

## **Teachers' Experiences of Academic Mentoring and Supervision in Public Schools of Quetta**

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### **Abstract**

Academic supervision and mentoring shape how public-school teachers experience their professional lives, yet little is known about how these processes actually unfold in the specific socio-economic, political, and demographic setting of Quetta, Pakistan. Design: This study adopted a qualitative research design, using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) to analyse the data. Population: The population comprised public-school teachers working at the

middle-school level in and around Quetta, Balochistan. Significance: The study addresses a notable gap in the literature on teacher supervision and mentoring in Balochistan and offers context-specific evidence to inform policy and practice in this area. Respondents: Twenty in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty middle-school teachers (twelve female, eight male), drawn from urban, peri-urban, and rural public schools in and around Quetta. Findings: The findings identify six connected themes: (1) the compliance encounter, in which supervision becomes an administrative exercise rather than a pedagogical dialogue; (2) an invisible, informal support network based on peer mentoring where formal induction fails to take place; (3) a system built for the centre, in which distance, gender, and disruption lead to differential access to supervision; (4) categorical invisibility, in which multigrade, inclusive, linguistically diverse, and co-curricular classrooms lie beyond the scope of the supervisory template; (5) material conditions for professional development, such as delayed salary and patronage in staffing; and (6) proof of concept without institutionalization, in which pilots that had demonstrated the efficacy of alternative methods of supervision could not be institutionalized due to a lack of continued government funding. A meta-theme of not being indifferent, just underserved, runs through the six, showing that teachers are not resisting the idea of accountability but only its current, administrative, undifferentiated form. The findings extend developmental and instructional supervision theory to the underexamined context of a provincial South Asian society and offer practical recommendations for policy-making.

**Keywords:** academic supervision, teacher mentoring, professional development, reflexive thematic analysis, public schools, Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan

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## Introduction

Academic supervision and mentoring are caught in a paradox in contemporary education policy. In the first place, research over the decades is abundant, which points to the fact that continued, trusting, and instructionally-focused support is one of the most potent instruments of improvement in the areas of teaching quality, teacher retention, and learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Hussain et al., 2026). However, on the other hand, in many public education systems, especially those functioning in developing countries, the practical experience of teachers in being supervised is mostly limited to administrative audits, infrequent and unconnected visits and relationships which are evaluative rather than developmental in nature (Kalim & Bibi, 2024; Rokhman et al., 2024, as cited in academic supervision literature). The gap between the two situations cannot be explained by the failure to implement the policy properly; it is determined by the structural, cultural, and material circumstances that shape how teachers perceive the experience of being under someone else's supervision.

Pakistan serves as an example that clearly illustrates the described situation. In successive policy documents, the terms of coaching, mentoring and continuous professional development have increasingly become used, while empirical studies show that professional development in the

country usually takes the form of workshops, is not connected to classroom practice and has no mentoring involved (Nawab & Baig, 2024; Nawab & Quraishi, 2024). Furthermore, in the case of Balochistan – the largest in size but one of the poorest provinces in Pakistan – even additional features can be identified: vast distances between schools and district headquarters, lack of personnel who would be trained, strict rules of gender segregation which determine who can supervise whom, flooding, insecurity and poverty – all of that in addition to the previously mentioned features (Balochistan Commission on the Status of Women & UN Women, 2025). The provincial capital of Quetta, in turn, incorporates almost all of the features in its immediate vicinity: densely populated schools near the residence of the Assistant Education Officer, peri-urban schools on the border of city services and rural neglect, and rural or semi-rural schools with poor road access.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Instructional supervision has been institutionalized in the Pakistani public education system through regular visits by Assistant Education Officers (AEOs) and, at times, internal supervision by school head teachers. Nevertheless, an increasing body of literature from the region and internationally indicates that the practice of instructional supervision tends to degenerate into an exercise of checking compliance, verifying registers and inspecting infrastructure, while paying little attention to the act of classroom teaching itself (Kalim & Bibi, 2024; Rokhman et al., 2024). When mentorship is provided in the form of instruction that teachers view as developmental, it is more a matter of personal inclination and informal relationships than anything else (Akram & Malik, 2024; Hussain et al., 2026). Moreover, it appears that teachers in rural, peripheral, girls-only, shift-sharing, multigrade, or other non-conventional school contexts receive comparatively little attention from supervisors, in contrast to teachers in conventional settings (Balochistan Commission on the Status of Women & UN Women, 2025; Shad Foundation, 2025).

However, the literature on the issue is limited, with few studies that address the dynamics from a systemic perspective, taking into account teachers' experiences across a variety of school contexts within the same administrative district. This study aims to fill that gap.

### **Purpose and Objectives of the Study**

This study was undertaken to gain an in-depth, contextual understanding of the phenomenon of mentoring and supervision in the academic lives of public school teachers in Quetta and how these practices are meaningful to them. This study was guided by the following three objectives:

Objective 1: To examine the content, process, and emotional dimensions of the academic supervision experienced by public school teachers of Quetta.

Objective 2: To identify the sources of professional mentorship that public school teachers of Quetta draw upon across their careers.

Objective 3: To examine how geographical, gendered, material, and classroom-level contextual factors shape teachers' access to supervision and mentoring.

### **Significance of the Study**

The current research adds value to the existing body of knowledge in several ways. Firstly, it offers a theme-based empirical investigation of instructional supervision and mentoring in a South Asian province that has not received the same level of attention from the research community as Punjab or Sindh provinces. At the same time, Balochistan Province has its own geographic and socio-cultural specificity (Balochistan Commission on the Status of Women & UN Women, 2025). Secondly, due to the use of the reflexive thematic analysis of a purposively selected diverse sample including urban, peri-urban, and rural schools, different subjects and grade levels, as well as both males and females among the teachers, the study reveals that what may seem to be different issues such as compliance with administration, mentoring, neglect, invisibility, lack of materials, poverty and unsustained piloting, in fact, are interconnected aspects of the same system's logic. Finally, the research findings have practical implications for policymakers interested in transforming the audit-oriented model of teacher supervision in Pakistan and South Asia into a developmental one.

## **Literature Review**

The pertinent literature for this study is divided into four intersecting fields of research: global perspectives on instructional supervision; teacher mentoring and professional development; the importance of trust in the supervisory relationship; and the particular context of teacher work in Pakistan and Balochistan. These areas are discussed in turn before the theoretical framework underlying them is outlined.

### **Global Perspectives on Instructional Supervision**

Instructional supervision has been widely conceptualized as a process of professional development that provides teachers with structured opportunities to reflect on their practice in collaboration with a knowledgeable supervisor (Glickman et al., 2018). Similarly, in their famous redefinition of supervision, Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007) argue for supervision as a tool for fostering a sense of professional community among educators with a common instructional purpose. While there is a robust literature supporting the concept of developmental supervision on a theoretical level, a large body of recent empirical evidence from low- and middle-income countries shows that the actual practice of supervision remains predominantly administrative and compliance-oriented. Systematic reviews of educational supervision practices across several countries show that supervision is often limited to routine administrative work rather than focused on its developmental potential to improve teaching quality (Rokhman et al., 2024, as cited in International Journal of Educational Administration, 2024). The same trend has been observed in studies from Ghana, the Philippines, Tanzania, and Indonesia, indicating that instructional supervision is characterized by

a lack of resources, the generalization of supervisory expertise rather than a focus on specific subjects, and detachment from the realities of classroom observation.

