



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.71317/kjard.2.7.2026.258>

The Kashmir Journal of Academic Research and Development

Journal homepage: <https://rjsaonline.org/index.php/KJARD>



Teaching Critical Reflection or Performing It? Teacher Educators' Experiences of Reflective Practice in Punjab, Pakistan

Dr. Tahira Batool Bokhari

Associate Professor, Department of Education, Government College for Women, Jhang,

Email: drtahirabatool96@gmail.com

Dr. Naima Qureshi

Assistant Professor, Division of Education, University of Education, Lahore,

Email: naima.qureshi@ue.edu.pk

Arooj Zaman

MS Scholar, Department of Education, GC Women University, Sialkot,

Email: aroorjarifi71990@gmail.com

Dr. Yaar Muhammad

Associate Professor, Department of Education, GC Women University, Sialkot,

Email: Yaar.Muhammad@gcwus.edu.pk

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Received:

May 29, 2026

Revised:

June 13, 2026

Accepted:

June 27, 2026

Available Online:

July 12, 2026

Keywords:

Critical Reflection, Reflective Practice, Teacher Educators, Professional Development, Punjab, Pakistan, Performativity, Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Corresponding Author:

drtahirabatool96@gmail.com

The role of teacher educators in Punjab, Pakistan in developing the critical reflection of future teachers is central to professional development programmes, though teacher educators' own critical reflection has not been examined. This paper explores teacher educators' understanding, practice, and experience of critical reflection in professional development settings in Punjab. Semi-structured interviews with 20 public-sector teacher educators were conducted and analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. AI-assisted transcription produced initial transcripts, subsequently verified by the researchers and the data organisation was facilitated by NVivo 15 and AI-assisted coding. The analysis produced four themes, through which surface-level reflection as a professional habit, the performative compliance trap, and institutional power and reflective silencing are framed, and emergent instances of genuine critical reflection are documented. Results indicate that critical reflection functions predominantly as a compliance practice, governed by institutional surveillance rather than oriented toward transformative professional growth. The study extends understanding of how systemic and cultural constraints shape the quality and extent of reflective practice within the context of teacher education in Pakistan informing structural redesign of professional development programmes.

Introduction

Critical reflection occupies a central position in global teacher professional development discourse. Since the 1980s, researchers in the education, health, and social care sectors have maintained that the ability to critically re-examine practice is central to all professional development, as well as to professional ethical judgement, and improvement of institutional outcomes (Brookfield, 1987; Schön, 1987). Reflective practice in the context of teacher education, in particular, has been theorised as the process through which teachers develop critical awareness of pedagogical assumptions that is constituted by their pedagogical assumptions, institutional conditions and societal roles and obligations (Larrivee, 2000; Mezirow, 1994). The theoretically oriented model of critical reflection by Smith (2011) identifies four areas, namely personal, interpersonal, contextual, and critical each denoting a deeper level of engagement with the conditions of professional action. Smith's (2011) framework specifies that authentic critical reflection should be more than a control over oneself, it demands critical engagement with the institutional power structures that govern professional action.

Policy on teacher professional development in Pakistan has been subject to repeated reform since 2005. Reflective practice as a core competency has been prefigured in the National Professional Standards of Teachers in Pakistan and provincial frameworks such as the Punjab Teacher Educator Standards (Aslam et al., 2021). Continuous professional development programmes, such as those that are sponsored by government and delivered by the Punjab Education Foundation and the School Education Department, include references to reflection among development outcomes (PEF, 2022). A documented discrepancy persists between policy requirements and teacher educators' enacted practice who are simultaneously supposed to model, and to develop critical reflection in others. Quantitative research revealed that prospective teachers in Punjab are able to recognise the mechanics of reflective practice but portray little ability of critical or contextual types of reflection (Akram & Qureshi, 2021). Empirical studies in comparable settings have documented that institutional cultures, hierarchical authority, and examination-based accountability systems constrain the depth of reflection practitioners are willing or able to demonstrate (Akram & Mehmood, 2021).

Ball's (2003) account of performativity provides an analytically useful framework for this study. The analysis of performativity as a technology of governance implies that in an event where reflection is institutionally required and evaluated, practitioners can take part in the superficial compliance, instead of the real self-reflection. The study of the problem of power and subjectivity by Foucault (1982) illuminates the processes through which professionals learn to discipline their expressions of reflection to meet the expectations of the institution to come up with what Clegg (1999) calls the internalisation of a political project as opposed to critical inquiry itself (Smith, 2011). Under these conditions, teacher educators may engage in reflection as institutional ritual while their underlying assumptions and contextual critiques remain unexamined.

