



RESEARCH PAPER

Teachers' Professional Development and Reflective Practice in English Language Teaching: Insights from Sindh's Education Sector

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how English Language Teaching (ELT) practitioners in Sindh engage in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and Reflective Practices (RP), focusing on the scope, challenges, and institutional support available. Professional growth and reflective engagement are essential for effective teaching; however, in Sindh's education sector, structured CPD opportunities and systematic RP mechanisms remain inadequate. Using a qualitative design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six English language teachers from schools and colleges. Data were analyzed through Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis framework to identify recurring patterns and challenges. Findings reveal uneven access to CPD, reliance on informal reflective tools such as journaling, and encouraging peer collaboration, but also highlight systemic barriers including excessive workload, limited infrastructure, and the perceived irrelevance of some training programs. Structured, context-specific CPD programs and sustained reflective practices are necessary, supported by institutional commitment, reduced workloads, and improved training relevance to enhance teacher professional growth.

Keywords:

Teacher Professional Development, Reflective Practice, ELT, Sindh's Education Sectors, CPD, Peer Collaboration, Thematic Analysis

Introduction

The field of English Language Teaching (ELT) is developing in pace with new educational demands, the move towards cross border contacts, and digital technologies. Amidst such a changing environment, the focus has been increasingly on the importance of teacher professional development (PD) and reflective practice as integral to quality teaching. Teachers are no longer considered as transmitters of knowledge but as active professionals who have to reflect upon and develop their teaching practices so that they meet the learning requirements of a wide range of learners in rapidly changing teaching and learning environments (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Borg, 2015).

Teacher development on the international stage emphasizes the need for CPD to be a means by which skills are developed, but also identity and professional engagement (Avalos, 2011; Kennedy, 2014). Reflective practice, therefore, is a personal and professional obligation which allows teachers to reflect critically on their teaching, beliefs and classroom acts (Farrell, 2015). Integration of CPD and reflective practice provides a route to transformative teaching—teaching that is student-focused, adaptable, and context-sensitive.

In Pakistan, however, CPD is unevenly spread and mostly reliant on external donors or ad-hoc institutional initiatives (British Council, 2013; Shamim & Qureshi, 2013). The private-sector institutions may have some in-house development programs; further, public schools and colleges are often challenged to sustain opportunities due to lack of funding,

inertia of administration, and inefficiency of policy. Educators in such circumstances often have limited access to formal professional learning options, and instead rely on autonomous learning or informal collegial interaction to develop professionally. Reflective practice, despite being promoted in principle, is not generally integrated in the cultural fabric of institutions or in teachers' evaluations.

Sindh is a microcosm of Pakistan's diversity and complexity, and mirrors the challenges of the nation. Although, facilities and training at urban areas including Karachi could be of better quality; the structural inequities of the rural and peri-urban areas hinder the development of the teachers. The types of capacity-building and quality teaching focused on in national education policy are a chasm away from the lives of teachers on the ground, who are overworked, under-resourced and often cut off from avenues for continued professional development.

This literature often deals with CPD and reflection as separate topics, or gives urban settings much prominence, and thus the voices of teachers in wider contexts are under-represented. And very limited researchers had been investigated into how English language teachers in Sindh view and enact CPD and reflection as integrated, emergent processes in their own local context.

This article addresses this gap by presenting empirical data on how English teachers from the education sector in all Sindh experience the professional development and reflective practice. It is based on qualitative data pertaining to in-service teachers inside public and private schools; and, it analyses the barriers, enablers, and modes of involvement that mold their professional trajectories.

By focusing on the experiences of the actors who are directly involved in the practice of language teaching, this paper seeks to guide decision-making for policy-makers, administrators, and teacher educators in terms of what works, what is still missing and what is still realizable. The objective is to develop a more equitable, sustainable and reflective CPD model for ELT practitioners in Pakistan's Sindh province and elsewhere.

Literature Review

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and reflective practice have become integral aspects of teacher training, particularly in English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL). As the language classroom changes in response to globalization, technology, as well as pedagogical changes, the continuing professional development for teachers is increasingly important for successful teaching and learning (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Borg, 2015).

CPD is defined as planned, structured and ongoing education activities which contribute to teachers' knowledge, skills and professional competencies (Kennedy, 2014). In the world of ELT, CPD comprises workshops, in-service training, seminars, mentoring, belonging to professional communities, and now, ever more so, getting online for webinars and MOOCs. Effective CPD is associated with better teaching practice, student outcomes and teacher retention (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017).

Globally, the focus has moved "from short, one-time trainings to longer-term, collaborative and context-based professional development models" (Borko, 2004, p.13). The same research evidences the importance of CPD being tailored to Teachers' needs, belief system and school context to enact change (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). In ELT, since teacher knowledge encompasses only partly content knowledge and also part pedagogical flexibility, CPD is even more crucial to respond to curricula and learners' variety (Freeman & Johnson, 1998).

