (N)	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	t-value
1	Rural Female	40	25.5	8.16	1.36 ^{NS}
2	Urban Female	40	29.38	6.85	

Df=78 at.05 level = 1.99; 01 level = 2.64

NS - Not significant at .05level

The mentioned table no. 6 reflected that obtained t-value is 1.36 which is lower than both the standard t-value (1.99 at 0.05 level and 2.64 at 0.01 level) at df (78). It shows that Hypothesis-6 stating that “There is no significant difference between the perception of rural female and urban female teachers towards

creativity” where it is proved to be significant at both the levels. Hence, Hypothesis-26 is rejected. Therefore, it is concluded that both rural and urban female teachers opine similar towards creativity. It infers that activities like literary writings, skill test, personality test, I.Q. test etc. were promoted the creativity among the students.

Table 7: Test of significance between the perception of urban male teachers and rural male teachers on Creativity (N=160)

Sl. No.	Category	Number (N)	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	t-value
1	Urban Male	40	25.0	8.28	1.12*
2	Rural Male	40	22.88	8.66	

Df = 78 at .05 level = 1.99; 01 level = 2.64
 NS - Not significant at .05 level

In the above table No. 7 depicts that obtained t-value is 1.12 which is lower than both the standard t-value (1.99 at 0.05 level and 2.64 at 0.01 level) at df (78). It shows that Hypothesis -7 stating “There is no significant difference between the perception of urban male and rural male teachers on creativity” is proved to be significant at both the levels. Hence Hypothesis-7 is accepted.

Thus, it is concluded that both urban and rural male teachers opine similar towards creativity. The reason might be both rural and urban autonomous colleges were conducting competitions on current events, skill test, personality test, inspiring to do new thing for development of creativity among the students.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study indicate that teachers’ perceptions of creativity in autonomous colleges vary primarily along gender lines, while rural–urban differences are comparatively limited. The overall gender comparison revealed a significant difference between male and female teachers, suggesting that creativity-related practices and opportunities are experienced differently by teachers based on gender. Female teachers, particularly in urban contexts, reported relatively higher perceptions of creativity, pointing towards greater engagement with or recognition of creative academic activities. This pattern suggests that creativity within autonomous colleges is not uniformly perceived but is mediated by gendered professional experiences, roles, and expectations within institutional environments.

At the same time, the largely non-significant differences across rural–urban comparisons—especially among male teachers and among female teachers—indicate a degree of contextual stability in perceptions of creativity across institutional locations. This finding implies that autonomy may provide a relatively consistent structural framework for creative practices irrespective of locale. However, the significant differences observed in specific cross-gender and cross-locale comparisons highlight that creativity is shaped by the interaction of gender and context rather than by location alone. These results underscore the importance of examining creativity as an organisational and cultural phenomenon, embedded in institutional practices and social dynamics. For autonomous colleges, fostering creativity therefore requires not only structural autonomy but also inclusive academic cultures that recognise and

support diverse faculty experiences and modes of creative engagement.

Educational Implications

The findings of the study highlight the need for autonomous colleges to move beyond structural autonomy and actively cultivate institutional cultures that support creativity among teachers. Since gender-based differences emerged as more salient than rural–urban differences, institutional leaders should adopt gender-responsive strategies that encourage equal participation of male and female teachers in creative academic initiatives. Providing platforms for collaborative innovation, recognising creative contributions in teaching and curriculum design, and supporting experimentation with new pedagogical approaches can strengthen teachers’ engagement with creativity.

The relative consistency of creativity perceptions across rural and urban contexts suggests that institutional policies and leadership practices play a critical role in shaping creative environments. Autonomous colleges should institutionalise mechanisms such as professional development programmes, interdisciplinary forums, and innovation-oriented academic events to sustain creative practices across contexts. For policymakers and quality assurance agencies, the findings underscore the importance of incorporating creativity-related indicators into evaluation frameworks for autonomous colleges, ensuring that institutional autonomy translates into meaningful support for creative teaching and academic innovation.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined teachers’ perceptions of creativity in autonomous colleges with reference to gender and locale. The findings indicate that gender plays a more prominent role than institutional location in shaping teachers’ perceptions of creativity, while rural–urban differences remain comparatively limited. Female teachers, particularly in urban contexts, reported relatively higher perceptions of creativity, whereas perceptions among male teachers remained largely consistent across locales. These results suggest that creativity within autonomous colleges is experienced in differentiated ways rather than as a uniform institutional characteristic.

The study underscores that institutional autonomy alone is insufficient to guarantee a creative academic environment. While autonomy may provide structural opportunities for innovation, the realisation of creativity depends on inclusive institutional cultures, supportive leadership, and equitable academic practices. By foregrounding teachers' perspectives, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how creativity is perceived and enacted within autonomous higher education institutions. Addressing gendered differences in creative engagement is essential for ensuring that autonomy translates into sustained innovation and academic vitality in higher education.

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