Three significant limitations characterise the existing literature on reflective practice in teacher education. The vast majority of studies on the Pakistani context have adopted quantitative designs, measuring reflective practice through questionnaire scales and competency checklists (Nasur et al., 2021). Such methods generate data on the frequency and reported character of reflective activities but cannot capture the subjective meanings teacher educators attribute to those activities or the institutional factors that will inform them. Second, existing qualitative research in Pakistan has focused on pre-service teachers and not teachers educators who serve simultaneously as reflective practitioners and as models of reflection for student teachers (Khokhar, 2006). Third, the critical dimension of reflection has not been examined in the Pakistani context. In particular, its capacity to interrogate institutional power, institutional norms, and discuss socio-political realities are not examined, since critical engagement with power has often been construed as resistance to Western educational agendas (Hussain et al., 2022). This is not simply a deeper form of reflection but a different epistemic orientation toward practice, knowledge and status within the institution (Larrivee, 2008; Smith, 2011).

The performativity literature presents unresolved problems for teacher education in Punjab. In the event that critical reflection is regularly evaluated, tracked, and linked to professional development, teacher educators may produce elaborate performances of reflection that lack the substantive self-examination such practices require. The discrepancy between the performance of reflection and its critical substance has not been examined within the context of professional development in Punjab.

This paper addresses these three limitations by considering the experiences of teacher educators in Punjab, Pakistan, in terms of how they learn about critical reflection, how they apply it to situations of professional development, and what institutional climate supports or limits authentic critical practice. The research questions that guide the study are as follows:

1. How do teacher educators in Punjab understand and experience critical reflection within professional development programmes?

2. What institutional and contextual factors shape the nature and depth of reflective practice among teacher educators in Punjab?
3. In what ways, if any, do teacher educators in Punjab move beyond surface compliance toward genuinely critical forms of reflection?

The contribution made in this paper is a qualitative, empirically grounded account of reflective practice being lived as compared to being aspirational to institutions and situated within the institutional and policy context of Punjab.

Literature Review

Critical Reflection: Conceptual Foundations and Purposes

Critical reflection is a concept with competing theoretical foundations. Dewey (1933) placed reflection as purposive inquiry as a result of doubt; Mezirow (1981) advanced it to frame critical reflection as the scrutiny of premises and assumptions that influence action; and Habermas (1978) placed it as a mode of knowing as a critique of all other modes of knowledge and not as mere reenactment of what is. Smith (2011) reasonably project this conceptual variety onto four functions: aiding thinking, providing learning, allowing self-evaluation and exploring social systems. These purposes are not inherently sequential or hierarchical but represent distinct orientations toward practice that can be in opposition or contemporary in the experience of a particular professional. What this framework means to teachers as educators is that, most formal professional development addresses only the first two purposes, leaving the critical and contextual dimensions unaddressed, despite the fact that both of these dimensions are crucial to the professional development of teachers in institutions (Brookfield, 1987; Larrivee, 2000).

The difference between reflection in action and reflection on action introduced by Schön (1987) has had a massive impact on teacher education, that is, it provides an account on professional knowledge generation through practitioner lens (Smith, 2011). But the critics have said that Schön's model risks reducing reflection to a technical problem-solving task that does not question structural conditions of practice (Bleakley, 1999). Larrivee (2008) suggested a hierarchical theory of reflective practice, consisting of pre-reflection, surface reflection, pedagogical reflection, and critical reflection, asserting that progression through these levels requires explicitly designed scaffolding rather than incidental learning. The model is specifically applicable to the professional development programmes, which typically set the environment of surface and pedagogical reflections but rarely create conditions for critical engagement with institutional power or social context (Larrivee, 2000, 2008).

Performativity and the Problem of Compliance

Ball (2003) introduced performativity into education to describe how performance metrics and assessment mechanisms alter how professionals understand and present themselves. When the professionals are aware that their reflective products are to be reviewed, assessed, or taken as evidence of competence, the character of their engagement with reflection changes. Reflection is a representation of the self to Foucaults' (1982) sense, in such a way that individuals construct themselves as recognisable professionals conforming to institutionally valued norms (Smith, 2011). Hierarchical authority structures, deference to supervisors, and the material stakes of professional assessment add to this dynamic in the teacher education context of Pakistan and intensify the compliance dynamic in Punjab's teacher education system (Akram & Mehmood, 2021; Aslam et al., 2021).

When it is institutionally enforced, Clegg (1999) claims that self-reflection may turn into the process of internalisation of a political project without being actively criticised by anyone. This is the paradox of mandated reflection: It presents as professional empowerment while functioning as institutional control and, in some institutional circumstances, a mechanism of control. According to Boud and Walker (1998) one of the main factors determining the quality of professional reflection is the institutional context since they contend that prescriptive models of reflection that do not attend to context risk producing compliant rather than critical reflectors. These concerns apply directly to Punjab's professional development context, which often minimise reflection to set patterns, portfolio submissions, and behavioural observations, among others (Akram & Qureshi, 2021; PEF, 2022).