A key finding that repeats itself in the literature is the disjunction between the policy rhetoric of instructional leadership and coaching in supervisory practice and the continuation of the old tradition of administration-focused supervision. This gap between rhetoric and practice is not specific to Pakistan; it has emerged as a structural element of supervision systems that have adopted developmental language without corresponding changes in supervisors' training, workload, and accountability (Kalim & Bibi, 2024). As supervision becomes increasingly instructional, it is explained not by the change of nomenclature but by certain relational and procedural aspects of the practice: prolonged contact during a whole lesson, rather than a walk-through, expertise of the supervisor in the subject observed, and feedback directed at the Teacher's instructional practice rather than at administrative files (Glickman et al., 2018).

### **Teacher Mentoring and Professional Development**

There is another line of research closely linked to the previous one, focusing on teacher mentoring programs. While mentoring is traditionally associated with induction of novice teachers, its relevance across the career span is increasingly recognized (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). A seminal paper by Feiman-Nemser (2001) showed that structured and sustained mentoring during the early career years was associated with improved retention, instructional practice, and professional confidence of teachers, while unstructured or absent induction led to teacher attrition and feelings of isolation. Recent studies extend these findings to career-long in-service mentoring and to the use of digital and hybrid forms of mentoring in resource-constrained contexts where physical meetings between mentors and mentees are impractical (Hussain et al., 2026). Hussain et al.'s (2026) mixed-methods study of language teachers in low-resource contexts identified three mutually reinforcing paths through which mentoring supported teachers' professional development: instructional reconstruction, reflective empowerment, and socio-emotional scaffolding. These findings are consistent with qualitative studies of mentoring relationships between teachers in South Asian contexts.

Specific to Pakistan, the professional development literature shows remarkable coherence in its criticism of current practices. According to Kalim and Bibi (2024), professional development programs in Pakistani public schools tend to follow a standardized approach that disregards teachers' varied needs by subject, grade, and school type. Nawab and Baig (2024) report similar problems with professional development in rural Pakistani schools, which suffer from the lack of proximity, resources, and local follow-up support. Nawab and Quraishi (2024) demonstrated that teachers' perceptions of the value of professional development programs among school leaders independently predicted the actual availability of such programs, independent of formal policies. Akram and Malik (2024) extended the critique of professional development to higher education institutions, finding that institutional constraints, including workload, a lack of protected time, and a lack of a mentoring culture, significantly reduce the coverage of mentoring programs, even when

they exist formally. It can be concluded that the main obstacle for Teacher mentoring in Pakistan lies not so much in the policy language, which has increasingly embraced the vocabulary of international instructional coaching and mentoring, but rather in the absence of institutional structures that would make it feasible.

### **Trust, Evaluation, and the Supervisory Relationship**

A distinct but closely related strand of literature examines the relational quality of supervisory and coaching encounters, specifically the distinction between evaluative and developmental framings of the same basic activity: classroom observation. Instructional coaching research consistently identifies relational trust, built through partnership, reliability, and confidentiality, as a precondition for teachers to disclose genuine difficulty and receive useful help, and finds that coaching relationships are markedly more effective when structurally separated from evaluative or administrative decision-making authority. Evidence from United States school-leadership contexts similarly shows that when the same individual holds both evaluative and coaching authority over a teacher, relational trust and the likelihood of open disclosure both decline, since teachers reasonably anticipate that admissions of difficulty could affect consequential employment judgments. This trust-evaluation tension is theorized as a structural feature of supervisory relationships rather than a failure of individual supervisors' interpersonal skill, meaning that redesigning the formal separation between evaluative and developmental functions, rather than simply training supervisors to be warmer, is identified as the more durable intervention. This body of work provides a direct theoretical lens for interpreting Pakistani teachers' frequently reported tendency to present a polished, guarded version of their teaching during formal AEO visits while reserving genuine disclosure of difficulty for informal, trust-based relationships with peers or, where available, externally funded coaches.

### **Contextual Barriers in Pakistan and Balochistan**

Balochistan's specific socio-cultural and geographic context substantially shapes how supervision and mentoring can be delivered. The province's female literacy rate remains markedly lower than the national average, and gender-segregation norms mean that male supervisory officers are frequently not expected, or not permitted, to visit girls' schools without a female colleague present, concentrating supervisory capacity for the province's roughly 4,355 girls' schools within a comparatively small pool of female Assistant Education Officers (Balochistan Commission on the Status of Women & UN Women, 2025). Recent qualitative work on girls' education in rural Balochistan documents how chronic shortages of female teachers, compounded by honour-code-related mobility restrictions, interact with tribal and patriarchal norms to constrain both girls' enrollment and the professional mobility of the female teachers who do enter the system, producing a self-reinforcing scarcity of exactly the personnel needed to supervise and mentor within gender-segregated schooling structures. Geographic distance compounds this gendered constraint: with a substantial share of the poorest rural girls in Balochistan never having entered a classroom at all, and with road quality and travel time repeatedly identified as material barriers to supervisory visits,

contact and support attenuate sharply as distance from the provincial center increases (Shad Foundation, 2025).

A further, less frequently examined contextual factor is the material precarity many Pakistani public-school teachers experience, including delayed salary disbursements, dependence on private tuition income, and, in some accounts, perceptions that postings and transfers are influenced by personal connections rather than transparent, merit-based criteria (Rafiq & Ashraf, 2024). Research on school leadership and teacher motivation in Pakistani public secondary schools similarly identifies delayed salaries, favouritism, and limited autonomy as systemic challenges that directly affect teacher motivation, alongside a need for policy reforms to address fair evaluation and decentralized decision-making. This literature suggests that professional development and supervision cannot be meaningfully analyzed in isolation from the material and procedural conditions of teachers' broader working lives, a claim directly echoed in the present study's findings.

### **Research Gap**

Read together, this literature converges on several claims: that instructional supervision across many low- and middle-income contexts, including Pakistan, tends toward administrative compliance rather than pedagogical development; that meaningful mentoring, where it exists, is disproportionately informal, individually dependent, or externally funded and time-limited rather than institutionalized; that relational trust is a structural precondition for developmental disclosure and is undermined when evaluative and developmental functions are fused; and that geographic, gendered, and material conditions distribute whatever supervisory and mentoring capacity exists unevenly, systematically disadvantaging rural, peripheral, and female-serving school contexts. What remains comparatively underexamined is how these dynamics operate together, as an interlocking system, within a single provincial context, and how teachers themselves narrate the relationship between the administrative content of supervision, its emotional register, its uneven geographic and gendered reach, its blindness to non-standard classroom contexts, and the material conditions that underpin or undermine their capacity to engage with professional development at all. The present study addresses this gap through a reflexive thematic analysis of interviews with 20 public school teachers in and around Quetta.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Three related theories of supervision and teaching are employed in the present study to provide an interpretive frame for teachers' comments and accounts: developmental supervision theory, situated learning and communities of practice, and relational trust theory. Because academic monitoring and supervision are formally the responsibility of head teachers and Assistant Education Officers rather than of teachers themselves, these theories are applied not to assess head teachers directly but as an interpretive lens for evaluating, through teachers' own accounts, how

far the supervisory conduct of heads and AEOs departs from developmental principles — identifying, in effect, the strengths, shortfalls, and flaws of current supervisory practice as experienced by those being supervised.

