



**DEVELOPING TEACHER AGENCY FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN INITIAL
TEACHER EDUCATION: AN ANALYSIS OF PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS'
PERSPECTIVES**

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a multiple case study concerning how the Inclusiveness Education Agency of the prospective teacher can be fostered by the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes in the Punjab, Pakistan. The quintain, which is the agency of inclusive education in ITE, is the conceptual thread linking four institutionally differentiated cases which were founded on disparities in the institutional environment in Punjab. The study uses the transformative framework of teacher agency and the multiple case study analysis to explore how the enabling conditions, agentic strategies, and cross-case patterns contribute, or do not contribute, to the development of professional identity among prospective teachers. The data obtained through semi-structured interviews with twenty-three prospective teachers was transcribed using TurboScribe AI and checked by the research team afterwards. Data management and analysis were conducted using NVivo 15 with AI-assisted coding. The results reveal that agentic orientations are deeply shaped by institutional context, which makes curriculum-practice disconnects restrictive to agentic development. Prospective teachers rely on personal attributes as agentic assets despite structural constraints. The paper derives policy implications for ITE curriculum reform, faculty development, and inclusive education policy in Punjab. The paper contributes situated, context-specific evidence to an under-researched area of global significance.

Keywords: Teacher Agency, Inclusive Education, Initial Teacher Education, Punjab, Pakistan, Multiple Case Study, Prospective Teachers

Introduction

Across diverse national education systems, the role of teachers has shifted to that of active contributors to systemic transformation, ensuring that schools become places of equal and inclusive education for all learners (UNESCO, 2005; United Nations, 2006). This orientation involves technical knowledge and the skill of acting intentionally and automatically under complex institutional circumstances. (Pantić, 2015; Priestley et al., 2015). Teacher agency (TA), as the transformational process where teachers take strategic action to reduce exclusion and underperformance, has become a central research construct in the field of inclusive education (Andreoli et al., 2022; Pantić, 2015). However, the practical advancement of TA in inclusive education in pre-service settings is still poorly theorised and empirically underdeveloped, particularly in the Global South (Hick et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2020).

A clear example of this is Pakistan. The government has ratified international conventions, such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006). The implementation of inclusive education principles in ITE programmes is, however, chaotic, poorly resourced, and contextually uneven



(British Council, 2020; Safdar et al., 2024). The largest ITE system in Pakistan is located in Punjab, the most populous province of Pakistan, and it consists of hundreds of government and privately owned colleges of education and teacher training institutions. Unequal distribution of resources, funding, governance, and the culture of institutions generate significantly different teaching and learning conditions, as well as conditions for developing the agentic orientations required for inclusive education (British Council, 2020). Existing studies have tended to simplify ITE in Pakistan, overlooking the contextual complexity that shapes the professional development of prospective teachers. The present paper challenges that oversimplification.

Teacher agency in inclusive education is the central focus of the current paper because it is evolving within ITE programmes in various institutional contexts in Punjab. The inquiry is organised into three research questions, which are interconnected. First, what are the ways that ITE programmes in Punjab influence prospective teachers' sense of agency towards inclusive education, and what is the difference between this in institutional contexts? Second, how are the structural and cultural conditions of ITE programmes facilitating or constraining the development of teacher agency? Third, what is the relationship between the personal characteristics and professional identity of prospective teachers and the conditions in the institution to create a difference in agentic orientation? The set of questions is considered in the light of four cases that represent a unique ITE institutional setting in the state of Punjab. The paper uses multiple case study analyses by Stake (2006) to examine how the quintain manifests differently across institutional settings and what this disparity reveals about the conditions required to develop agency in pre-service teacher education.

Literature Review

Teacher Agency as Transformative Practice

Teacher agency is a contested yet productive theoretical construct. Earlier notions placed agency in the volition of individual teachers and as an inherent capacity that existed in teachers or was absent within them (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). This has been disputed by newer ecological models. According to Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015), agency is not a personality trait because it is an achievement created by the interaction of individual dispositions, professional backgrounds, and environmental conditions (Priestley et al., 2015). This ecological theory recognises iterational, practical-evaluative, and projective agency dimensions, in which the research focus shifted from individual traits to structural conditions and contextual affordances.