Institutional Culture and Reflective Practice in Pakistan

Institutional culture in Pakistani teacher education has been a persistent concern in the research literature. Research in Punjab documents that teacher educators hold favourable views of reflective practice, but face major challenges in its practice, such as a lack of time, peer mistrust, authoritarian organisational cultures, and the absence of structured spaces for critical professional dialogue (Akram & Mehmood, 2021). Hsiung (2008) held that to teach reflexivity in the teaching of qualitative interviewing, one must be explicit in terms of the social and power relations of the very process of interview itself; the same concern applies

to professional development contexts where reflexivity is modelled by those in authority wherein reflexivity is taught but not actually modelled by those of authority in that context (Smith, 2011).

Brookfield's (2017) four-lenses model provides a structured framework for teacher professional development (Brookfield, 1987), in which educators reflect on their assumptions using autobiographical reflection, peer feedback, student perspectives and theoretical literature questions. Nonetheless, Pakistani research shows that the theoretical and student-perspective lenses are absent from most formal professional development activities (Hussain et al., 2022). Akram and Qureshi (2021) revealed that pre-service teachers in Pakistani teacher education programme developed reflective thinking based on personal narrative as opposed to critical social analysis, which indicates that the structural and contextual domains of reflection identified by Smith (2011) are under-researched in formal programmes (Aslam et al., 2021).

Reflexivity, Power, and Knowledge Production

The distinction between reflection and reflexivity is theoretically significant. Although reflection is generally understood to include considering thoughts, actions and experiences one is involved in, reflexivity involves a systematic interrogation of the conditions under which knowledge is produced and where the researcher, or practitioner, fits into those circumstances including the researcher's own positionality within those circumstances (Finlay & Gough, 2003; Smith, 2011). Reflexivity has been theorised as a practice of examining how the researcher's positionality shapes knowledge production (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). In the field of professional development, a reflexive stance would require teacher educators to examine their practices and question the epistemological and institutional conditions that govern them within educational institutions to determine what is counted as good practice (Foucault, 1982; Habermas, 1978).

As Gough and Madill (2012) have highlighted that researcher subjectivity, and by extension professional subjectivity, must be framed as a resource, and not a source of bias. This perspective aligns with the Big Q qualitative values and can be directly applied to the context of professional development where practitioner subjectivity and situated knowledge have been treated as a confounding variable rather than an analytic resource. This shift in perspective should inform how professional development programmes in Punjab are structured and encourage teacher educators to reflect on their own practice.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative design following Braun and Clarke (2022) account of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Reflexive TA). The reason why Reflexive TA was chosen is a combination of theoretical flexibility and the willingness to focus on the researchers as active meaning-makers, opposed to being an passive analysts, its commitment to interpretation, subjectivity, and situated knowledge, (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022). Other qualitative methods were taken into account. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was abandoned due to the fact that the research wanted patterns of shared meaning of a dataset and not idiosyncratic descriptions of the lived experience of individuals. Constructivist Grounded Theory was excluded because theory generation was not the primary aim of this study (Charmaz, 2014). Reflexive TA enabled analysis of both experiential and critical dimensions of participants' accounts without requiring a predetermined coding framework.

Philosophical Paradigm

The study adopted a constructionist ontology in which realities are socially constructed within specific institutional and cultural contexts (Crotty, 1998). The study had the contextualist perspective that all knowledge is created under certain social, cultural, and institutional circumstances and that the positionality of the researcher informs what it is possible to know and how it can be expressed (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Language was understood as constitutive rather than representational: Participant accounts do not reflect a pre-existing reality but actively constitute the meanings and experiences participants describe (Willig, 2013). The analytical tendency was mainly critical, about questioning the conditions in which reflective practice is practiced and the power relations in which conditions are framed, and, at the same time, keeping an empathic focus on the actual struggles and understandings voiced by the participants.

Analytic Approach

The method of analysis was a mixture of inductive and deductive orientations. The primary orientation was inductive, allowing patterns to emerge from the data without a predetermined theoretical framework instead of the data being forced through a theoretical perspective on the case. The theoretical resources offered by the domains of critical reflective thinking proffered by Smith (2011) Foucauldian theorisations of performativity and disciplinary power, however, functioned as sensitising concepts that informed but did not predetermine the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The analytic focus was primarily latent rather

than semantic: Analysis examined not only what participants said but also the assumptions and ideological commitments underlying their accounts (examining what the participants said was one of the underlying assumptions, contradictions, and ideological commitments that their narratives reflected) (Clarke et al., 2019).