However, in South Asia, CPD is often poorly coordinated and under-resourced. And Pakistani teachers especially in the public sector schools, are also said to have low level of access to continuous staff development chances (Shamim & Rashid, 2019). The majority of the CPD programmes are donor driven or externally funded (e.g., with the involvement of the British Council, RELO, or SPELT) and, despite the beneficial resources they provide, they rarely lead to long-term pedagogical impact as a result of insufficient institutional embedding, localization, and follow-up (British Council, 2013). The planning and evaluation of such initiatives are seldom done with the input of teachers which deters them from being meaningful to everyday classroom contexts in the varied education environment of Pakistan.

Reflective Practice in ELT

Reflective teaching refers to the teachers' critical examination of their own teaching practices with the aim of facilitating future instruction (Farrell, 2015). Reflection can be formal (journals, peer observations, portfolios) or informal (mental self-assessment, post-lesson evaluation). Reflection was originally presented by Dewey (1933) as an intentional, rational act, and then later (Schön, 1983; Zeichner & Liston, 1996) it was expanded to professionals at work in the field of teaching.

Farrell's (2015) five-level reflective model of philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond practice is frequently referenced in ELT environments. Reflection has been recognized as a process not just by which individuals may develop but also as a professional responsibility, helping teachers to situate their expertise, respond to the needs of learners, and make sense of the complex and changing contexts of the classroom (Edge, 2011). If informal reflection (albeit under-institutional) can lead to positive classroom interactions and enable the teacher to respond to student needs (as is cross-reported by teachers in numerous previous studies (Farrell, 2015; Zahid & Khan, 2020), then we should be prioritizing this in our provision. In low- and middle-income countries such as Pakistan reflective practice is not uncommon, but informal and not systematically supported at the level of the wider institutional environment. Formal reflection is also hampered by high teaching loads, curriculum mandate from the top, and lack of time. But despite these difficulties, numerous teachers say that self-reflection increases their pedagogical insight and learner involvement.

There is now a consensus emerging that CPD and reflective practice are not distinct. Effective professional development is not something imposed top down, but is reflexive, connecting theoretical knowledge to teachers' classroom realities (Larrivee, 2000; Zeichner, 2009). Reflection-informed CPD is more likely to lead to greater involvement and experimentation in teaching (Mann, 2005). Practices that link reflection and development include peer observation, action research, and critical incidents.

Efforts in terms of ELTR (English Language Teaching Reforms) and RELO-funded projects in the Pakistani ELT scenario as well as RELO funded projects have aimed at promoting reflective CPD through activity-based training. However, the implementation remains uneven. Urban and well-resourced-school-based teachers have a greater advantage over the Sindh rural teachers who have limited exposure, support, or reflective time (Aslam & Siddiqui, 2019).

The situation in the education sector in Sindh reflects what is happening in the country as a whole. Unlike private entities, which can promote CPD through in-house workshops and peer mentoring, public sector colleges and schools may have to face bureaucratic barriers, staff shortages and funding shortages. CPD is still at the bottom of the agenda for school leadership, and teachers are only assessed on their immediate performance and not on professional development (Shamim & Qureshi, 2013).

Reflective practice is also not integrated into teacher assessment or curriculum development. For teachers interested in reflective work — whether journaling about their teaching or talking with a peer — the onus is on them to make time for it. Social cultural factors of hierarchy, fear of being criticized, and lack of trust also impair peer feedback and reflection (Ali & Walker, 2014). These are the facts the delay the professions, teachers continue to be stuck in old ways and old manner of taking rote learning.

More recent research is promoting teacher-developed, context-dependent CPD models, focusing on reflection, collaboration and agency (Richards & Burns, 2009). Especially, in a province like Sindh with its lack of institutional support, it is vital to motivate teachers to take charge of their learning. Organizations such as SPELT have tried to address this gap, but they are not extensive enough.

Digital technology facilitates novel forms of reflective practice and CPD – including virtual communities of practice, online journaling or asynchronous peer feedback – with greater significance in the post-pandemic era. But access and literacy in digital remain staggered, spurring further questions around equity.

CPD and reflective practice are central to teacher effectiveness in English language teaching. But in Sindh's education space, regulations are selectively enforced, unsupported and supported by individual-driven initiative. This research adds to the literature by exploring what English teachers in Sindh feel and think about CPD and reflective practices and how system forces contribute to limit their involvement.

CPD and RP may be much heralded in academic literature and educational policy in Sindh, alongside the rest of the region, but the practices of such programs in educational institutions across Sindh are uneven and sporadic. Obstacles include: lack of time, inadequate access to needed resources, little institutional support, disconnected or unrelated courses. It is important to understand what opportunities are currently available for teachers to engage in CPD and reflect—in spite of such challenges in the system—so as to inform future policy and interventions.