The transformative framework that Pantić (2015) adds to this idea of the ecological perspective is the anticipation of social justice as the goal of teacher agency. The framework describes four components of moral orientation and professional identity (purpose), situational knowledge and relational skill (competence), individual and collective efficacy within the constraints of structure (autonomy), and critical self-evaluation and situational analysis (reflexivity). Pantić and Florian (2015) apply this framework directly to inclusive education on the premise that inclusive TA means that teachers need to act strategically to minimise the risks of marginalisation and facilitate equal outcomes among all students. The current study has the conceptual architecture of this four-component framework.

Teacher Agency in Inclusive Education Contexts

Since 2015, empirical studies on TA in relation to inclusive education have expanded considerably. Andreoli et al. (2022) developed a scoping review that identified enabling conditions and barriers at the micro, meso, and macro levels. Individual characteristics, such as attitude, empathy, and professional self-concept, influence agentic enactment at the micro



level. Mediators at the meso level are school culture, working relationships, and administrative support. Macro-level policies and curriculum requirements create or limit the operational space available to teachers (Andreoli et al., 2022; Miller et al., 2020). Andreoli et al. (2022) further identified four types of agentic enactment: enabling conditions, strategies, outcomes, and outcome directions, a framework that guides the analysis in the current study.

According to Miller et al. (2020), there are four clusters of agentic actions in the context of inclusive education: instructional strategy, collaborative practice, family and community engagement, and advocacy. Interestingly, these clusters presuppose a certain level of institutional support and professional preparation, which is usually lacking in under-resourced settings. The literature on how teacher attitudes toward inclusive education develop in pre-service settings remains limited in pre-service teacher training, and very little literature exists on how these processes occur in low- and middle-income countries.

Initial Teacher Education and Inclusive Preparation

Inclusive orientations among prospective teachers represent another area of critically inadequate provision within ITE. According to Florian and Rouse (2009), ITE is tasked with preparing individuals to enter a profession grounded in individual and collective responsibility for the learning of all children. Rouse (2010) suggests that ITE is a necessary but insufficient condition for promoting inclusion, given that graduates are subsequently inducted into school cultures and into the wider community. The issue with this is that prospective teachers often report that there is a disconnect between values and attitudes that are developed during the years of ITE and the practical competence needed to implement inclusive strategies in real classrooms.

This is especially pronounced in situations in which ITE programmes do not include specific content on inclusive education, when field placements are not created with the focus on inclusive content, and when faculty are not well exposed to disability-affirmative pedagogies (Lindqvist & Nilholm, 2023). According to Eteläpelto et al. (2013), professional agency is determined by the interplay between personal professional identity and a sociocultural workplace environment, in which the process starts at the level of ITE and continues throughout a professional career. Pre-service contexts that foreground professional identity formation, collaborative practice, and critical reflection are associated with stronger agentic orientations in graduates than those organised around propositional knowledge transmission alone (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Priestley et al., 2015).

Inclusive Education in Punjab, Pakistan

Policy ambition and institutional reality in Punjab exist in persistent tension. Pledges by the governments on inclusive education, expressed in the Education Sector Plan 2020-2025 and complying with the demands of the UNCRPD, have not produced systematic change in ITE curricula or teacher training provisions (British Council, 2020; GOP, 2020). Colleges of education still function on syllabuses that do not include inclusive education material and have limited resources for practical training in inclusive environments, and faculty who often lack specialist knowledge of differentiated instruction or disability-affirming pedagogy (Safdar et al., 2024).

Studies in Punjab primary schools have found that culturally embedded ableist assumptions and insufficient institutional support continue to act as obstacles to inclusive practice (British Council, 2020; Thakur et al., 2021). Prospective teachers enter ITE programmes with pre-formed cultural perceptions of disability and difference due to family, community, and religious forces that ITE programmes have seldom challenged (GOP, 2020).



The empirical work that this study attempts is to understand how these conditions interplay with ITE institutional cultures to influence agentic development.

Methodology

Research Design

This research employs a multiple case study design provided by Stake (2006) in the study of the teacher agency of inclusive education in four ITE institutions in Punjab, Pakistan. The multiple case study design is suitable because the institutions where the quintain manifests are diverse, and a single-case analysis would be insufficient to capture the situational diversity around which the analytical issue is centred (Stake, 1995, 2006). The design enables deep particularisation of each case while permitting cross-case assertions grounded in varied evidence, in keeping with Stake's principle of perceiving both the individual case and the quintain as a community of cases (Stake, 2006).