Participants and Sampling

Participants were recruited through purposive criterion sampling. Participation criteria were as follows: The participants had to be teacher educators currently practicing in the field of public-sector colleges of education or university education departments in Punjab, with at least three years of experience in teacher education, and who had attended at least one formal professional development programme in the past two years. Sampling was carried out to recruit 20 participants in five institutions in three districts of Punjab. There were 13 women and 7 men in the sample, the experience in teaching was between 3 and 22 years. The institutional affiliates were government colleges of education, a university education department and a district teacher education centre. Rather than invoking saturation, which carries positivist assumptions about data adequacy inconsistent with Reflexive TA, sample adequacy was evaluated using Malterud et al.'s (2016) concept of information power: The targeted research questions, the special characteristics of participants, and the theoretically-based method of analysis, justified the suitability of a sample of 20 participants to yield analytically meaningful patterns.

Data Collection

Data were generated through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with the participants from colleges and universities. Interviews were of 45 to 76 minutes. The interview guide was developed through a structured process informed by the literature reviewed in Section 2 and also piloted among two teacher educators who were not part of the main study population (Flick, 2022; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Questions were used to explore the knowledge of the participants about critical reflection, their engagement with professional development activities, the institutional circumstances in which they worked and how they understood the relationship between mandated reflection and substantive professional learning. Participants provided informed consent; interviews were audio-recorded. AI-assisted transcription produced initial transcripts, subsequently verified by the researchers against the original audio recordings. This approach is consistent with published guidance on AI-assisted qualitative data generation, in which AI can help to make the process more efficient without substituting the researcher input into the data.

Data Analysis Procedures

The six stages of Reflexive TA of Braun and Clarke (2022) were used to analyse interview data.

Phase 1: Familiarisation entailed multiple re-reading of the full 20 transcripts of the interviews, listening to the chosen audio transcripts and making the preliminary analytical memos. This phase was extended and detailed, ensuring sustained engagement with the full dataset before systematic coding.

Phase 2: Coding, entailed the systematic code production in the entire dataset. Codes were generated inductively and refined iteratively, with the researcher serving as an active meaning-maker, but not as a neutral classifier (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Code labels were stored in an analytic form, including “compliance as protection,” “reflection as theatre” and “institutional permission to question.”

Phase 3: Generated initial themes by grouping codes around shared organising concepts rather than aggregating topically related data as used in phase 2 and 3 (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 4: Involved developmental analysis of candidate themes versus the entire dataset, involving substantial revision of formulations that did not account for the full dataset or where the analytic logic was unclear.

Phase 5: was about refining, defining and naming of themes. Each theme name was developed to capture the core pattern of shared meaning rather than merely describe its content.

The write-up (Phase 6) resulted in integrating interpretive commentary with participant quotations, following Braun and Clarke's (2022) analytic narrative approach.

Use of CAQDAS Software

The data were organised using NVivo 15. The development and management of code systems, text retrieval and methodical organisation of coded records, writing of memos to assist analytical reflection and visualisation of original thematic frameworks were all specific functions. The NVivo 15 AI-assisted coding option was applied to help sort the first familiarisation with the

data closely and validate the consistency of the data coded by hand, not to create or replace the researcher interpretation of the data (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019).

Researcher Reflexivity

The lead researchers are experienced professors of education in Punjab having extensive experience on both qualitative research supervision and formal professional development programmes. This positioning has brought about strengths of analysis and possible blind spots. Familiarity with the institutional landscape enabled contextually sensitive interpretation but risked normalising conditions that the analysis should render visible. Reflexive journaling was maintained throughout data generation and analysis and decisions, reactions, and developing interpretations were documented. The journals informed the analysis without functioning as a mechanism for managing bias. The researcher's subjectivity informed interpretation rather than functioning as a confounding variable (Finlay & Gough, 2003; Gough & Madill, 2012).

Trustworthiness and Quality

Quality was assessed using criteria consistent with fully qualitative, interpretivist research (Tracy, 2010; Yardley, 2000). Conceptual coherence was maintained by aligning the constructionist epistemological position with the critical-latent analytic orientation of Reflexive TA throughout. The analytical memos and reflexive journal were used to record this reflexive interaction with the data. Transparency was achieved through thorough methodological reporting. The analysis moved consistently beyond semantic description to examine latent meaning. Grounding based on the data is illustrated in the quotes and analytic commentary in the Section 4.

Ethical Considerations

Data were collected after receiving approval of the concerned institutions. Written informed consent was given by all participants prior to the start of interviews, and they were reminded of their right to withdraw at any point without repercussion. Confidentiality was maintained by assigning participants numerical identifiers (Participant 1 to Participant 20). Transcripts and audio recordings were stored in password protected laptops which were accessible only to the research team.