First and foremost, Glickman et al.'s (2018) theory of developmental supervision serves as the organizing framework for the study as a whole, insofar as it offers both a theory of supervision and an account of where current practice in the studied system falls short of its ideal form. Specifically, this theory defines supervision of classroom teaching and the provision of feedback not as a tool for validating teachers' adherence to administrative standards but as a highly individualized process tailored to teachers' stage of professional development, and in which the supervisor adopts a varying range of directive, collaborative, and non-directive approaches in light of teachers' varying levels of expertise and confidence. Developmental supervision theory thus enables the analysis to identify and interpret the recurring theme in the participants' accounts of the analytic distance between the administrative content of their supervision meetings and the differentiated, pedagogically oriented approach described in this framework.

Secondly, communities of practice theory, as elaborated by Wenger (1998), and Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the zone of proximal development together enable the analysis to identify and interpret the informal, peer-based mentorship relationships that recur in participants' descriptions. In the absence of formal induction into teaching, participants describe learning to teach through observing and conversing with more experienced colleagues, in ways that closely align with the account offered by the theory of situated learning. Through these lenses, the analysis recognizes the informal mentoring economy identified in Theme 2 not as a simple gap-filling improvisation but as a theoretically established means of professional development that happens to occur entirely outside the formal structure of the school system.

Thirdly, the theory of relational trust provides the interpretive framework for participants' frequent distinction between evaluations and developmental work. As developed in the instructional coaching and school-leadership literature, this theory postulates that teachers' readiness to disclose their instructional difficulties is determined by their sense of safety — i.e., their certainty that this disclosure will not be used to inform subsequent decisions about their employment, contracts, and professional standing. Where supervisory and evaluative authority are united in a single visit and a single individual, as is typically the case in the described school system, relational trust theory accurately predicts the recurrent guardedness and performance of competence and provides a theoretical explanation for the markedly different reception of the single clearly effective developmental intervention that some participants have experienced (an externally-funded instructional coaching pilot with no evaluative authority).

The combined use of these three frameworks makes possible the transition from a purely descriptive account of participants' experiences to an interpretive one, which helps to understand not only the nature of current supervision practices but also the persistence of informal mentoring and, finally, the specific structural distinction between evaluation and development that has been



recurrently identified across several independent participant accounts as the key factor facilitating professional disclosure and development.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative, exploratory design using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) as articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019, 2021) and refined in their subsequent methodological writing (Braun & Clarke, 2023, 2024). Reflexive thematic analysis was selected over alternative qualitative approaches, such as grounded theory or interpretative phenomenological analysis, because the study's aim was not to generate a formal substantive theory or to produce an idiographic account of individual meaning-making, but rather to identify patterned, shared meanings across a purposively diverse sample of participants while explicitly foregrounding the researcher's active, interpretive role in constructing those patterns. Consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2019, 2021) framing, themes in this study are understood not as pre-existing entities waiting to be discovered in the data, but as analytic outputs actively constructed through sustained, reflexive engagement between the researcher and the dataset.

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) six-phase process: (1) familiarization with the dataset through repeated reading of all twenty transcripts; (2) systematic generation of initial codes at the level of the meaning unit across the full corpus; (3) collation of codes into candidate themes; (4) review of candidate themes against both the coded extracts and the full dataset; (5) refinement, naming, and definition of themes; and (6) production of the final analytic narrative. This structure is reflected in the study's audit trail, which comprises a full initial-coding document, a focused-coding document presenting seven candidate themes with a coverage matrix, and a final theme-development document in which two candidate themes were merged and the full thematic structure was finalized against explicit boundary-setting criteria, consistent with recently published guidance on transparent reporting of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2024).

### **Research Context and Setting**

The research was conducted in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan province, Pakistan. It is noteworthy that the sampling frame of this research has been intentionally designed to include all possible contexts of schools existing within a certain administrative area: urban schools in the developed part of the city, peri-urban schools on the outskirts of the city which are being developed rapidly, and rural or semi-rural schools situated in distant towns which can be reached through a poor road network. In other words, such diversity of contexts was required for this research because the study focused on the impact of geographic and structural context on access to supervision, which would not be achieved if the sample of participants were restricted to urban schools that are easily accessible.

## Participants

In total, 20 middle-school teachers from public schools took part in the study, selected purposively to provide maximum diversity in gender, subject matter, years of experience, school location, and school type. All participants were classroom teachers working at the middle-school level; several also taught in multigrade or inclusive classrooms; participants taught core academic subjects (Mathematics, General Science, English, Urdu, Social Studies) and a co-curricular subject (Physical Education); teachers were hired on both permanent and contract terms of employment. Teaching experience ranged from 2 to 24 years. The sample included 12 female and 8 male teachers to cover the gendered aspects of access to supervision described in the literature for the whole of Balochistan. Table 1 shows the full profile of participants. In terms of school setting, fifteen participants were based in urban schools, three in peri-urban schools, and two in rural schools; three schools (T-04, T-06, T-15) were explicitly recorded as girls' schools, while the gender-segregation status of the remaining seventeen schools was not separately classified in the original interview records. Respondents were drawn from teachers rather than heads alone because the study's object of inquiry is the supervisory relationship as experienced by the party being supervised: academic monitoring and supervision are formally administered by head teachers and Assistant Education Officers, but it is teachers, as the recipients of that supervision, who are best positioned to describe its content, conduct, and effect on their own practice. This design mirrors an established convention in the international supervision literature, in which teachers are asked to report on their trust in, and perceptions of, administrators' supervisory capacity rather than administrators being asked to evaluate themselves (Kalim & Bibi, 2024). Participant T-06, a senior teacher who also carries additional administrative charge at her school, was included to provide a complementary perspective from within the same middle-school teaching cadre.

*Table 1: Participant Profiles (N = 20)*

| ID   | Name                 | Gender | Level / Subject                                  | School Location                      | Years        |
|------|----------------------|--------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| T-01 | Master Abdul Ghafoor | Male   | Middle — General Science (Physics & Chemistry)   | Liaquat Bazaar (Urban)               | 24           |
| T-02 | Ms. Sidra Baig       | Female | Middle — General                                 | Jinnah Town (Urban)                  | 2            |
| T-03 | Mr. Imran Marri      | Male   | Middle — Science & Mathematics                   | Kuchlak (Rural periphery)            | 11           |
| T-04 | Ms. Bakhtawar Kakar  | Female | Middle — English                                 | Sariab Road, Girls' School (Urban)   | 13           |
| T-05 | Mr. Naeemullah Zehri | Male   | Middle — General Science (Biology)               | Zarghoon Road (Urban)                | 17           |
| T-06 | Rukhsana Panezai     | Female | Middle — General Science (Administrative Charge) | Samungli Road, Girls' School (Urban) | 19           |
| T-07 | Zeeshan Baloch       | Male   | Middle — Mathematics & General Science           | Sabzal Road (Urban)                  | 4 (contract) |