The Quintain

Teacher agency for inclusive education is developed in ITE programmes in Punjab, Pakistan. The concept of the intersection of institutional preparation, future teacher professional identity, and agentic orientation toward inclusive practice is the binding thread. The four cases share this quintain and are meaningfully different in terms of their institutional contexts, institutional structures, geographical locations, and resource profiles. This variety allows the study of the influence of context on quintain expression across varied locations, which is the core analytical purpose of the multiple case study design (Stake, 2006).

Philosophical Paradigm

This research is situated in the framework of the constructivist naturalistic paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 2000). Knowledge is perceived as constructed and situated, generated in specific social circumstances through the interaction between researchers and participants. Reality is understood to be plural and contextually constructed and is determined by institutional histories, cultural values and social relations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This ontological position fits the interest in this study of the situated development of teacher agency and the desire to comprehend every case in its entire situational complexity (Creswell & Poth, 2023; Schwandt, 2000). The interpretative impact of the positionality of the researcher is noted since he is an education scholar working in Punjab, and thus, it affects the way he collects and analyses the data.

Case Selection and Sampling

Purposive sampling was done to select four cases and was based on the opportunity to learn, varying context, and relevance to the quintain (Patton, 2015; Stake, 2006). The criteria used in the selection were institutional type (public or private) and geographic setting (urban, peri-urban, or rural), resource profile, and programme orientation.

1. Case A refers to a Department of Teacher Education that is part of an established public university with relatively good infrastructure in City A.
2. Case B is a Government College for Elementary Teachers (GCET), which is a peri-urban centre and serves a predominantly rural population of students in City B.
3. Case C is a Department of Teacher Education in City C that is part of an established private university and has curricular autonomy and a reform orientation.
4. Case D is a Government College for Elementary Teachers in City D, a remote college in southern Punjab with very poor infrastructure and limited faculty capacity.

Within-Case and Cross-Case Analysis

The analysis was conducted in two stages (Stake, 2006). In Phase 1, a within-case analysis was conducted in which every institution was viewed as a unique entity in its setting.



Each case was developed into a thick description that investigated the lived activity, experience, and situation of prospective teachers in each institutional context (Geertz, 1973). Phase 2 was a cross-case analysis in which we examined trends and divergences among the four cases. Assertions were formulated from evidence drawn from multiple cases, with each assertion supported by data from at least two cases. It was also more focused on particularisation and pattern-seeking, which should not involve forced uniformity in different institutional settings (Miles et al., 2020; Stake, 2006).

Data Collection

Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews with 23 prospective teachers on each of the four cases, with five or seven participants/teachers. The interviews centred on the experience of participants about ITE curriculum content regarding inclusive education, their sense of adequacy and professional competency, their views on institutional support and constraints, and their professional identity with respect to diversity and inclusion. All interviews lasted between forty-five and seventy minutes, depending on the preferred language, either Urdu or English. Documents about participants, such as programme syllabi, institutional mission statements, and field placement records, were reviewed to contextualise the information collected during the interviews. The data regarding interviews and documentation were supplemented with observations of selected teaching practice sessions across all four cases (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2018).

Transcription of audio recordings was performed by TurboScribe AI, and all transcripts were reviewed and verified by the research team against the original recordings. These two verification steps ensured the accuracy of transcription across both Urdu and English data (Miles et al., 2020).

Trustworthiness and Triangulation

Trustworthiness was established using more than one data source, that is, interviews, documents, and observations, for each case (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010). A subsample of participants engaged in member checking, in which they reviewed the researcher's interpretations of their case data and provided corrective feedback. Analytical rigour was facilitated by peer debriefing with a mentor outside the project to test the researchers' interpretative assumptions. Reflexive memos were maintained by the research team during data collection and analysis. The presentation of the findings was informed by triangulation and not a single truth claim, maintaining the multiplicity of realities apparent in the four cases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 2006).