Findings

Analysis generated four themes: (1) The Compliance Mask: Reflection as Institutional Performance; (2) The Habit of Surface: Familiar Reflection, Unfamiliar Depth; (3) Reflective Silencing: Institutional Power and the Limits of Critical Voice; and (4) Cracks in the Wall: Moments of Genuine Critical Insight. Together, these themes reveal reflective practice in Punjab's professional development programmes as structured by competing institutional and professional demands.

Theme 1: The Compliance Mask: Reflection as Institutional Performance

The most prevalent pattern in the dataset was how the teacher educators had learned to generate reflective products that could meet the requirements of the institutions without disturbing their underlying assumptions and practices. To most of the participants, reflection had developed into a familiar genre of professional writing and speaking as opposed to a meaningful process of introspection. The theme encapsulates the risk that Smith (2011) outlines, contending that critical reflection can develop into a perfunctory description of what occurs instead of an actual process of inquiry.

Participants talked about the experience of taking part in professional development workshops, during which reflective tasks were done within a short period of time, in a formulaic and low-investment way. One participant articulated this directly: "We are aware of what they want to hear. You write that you thought about what you have taught, you have identified a weakness, you say what you will do differently. 10 minutes, that's all" (Participant 7).

It is evident from the brevity of this account, that mandated reflection, is of a procedural nature. It not only brings out the procedural nature of the mandated reflection, but also the participant having a clear conscious on the performance he/she is creating. Here the act of reflection takes on a transactional element: There is an apparent need for the individual teacher to be self-study, which the teacher educator is able to provide at an effective rate. Such a change is not made through the actual process of the critical inquiry.

This compliance orientation was not merely a matter of disengagement. Several participants described compliance as a deliberate strategy for institutional self-protection:

I have also learned how to say what to say, how to say it. When I am too critical, when what I write is a challenge to the system or to the curriculum, then they feel uncomfortable with me. And I maintain it within

the scope of acceptability. I am thinking of my classroom management, perhaps questioning strategies. On the greater questions not. (Participant 12)

This account illustrates the Foucauldian dynamic at work: The teacher educator has internalised the rules of safe reflection and disciplines his or her output to institutional expectation not necessarily by being ordered about but by learning to anticipate institutional reaction (Foucault, 1982). The reflection Participant 12 speaks of as being in this range of reflection fits into the individual range that Smith (2011) describes: participating in attention to oneself as being within a practice, and does not go further to the contextual/critical consideration of the conditions that organise that practice.

Theme 2: The Habit of Surface: Familiar Reflection, Unfamiliar Depth

A second pattern revealed how habitual surface reflection precluded deeper critical engagement. Most participants practiced surface and pedagogical reflection with facility; they frequently evaluated their teaching methods, they sought student feedback on an informal basis, and they modified teaching plan to reflect perceived consequences. This was an authentic and appreciated activity. Nonetheless, participants consistently described the critical and contextual domains of reflection as unfamiliar or absent from their professional formation that they were unfamiliar with or uncomfortable on the domains or that they were not involved in their formation as professionals at all (Larrivee, 2008; Smith, 2011).

The participants were familiar with inwardly searching their technical performance but had not been supported to examine the institutional or political conditions of their practice. One participant described this with notable self-awareness:

I know how to reflect on a lesson. I am capable of analysis of my questioning, my pacing, the way students engage. But why do we teach what we teach, who sets the curriculum, what gets omitted, etc. It was not how I was ever taught to do. (Participant 3)

This description shows a professional construction that has prioritised the reflection on action as proposed by Schön (1983), at a technical level without giving much consideration to contextual and critical aspects of reflection (Smith, 2011).

Some participants directly related this gap with the nature of professional development programmes:

Workshops are never anything but skills: communication skills, classroom management, how to use technology. The reflection section is always concerned with your usability of the skill. Did you use it correctly? Can you repeat it? Space to question why, why, why this is what a teacher needs. (Participant 9)

This description related to the discussion by Boud and Walker (1998) that the context of professional development which involves attention to technique but not to the larger ends and circumstances of practice shape the development of constrained and not critical reflectors. The pattern indicates that the professional development system has produced a practitioner fluent at surface reflection but unprepared for critical depth (Larrivee, 2008; Smith, 2011).

Theme 3: Reflective Silencing: Institutional Power and the Limits of Critical Voice

A major third theme was one of the active institutional inhibition and suppression of critical reflection by the repeated performance of relations of power within institutions. This theme goes beyond the preceding two to explore not just the inability to raise the critical voice but the most effective silencing of the critical voice by institutional systems and cultures. Participants talked of a top-down world, where being a critical practitioner risked marginalisation and professional penalty instead of being an incentive behaviour due to its purported danger and the sanction that followed it (Ball, 2003; Foucault, 1982).