| ID   | Name                    | Gender | Level / Subject                             | School Location                             | Years |
|------|-------------------------|--------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------|
| T-08 | Amna Rind               | Female | Middle — General                            | Outer Sariab Area (Urban periphery)         | 9     |
| T-09 | Rasheed Domki           | Male   | Middle — Multigrade (Combined Classes)      | Spezand (Rural periphery)                   | 8     |
| T-10 | Shaista Raisani         | Female | Middle — Mathematics                        | Spiny Road (Urban)                          | 15    |
| T-11 | Ms. Uzma Jatoi          | Female | Middle — General (Inclusive Classroom)      | Wahdat Colony (Urban)                       | 8     |
| T-12 | Mr. Rahimullah Kakar    | Male   | Middle — General (Linguistically Diverse)   | Pashtunabad (Urban)                         | 10    |
| T-13 | Ms. Farzana Achakzai    | Female | Middle — Urdu & Social Studies              | Airport Road (Urban)                        | 10    |
| T-14 | Mr Bashir Ahmed Raisani | Male   | Middle — General                            | Mastung Road (Peri-urban, flood-vulnerable) | 7     |
| T-15 | Ms. Nighat Sarparah     | Female | Middle — Physical Education & Co-Curricular | Zarghoon Road, Girls' School (Urban)        | 12    |
| T-16 | Mr. Fareed Nasir        | Male   | Middle — General Science (Shared Building)  | Jinnah Road (Urban)                         | 9     |
| T-17 | Ms. Sonia Nasrullah     | Female | Middle — General Science (Chemistry)        | Spiny Road (Urban)                          | 13    |
| T-18 | Mr. Adnan Sarparah      | Male   | Middle — Social Studies & Islamiyat         | Jinnah Town (Urban)                         | 11    |
| T-19 | Ms. Nasreen Domki       | Female | Middle — General                            | Killi Shaikh Hussain (Peri-urban)           | 6     |
| T-20 | Mr. Naveed Achakzai     | Male   | Middle — Mathematics                        | Alamdard Road (Urban)                       | 10    |

***Note.** School locality names are used only at the neighbourhood level; individual school names are withheld to protect participant confidentiality. Data drawn from the study's initial-coding transcript records (Interviews T-01–T-20).*

### Data Collection

Data collection involved the completion of 20 in-depth semi-structured interviews, conducted in a combination of Urdu and English at the participants' choice, with transcripts and translations into English provided where required. Interview questions were designed to elicit information about participants' long career experience of being observed, appraised, and mentored; the nature of supervisory visits including its content and conduct, sources of professional help regardless of its formality and informality, and participants' perspectives regarding mentoring and supervision taking into account their specific teaching situation. Questions were formulated in an open-ended manner, and further probes were developed based on participants' initial answers to ensure that any unexpected yet analytically relevant information, such as the influence of delayed salary

payments and floods on the supervisory relationship, could be elicited organically. Interviews ranged from approximately 40 to 70 minutes and were conducted at the participants' convenience at their schools.

## **Data Analysis**

Following data familiarization, initial coding was conducted inductively at the level of the meaning unit (typically a sentence or short passage) across all twenty transcripts, generating a master list of initial codes with working definitions and cross-references to the interviews in which each code appeared. Consistent with reflexive thematic analysis's acknowledgement of the analyst's active interpretive role, coding combined primarily semantic (descriptive) coding with a degree of latent (interpretive) coding where an extract clearly signalled an underlying pattern, such as the trust-versus-evaluation logic that later became central to Theme 1.

In the second, focused-coding phase, initial codes were clustered into seven candidate themes, each defined, illustrated with extracts from multiple independent interviews, and explicitly bounded against neighboring candidate themes. A coverage matrix cross-referencing each interview to its contributing candidate theme(s) was constructed at this stage to verify that every theme drew on more than a single participant's account and that every interview's data had been meaningfully incorporated into the emerging structure.

In the third phase, corresponding to Braun and Clarke's (2021) Phases 4 and 5, the seven candidate themes were reviewed against the full dataset. Two candidate themes, respectively, concerning the administrative content of supervision and its relationally experienced evaluative register, were merged into a single theme (Theme 1 in the final structure) after review indicated they described two faces of one integrated phenomenon rather than two independent patterns. A candidate theme concerning uneven geographic and gendered reach was retained as a single theme with three internal sub-themes, rather than split into separate geographic and gendered themes, because review indicated that distance, gender, and structural or event-driven disruption shared a common underlying mechanism, a system whose default design assumes a standard, easily reached, single-shift, undisrupted school. A cross-cutting narrative thread present across nearly every interview's closing responses, that participants are not indifferent to being observed or mentored but are underserved by its current form, was promoted to an overarching theme rather than treated as a seventh theme running parallel to the others, since it functioned analytically as the interpretive thread tying the remaining six themes together. This produced the study's final structure: six substantive themes organized beneath one overarching theme, each defined by a single organizing concept, developed through two to four subthemes, and grounded in data from multiple independent participants.

## **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was addressed using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, adapted to the constructionist orientation of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021, 2024). Credibility was supported through

purposive maximum-variation sampling across school type, subject, gender, and experience level; through prolonged engagement with the full dataset across multiple analytic passes; and through the explicit search, at the review stage, for disconfirming cases, participants who experienced supervision as genuinely developmental as the norm rather than the exception, a search that itself became a reportable analytic finding given the near-total absence of such cases in the dataset. Dependability and confirmability were supported through the maintenance of a complete audit trail comprising the initial-coding, focused-coding, and theme-development documents described above, allowing the analytic path from raw data extract to final theme to be traced and interrogated at every stage. Transferability is supported through the thick, contextually detailed description of participants and settings provided in Table 1 and throughout the findings, allowing readers to judge the applicability of the findings to other, comparable provincial or resource-constrained contexts. Consistent with reflexive thematic analysis's explicit rejection of a search for a single, coder-independent 'true' meaning in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019), inter-rater reliability coefficients were not calculated; instead, reflexivity was maintained through sustained, documented engagement with how the analyst's own assumptions about supervision and mentoring shaped the coding and theme-development process.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All participants provided informed consent prior to participation, were assured of confidentiality, and were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Interview data were anonymized prior to analysis, with school names generalized to the neighbourhood level, and any details that could uniquely identify a participant, such as an unusual combination of subject, location, and tenure, were reviewed for potential disclosure risk before inclusion in the findings. Given the sensitivity of some participants' accounts, including references to salary delays, perceived patronage, and, in one case, security-related travel restrictions, particular care was taken in presenting the findings to avoid any identifying details beyond those participants themselves provided for the record.

### **Findings**

Six interconnected themes were derived from the dataset, organized beneath an overarching theme that captures their shared interpretive significance. Table 2 summarises the final thematic structure; Figure 1 visually depicts the relationships among themes. Each theme is developed below with its constituent sub-themes and grounded in participants' own words, drawn from across the twenty interviews.