Ethical Considerations

Data collection was conducted following ethical approval from the research ethics committee of the host institution. All participants were provided informed consent, and the consent forms were in Urdu and English. The participants were guaranteed that they would not be penalised in case they withdrew at any point. In this paper, all cases and participants have been anonymised. Site access permission was granted in writing by the institutional administrators. The reciprocal arrangement with each case site was organised as a written overview of initial discoveries that were disseminated with institutional heads at the end of the fieldwork (Christians, 2005; Creswell & Poth, 2023).

Case Reports

Case A

Case A refers to a Department of Teacher Education in an established public university with relatively good infrastructure in City A. It admits approximately 1,000 student teachers each year to its Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Associate Degree in Education (ADE)



courses. The organisation enjoys a relatively good physical infrastructure, operational faculty, and proximity to local urban schools for field placement. The department has established a fairly stable institutional culture that, though tradition-oriented, has enabled gradual reform adoption. Most of the faculty hold PhDs, and several have done Directorate of Staff Development training programmes.

Prospective teachers at Case A recounted an ITE experience that offered basic theoretical learning of inclusive education but lacked adequate practical application or classroom-based reinforcement. The programme of inclusive education was mostly presented in one mandatory course, but it was delivered not as an integrated pedagogical domain, but as a collection of isolated facts rather than as integrated pedagogical content. One of the participants stated,

At the university, we learned definitions of inclusion in the classroom, but when we were at school, we did not hear anybody speak about that. Differentiation instruction was a phrase that the cooperating teacher had never heard of (Case A, Participant 3, Interview).

This curriculum-practice disconnect was the dominant theme of the Case A interviews.

The most enabling conditions for agency development at Case A were the fact that the institution was close to specialist resource centres in Lahore and a small yet committed group of faculty that incorporated inclusive perspectives in their courses on methods. The participants credited these faculty members with shaping their professional sense of purpose. One of the participants mentioned,

One of the professors has kept repeating to us that every child should be in our classroom and not sent away. That was something that stuck with me (Case A, Participant 7, Interview).

This purpose-driven orientation aligns with the first element of Pantić's (2015) framework and reflects agency development through relational proximity to committed educators.

Ableist assumptions remained embedded in the institutional culture at Case A. Even at the time of the study, inclusive school placements were seldom used, and future teachers reported no formal background training in working with students with disabilities. The disconnect between curriculum rhetoric and field experience limited the development of practical competence and independence, which are the second and third elements of the Pantić framework. Case A shows that urban resource advantage does not automatically translate into the development of inclusive agentic orientations in cases of institutional culture that has not been restructured.

Case B

Case B is a Government College for Elementary Teachers (GCET), which is a peri-urban centre and serves a predominantly rural population of students in City B. It is primarily a preparation centre for primary teachers through the ADE programme and has a student body that is predominantly rural and peri-urban. There were insufficient physical resources; libraries were poorly equipped, ICTs were scarce, and faculty turnover was high. The college enjoyed little institutional freedom and was in a slow process of curriculum alignment.

Prospective teachers at Case B provided an institutional context where the idea of inclusion education was highly sidelined both on the curriculum level and at the discourse level. To answer the question of inclusion, some of the participants first interpreted the concept as gender equality and not disability or learning deficiency. This conceptual gap reflects the absence of inclusive content in teaching materials and the limited faculty exposure to contemporary inclusive practices (British Council, 2020). One of the participants thought:



"I did not know the concept of inclusive education until this interview. We also have children in our classrooms who are not able to read, but we do not declare it as a disability. We refer to this as backwardness" (Case B, Participant 2, Interview).

Nevertheless, adaptive agency was nonetheless clearly evident among prospective teachers at Case B, a pragmatic, contextually responsive form of action consistent with student-centred approaches in the broader literature (Andreoli et al., 2022; Miller et al., 2020). Some of them reported having designed informal support programmes for struggling learners in the field placement as a result of personal qualities such as empathy and relational attentiveness, rather than formal training. This was clearly described in an observational vignette that occurred during a Case B field placement session. In one of the primary mathematics lessons monitored by the researcher, a prospective teacher spontaneously divided the class into mixed-ability groups, positioned quick learners in groups with slower ones, and moved around the classroom, giving individual attention. She explained this strategy later when asked about it by saying that it was simply a matter of instinct: "I simply knew that some of them needed more time" (Case B, Field Observation Notes). Such adaptive agency, emerging despite structural neglect of inclusive preparation, reflects individual agentic capacity that ITE has neither cultivated nor extinguished.