Participants in government colleges of education in particular described an institutional culture whereby criticism towards programmes, curricula or administrative choices was not welcome and was professionally expensive. A recurring image in these accounts was that of closed doors: "There are things you can say in the hallway with a trusted coworker. You can never say them during a professional development session. Indeed, there is no such thing as professional development session: you colleagues can hear what you have to say" (Participant 10). This consciousness of being watched and critiqued changed the possible place of critical reflection into a performative compliance site.

One participant explained about trying to implement a more critically reflecting practice with junior colleagues, and facing institutional change:

I attempted to make a small reading group of our department. We would read articles, talk about them, ask ourselves why and what we were doing. I was summoned by the principal after two meetings. He was not

hostile as such. However, he clarified that professional development activities had to be in line with the official programme. Our reading group is not on the schedule. It was disapproved. We stopped. (Participant 18)

This narrative illustrates how institutional power forecloses critical engagement. The reading group was not suppressed on ideological basis, but marginalised by the process of the procedure, calendar and approval. The outcome was the same: The space for critical inquiry was foreclosed (Brookfield, 1987; Smith, 2011). Political, ethical, and social reflection in the Smith (2011) meaning of exploring and evaluating the contexts requires just the type of unchoreographed, long-term, and trust-based dialogue that Participant 18 speaks of; and just that type of dialogue the institutional apparatus could not accomplish.

Theme 4: Cracks in the Wall: Moments of Genuine Critical Insight

The fourth theme documents exceptions to the patterns described above. Although the prevalence of the performative compliance, surface habituation and institutional silencing were found in the dataset, the data also documented moments in which critical reflection had genuinely occurred: Moments where teacher educators had tried to expose their own assumptions, challenge institutional norms or come to a new understanding of their practice in the context of larger social and political realities. These were usually informal, relational, and beyond the confines of formal professional development practices.

Several participants described how trusted peer relationships enabled genuine critical engagement. Beyond institutionalised assessment and professional scrutiny, small circles of co-workers developed what one participant referred to as an unofficial space to have open and candid professional conversations:

We, my best friends and I, have been collaborating over a long period of time. When something occurs on a workshop, about something that angers us or makes no sense to us, we discuss it later. Honestly. We challenge the method, we challenge the suppositions on which it is based. It is in that place that my true professional development occurs. Not in the phase of the workshop. (Participant 5)

This account identifies the conditions that enable critical reflection. The crucial area of the framework created by Smith (2011), addressing power, ethics, and social contexts becomes accessible when participants feel psychologically safe, the stakes involved in being heard or misrepresented are not high, and the therapeutic relationship is characterised by reciprocal trust but not by hierarchical assessment (Akram & Mehmood, 2021). In Punjab, institutionalised formal professional development programmes have not so far achieved these conditions.

A minority of participants described more deliberate engagement with critical reflection, connected to academic literature or postgraduate study:

I first read Foucault when I was doing my M.Phil. I started to consider teaching in a different light. Who is in a position to determine what is good knowledge. What we do not include in our curriculum and the reasons. That altered my perception about my work. But that is a personal quest. It was not as a result of any professional development programme. (Participant 11)

This narrative is analytically significant in that it exemplifies on the one hand, the transformative power of a critical reflection, and, on the other hand, the arbitrary, personalised quality of access to it in the context of the development of professions in Punjab (Mezirow, 1994; Smith, 2011). Critical insight was typically the product of personal initiative or fortuitous peer relationships rather than structured professional development.

Discussion

Interpretation of Findings

The four themes construct a coherent analytical account: Critical thinking in the Punjab teacher professional development is more often a context in which an institutionally driven need must be fulfilled than a process that one must participate in. This account concerns not individual reflective capacity but systemic conditions that preclude critical depth that has organised reflective practice in such a way that precludes the critical and contextual space that can make it transformative through deliberate and active means (Larrivee, 2008; Smith, 2011). The compliance pattern documented in Theme 1 is not a personal failing but a strategic adaptation to an institutional context in which critical depth carries professional risk (Foucault, 1982).

The conclusions that the true critical thinking took place mostly in the informal setting both in the trust-building activity and not in the formal professional development practices are important in theory. It implies that the elements of critical reflection provided by Smith (2011), such as safety, trust, and the right to ask unrelated to the fear of institutional penalties are structurally disillusioned in the majority of formal professional development in Punjab. These findings echo well with the argument put

forth by Brookfield (1987) that one of the conditions necessary to develop the capacity to think critically is the establishment of environments that exhibit actual intellectual challenge, as opposed to enforcing the production of reflective outputs.