***Table 2: Summary of the Thematic Structure***

| <b>Theme</b>   | <b>Organizing Label</b>  | <b>Sub-themes</b>                                                                           | <b>Interviews</b> |
|----------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Theme 1</b> | The Compliance Encounter | Administrative content;<br>evaluation forecloses trust;<br>insecurity intensifies<br>burden | 11                |

| Theme              | Organizing Label                               | Sub-themes                                                                                  | Interviews    |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>Theme 2</b>     | The Informal, Invisible Backbone               | No formal entry point; mentoring by disposition; uncompensated and fragile                  | 11            |
| <b>Theme 3</b>     | A System Built for the Center                  | Geographic periphery; gendered periphery; structural/event-driven periphery                 | 9             |
| <b>Theme 4</b>     | Categorical Invisibility                       | Multigrade teaching; unaudited learning needs; linguistic diversity; co-curricular subjects | 4             |
| <b>Theme 5</b>     | Material Preconditions for Professional Growth | Economic precarity; perceived procedural unfairness                                         | 3             |
| <b>Theme 6</b>     | Proof of Concept Without Institutionalization  | The pilot as counterfactual; urban-only reach; reforms without follow-through               | 3             |
| <b>Overarching</b> | Not Indifferent, Just Underserved              | Interpretive thread linking all six themes                                                  | 20 (implicit) |

*Note.* Interview counts indicate the number of distinct interviews from which the theme was directly constructed; several interviews contribute to more than one theme.

| <b>Overarching Theme: Not Indifferent, Just Underserved</b> |                                          |                                                 |                                                 |                                               |                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Theme 1<br/>Compliance<br/>Encounter</b>                 | <b>Theme 2<br/>Informal<br/>Backbone</b> | <b>Theme 3<br/>Built for<br/>the<br/>Center</b> | <b>Theme 4<br/>Categorical<br/>Invisibility</b> | <b>Theme 5<br/>Material<br/>Preconditions</b> | <b>Theme 6<br/>Proof Without<br/>Institutionalization</b> |

*Figure 1: Conceptual Map of the Thematic Structure*

*Note.* Theme 1 sits at the analytical Centre of the dataset; Themes 2–6 each describe how teachers and schools respond to, compensate for, or are differentially exposed to the pattern described by Theme 1. The overarching theme threads through all six, reframing them collectively as evidence of an underserved rather than a resistant teaching workforce.

### **Theme 1: The Compliance Encounter — What Supervision Does, and How It Feels**

The supervisory visit is organized, almost everywhere in this dataset, as an administrative audit rather than a pedagogical encounter, and this administrative content is inseparable from an unmistakable emotional register of surveillance rather than support. This register intensifies sharply for teachers whose employment or personal circumstances already carry independent risk.

### ***Administrative Content Over Pedagogical Substance***

It has been common across all interviews that whatever the subject and level involved and wherever the school is located, the supervision visit always includes the routine of verification of registers, percentages of attendance and enrolments, checking of the syllabus-progress chart, assessing the physical condition of the school building, and a small proportion of time for teaching, which is observed in case at all. As Master Abdul Ghafoor, with 24 years of experience, put it, "What he wrote in the visit book was about attendance percentage and the state of the boundary wall" (T-01). Similarly, Rukhsana Panezai, a senior teacher who also carries additional administrative charge at her school, gives the same pattern of supervision visit from the other side: "The AEO's visit is, in practice, an audit of my administration, rather than an evaluation of teaching in individual classes" (T-06).

Shaista Raisani and Imran Marri both point out that the officials who conduct such visits are administrators without expertise in any particular subject. So even if some time is spent in the classroom, the feedback remains disconnected from the subject-specific requirements of mathematics or science teaching (T-10, T-03). In the same vein, Naeemullah Zehri's experience shows that, even though over the course of seventeen years the language of official circulars has changed significantly towards terms such as mentoring, coaching, and continuous professional development, the supervision of teaching "has not changed meaningfully" (T-05). A similar contradiction between the language of policy and its actual practice was evident in Adnan Sarparah's description of a curriculum transition: "supervision meant to check whether I had switched to using the new books."

### ***Evaluation Forecloses Honesty, Trust Enables It***

The content of the visit is inseparable from how it is relationally experienced. Naeemullah Zehri is unusually well placed to compare the two directly, having experienced both the standard AEO visit and a funded coaching pilot within the same career: "With the standard visits, I am aware of being checked, evaluated... With the mentor, I felt I could actually admit difficulty" (T-05). The same distinction structures Zeeshan Baloch's account of teaching on a renewable contract: "I present the most polished version of my teaching I can manage during those visits, rather than an honest picture of where I actually need support" (T-07).

Notably, the one clear exception to this pattern in the dataset, an older Inspector who, according to Master Abdul Ghafoor, "spent almost half an hour in my classroom, and afterwards sat with me privately" (T-01), did not occur outside the government system but within it. This suggests the evaluation/trust split is not an inherent property of formal supervision as such, but a product of how the great majority of visits are currently conducted; the capacity for a different kind of encounter already exists within the same institutional structure, even if it is rarely realized.

### ***Insecurity Intensifies the Evaluative Burden***

For two different sets of employees, the weight of supervisory evaluation overlaps with an additional factor that makes them vulnerable. For instance, for Zeeshan Baloch, an ordinary visit

becomes inextricably entwined with the issue of his contract extension: "I really have a feeling that anything bad written about me on the visit card... can influence the renewal of my contract" (T-07), a stake which their regular colleagues do not have. For Farzana Achakzai, the evaluative weight of a routine visit collided directly with an unrelated crisis: her school received a supervision visit during a four-month salary delay, and staff "felt it was difficult to engage with the usual pleasantries and cooperative tone expected during such a visit" while personally under financial strain (T-13). In both cases the visit itself did not change in form, remaining the same administrative checklist described above, but its emotional cost to the Teacher rose sharply because of a second, entirely unacknowledged burden layered underneath it.

Theme 1 sits at the analytic Centre of the dataset: it is the direct, immediate object of description in almost every transcript, and each of the remaining five themes can be read, in part, as an account of how teachers and schools respond to, compensate for, or are differently exposed to the pattern described here. (Interviews contributing: T-01, T-03, T-05, T-06, T-07, T-09, T-10, T-13, T-15, T-16, T-18.)

## **Theme 2: The Informal, Invisible Backbone**

In the vacuum left by absent formal induction and ongoing mentoring, an entirely unofficial economy of care- a senior teacher noticing a struggling junior colleague, a peer messaging group, a chance encounter in a market- does the actual work of developing teachers, invisibly and at zero institutional cost.

### ***No Formal Entry Point***

New teachers across the dataset describe an almost identical first day: no orientation, no assigned mentor, no structured introduction to classroom practice. Sidra Baig recalls: "I was simply given the key to my classroom, a register, and a class of thirty-eight children" (T-02). Imran Marri's first rural posting involved "working alongside one older colleague who was kind but was not, himself, trained... to mentor" (T-03), and Uzma Jatoi, eight years into her career, still reports "no formal training at all" in how to teach the diverse classroom she was assigned to (T-11).

### ***Mentoring by Disposition, Not by Design***

Whenever mentoring occurs, it consistently returns to the disposition of a single individual rather than to any institutional design. "Master Fazal was the closest thing to a true mentor that I have had," Abdul Ghafoor says, motivated, as he puts it, only because "he cared that I become a good teacher" (T-01). Sidra Baig was turned around when "a senior teacher... noted that I looked lost... began checking on me during break time most days... of her own initiative" (T-02). Bakhtawar Kakar describes the same process among the women teachers at her all-girls school, while Rasheed Domki, stranded in a rural multigrade position, works through the assistance of a distant colleague in another school "by phone" (T-04, T-09). At each step of the way, what made the mentor active was solely their choice to notice and assist, rather than any part of the system's design to schedule, require, or even recognize such work.



### ***Uncompensated, Unrecognized, and Structurally Fragile***

The very fact that this skeleton exists outside of the formal structure also makes it vulnerable to the other decisions of the structure, primarily the transfer of teachers. Abdul Ghafoor, in turn, is now mentoring junior teachers himself in the way Master Fazal did with him, saying simply that "nothing in my job description asks me to do so... It is not recognized, not compensated" (T-01). The fragility of the process is illustrated perfectly by Rukhsana Panezai, drawing on her own experience mentoring a junior colleague: "just as I begin to build a rapport with a teacher... they may be transferred to another school" (T-06), without either side having any plan in place to continue or transfer the relationship.