The current study is thus relevant as it provides input from the lived experiences of English teachers in Sindh. It provides a clear understand of learning barriers and informal learning strategies they use to keep growing professionally. Such insights are relevant to policy makers and educational leaders who look to create more supportive conditions for teacher learning.

Material and Methods

After setting the theoretical and contextual backdrop of CDP and reflection in ELT, the subsequent section presents the methodological approach used to investigate how reflection and CDP are visible in educational scenario of Sindh.

Following an interpretivist paradigm, the current study was a qualitative research study designed to explore teachers' beliefs, experiences and practices concerning professional development and reflection with focus on EFL teachers. A qualitative approach is particularly suited for the study of personal, situational experiences, as well as societal events, in depth (Creswell, 2014). As CPD and reflective teaching are influenced by personal beliefs, institutional customs and socio-political contexts, such an exploratory approach would allow the researcher to gather deeper understandings which may not have been possible using a quantitative methodology.

A semi-structured interview based, small-scale design was selected in order to give the participants an opportunity to articulate the experiences in their own language and at the same time allow the researcher to ask about themes under investigation. The idea wasn't

to draw to entire teacher population but to have a rich contextual understanding of how CPD and reflective practices are experienced in the teacher community of Sindh education sector.

Data was collected through a Google Form using semi-structured, open-ended questions that invited detailed, reflective responses. This approach allowed participants to respond at their own pace and in a setting, they found comfortable, which encouraged depth and honesty in their answers. The form was shared with selected English language teachers across Sindh via email and WhatsApp, with a short message explaining the purpose of the study, ethical assurance of confidentiality, and a digital consent section embedded at the beginning of the form.

A total of six English language teachers from various educational levels (secondary and tertiary) and sectors (public and private) submitted responses. Their experience ranged from 3 to 15 years, and they represented both urban and rural areas within Sindh. Participants had the option to write their responses in English or Urdu; all Urdu responses were later translated into English for consistency and analysis.

This method enabled the researcher to gather rich, narrative data that captured individual perspectives while maintaining the flexibility of asynchronous participation. The online format was particularly effective in overcoming geographic and scheduling barriers, especially for participants from remote or underserved areas of Sindh.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations All the ethical considerations about qualitative research were thoroughly respected. All participants were provided with clear information on the study's purpose and nature. Anonymity was preserved by assigning pseudonyms to individuals and institutions with any identifying information expunged.

Confidentiality was rigorously upheld throughout transcription which were securely kept and used only by the researcher. Participation was not compulsory, and it was made clear to participant that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any negative impacts.

Table 1
Participant Profile

Participant	Institution Type	CPD Engagement	Reflective Practice
Teacher 1	Public College	External workshops (Oxford, SPELT)	Journaling, peer feedback
Teacher 2	Public School	Research, online sessions	Journaling
Teacher 3	Public College	SPELT workshops	Informal discussion
Teacher 4	Public College	None reported	Peer feedback
Teacher 5	Private School	Internal sessions	Team teaching
Teacher 6	Private College	RELO webinars, online courses	Journaling, lesson review

Depending on the collected data from in-service English teachers from various parts of Sindh this section of the study discusses and presents the key themes emerged from the content analysis by employing Braun and Clarke's six stages thematic analysis framework.

Starting with reading of the six responses in full. Initial notes were made with regard to dominant ideas and themes, including reference to external courses, online learning, peer collaboration, and impediments such as time pressures. To further analytic development, the data were then coded line-by-line, with examples of codes such as "external CPD," "journaling", "peer feedback" and "heavy workload".

As coding proceeded, codes were put into preliminary themes. The themes were checked for coherence and independency. Codes such as Workshops and Webinars were categorized under the theme CPD Opportunities, and codes such as Collaboration activities were categorized under Peer Collaboration. After the themes were constructed, they were elaborated and illustrated with vivid examples related to participants.

Lastly, themes represented the rich inner lives of English teachers in Sindh's education system and furnished a more nuanced view of opportunities and challenges in relation to CPD and RP.

Table 2
Coding Scheme

Code	Theme	Example
"Oxford and SPELT workshops"	CPD Opportunities	"I have attended workshops organized by Oxford and SPELT."
"Webinars by RELO"	CPD Opportunities	"Completed online courses aimed at enhancing teaching strategies."
"Journaling, self-assessment"	Reflective Practice	"Journaling, peer feedback, lesson reviews."
"We failed to develop this culture"	Peer Collaboration	"We have failed to develop this culture at our workplace."
"Heavy teaching load"	Barriers to CPD	"Heavy teaching load is one of the main challenges."