Connection to Existing Literature

These findings corroborate and develop existing research in three specific ways. Research in Punjab has already reported that teacher educators believe in the importance of reflective practice, but they face obstacles to practice (Akram & Mehmood, 2021). The present research offers a more detailed, theoretically informed description of what those barriers are and reveals that they operate through institutional cultures of surveillance and compliance rather than practical constraints such as time. This builds on the argument of Boud and Walker (1998) of the primacy of situation in defining the quality of reflection on the particular institutional context of the Punjab teacher-education system to the public-sector.

The results also confirm the analysis of Ball (2003) of performativity as a technology of educational governance. The institutionally enforced, assessed, and reported reflective practice is then turned into a self-surveillance and conformity system at an institutional level instead of a mode of professional development. Such a dynamic has been recorded in the Western context, and this paper has shown how it works in a Pakistani institutional context but it is compounded by hierarchical authority structures and the cultural expectation of deference to institutional authority (Aslam et al., 2021).

The observation that critical reflection took place in informal areas that were characterised by trust among peers is in line with the studies of community of practice and collaborative learning process in the professional contexts (Brookfield, 2017). Nonetheless, it extends this literature by documenting the tendency for greater institutional formalisation to reduce the space available for critical reflection: The more developmental activities were formally organised and assessed, the less did they leave room to the form of honest critical dialogue that the participants referred to as being truly developmental.

Implications

These results, in a theoretical way, make it more difficult to assume that a requirement to reflect will result into reflective practitioners. They also propose that the conditions of reflective practice are as constitutive of its nature as the frameworks and techniques deployed. These structural conditions have to be taken into account by professional development theorists and programme designers instead of emphasising solely on reflective models and competency frameworks (Larrivee, 2008; Smith, 2011).

In practice, the results can be directly applied to the design of professional development programme in Punjab. Programmes in which visible compliance indicators (e.g., completed reflective templates, portfolio submissions and observable behaviour outcomes) are prioritised can unwittingly undermine the critical reflection that they aim to foster. Programme designers must design truly safe, evaluatively low stakes places of critical dialogue, demonstrate critical reflection by making their own institutional assumptions and critiques visible to participants, and develop sustained professional relationships with participants rather than delivering discrete, decontextualised training events.

Limitations

The research is limited by the sample to the public-sector institutions in three Punjab districts. It is not represented by these institutions of teacher education of the private sector with various accountability structures and cultures. The sample is, though informative, mainly made up of experienced teacher educators, the experiences of new professionals in the field might vary in some crucial ways. The study generates situated and partial interpretations; transferability depends on careful contextual assessment; they need close contextual sensitivity to be transferred to other provincial or national settings (Creswell & Poth, 2023; Patton, 2015).

Future Research Directions

This study gives rise to three possible research directions. To start with, longitudinal research that can monitor the changes in reflective practices of teacher educators with time, as they engage in variously designed professional development programmes would be an essential source of evidence to programme designers. Second, a comparative study on the work of the public and private-sector institutions in Punjab would highlight how accountability structures differ in how reflective engagement is nature and depth. Third, any action research study that clearly sets the conditions of professional development conducive to critical reflection, paying utmost attention to safety, trust and power and then evaluates the results in a qualitative manner would link the theoretical knowledge of this study with practical programme change.

Conclusion

This research paper explored the nature of critical reflection by teacher educators in Punjab, Pakistan in relation to the aspects of their professional development. It indicated that the critical reflection tends to be institutional compliance on the one hand: visible, procedural performance designed to satisfy institutional requirements as opposed to a contentious encounter with the personal, interpersonal, contextual, and critical domains that make up a real reflective practice. A combination of institutional covert and overt surveillance, hierarchical control, and a professional development structure which has defined goals of measurable behavioural effects all create the environment in which surface reflection prospers and critical depth is methodically repressed.

These findings have much more than merely teacher education in Punjab. They add to a developing literature that questions the notion that the requirement to be reflective is effective in becoming a reflective practitioner. The idea of critical reflection described by the model, framework, and assessment rubrics of Smith (2011), presupposes more than models, frameworks, and assessment rubrics; it presupposes the conditions of safety, trust, and the sense of real intellectual freedom. Without these conditions, the structural form of reflection may be preserved while its critical substance is absent. Teacher educators who do reflection contrary to practicing cannot develop a critical reflective practice that might be an example to the teachers they teach; the compliance orientation is reproduced in the teachers that educators train.

Future research should examine the structural and cultural conditions of professional development with the same rigour applied to its technical dimensions. The main challenge in professional development is to develop institutional support for critical reflection. Professional development will continue to yield reflections on performances until such conditions are corrected and structural reforms are implemented.