A clear generational fault line runs through this theme. Sidra Baig describes "resignation... among the more senior teachers" alongside "more frustration" among newer colleagues, "because we came out of our training hearing quite a lot about mentoring" (T-02), a signal that expectations are rising even as the underlying system remains unchanged. This theme is also the informal, person-level counterpart to Theme 6 below: in both cases, something that works is never built into the system's structure and so cannot outlast the individual or the funding cycle that produced it. (Interviews contributing: T-01, T-02, T-03, T-04, T-06, T-08, T-09, T-11, T-12, T-15, T-17.)

### **Theme 3: A System Built for the Centre**

Whatever supervisory and mentoring capacity the system has defaults to the standard urban single-shift undisrupted school. Every departure from that default- distance, gender, disaster, a shared building- multiplies neglect rather than triggering any compensatory response.

#### ***Geographic Periphery***

Distance is a critical factor in defining many aspects of Imran Marri's work in Kuchlak; it was "mostly distance and the state of the road" that limited visits to two or three in two years (T-03), and this distance was later decisive in defining who would be able to profit from innovation, as a mentoring pilot project "never reached schools out here in the periphery" (T-03). The account of Rasheed Domki reveals another instance of how the lack of geographic attention interacts with a lack of appropriate staffing; the rural school run by Rasheed Domki is understaffed, and the vacant position "has never been filled" (T-09).

#### ***Gendered Periphery***

Another parallel pattern of neglect is based on gender issues. Bakhtawar Kakar notes that "a male AEO is not expected to visit a girls' school unsupervised," and the consequent shortage of officers who can visit the girls' schools results in "bottlenecking" of such visits (T-04); Rukhsana Panezai confirms this bottleneck independently from her girls' school (T-06). Sidra Baig associates this officer shortage with the gender-related rule that "female teachers should not need or ask for too much" (T-02), and the account of Amna Rind demonstrates that the shortage affects not just the supervision but also access to training facilities, depending both on arranged family transportation

and even on "heightened tensions in parts of the city." This pattern is consistent with province-level evidence documenting a chronic shortage of female education officers and teachers relative to demand, and gender-segregation norms that concentrate whatever supervisory capacity exists within a comparatively small pool of women able to travel and to supervise unaccompanied (Balochistan Commission on the Status of Women & UN Women, 2025).

### ***Structural and Event-Driven Periphery***

A third, less visible form of the same pattern arises from a school's physical or temporal structure rather than its location or the gender of its staff. Fareed Nasir's shared-building shift system leaves "very little opportunity for the kind of informal after-class conversation" that mentoring depends on, because the building "must be vacated so promptly" for the next shift (T-16). Bashir Ahmed Raisani's account of flood damage shows the same centre-default logic at work in response to a genuine crisis: supervision "returned immediately to the standard format" once it resumed, "without much acknowledgement" of what the school had just been through (T-14).

These three forms of periphery are not always independent of one another. Amna Rind's account sits at the intersection of two of them at once, peripheral in location and constrained by gendered mobility norms, and shows the two compounding rather than simply adding: family transport dependency, security-related travel restrictions, and the concentration of nearly all training in the city centre together produce a level of exclusion greater than either factor would predict alone (T-08). (Interviews contributing: T-02, T-03, T-04, T-06, T-08, T-09, T-14, T-16, T-19.)

## **Theme 4: Categorical Invisibility — Classrooms the Framework Cannot See**

The standard supervisory template assumes a single mental model of a classroom, one grade, one language, standard-abled students, core subjects, and instructional realities outside that model do not register as data at all, regardless of how well or poorly resourced the school otherwise is.

### ***Multigrade Teaching***

Rasheed Domki's registers and syllabus-progress charts are "organized by individual grade, as if I had a separate class for each" (T-09), even though he alone teaches several combined grade levels simultaneously. When an AEO once noticed the arrangement and remarked that "it was not ideal," nothing followed from the observation: no adjusted template, no staffing response, no guidance (T-09). Domki is, in his own words, "judged against a template built for a teacher with one grade" (T-09).

### ***Unassessed and Unsupported Learning Needs***

Uzma Jatoti teaches at least one child she believes has an unassessed learning disability, alongside others with informally noticed needs, in an entirely mainstream classroom (T-11). Her account of a recent visit is telling: the officer's only comment "was about whether the whole class had reached

the expected point in the textbook... no curiosity at all about the adaptation" she had visibly built into her lesson (T-11).

### ***Linguistic Diversity and Student Mobility***

Rahimullah Kakar teaches a linguistically diverse classroom that includes children from displaced and migrant families, and describes how the resulting fluctuation in his attendance figures "could look like poor administration... when it actually reflects the underlying mobility of part of our student population" (T-12), a fluctuation the standard supervisory reading has no way to distinguish from genuine administrative failure.

### ***Co-Curricular and Non-Core Subjects***

Nighat Sarparah's account is the starkest illustration of this theme: "In twelve years, I can say with confidence that no supervisor has ever observed one of my Physical Education classes, not even briefly" (T-15). Her own conclusion, that this "complete disinterest... sends an implicit message that it is considered far less important" (T-15), names directly what the other three sub-themes only imply.

In every case the underlying mechanism is identical: the instruments used during supervision assume one standard classroom, and whatever falls outside that assumption is either rendered invisible, as with Sarparah's Physical Education classes, or actively misread as a teaching or administrative failure, as with Domki's multigrade organization being judged "not ideal" or Kakar's fluctuating attendance risking a false reading of poor administration, rather than being recognized as a distinct and legitimate teaching context in its own right. (Interviews contributing: T-09, T-11, T-12, T-15.)

## **Theme 5: Material Preconditions for Professional Growth**

Participants insist that mentoring cannot be meaningfully discussed in isolation from the basic material and procedural fairness of their working lives: unpaid salaries, dependence on private tuition, and perceived patronage in postings all directly compete with, or undermine trust in, professional development.

### ***Economic Precarity***

Achakzai's school suffered from unpaid salaries for almost four months, making it necessary for many other teachers to "borrow money from relatives or informal debt" (T-13); her conclusion follows: "if the most fundamental aspect of a teacher's employment... cannot be guaranteed, then no matter how excellent a mentoring programme may be designed, it will lack a stable foundation" (T-13). Naveed Achakzai describes another variation on this issue: an insufficient government salary, which makes private tutoring lessons "more necessity than luxury," competing with the same after-school hours that the training and mentoring programs are supposed to use (T-20). His concluding remark summarizes the essence of this theme: "the professional growth potential of a teacher and his/her mentoring do not occur independently from other aspects of a teacher's life

situation" (T-20). This pattern has a parallel in evidence collected from other Pakistani public secondary institutions: delays in salary payments, favouritism, and a lack of autonomy among teachers have been reported as systematic impediments to motivation, regardless of the professional development program used.