Case C

Case C is a private teacher education department in Lahore and is a constituent part of a well-established private university. It functions with a high level of curricular autonomy, a significantly smaller enrolment of students in a cohort, and a faculty demographic that includes members with doctoral qualifications in either inclusive or special education. The institution has formally established a rights-based approach to inclusive education and has been able to incorporate content about inclusive pedagogy in several different courses, as opposed to isolating the content in one module.

In this study, Case C had the most enabling institutional environment for teacher agency development. Future educators reported an ITE experience that actually involved all four aspects of Pantić's (2015) framework: purpose, competence, autonomy, and reflexivity (Pantić, 2015; Pantić & Florian, 2015). The design of the programme involved coteaching simulations, sensitisation workshops on disability, and reflective structured journals that the prospective teachers had to undertake to question what they had assumed about learning differences. One of the participants explained the influence of one exercise, a "cross-disability simulation":

"One afternoon, we attempted to read a text containing a dyslexic distorted font. My frustration annoyed me, and I was ashamed of being that aggravated. I read all the assignments differently thereafter. I stopped thinking that a struggling student was not troubling." (Case C, Participant 1, Interview)

Agentic dispositions were also modelled by Case C faculty through their active advocacy and collaborative leadership within institutional settings. This faculty modelling conformed to the enabling condition of professional development that Andreoli et al. (2022) identified and extended it by embedding professional development within a coherent institutional culture rather than as an individualised professional development add-on. Case C has disadvantages, such as inaccessibility to most potential teachers within Punjab. Its fee structure and location in a city imply that the facilitating conditions remain concentrated among a relatively privileged student group, raising significant equity concerns about who benefits from high-quality, inclusive teacher preparation.



Case D

Case D is a Government College for Elementary Teachers in City D, a remote college in southern Punjab with very poor infrastructure and limited faculty capacity. The college has a student body that is predominantly drawn from rural communities, and most of them are first-generation college attendees. Faculty resources are severely limited. Many positions are vacant, and the ones filled with instructors have MS or MPhil degrees and not doctoral degrees. The teaching practice placement schools are ill-equipped and cater to the needs of communities that have high levels of poverty and school-aged children who are out of school.

Case D presented the most constraining institutional conditions for agentic development among the four cases. Future teachers experienced an ITE programme marked by exam-oriented study, little practical interaction with schools, and the near-complete absence of discussion on inclusive education. According to the faculty, *Inclusive education is an urban concern because it is assumed at the community level that rural schools cater to rather homogeneous populations with similar learning needs (Case D, Faculty Interview).*

This assumption persisted even in relation to the interviews of participants who stated that there were students with visible disabilities, learning difficulties, and linguistic diversity in the classes they attended.

Despite this, participants in Case D claimed a distinct collective agentic orientation grounded in community belonging and a sense of moral duty towards underserved students. Many of them explained this as a sense of responsibility to students who had been subjected to the same systemic neglect that they themselves had been subjected to by their home communities, and that they expressed a desire to effect change through teaching. One participant mentioned, "My younger brother has an issue with reading. No one helped him. I would have liked to become the teacher who would have helped him" (Case D, Participant 4, Interview). This agentic intention, based on their own experience of being marginalised in education, was a valuable agentic resource that ITE at Case D failed to recognise or deliberately cultivate (Pantić, 2015; Priestley et al., 2015).

Cross-Case Analysis

Cross-Case Patterns and Assertions

Cross-case analysis produced three main assertions.

Assertion 1

It is not only the curriculum content but also the institutional culture that influences the agentic orientations of prospective teachers. In Cases A, B, and D, government-prescribed, nominally equivalent curricula were applied to prospective teachers, although their agentic orientations varied significantly. The included education content in Case A was theoretical and not practical. Above all, there was very little content in Cases B and D. However, in all three cases, the participants were exhibiting agentic capacity of different types. Instead, it was the relational and cultural texture of the institution that was the operational variable, not the curriculum content (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Priestley et al., 2015). The most developed and varied agentic orientations were evident in Case C with its coherently inclusive institutional culture, suggesting that curriculum integration delivered within a supportive institutional setting has a greater effect than formal syllabus prescription alone.