Figure 1: Theme Map – CPD and Reflective Practice (Braun & Clarke: 2006)

Results and Discussion

Thematic analysis of the six teacher responses produced four broad themes: (1) CPD Opportunities—External and Online, (2) Reflective Practice—Individually Driven, (3) Peer Collaboration—Emerging but Uneven, and (4) Barriers to CPD—Time, Load, and Institutional Gaps. Each theme is addressed here in terms of the research questions.

The first key theme relates to the accessibility of CPD. The most common form of input was in-service training obtained by teachers from sources other than the teachers' college (Oxford University Press workshops and SPELT sessions). Similarly, more teachers took online courses and webinars, especially those offered by organizations such as RELO. They valued these opportunities highly, but they remained sporadic and largely subject to the will or energy of individual teachers rather than to systemic planning.

The second theme suggests that reflective practice is mainly a self-directed approach adopted by teachers in the education sector of Sindh. Journaling, self-evaluation,

and peer feedback were some of the most commonly mentioned approaches. There was no evidence of widespread or formal use of structured reflective frameworks at the institutional level and this was in line with Farrell's (2015) research that informal and unstructured reflection dominates in many ELT contexts.

The third one is about peer work. Responses were mixed. Some teachers also described useful ongoing cooperation with colleagues through co-teaching or informal discussion, while others explained a lack of such sharing in their centers. This difference suggests that, although peer collaboration is appreciated, it is patchy and not systematically fostered.

The fourth theme underscores impediments to CPD and RP. Time, teaching load and institutional support were most commonly reported barriers. These barriers are aligned with the regression identified by Shamim and Rashid (2019) and claim that the systemic problems in the education system of Pakistan act as barrier in the continuation of the development of the teachers.

Table 3
Themes and Representative Quotes

Theme	Representative Quote
CPD Opportunities—External and Online	"Completed online courses aimed at enhancing teaching strategies." (Teacher 6)
Reflective Practice—Individually Driven	"I reflect on my teaching every month through peer feedback." (Teacher 4)
Peer Collaboration—Emerging but Uneven	"Teach the same topic simultaneously with other teacher." (Teacher 5)
Barriers to CPD—Time, Load, Institutional Gaps	"Heavy teaching load is one of the main challenges." (Teacher 4)

Conclusion

This study explored the professional development and reflective practices of English language teachers among education sector of Sindh. The study's results show that teachers are eager learners and reflective practitioners, yet their learning is often self-directed, respond to exterior forces. The institutional provision of CPD is uneven, and the majority of opportunities come from external bodies or online. Reflective practice, although generally recognized its potential as a form of professional development, reflective practice is largely informal and self-directed. Peer cooperation is becoming more common in some institutions, so that things are starting to change--spatially and in terms of knowledge exchanges--but it still varies so much and often depends on individual connections rather than institutional connections.

There are still major obstacles that hinder teachers' professional development, mainly lack of time (because of the heavy work burden), absence of suitable and accessible CPD activities, and minimal help from their managers. These results indicated that the existing teacher development in Sindh is not an integrated whole and there is a strong need for systemic change.

Schools and colleges should structure and organize needs-based CPD that is relevant to the everyday practice of teachers. Local organizations rather than out of region organizations should lead workshops/mentoring/PLCs in technology centres. Structured opportunities to develop reflective practice can be provided through formal channels, for example and at the institutional level, encouragement of practicing teaching journals, peer observation, and sharing the process of reflection in groups. Perhaps most crucially, is the need for the leaders of a school (or district) to see the benefits of CPD and provide time within the working week to enable it.

Second, the need for a culture of collaboration between teachers. Institutions should have mechanisms for fostering peer learning such as communities of practice and collaborative projects. Lastly, infrastructural deficits, the accessibility of high-quality material and professional relevance are important aspects to consider in order to maintain high levels of teacher desire and motivation to learn.

To conclude, while the commitment of teachers in Sindh's education system is promising toward professional improvement, they stand in need of greater institutional support to achieve their full impact potential. Addressing the obstacles identified in this work can help policy makers and educators to develop a stronger and more introspective culture of teacher development across the region.

Recommendations

Need-based CPD activities strongly linked with daily practice that has been appropriately tailored by local organizations, delivered locally through workshops and mentoring, which is sustained over time through online professional learning communities supported by technology centers in schools and colleges. Universities must institutionalize reflective practices such as teaching journals, structured peer observations, and group reflection sessions, school and district leaders should provide time within the workweek for engaging professional development activities. Given the above, a culture of collaboration should be actively fostered through collaborative projects with necessary infrastructure supporting, availability to high quality teaching resources and CPD content being contextualized to teachers' professional contexts. Furthermore, the broader educational reform agenda in a region or nation should include CPD and reflective practice, with regular teacher feedback supporting continuous review and adaptation to ensure provision remains both relevant and effective.

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