### ***Perceived Procedural Unfairness***

Another aspect of the same principle, extended from pay to postings and transfers, is described by Nasreen Domki – the common belief that these processes "are not always based on purely objective, seniority-based or merit-based criteria; personal relations could influence them" (T-19). This is proven by her own experience with a delay in a transfer request, which "took a considerably long time to be processed, well over a year" (T-19). Domki's concluding remark makes this connection explicit: "if the system of postings and opportunities is perceived to be influenced by connections rather than merit, then this can undermine the credibility of supervision and mentoring efforts in quite a subtle way" (T-19), mentioning the same trust mechanism that is present in Theme 1, but deriving it from a different place, namely from the administrative system. This theme lies one step away from the classroom compared with the others; it does not address the quality or nature of supervision, but rather whether the environment enables teachers to become engaged in the mentoring process. (Interviews: T-13, T-19, T-20.)

## **Theme 6: Proof of Concept Without Institutionalization**

The dataset contains direct evidence that there is a better model of supervision that is possible, not just hypothetical, but something that some of the participants have actually experienced, and which consistently depends on external funding and ad hoc scheduling, and disappears when this funding ends.

### ***The Pilot as Counter-Factual***

Naeemullah Zehri provides the clearest evidence in the dataset that the alternative model is not just theoretically conceivable, but that it had already been implemented and successfully tested: "a trained mentor visited my class once a month, always observed my entire lesson from beginning to end, and then stayed for another forty five minutes" (T-05), providing exactly the kind of trust-based, development-oriented relationship that was missing from Theme 1. Furthermore, this program had been terminated not for any lack of effectiveness, but merely due to "the conclusion of the NGO funding cycle... and no attempt has been made to fund it using district funds" (T-05).

### ***Urban-Only Reach***

Even where such pilots have taken place, the centre/default logic of Theme 3 ensures that they would benefit only urban schools: Imran Marri notes that a similar mentoring program "was conducted only in certain city schools and never reached schools out here in the periphery" (T-03).

### ***Reforms Announced Without Follow-Through***

A related but distinct pattern appears in Adnan Sarparah's account of a curriculum transition, where an initial, brief workshop was never followed by ongoing support: "there has been no systematic follow-up to check how the transition actually went in individual classrooms... the reform was, in a sense, announced and then left to implement itself" (T-18). Here it is not a mentoring pilot but a policy reform itself that shows the same institutional pattern, a promising start with no structure built to sustain or follow through on it.

The same underlying pattern recurs at two different scales elsewhere in this dataset: at the level of an individual relationship (Theme 2) and at the level of a funded institutional programme (this theme); something that visibly worked was never built into the permanent structure of the system, and so its benefit could not outlast the individual, or the funding cycle, that produced it. Naeemullah Zehri names this directly: "we already know what it looks like. What we need is for it to become the norm rather than a temporary exception" (T-05). (Interviews contributing: T-03, T-05, T-18.)

### **Overarching Theme: Not Indifferent, Just Underserved**

Read together, the six themes developed above do not describe teachers who are resistant to being observed, mentored, or held accountable. Where participants are asked directly, across markedly different contexts, they consistently reject that framing. Master Abdul Ghafoor, having reflected on his experience of twenty-four years of observations, which have been mainly of an administrative nature, says, "It is not the case that the teachers here do not value being observed and mentored... It is not the lack of desire to change... It is the feeling that the observation and mentoring process has nothing to do with the real work that we do" (T-01). Sidra Baig, who has just started her teaching career after two years, puts forward her demand in almost similar words: "I am not demanding for less accountability... I am demanding it to be relevant" (T-02). Similarly, Rasheed Domki, who has to teach several combined grade levels alone in a rural, understaffed school, wants nothing more than that. He says, "I am only demanding for the system to recognize... the reality that we teachers are already dealing with." (T-09).

Sonia Nasrullah, teaching Chemistry without a functioning laboratory, frames the stakes in terms of what students lose rather than what she is owed: "Chemistry taught without genuine practical experience is, in an important sense, an incomplete version of the subject" (T-17).

This overarching pattern is the single most important interpretive finding of the analysis, because it reframes what the six themes, taken together, actually reveal. The dataset does not document a teaching workforce that needs to be persuaded of the value of supervision or mentoring, nor one that is disengaged from its own development. It documents a system whose current design, administratively focused (Theme 1), reliant on unrecognized individual goodwill (Theme 2), unevenly distributed by geography, gender, and structural circumstance (Theme 3), blind to whole categories of classroom reality (Theme 4), indifferent to the material conditions that make engagement possible at all (Theme 5), and unable to institutionalize even its own proven successes

(Theme 6), has not yet built the structures its own teachers are, repeatedly and specifically, asking it to build.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study extend and, in several respects, sharpen the existing literature on instructional supervision and Teacher mentoring in Pakistan and comparable low-resource contexts. Three points of connection and departure from prior scholarship merit particular attention.

### **Confirming and Extending the Compliance-Orientation Literature**

The first theme's conclusion that supervision in the dataset is dominated by administrative auditing rather than pedagogical dialogue is highly consistent with systematic reviews of educational supervision across multiple national settings, as well as Pakistani studies of professional development delivery (Kalim & Bibi, 2024; Rokhman et al., 2024). However, this study contributes a detailed explanation of how this compliance orientation endures despite the recent trend toward coaching/mentoring policy language – the description provided in this case suggests not ignorance of new terminology but a disconnect between official circular language and the reality of generalist, evaluatively unified, brief visits. It corresponds to the overall lesson from the instructional supervision literature that the mere rebranding of supervisory position titles without changing how supervisors are trained and qualified, and how their workload is distributed, will leave the practice essentially unaltered (Glickman et al., 2018).

### **The Trust-Evaluation Split as a Structural, Not Individual, Phenomenon**

The second sub-theme of Theme 1 and the relation between this sub-theme and Theme 6's description of an NGO-funded pilot study demonstrate the power of the claim at the core of relational trust theory that teachers' ability to reveal problems of instructional performance depends on a structural split between the two roles of evaluator and mentor, not on the personal characteristics of individual supervisors (Glickman et al., 2018). The dataset's only clear exception to this pattern was provided by an old-fashioned Inspector who spent significant private time with a teacher, and this occurred within the very same bureaucratic framework that generally produced cautious, artificial meetings, indicating the capacity of this bureaucratic setting to generate developmental supervision even without the injection of extra funds.

### **Center-Default Design as a Unifying Mechanism Across Distinct Forms of Neglect**

Theme 3's finding that geographic distance, gender-segregation norms, and structural or event-driven disruption share a single underlying mechanism, a system whose default design assumes a standard, easily reached, single-shift, undisrupted school, extends the existing literature on rural and gendered educational neglect in Balochistan (Balochistan Commission on the Status of

Women & UN Women, 2025; Shad Foundation, 2025) by showing that these are not three separate deficits to be separately remediated but three expressions of one design assumption. This has a direct and important implication for reform: interventions that address only distance (for example, additional vehicles for AEOs) or only gender (for example, recruiting more female officers) without addressing the underlying default-to-centre design logic are likely to leave the compounding cases, such as Amna Rind's simultaneous exposure to distance and gendered mobility constraints, substantially unaddressed.

### **Categorical Invisibility as an Instrument Design Problem**

Theme 4 contributes a finding largely absent from the reviewed literature: that certain entirely legitimate and common teaching contexts, multigrade classrooms, inclusive classrooms with unassessed learning needs, linguistically diverse and mobile student populations, and non-core or co-curricular subjects, are not merely under-supervised but structurally illegible to the standard supervisory instrument. This is a more specific and more actionable claim than a general finding of neglect: it suggests that the supervisory template itself, its registers, its observation checklists, its assumptions about what a classroom looks like, requires redesign, not merely more frequent application, before non-standard classrooms can be fairly seen, let alone developmentally supported.