Assertion 2

In all four cases, prospective teachers used personal qualities, especially empathy, relational attentiveness, and moral purpose, as main agentic resources when they had not been prepared in the institution. The adaptive agency noted in Case B, the relational commitment in

Case D, and the moral purpose in Case A can be attributed to the purpose component of the teacher agency as presented by Pantić (2015). This observation is similar to the list of personal attributes provided by Andreoli et al. (2022) as an enabling condition that practising teachers should have, and extends the finding into the pre-service context. The development of personal agentic capacity appears to occur despite, rather than as a result of, poor ITE provision.

Assertion 3

There is a curriculum-practice gap in all the cases, which is the most persistent structural constraint on agency development. In Cases A, B, and D, field placements in non-inclusive schools did not expose future teachers to the process sites where agentic capacity could be practised and refined. Case C addressed this gap through simulation and reflective structures. In the absence of field experience that exposes potential teachers to inclusive practice, ITE reproduces the structural circumstances that marginalise inclusive education rather than transforming them (Miller et al., 2020).

The Quintain Reconceptualised

The analysis of the quintain in four cases reveals that teacher agency for inclusive education in ITE in Punjab is not a coherent developing process, but a collection of disjointed and mainly individualised responses to institutional neglect. Most ITE institutions in Punjab lack the conditions that were identified in the theoretical literature as required to develop an agentic environment: enabling environments, professional development, collaborative culture, and structured reflexivity (Andreoli et al., 2022; Priestley et al., 2015). The Punjab ITE system is not designed to build teacher agency for inclusive education. It produces generalists, and where inclusive agency develops, it does so despite the system rather than through it.

Case C is a productive counterexample that shows that richer forms of agentic orientations are achievable through intentional institutional design. However, its inaccessibility confirms an elite model of inclusive teacher preparation, in which the practices of private, urban, and economically advantaged institutions prepare teachers to a standard of instruction that public, rural, and underserved institutions cannot replicate. This stratification is, in itself, an equity issue that the policy in Punjab has not yet addressed.

Particularisation and Pattern

The sources of agentic motivation remain case-specific. The relational purpose of Case D, which is rooted in the community, Case B, which is based on the instinct of adaptation, Case A, which is guided by the faculty, and Case C, which is developed through systematic cultivation of reflexivity, all represent distinct agentic pathways. These pathways cannot be reconciled into one developmental model. Where curriculum policy prescribes a single, standardised pathway for agentic development, it will fail to capture the situated diversity of these cases (Geertz, 1973; Stake, 2006).

Case C is the atypical case. It is not an exception but a clarifying contrast, thus specifying exactly those conditions of the agents that do enable agency development in the rest of the three cases. This is a distinctive and productive role of the atypical case in multiple case study design (Stake, 1995).

Methodological Reflections

The use of a multiple case study design has enabled this study to maintain situational particularity and develop cross-case assertions (Stake, 2006). A one-case design would have over-represented the possibilities of ITE in the developing agency (Case C) or under-represented them (Case D). The four-case design produced assertions grounded in varied evidence, allowing differentiation between what is localised and what is more broadly patterned (Stake, 1995). NVivo 15 with AI-assisted coding proved efficient in constructing



cross-case matrices and identifying patterns; however, manual examination of AI-generated codes by the research team was essential to interpretive rigour and contextual sensitivity (Jackson & Bazeley, 2024).

Discussion

Interpretation of Results

The results affirm the literature on TA in inclusive education in several significant ways. The trend in Cases A, B, and D is consistent with the findings of Andreoli et al. (2022), who found structural absence, namely, of professional development, collaborative culture, and administrative support, as the primary barriers to agentic enactment. In this paper, these barriers have been identified as existing at the pre-service level, showing how the conditions constraining TA in schools are reproduced, and in some respects first established, through ITE programmes.