References

- Akram, T., & Mehmood, S. (2021). Four lenses of reflection: Experiences of teacher educators. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 7(2), 34–46. [https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2023\(7-II\)04](https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2023(7-II)04)
- Akram, T., & Qureshi, A. M. (2021). Reflective practices of teacher educators in Punjab: A narrative perspective. *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews*, 5(2), 1038–1047. <https://doi.org/10.18510/hssr.2021.93102>
- Aslam, S., Hali, A. U., Zhang, B., & Saleem, A. (2021). The teacher education program's impact on preservice teachers' reflective thinking in Pakistan. *Sage Open*, 11(4), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211055724>
- Ball, S. J. (2003). The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(2), 215–228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0268093022000043065>
- Bleakley, A. (1999). From reflective practice to holistic reflexivity. *Studies in Higher Education*, 24(3), 315–330. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079912331379925>
- Boud, D., & Walker, D. (1998). Promoting reflection in professional courses: The challenge of context. *Studies in Higher Education*, 23(2), 191–206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079812331380384>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. Sage Publications.
- Brookfield, S. (2017). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Brookfield, S. D. (1987). *Developing critical thinkers: Challenging adults to explore alternative ways of thinking and acting*. Jossey-Bass.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. Sage Publications.
- Clarke, V., Braun, V., Terry, G., & Hayfield, N. (2019). Thematic analysis. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences* (pp. 843–860). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-5251-4_103
- Clegg, S. U. E. (1999). Professional education, reflective practice and feminism. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 3(2), 167–179. <https://doi.org/10.1080/136031199285101>

- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2023). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Sage Publications.
- Finlay, L., & Gough, B. (Eds.). (2003). *Reflexivity: A practical guide for researchers in health and social sciences*. Blackwell Science.
- Flick, U. (2022). *An introduction to qualitative research*. Sage Publications.
- Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical Inquiry*, 8(4), 777–795. <https://doi.org/10.1086/448181>
- Gough, B., & Madill, A. (2012). Subjectivity in psychological science: From problem to prospect. *Psychological Methods*, 17(3), 374–384. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029313>
- Habermas, J. (1978). *Knowledge and human interests* (2nd ed.). Heinemann.
- Hsiung, P.-C. (2008). Teaching reflexivity in qualitative interviewing. *Teaching Sociology*, 36(3), 211–226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0092055X0803600302>
- Hussain, M. Z., Akhtar, S., & Bukhari, S. T. N. (2022). Promoting reflective practice for professional development of teachers. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 7(2), 634–641. [https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2023\(7-II\)56](https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2023(7-II)56)
- Jackson, K., & Bazeley, P. (2019). *Qualitative data analysis with NVivo*. Sage Publications.
- Khokhar, H. A. (2006). *Reflective conversation for teacher development* [Master thesis, Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development]. Karachi. https://ecommons.aku.edu/etd_pk_ied_med/569/
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. Sage Publications.
- Larrivee, B. (2000). Transforming teaching practice: Becoming the critically reflective teacher. *Reflective Practice*, 1(3), 293–307. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713693162>
- Larrivee, B. (2008). Development of a tool to assess teachers' level of reflective practice. *Reflective Practice*, 9(3), 341–360. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623940802207451>
- Malterud, K., Siersma, V. D., & Guassora, A. D. (2016). Sample size in qualitative interview studies: Guided by information power. *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13), 1753–1760. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315617444>
- Mauthner, N. S., & Doucet, A. (2003). Reflexive accounts and accounts of reflexivity in qualitative data analysis. *Sociology*, 37(3), 413–431. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385030373002>
- Mezirow, J. (1981). A critical theory of adult learning and education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 32(1), 3–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/074171368103200101>
- Mezirow, J. (1994). Understanding transformation theory. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 44(4), 222–235. <https://doi.org/10.1177/074171369404400403>
- Nasur, A., Ahad, H. M., & Gul, F. (2021). Analysis of reflective practices for professional development of teachers. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 8(2), 326–344. [https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2024\(8-II\)28](https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2024(8-II)28)
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. Sage Publications.
- PEF. (2022). *Training manual: Teacher development program (TDP)*. Punjab Education Foundation.
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.
- Schön, D. A. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner: Toward a new design for teaching and learning in the professions*. Jossey-Bass.
- Smith, E. (2011). Teaching critical reflection. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 16(2), 211–223. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2010.515022>

Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837–851. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121>

Willig, C. (2013). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology* (3rd ed.). Open University Press.

Yardley, L. (2000). Dilemmas in qualitative health research. *Psychology and Health*, 15(2), 215–228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08870440008400302>



2026 by the authors; Journal of The Kashmir Journal of Academic Research and Development. This is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).