### **Material Preconditions and the Limits of Supervision-Focused Reform**

Theme 5's finding that economic precarity and perceived procedural unfairness in postings directly compete with, and undermine trust in, professional development aligns with and extends research on teacher motivation in Pakistani public schools, which similarly identifies delayed salaries and perceived favouritism as systemic barriers to teacher engagement, independent of any specific supervisory intervention (Rafiq & Ashraf, 2024). This finding carries a caution for policymakers: interventions that improve the design or content of supervision and mentoring without addressing the material and procedural conditions underpinning teachers' broader working lives may find their developmental investment absorbed by, or subordinated to, these more basic and more urgent concerns.

### **Institutionalization as the Central, Recurring Failure**

Perhaps the most consequential finding across the dataset, recurring at both the individual-relationship level (Theme 2) and the funded-programme level (Theme 6), is that the system's failure is not primarily one of never having tried a better model, several participants describe direct, positive experience of exactly the kind of developmental, trust-based, subject-informed mentoring the literature recommends, but of never absorbing what worked into a durable institutional structure. This finding is consistent with recent mixed-methods evidence from Pakistani language-teacher mentoring, which similarly finds that mentorship functions best as a sustained, structurally embedded relationship rather than an episodic intervention, and that digital and hybrid models show particular promise for extending reach in resource-constrained settings (Hussain et al., 2026).

It suggests that the central policy lever available is not the creation of new pilot models, for which the dataset shows Balochistan already has working examples, but rather the harder organizational task of institutionalizing what has already been proven to work.

### **The Overarching Theme as a Reframing of the Policy Problem**

Finally, the overarching theme-"not indifferent, just underserved"-carries a distinct and important implication for how the policy problem itself should be framed. A significant strand of education-reform discourse, in Pakistan and elsewhere, implicitly or explicitly treats low teacher engagement with supervision and professional development as a motivational or cultural problem to be solved through incentives, monitoring, or exhortation. The consistency with which participants across markedly different contexts, urban and rural, senior and early-career, core-subject and co-curricular, reject this framing and instead ask for a different form of the same underlying accountability relationship suggests that the more accurate diagnosis is a supply-side one: the system has not yet built the structures its own teachers are already asking it to build. This reframing does not deny that individual variation in engagement exists. However, it locates the primary explanatory weight for the patterns observed in this dataset in institutional design rather than teacher disposition, a conclusion with direct implications for where reform effort should be directed.

## **Implications**

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

Several concrete, data-grounded implications follow from these findings. First, supervisory templates and checklists should be explicitly redesigned to accommodate multigrade, inclusive, linguistically diverse, and co-curricular classroom contexts, rather than treating departures from a single-standard classroom model as data anomalies or administrative irregularities. Second, the evaluative and developmental functions currently fused within a single AEO visit could be structurally separated, even within existing staffing levels, by designating specific visits or specific personnel as explicitly non-evaluative, coaching-oriented encounters, building on the demonstrated capacity for this kind of encounter already present within the system, as shown by the one clearly developmental government-conducted visit in this dataset. Third, given the demonstrated success and equally demonstrated fragility of externally funded pilots, district education authorities should treat the transition of a successful pilot into a permanently funded, locally staffed programme as a standard, planned phase of any future pilot design, rather than leaving institutionalization to chance or to a separate, uncoordinated policy process. Fourth, supervisory capacity for girls' schools and for geographically peripheral schools should be planned as a distinct resourcing problem, requiring dedicated recruitment, transport, and possibly technology-mediated alternatives, rather than assuming that general increases in supervisory staffing will reach these settings in proportion. Moreover, from a more fundamental perspective, policymakers need to understand that investment in professional development will not yield the



desired outcomes until necessities, such as timely salary payments and the posting/transferring process itself, are addressed.

### **Implications for Theory**

From a theoretical point of view, this study contributes to the literature on developmental supervision (Glickman et al., 2018) and relational trust theory by extending their mainly developed research bases in high-income countries to a provincial setting in South Asia, thus demonstrating that the underlying mechanism, namely, the incompatibility between authentic developmental disclosure and fused evaluative authority, is consistently present in this radically different institutional and cultural setting. This study also contributes to the literature on situated learning (Wenger, 1998) by identifying a real-world example of a community of practice that functions without any formal structures and, in order to mitigate the effects of these very institutional factors, especially staff changes.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Several issues are relevant to these results. Although the sample was purposively varied and consisted of twenty teachers in one province's capital and its surroundings, and although such a sampling procedure was very appropriate to achieve the purposes of this research, the specific thematic framework developed in this case must be tested for generalizability to other areas of Balochistan, especially rural areas, and to other provinces as well. Interview-based self-report, while indispensable for accessing teachers' own interpretive frameworks, does not permit direct verification of supervisory visit content or frequency against independent records; future research combining interview data with visit-log analysis or direct observation would strengthen causal claims about the relationship between visit content and teacher outcomes. The near-total absence of disconfirming cases, participants who experienced supervision as developmental as the norm rather than the exception, is itself a notable finding. However, a larger or differently sampled study might surface such cases and illuminate the conditions under which they arise. Finally, this study's cross-sectional design captures teachers' accounts at a single point in time; longitudinal research following teachers and specific pilot programmes over time would allow the institutionalization failure identified in Theme 6 to be traced as it unfolds rather than reconstructed retrospectively.

Future research might productively examine the specific organizational conditions, staffing models, funding mechanisms, and accountability structures, under which externally funded mentoring pilots have, in other contexts, successfully transitioned into permanently institutionalized programmes, since this study's data establish the problem of non-institutionalization clearly but do not, by design, identify successful counter-examples of institutionalization to learn from. Comparative research across Pakistani provinces, and across similarly resource-constrained education systems elsewhere in South Asia, would help establish which elements of the thematic structure identified here reflect conditions specific to Balochistan and which reflect more general features of centrally administered, resource-constrained public education systems.

## Conclusion

This study set out to understand how public-school teachers in Quetta, Balochistan, experience academic mentoring and supervision, and what patterns of meaning organize those experiences across a deliberately diverse range of school contexts. Using reflexive thematic analysis of twenty in-depth interviews, the study identified six interconnected themes: the compliance encounter, the informal invisible backbone, a system built for the Centre, categorical invisibility, material preconditions for professional growth, and proof of concept without institutionalization, unified by an overarching interpretive theme: teachers in this dataset are not indifferent to supervision or mentoring but are underserved by their current form.

The essential contribution of this research is to prove that these six categories do not constitute a series of unrelated challenges but are rather manifestations of a unique system logic which consists of a supervisory mechanism based on an unstated standard, which consists of a single grade, accessible, single shift, well-resourced, undisturbed school and class, which systematically ignores, neglects, or under-supports all that which does not fit the standard, while leaving teachers themselves to fill the gap informally. More importantly, the data also show that an effective solution is not just possible but has been implemented in Balochistan in the past, only to have its benefits disappear after funding was withdrawn. This combination of proof of both challenge and solution sets this research apart from mere diagnosis and lays down a distinct policy agenda based on what teachers in Balochistan have proven works.

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