The prominence of personal qualities as central agentic assets in all four cases extends the ecological model proposed by Priestley et al. (2015) into a pre-service environment. The iterative aspect of agency, namely, accumulated personal experience of educational exclusion, was also particularly prominent in Case D, where the prospective teachers made reference to their own poor schooling as a source of motivation. The results of this study imply that ITE programmes do not need to view students' biographical knowledge of educational exclusion as a deficit to be remediated but as an agentic resource to be recognised and actively developed. The curriculum-practice gap observed in Cases A, B, and D echoes international literature showing that student teachers may be values-ready but practically underprepared.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

In theory, the results indicate a view of TA for inclusive education as an ecologically emergent occurrence that is especially conscious of the institutional situation of ITE (Pantić, 2015; Priestley et al., 2015). The four-component model by Pantić (2015), purpose, competence, autonomy, and reflexivity, was analytically productive in all four cases. The paper proposes a fifth dimension for ITE: contextual preparedness, that is, informed awareness of the particular institutional, cultural, and structural circumstances that a prospective teacher will encounter in their placement organisation.

In practice, the results indicate three ITE reform priorities in Punjab. Inclusive education needs to be integrated across the ITE curriculum instead of being contained in a single unit. This is feasible at the programme level, as illustrated in Case C. Field placement systems should actively place prospective teachers in inclusive school environments where they can practice the agentic strategies found to be effective in the literature (Miller et al., 2020). Any meaningful curriculum reform is dependent on faculty development in terms of inclusive pedagogy. The absence of faculty to model inclusive agentic orientations will keep curriculum change superficial, and prospective teachers will still experience the values-practice gap that this study and others consistently document (British Council, 2020; Lindqvist & Nilholm, 2023).

The Value of Multiple Case Studies

A single-case analysis would have produced a distorted or unrepresentative account of ITE provision in Punjab. An analysis of Case C alone would have produced unfoundedly optimistic findings on system capacity. An analysis of Case D on its own would have resulted in an account of institutional failure that overlooked the prospective teachers' significant agentic resources. The multiple case-based design allowed the research to present both within case analysis and cross-case patterns in constructive tension, which is a recognised analytical



strength of Stake's (2006) multiple case study design. Only by analysing the quintain in different institutional locations did it become visible.

Limitations

The sample size and scope are limitations of the study. Four cases are insufficient to encompass the richness of ITE institutions in Punjab, and a sample of 23 prospective teachers, although providing complex data, is certainly not the entire spectrum of experiences of students in each institution. The researchers' positionality as education scholars in Punjab introduces an interpretive lens shaped by professional proximity to the settings studied. Each participant also had a limited time, which restricted the quality of the observational data. Rural institutional cultures, in which girls' sustained participation in research was socially regulated, could have influenced what participants felt comfortable sharing.

Future Research Directions

There are three priorities for future research. First, longitudinal case studies that follow prospective teachers who went through ITE into early career practice would shed light on whether agentic orientations developed during ITE remain intact or are eroded by school cultures (Priestley et al., 2015). Second, more cases from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, and Balochistan would allow a comparison of provincial ITE systems and analysis of whether the situation is nationwide or specific to Punjab. Third, a study exploring faculty agency in its own right would complement this prospective teacher-centred study and reinforce the faculty development priority that these findings consistently indicate (Eteläpelto et al., 2013).

Conclusion

This study explored teacher agency toward inclusive education as emerging in initial teacher education programmes in four institutional cases in Punjab, Pakistan. The quintain warranted multiple case study analyses because its expression is largely defined by institutional conditions. The cross-case pattern was, however, consistent across all four cases: structural neglect and individual resilience. Prospective teachers used personal qualities, especially moral purpose, empathy, and relational attentiveness, to generate agentic orientations that were not intentionally nurtured in their institutions.

The value of the study is that it presents situational evidence that the conditions needed to support teacher agency, namely, enabling institutional settings, reflective practice, practical skills, and collaborative culture, are systematically underprovided in the majority of ITE institutions in Punjab. This does not render individual prospective teachers failures. Rather, it is an institutional design, curriculum policy, and resource allocation failure. The difference between the demands of inclusive education and what ITE currently offers in Punjab is not a marginal issue. It is one of the factors that pose major and ongoing threats to educational equity in the province.

Future research studies should attempt to fill in this disconnection by using longitudinal and interventional designs by integrating inclusive pedagogy into curricula, placing future teachers in truly inclusive schools, and using permanent faculty development where teaching reforms rely on. An understanding of how institutional context shapes the formation of teacher agency is both the necessary starting point in the development of ITE systems that prepare teachers to challenge the conditions of exclusion that the conditions of exclusion that a substantial proportion of children in Punjab continue to face.

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